

Final recommendations on the  
future electoral arrangements  
for Forest of Dean in Gloucestershire

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

*June 2001*

# LOCAL GOVERNMENT COMMISSION FOR ENGLAND

This report sets out the Commission's final recommendations on the electoral arrangements for the district of the Forest of Dean in Gloucestershire.

Members of the Commission are:

Professor Malcolm Grant (Chairman)  
Professor Michael Clarke CBE (Deputy Chairman)  
Peter Brokenshire  
Kru Desai  
Pamela Gordon  
Robin Gray  
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Barbara Stephens (Chief Executive)

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A large map illustrating the existing and proposed ward boundaries for Coleford, West Dean and Lydney is inserted inside the back cover of the report.





## Local Government Commission for England

26 June 2001

Dear Secretary of State

On 27 June 2000 the Commission began a periodic electoral review of Forest of Dean under the Local Government Act 1992. We published our draft recommendations in January 2001 and undertook an eight-week period of consultation.

We have now prepared our final recommendations in the light of the consultation. We have confirmed our draft recommendations in their entirety. This report sets out our final recommendations for changes to electoral arrangements in Forest of Dean.

We recommend that the Forest of Dean District Council should be served by 48 councillors representing 27 wards, and that changes should be made to ward boundaries in order to improve electoral equality, having regard to the statutory criteria. We recommend that the Council should continue to hold elections every four years.

The Local Government Act 2000 contains provisions relating to changes to local authority electoral arrangements. However, until such time as Orders are made implementing those arrangements we are obliged to conduct our work in accordance with current legislation, and to continue our current approach to periodic electoral reviews.

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

Yours sincerely

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

PROFESSOR MALCOLM GRANT  
Chairman



## SUMMARY

We began a review of the electoral arrangements of the Forest of Dean on 27 June 2000. We published our draft recommendations for electoral arrangements on 9 January 2001, after which we undertook an eight-week period of consultation.

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

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

- **in 20 of the 28 wards the number of electors represented by each councillor varies by more than 10 per cent from the average for the district and five wards vary by more than 20 per cent;**
- **by 2005 this situation is not expected to improve greatly, with the number of electors per councillor forecast to vary by more than 10 per cent from the average in 17 wards and by more than 20 per cent in four wards.**

Our main final recommendations for future electoral arrangements (see Tables 1 and 2 and paragraph 120) are that:

- **Forest of Dean District Council should have 48 councillors, three fewer than at present;**
- **there should be 27 wards, instead of 28 as at present;**
- **the boundaries of 22 of the existing wards should be modified, resulting in a net reduction of one, and six 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 24 of the proposed 27 wards the number of electors per councillor would vary by no more than 10 per cent from the district average.**
- **This improved level of electoral equality is forecast to continue, with the number of electors per councillor in only three wards expected to vary by more than 10 per cent from the average for the district in 2005.**

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

- **new warding arrangements and the distribution of councillors for the parishes of Cinderford, Coleford, Drybrook and Lydney;**
- **revised warding arrangements and the redistribution of councillors for the parishes of Newent and West Dean.**

All further correspondence on these final recommendations and the matters discussed in this report should be addressed to the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, who will not make an Order implementing them before 7 August 2001:

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

Table 1: Final Recommendations: Summary

Ward name	Number of councillors	Constituent areas	Map reference
1 Alvington, Aylburton & West Lydney	2	Alvington & Aylburton ward (the parishes of Alvington and Aylburton); Lydney, ward (part– the proposed Lydney West parish ward of Lydney parish)	Map 2 and Large map
2 Awre	1	<i>Unchanged</i> (the parish of Awre)	Map 2
3 Berry Hill	1	Broadwell ward (part – the proposed parish ward of Berry Hill of West Dean parish)	Large map
4 Blaisdon & Longhope	1	<i>Unchanged</i> (the parishes of Blaisdon and Longhope)	Map 2
5 Bream	2	Bream ward (part– the proposed Bream parish ward of West Dean parish)	Map 2 and Large map
6 Bromesberrow & Dymock	1	Dymock & Kempsey ward (the parishes of Dymock and Kempsey); Redmarley ward (part - the parish of Bromesberrow)	Map 2
7 Christchurch & English Bicknor	1	Newland ward (part – the parishes of English Bicknor and Staunton Coleford); Broadwell ward (part – the proposed parish ward of Christchurch of West Dean parish)	Map 2 and Large Map
8 Churcham & Huntley	1	<i>Unchanged</i> (the parishes of Churcham and Huntley)	Map 2
9 Cinderford East	2	Cinderford ward (part – the proposed Cinderford East parish ward of Cinderford parish)	Maps 2 and A2
10 Cinderford West	2	Cinderford ward (part – the proposed Cinderford West parish ward of Cinderford parish)	Maps 2 and A2
11 Coleford Central	2	Coleford ward (part – the proposed Cinderford Central parish ward of Coleford parish)	Map 2 and Large map
12 Coleford East	3	Coleford ward (part – the proposed Coleford East parish ward of Coleford parish)	Map 2 and Large map
13 Hartpury	1	<i>Unchanged</i> (the parishes of Corse, Hartpury and Upleadon)	Map 2
14 Hewelsfield & Woolaston	1	Hewelsfield & St Briavels ward (part – the parish of Hewelsfield & Brockweir); Woolaston ward (the parish of Woolaston)	Map 2
15 Littledean & Ruspidge	2	Littledean ward (the parish of Littledean); Ruspidge ward (the parish of Ruspidge & Soudley)	Map 2

	<b>Ward name</b>	<b>Number of councillors</b>	<b>Constituent areas</b>	<b>Map reference</b>
16	Lydbrook & Ruardean	3	Drybrook ward (part – the proposed Ruardean Hill parish ward of Drybrook parish); Lydbrook ward (the parish of Lydbrook); Ruardean ward (the parish of Ruardean)	Map 2 and A3
17	Lydney East	3	Lydney ward (part – the proposed Lydney East parish ward of Lydney parish)	Map 2 and Large map
18	Lydney North	1	Lydney ward (part – the proposed Lydney North parish ward of Lydney parish)	Map 2 and Large map
19	Mitcheldean & Drybrook	3	Drybrook ward (part – the proposed Drybrook Village parish ward of Drybrook parish); Mitcheldean ward (the parish of Mitcheldean)	Maps 2 and A3
20	Newent Central	2	Newent Central ward (part – the proposed Newent Central parish ward of Newent parish)	Maps 2, A4 and A5
21	Newland & St Briavels	2	Bream ward (part – the proposed Ellwood & Sling parish ward of West Dean parish); Hewelsfield & St Briavels ward (part – the parish of St Briavels); Newland ward (part – the parish of Newland)	Map 2 and Large map
22	Newnham & Westbury	2	Newnham ward (the parish of Newnham); Westbury-on-Severn ward (the parish of Westbury-on-Severn)	Map 2
23	Oxenhall & Newent North East	1	Newent & Oxenhall ward (part – the parishes of Gorsley & Kilcott and Oxenhall, and the proposed Newent North East parish ward of Newent parish)	Maps 2, A4 and A5
24	Pillowell	2	<i>Unchanged</i> (the Pillowell parish ward of West Dean parish)	Map 2
25	Redmarley	1	Redmarley ward (part – the parishes of Pauntley, Redmarley D’Abitot and Staunton)	Map 2
26	Tibberton	1	Oxenhall & Newent ward (part – the proposed Newent South West parish ward of Newent parish); Tibberton ward (the parishes of Rudford & Highleadon, Taynton and Tibberton)	Maps 2 and A5
27	Tidenham	3	<i>Unchanged</i> (the parish of Tidenham)	Map 2

Notes: 1 The whole district is parished.

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

Table 2: Final Recommendations for the Forest of Dean

Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2000)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2005)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
1 Alvington, Aylburton & West Lydney	2	2,384	1,192	-9	2,528	1,264	-8
2 Awre	1	1,372	1,372	5	1,419	1,419	4
3 Berry Hill	1	1,309	1,309	0	1,382	1,382	1
4 Blaisdon & Longhope	1	1,404	1,404	7	1,435	1,435	5
5 Bream	2	2,382	1,191	-9	2,463	1,232	-10
6 Bromesberrow & Dymock	1	1,493	1,493	14	1,532	1,532	12
7 Christchurch & English Bicknor	1	1,232	1,232	-6	1,267	1,267	-7
8 Churcham & Huntley	1	1,389	1,389	6	1,397	1,397	2
9 Cinderford East	2	2,614	1,307	0	2,679	1,340	-2
10 Cinderford West	3	3,523	1,174	-10	3,934	1,311	-4
11 Coleford Central	2	2,489	1,245	-5	2,703	1,352	-1
12 Coleford East	3	4,053	1,351	3	4,121	1,374	0
13 Hartpury	1	1,301	1,301	-1	1,325	1,325	-3
14 Hewelsfield & Woolaston	1	1,430	1,430	9	1,456	1,456	6
15 Littledean & Ruspidge	2	2,932	1,466	12	3,072	1,536	12
16 Lydbrook & Ruardean	3	3,927	1,309	0	4,189	1,399	2
17 Lydney East	3	3,861	1,287	-2	4,135	1,378	1
18 Lydney North	1	1,420	1,420	9	1,440	1,440	5
19 Mitcheldean & Drybrook	3	3,426	1,142	-13	3,669	1,223	-11
20 Newent Central	2	2,744	1,372	5	2,843	1,422	4
21 Newland & St Briavels	2	2,807	1,404	7	2,890	1,445	6

Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2000)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2005)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
22 Newnham & Westbury	2	2,519	1,260	-4	2,587	1,294	-5
23 Oxenhall & Newent North East	1	1,336	1,336	2	1,433	1,433	5
24 Pillowell	2	2,704	1,352	3	2,785	1,393	2
25 Redmarley	1	1,378	1,378	5	1,401	1,401	2
26 Tibberton	1	1,425	1,425	9	1,460	1,460	7
27 Tidenham	3	3,917	1,306	0	4,147	1,382	1
<b>Totals</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>62,711</b>			<b>65,701</b>		
<b>Averages</b>			<b>1,308</b>			<b>1,369</b>	

Source: Electorate figures are based on information provided by Forest of Dean District Council.

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

# 1 INTRODUCTION

1 This report contains our final recommendations on the electoral arrangements for the district of Forest of Dean. We have now reviewed six districts in Gloucestershire as part of our programme of periodic electoral reviews (PERs) of all 386 principal local authority areas in England. Our programme started in 1996 and is currently expected to finish in 2004.

2 This was our first review of the electoral arrangements of the Forest of Dean. The last such review was undertaken by our predecessor, the Local Government Boundary Commission (LGBC), which reported to the Secretary of State in November 1979 (Report No. 360). As a consequence of a parish review, modifications were proposed in the Forest of Dean (Parishes and Electoral Changes Order 1997). The electoral arrangements of Gloucestershire County Council were last reviewed in May 1982 (Report no. 424). We intend reviewing the County Council's electoral arrangements in 2002.

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

- the statutory criteria contained in section 13(5) of the Local Government Act 1992, 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 We are required to make recommendations to the Secretary of State on the number of councillors who should serve on the District Council, and the number, boundaries and names of wards. We can also make recommendations on the electoral arrangements for parish and town councils in the district.

5 We have also had regard to our *Guidance and Procedural Advice for Local Authorities and Other Interested Parties* (fourth edition published in December 2000), which sets out our approach to the reviews.

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

7 The broad objective of PERs is to achieve, so far as practicable, equality of representation across the district as a whole. Having regard to the statutory criteria, our aim is to achieve as low a level of electoral imbalance as is practicable. We will require particular justification for schemes which would result in, or retain, an electoral imbalance of over 10 per cent in any ward.

Any imbalances of 20 per cent or more should only arise in the most exceptional circumstances, and will require the strongest justification.

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

9 In July 1998, the Government published a White Paper, *Modern Local Government – In Touch with the People* which set out legislative proposals for local authority electoral arrangements. In two-tier areas, it proposed introducing a pattern in which both the district and county councils would hold elections every two years, i.e. in year one, half of the district council would be elected, in year two, half the county council would be elected, and so on. The Government stated that local accountability would be maximised where every elector has an opportunity to vote every year, thereby pointing to a pattern of two-member wards (and divisions) in two-tier areas. However, it stated that there was no intention to move towards very large electoral areas in sparsely populated rural areas, and that single-member wards (and electoral divisions) would continue in many authorities. The proposals have been taken forward in the Local Government Act 2000 which, among other matters, provides that the Secretary of State may make Orders to change authorities' electoral cycles. However, until such time as the Secretary of State makes any Orders 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 the two-tier district areas, and our current *Guidance*.

10 This review was in four stages. Stage One began on 27 June 2000, when we wrote to the Forest of Dean District Council inviting proposals for future electoral arrangements. We also notified Gloucestershire County Council, Gloucestershire Police Authority, the local authority associations, Gloucestershire Association of Parish & 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 South West region, and the headquarters of the main political parties. We placed a notice in the local press, issued a press release and invited the District Council to publicise the review further. The closing date for receipt of representations, the end of Stage One, was 2 October 2000. At Stage Two we considered all the representations received during Stage One and prepared our draft recommendations.

11 Stage Three began on 9 January 2001 with the publication of our report, *Draft recommendations on the future electoral arrangements for the Forest of Dean in Gloucestershire*, and ended on 5 March 2001. During this period we sought comments from the public and any other interested parties on our preliminary conclusions. Finally, during Stage Four we reconsidered our draft recommendations in the light of the Stage Three consultation and now publish our final recommendations.

## 2 CURRENT ELECTORAL ARRANGEMENTS

12 The district of the Forest of Dean is situated in western Gloucestershire and is bounded by the River Severn to the south and south-east, the district of Tewkesbury to the east, Worcestershire and Herefordshire to the north-east and north-west respectively and by the River Wye and Wales to the west. The Forest of Dean includes part of the Wye Valley to the west, the Malvern Hills to the north and the Forest of Dean National Forest Park in the centre.

13 The district contains 41 parishes and is entirely parished. Around 30 per cent of the district's electorate is resident in the three principal settlements of Coleford, Cinderford and Lydney, with the remainder dispersed amongst a number of smaller, more rural towns and villages. The Forest of Dean's main transport links include the A40 and A48 trunk roads, with the M50 passing through the northern edge of the district.

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

15 The electorate of the district is 62,711 (February 2000). The Council at present has 51 members who are elected from 28 wards, four of which are relatively urban in Coleford, Cinderford, Lydney and Newent, with the remainder being predominantly rural. Three of the wards are each represented by five councillors, two are each represented by three councillors, seven are each represented by two councillors and 16 are single-member wards. The Council is elected as a whole every four years.

16 Since the last electoral review there has been an increase in the electorate in Forest of Dean District, with around 15 per cent more electors than two decades ago as a result of new housing developments. The most notable increases have been in Coleford, Newent Central and Redmarley wards.

17 At present, each councillor represents an average of 1,230 electors, which the District Council forecasts will increase to 1,288 by the year 2005 if the present number of councillors is maintained. However, due to demographic and other changes over the past two decades, the number of electors per councillor in 20 of the 28 wards varies by more than 10 per cent from the district average, in five wards by more than 20 per cent and in two wards by more than 30 per cent. The worst imbalance is in Redmarley ward where the councillor represents 40 per cent more electors than the district average.

*Map 1: Existing Wards in the Forest of Dean*

Figure 3: Existing Electoral Arrangements

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2000)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average (%)	Electorate (2005)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average (%)
1	Alvington & Aylburton	1	1,007	1,007	-18	1,035	1,035	-20
2	Awre	1	1,372	1,372	12	1,419	1,419	10
3	Blaisdon & Longhope	1	1,404	1,404	14	1,435	1,435	11
4	Bream	3	3,260	1,087	-12	3,360	1,120	-13
5	Broadwell	2	1,968	984	-20	2,058	1,029	-20
6	Churcham & Huntley	1	1,389	1,389	13	1,397	1,397	8
7	Cinderford	5	6,077	1,215	-1	6,613	1,323	3
8	Coleford	5	6,542	1,308	6	6,824	1,365	6
9	Drybrook	2	2,320	1,160	-6	2,480	1,240	-4
10	Dymock & Kempley	1	1,154	1,154	-6	1,176	1,176	-9
11	Hartpury	1	1,301	1,301	6	1,325	1,325	3
12	Hewelsfield & St Briavels	1	1,495	1,495	22	1,519	1,519	18
13	Littledean	1	993	993	-19	1,026	1,026	-20
14	Lydbrook	2	1,828	914	-26	1,998	999	-22
15	Lydney	5	6,658	1,332	8	7,068	1,414	10
16	Mitcheldean	2	2,111	1,056	-14	2,233	1,117	-13
17	Newent & Oxenhall	1	1,058	1,058	-14	1,091	1,091	-15
18	Newent Central	2	3,353	1,677	36	3,531	1,766	37
19	Newland	1	1,424	1,424	16	1,494	1,494	16
20	Newnham	1	1,077	1,077	-12	1,101	1,101	-15
21	Pillowell	2	2,704	1,352	10	2,785	1,393	8
22	Redmarley	1	1,717	1,717	40	1,757	1,757	36
23	Ruardean	1	1,094	1,094	-11	1,156	1,156	-10
24	Ruspidge	2	1,939	970	-21	2,046	1,023	-21

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2000)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average (%)	Electorate (2005)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average (%)
25	Tibberton	1	1,094	1,094	-11	1,114	1,114	-14
26	Tidenham	3	3,917	1,306	6	4,147	1,382	7
27	Westbury-on-Severn	1	1,442	1,442	17	1,486	1,486	15
28	Woolaston	1	1,013	1,013	-18	1,027	1,027	-20
	<b>Totals</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>62,711</b>	–	–	<b>65,701</b>	–	–
	<b>Averages</b>	–	–	<b>1,230</b>	–	–	<b>1,288</b>	–

Source: Electorate figures are based on information provided by Forest of Dean 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 2000, electors in Lydbrook ward were relatively over-represented by 26 per cent, while electors in Redmarley ward were relatively under-represented by 40 per cent. Figures have been rounded to the nearest whole number.

### 3 DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS

18 During Stage One we received five representations, including district-wide schemes from Forest of Dean District Council and a group of four County Councillors, and representations from Hartpury and Hewelsfield & Brockweir parish councils and the local Labour Group. In the light of these representations and evidence available to us, we reached preliminary conclusions which were set out in our report, *Draft recommendations on the future electoral arrangements for the Forest of Dean in Gloucestershire*.

19 Our draft recommendations were based on the District Council's proposals, which achieved some improvement in electoral equality, and provided a scheme based on a mix of single, two and three-member wards. However, we moved away from the District Council's scheme in number in 11 wards, affecting five areas, using our own proposals. We proposed that:

- Forest of Dean District Council should be served by 48 councillors, compared with the current 51, representing 27 wards, one than at present;
- the boundaries of 22 of the existing wards should be modified, while six wards should retain their existing boundaries;
- there should be new warding arrangements and the redistribution of councillors for the parishes of Cinderford, Coleford, Drybrook and Lydney;
- revised warding arrangements and the redistribution of councillors for the parishes of West Dean and Newent.

#### **Draft Recommendation**

Forest of Dean should comprise 48 councillors, serving 27 wards. The whole council should continue to be elected every four years.

20 Our proposals would have resulted in significant improvements in electoral equality, with the number of electors per councillor in 24 of the 27 wards varying by no more than 10 per cent from the district average. This level of electoral equality was forecast to improve further, with only three wards varying by more than 10 per cent from the average in 2005.



## 4 RESPONSES TO CONSULTATION

21 During the consultation on our draft recommendations report, we received 24 representations. A list of all respondents is available from us on request. All representations may be inspected at our offices and those of Forest of Dean District Council.

### **Forest of Dean District Council**

22 The District Council broadly welcomed our draft recommendations and also noted a minor discrepancy in our electorate figures.

### **Parish Councils**

23 We received representations from fifteen parish and town councils. Coleford Town Council and Hartpur and Redmarley parish councils expressed support for our draft recommendations

24 Alvington Parish Council objected to our proposed Alvington, Aylburton & West Lydney ward arguing that Alvington has no community links with Lydney.

25 Gorsley & Kilcote Parish Council supported our proposed Oxenhall & Newent North East ward, but together with Newent Town Council, they objected to our proposed Newent Central ward. They argued that the existing boundaries of Newent Central ward should be maintained and that Newent Central ward should be represented by three councillors. Newent Town Council also objected to our proposed Oxenhall & Newent North East ward. Both Gorsley & Kilcote Parish Council and Newent Town Council argued that a projected increase in the number of dwellings in the Newent area justified Newent Central being represented by three councillors.

26 Hewelsfield & Brockweir, St Briavels and Woolaston parish councils objected to our proposed Hewelsfield & Woolaston district ward. They all argued that the two parishes of Hewelsfield & Brockweir and Woolaston do not share a common identity and that there are no links, social or physical, between the two areas. Hewelsfield & Woolaston and St Briavels parish councils both suggested that they should be warded together at district level. Woolaston Parish Council suggested that it should be warded with Alvington parish rather than Hewelsfield parish at district level.

27 Littledean Parish Council objected to our proposed Littledean & Ruspidge ward. They argued that Littledean parish has nothing in common with Ruspidge parish. They proposed an alternative warding arrangement involving warding the parish of Littledean with parts of Blaisdon and Westbury parish

28 Drybrook and Mitcheldean Parish Councils objected to our proposed Mitcheldean & Drybrook ward. Both parishes objected to the warding of Drybrook parish. Drybrook Parish Council argued that Drybrook parish should remain in its entirety as a district ward and that it is distinct from Mitcheldean Parish. Mitcheldean Parish Council also argued that Mitcheldean and Drybrook are distinct communities which should not be warded together.

29 Newnham-on-Severn and Westbury-on-Severn Parish Councils objected to our proposed Newnham & Westbury ward. Both parish councils argued that the two parishes have nothing in common with each other. Newnham-on-Severn Parish Council stated that Westbury-on-Severn Parish Council expressed support for the 44-member scheme put forward by Councillors Boait and Dalziel.

30 West Dean Parish Council objected to our proposed Christchurch & English Bicknor and Berry Hill wards. They argued that a part of the parish should be placed in Berry Hill district ward rather than being warded with the parishes of English Bicknor and Staunton. West Dean Parish Council also objected to our proposed Newland & St Briavels ward, arguing that the Ellwood & Sling area of West Dean parish should not be included in the Newland & St Briavels ward and should remain part of a revised Bream ward.

### **Other Representations**

31 A further nine representations were received in response to our draft recommendations, comprising a joint submission from two County Councillors, one from another County Councillor, three from District Councillors, two from local residents and a 208-signature petition.

32 County Councillors Boait and Dalziel reiterated their Stage One district-wide-scheme, expressing concern that their proposal for a 44-member council had not been taken seriously. County Councillor Gardiner objected to our proposed Mitcheldean & Drybrook and Ruardean & Lydbrook wards. District Councillor Smith objected to our proposed Mitcheldean & Drybrook ward arguing that the parish of Drybrook should not be split and that the parish in its entirety should remain as a district ward. District Councillor Vick objected to our proposed Newent Central and Oxenhall & Newent North East wards. He argued that our proposals would result in a semi-urban area of the existing Newent Central ward being placed in the rural ward of Oxenhall and Newent North East. He suggested that, given an increase in the number of dwellings in the area, Newent Central ward merits being represented by three members and that it should keep its existing boundaries. District Councillor Vidler expressed concern at our proposed Littledean & Ruspidge ward and argued that the parish of Littledean should not be warded with the parish of Ruspidge at district level as the two parishes have little in common with each other.

33 A local resident objected to our proposal to place Hewelsfield & Brockweir parishes and Woolaston parish in the same district ward. He argued that Hewelsfield & Brockweir and Woolaston parishes have nothing in common with each other and that Hewelsfield & Brockweir parishes should be warded with St Briavels parish at a district level. Another local resident objected to our proposed Newent Central and Oxenhall & Newent North East wards and argued that in the light of the increase of dwellings in the area, Newent Central should keep its existing boundaries and be served by three councillors. We also received a 208-signature petition objecting to our proposed Hewelsfield & Woolaston ward on the grounds that there are no community links between the two areas.

## 5 ANALYSIS AND FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS

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

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

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

37 Our *Guidance* states that we accept that the achievement of absolute electoral equality for the authority as a whole is likely to be unattainable. However, we consider that, if electoral imbalances are to be kept to the minimum, such an objective should be the starting point in any review. We therefore strongly recommend that, in formulating electoral schemes, local authorities and other interested parties should start from the standpoint of absolute electoral equality and only then make adjustments to reflect relevant factors, such as community identity and interests. Regard must be had to five-year forecasts of changes in electorates and we would aim to recommend a scheme which provides improved electoral equality over this five-year period.

### **Electorate Forecasts**

38 The District Council submitted electorate forecasts for the year 2005, projecting an increase in the electorate of around 5 per cent from 62,711 to 65,701 over the five-year period from 2000 to 2005. It expects most of the growth to be in Coleford and Cinderford, although a significant amount is also expected in Newent Central and Tidenham wards. The Council has 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. Advice from the District Council on the likely effect on electorates of changes to ward boundaries has been obtained.

39 At Stage Three the District Council pointed out that the electorate for Cinderford had been overstated by 60 electors in our draft report. The correct total existing electorate figure is therefore 62,711.

40 We have noted this discrepancy and it has been corrected in our final recommendations.

41 District Councillor Vick, Newent Town Council, Gorsely & Kilcote Parish Council and a local resident argued that the Commission had failed to take into account a proposed increase of dwellings and subsequent increase in electorate in the Newent area which would justify an increase in the number of councillors to three. The Commission consulted with the District Council which confirmed that the proposed increase in the number of dwellings, and therefore electorate in the area, are not scheduled to take place before 2005 and therefore cannot be taken into account by us in our deliberations.

## **Council Size**

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

43 Forest of Dean District Council currently has 51 members. During Stage One we received proposals based on two different council sizes. The District Council proposed reducing council size by three, from 51 to 48 members. It stated that "although it is believed that the existing number of councillors ... secures effective and convenient local government, it is recognised that this number may need to change in order to secure electoral equality". The Council stated that it had therefore considered the effects of a number of council sizes and had concluded that "a council size of 48 appears to deliver the greatest electoral equality, and prevents the necessity for dividing many parishes into wards". It further noted that prior to 1997 the Council had operated on a council size of 49, before two additional councillors were allocated to the district as a consequence of the Forest of Dean (Parishes and Electoral Changes) Order 1997 (see paragraph 2 above). It also contended that "[a council size of 48] also means that for the main settlements there is little necessity to change significantly the ward boundaries". The Council therefore proposed basing its scheme on a council size of 48 members.

44 County Councillors Boait, Dalziel, Henchley and Smallwood submitted a district-wide scheme based on 44 members, a reduction of seven, representing a mix of single, two and three member wards. Ten of their proposed wards were the same as those put forward by the District Council. They stated that they had formulated their scheme "from the start point of the optimum size for wards being that of the average for the natural groupings of parishes that have been traditionally linked by existing structures, or geography", contending that "this submission is an attempt to convey the feelings of those more rural locations". They further stated that their scheme "not only offers a smaller set of variances ... but more importantly, it maintains fairness with the political mix of seats, and maintains more of the rural boundaries than the Council's preferred solution".

45 Having considered both the district-wide schemes received at Stage One we noted that there was cross-party support for the Council's 48-member scheme. The Council undertook local consultation during Stage One (and included copies of the responses received as an appendix to its main submission). The final scheme submitted to the Commission also included a number of locally derived proposals.

46 In contrast, while we acknowledged that a reasonable level of electoral equality would be secured under the County Councillors' 44-member scheme, we noted that there was little

evidence to suggest that the scheme had been consulted on or that it had received much support locally. We also noted that no analysis or evidence had been submitted to demonstrate how such a reduced council size would impact on the operation of the District Council. Furthermore, we noted that their scheme would result in an imbalance of representation between some of the town areas and the more rural areas of the district, most notably in Cinderford, where all three of the County Councillors' proposed wards would be under-represented.

47 In our draft recommendations report we considered the size and distribution of the electorate, the geography and other characteristics of the area, together with the representations received. We concluded that the achievement of electoral equality and the statutory criteria would best be met by a council of 48 members.

48 At Stage Three, Councillors Boait and Dalziel expressed concern that their Stage One proposal for a 44-member council had not been taken seriously by us and made a number of detailed observations regarding our approach to reviews, including the status of submissions, status of the draft recommendations, council size and parish administrative boundaries. We responded to their points in some detail directly to them.

49 We received a number of letters supporting the scheme of Councillors Boait and Dalziel from parishes in the district. However, our *Guidance* states that in considering changes to existing Council size the Commission looks for evidence of the impact on the effective management and operation of the particular council, in order that its recommendations meet the statutory criteria. Councillors Boait & Dalziel stated in their Stage Three submission that "In common with all District Councils, the Forest of Dean District Council is currently considering its modernisation plans. It would be difficult to assess the impact of any changes to electoral arrangements in the current climate". They go on to state that "it is obvious that many councils operate very effectively with 44 or less councillors and this cannot be used as a reason for discounting their local model". We do not consider that this is sufficient justification to warrant such a large reduction in council size and, as at Stage One, we have not been convinced that Councillors Boait and Dalziel have demonstrated how a reduction from 51 to 44 would impact on the operation of Forest of Dean District Council, in terms of effective management and operation. We note that our draft recommendations have also commanded broad support from the District Council and offices.

50 Therefore having considered the size and distribution of the electorate, the geography and the other characteristics of the area, together with the representations received, we remain of the view that the achievement of electoral equality and the statutory criteria would best be met by a council of 48 members.

## **Electoral Arrangements**

51 As set out in our draft recommendations report, we carefully considered all the representations received at Stage One, including the district-wide scheme from the District Council. From these representations, some considerations emerged which helped to inform us when preparing our draft recommendations.

52 In view of the degree of consensus over large elements of the District Council's proposals, and the consultation exercise which it undertook with interested parties, we concluded that we should base our draft recommendations on the Council's scheme. We considered that this scheme would provide a better balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria than the current arrangements or other schemes submitted at Stage One. However, in order to further improve electoral equality and having regard to local community identities and interests, we decided to move away from the District Council's proposals in five areas.

53 At Stage Three we received representations objecting to our recommendations in seven specific areas of the district; Hewelsfield and Woolaston parishes, West Dean parish, Drybrook and Lydbrook parishes, Newent parish, Littledean and Ruspidge parishes, Newenham and Westbury parishes and Alvington parish. We also received support for our draft recommendations from the District Council, and three parish councils. While we received a degree of support for the alternative 44-member scheme, as discussed previously we are unable to adopt this scheme.

54 We have reviewed our draft recommendations in the light of further evidence and representations received during Stage Three and have decided we intend confirming our draft recommendations in their entirety as final.

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

- (a) Tidenham, Woolaston, Alvington & Aylburton, Hewelsfield & St Briavels and Lydney wards;
- (b) Newland, Broadwell, Pillowell, Bream and Coleford wards;;
- (c) Cinderford, Lydbrook, Ruardean, Drybrook and Mitcheldean wards;
- (d) Awre, Ruspidge, Littledean, Newnham, Westbury-on-Severn, Blaisdon & Longhope and Churcham & Huntley wards;
- (e) Newent & Oxenhall, Newent Central, Tibberton, Hartpury, Redmarley and Dymock & Kempley wards.

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

### **Tidenham, Woolaston, Alvington & Aylburton, Hewelsfield & St Briavels and Lydney wards**

57 These five wards are situated in the southern part of the district. The three-member Tidenham ward comprises solely the parish of the same name. The number of electors per councillor is currently 6 per cent above the district average (7 per cent by 2005). The single-member wards of Woolaston (comprising the parish of Woolaston) and Alvington & Aylburton (comprising the parishes of Alvington & Aylburton) are both currently over-represented by 18 per cent (both by 20 per cent by 2005). The single-member Hewelsfield & St Briavels ward (comprising the parishes of Hewelsfield & Brockweir and St Briavels) is currently under-represented by 22 per cent (18 per cent by 2005). The existing Lydney ward (comprising the parish of Lydney) is currently represented by five councillors and is under-represented by 8 per cent (10 per cent by 2005).

58 In its Stage One submission, the District Council proposed retaining the existing three-member Tidenham ward unchanged, stating that this proposal had been supported by Tidenham Parish Council. Under the Council's 48-member scheme, the number of electors per councillor in the three-member Tidenham ward would be equal to the district average initially (1 per cent above by 2005).

59 The Council noted the electoral imbalances that exist in the current Woolaston and Alvington & Aylburton wards. It proposed that the single-member Woolaston ward should be enlarged to include Hewelsfield & Brockweir parish (and as a consequence should be renamed Hewelsfield & Woolaston ward), with St Briavels parish being included in a new Newland & St Briavels ward (to be discussed later). It also proposed that the existing Alvington & Aylburton ward should be retained unchanged. The number of electors per councillor in the Council's revised single-member Hewelsfield & Woolaston ward would be 9 per cent above the district average initially (6 per cent above by 2005). However, under a council size of 48, the single-member Alvington & Aylburton ward would be over-represented by 23 per cent initially (24 per cent by 2005).

60 The Council also proposed that the current five-member Lydney ward should be divided into three new wards, as put forward by Lydney Town Council and Lydney Labour Group during its local consultation exercise. It proposed that the current OO polling district should form a new single-member Lydney West ward covering the western and southern part of Lydney parish (an area to the west and south of the railway line). It further proposed a three-member Lydney East ward comprising the area to the north and east of the railway line, the northern boundary of which would run behind the properties on the northern side of Spring Meadow Road, the north-eastern side of Albert Street and the south-eastern side of Woodland Rise until Centurion Road, at which point it would run behind the properties on the western side of Livia Way and the northern side of Juno Drive before running eastwards along the centre of Highfield Lane, the eastern end of Highfield Road and the A48 to the parish boundary. The Council proposed that the remainder of Lydney parish (to the east of the railway line and to the north of the above boundary) should form a new single-member Lydney North ward. The number of electors per councillor in the Council's proposed single-member Lydney West, three-member Lydney East and single-member Lydney North wards would be 5 per cent above, 2 per cent below and 9 per cent above the district average initially (9 per cent, 1 per cent and 5 per cent above by 2005).

61 The Labour Group proposed combining the current single-member Alvington & Aylburton ward with the Council's proposed single-member Lydney West ward to create a new two-member Alvington, Aylburton & Lydney West ward. It argued that "the villages of Aylburton and Alvington ... are linked to the town of Lydney by the A48 and naturally look to Lydney as their nearest town and service provider". It further stated that "the linking of Aylburton and Alvington with Lydney West could give rise to a conflict between rural and urban interests" but was of the view that its proposal "was a better solution than the one proposed in the Council's submission". The number of electors per councillor in the Labour Group's proposed Alvington, Aylburton & Lydney West ward would be 9 per cent below the district average initially (8 per cent below by 2005).

62 Hewelsfield & Brockweir Parish Council opposed the Council's proposal to divide the current Hewelsfield & St Briavels ward.

63 Due to the high level of electoral equality resulting from the Council's proposed Alvington & Alyburton ward, we considered the Labour Group's proposal to link Alvington & Alyburton ward with West Lydney. While we acknowledged that this would combine two slightly more rural parishes with part of the more urban town of Lydney, we agreed with the Labour Group's argument that Alvington and Alyburton are linked to Lydney by the A48 and naturally look towards it as their nearest town and service provider. We were of the view that this revised ward would provide the best balance between securing electoral equality and reflecting local communities and put forward for consultation a two-member Alvington, Alyburton & West Lydney ward as part of our draft recommendations. The number of electors per councillor in the proposed ward would be 9 per cent below the district average initially (8 per cent below by 2005). Given the good level of electoral equality and reflection of local communities that would be secured under the Council's proposed Lydney East and Lydney North wards we adopted them as part of our draft recommendations.

64 We noted that there was some local opposition to the Council's proposal to link the parishes of Hewelsfield & Brockweir and Woolaston in a new ward and considered alternative configurations of parishes in this area. However, we are unable to view any area in isolation and must consider to the electoral arrangements in the Forest of Dean area as a whole. In the absence of a viable alternative being submitted, we concluded that the Council's proposals provide for the best balance between securing electoral equality, reflecting the identities and interests of local communities and providing identifiable boundaries. We therefore adopted the Council's proposed Hewelsfield & Woolaston ward as part of our draft recommendations. Furthermore, given the excellent electoral equality and reflection of local community identity that would be secured under the Council's proposed three-member Tidenham ward, we adopted it as part of our draft recommendations.

65 At Stage Three the District council expressed broad support for our draft recommendations as a whole.

66 Alvington Parish Council objected to our proposed Alvington, Alyburton & West Lydney ward, arguing that Alvington has no community links with Lydney and stating that "we feel that the proposal will leave Alvington under-represented due to the size of the Lydney Town". Hewelsfield & Brockweir Parish Council reiterated their Stage One objections to our proposed Hewelsfield & Woolaston ward, arguing that Hewelsfield & Brockweir parish has community links with St Briavels rather than Woolaston parish. They stated, "there is not the slightest connection between Hewelsfield and Brockweir parishes and Woolaston parishes, the two are simply being lumped together for convenience." St Briavels Parish Council objected to our proposed Newland & St Briavels ward, arguing that St Briavels should be warded with Hewelsfield & Brockweir parish. Woolaston Parish Council objected to our proposal to ward it with Hewelsfield parish. Alvington, Hewelsfield & Brockweir, St Briavels and Woolaston parish councils all expressed support for the 44-member scheme of Councillors Boait and Dalziel.

67 We also received representations from a local resident objecting to our proposal to combine Hewelsfield & Brockweir parish with Woolaston parish rather than St Briavels. We also received a 208 signature petition objecting to our proposed Hewelsfield & Brockweir ward,

68 We have noted that, as at Stage One, there is local opposition to the proposal to link the parishes of Hewelsfield & Brockweir and Woolaston in a new ward. However, having visited the area we remain of the opinion that there are sufficient links between Hewelsfield & Brockweir and Woolaston to justify the areas being placed in the same district ward. We have also considered alternative configurations of parishes in the area, involving the placing Hewelsfield & Brockweir and St Briavels parishes in the same district ward. However, we consider that the resulting level of electoral inequality which results from such a warding arrangement is unacceptable. We therefore remain of the view that our draft recommendations provide the best balance currently available between securing electoral equality, reflecting the identities of local communities and providing identifiable boundaries. We are therefore content to endorse our proposed Hewelsfield & Woolaston ward as final.

69 We have also noted Alvington Parish Council's objection to our proposed Alvington, Aylburton and West Lydney ward and its support for the 44-member scheme. However, as discussed earlier, we are not adopting the reduced council size, and we are therefore unable to adopt the warding patterns proposed under this scheme as they would result in high electoral variances. While we acknowledge that our proposals would result in two rural parishes being warded with part of the more urban Lydney, we remain of the opinion that the two parishes look towards Lydney as their natural service provider. With no viable alternative warding arrangements being proposed that would provide a similar balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria, based on a 48-member council size, we are content to endorse our proposed Alvington, Aylburton & West Lydney ward as final.

70 We also received support for our proposed Tidenham ward at Stage Three, and therefore we are content to endorse our draft recommendations in this area as final. Consequently our final recommendations will provide the same levels of electoral equality as our draft recommendations, and are shown on the large map at the back of this report.

### **Newland, Broadwell, Pillowell, Bream and Coleford wards**

71 These five wards are situated in the western part of the district, with a large part of the area comprising the parish of West Dean. The single-member Newland ward (comprising the parishes of Newland, Staunton Coleford and English Bicknor) is currently under-represented by 16 per cent (unchanged by 2005). The parish of West Dean is currently served by seven district councillors overall, representing three wards. The three-member Bream ward (comprising the Bream parish ward of West Dean parish) is currently over-represented by 12 per cent (13 per cent by 2005). The number of electors per councillor in two-member Pall ward (comprising the Pall parish ward of West Dean parish) is currently 10 per cent above the district average (8 per cent above by 2005). The two-member Broadwell ward (comprising the Berry Hill parish ward of West Dean parish) is currently over-represented by 20 per cent (unchanged by 2005). The existing Coleford ward (comprising the parish of Coleford) is currently represented by five councillors and is slightly under-represented by 6 per cent (unchanged by 2005).

72 In its Stage One submission, the Council proposed a new two-member Newland & St Briavels ward comprising the parishes of St Briavels and Newland, together with the settlements of Ellwood and Sling (in West Dean parish) from the northern part of the current Bream ward. It stated that it had considered a number of alternative options to create wards in this area, but

that its final proposal for a two-member ward would avoid the need to ward Newland parish. The number of electors per councillor in the Council's proposed Newland & St Briavels ward would be 7 per cent above the district average initially (6 per cent above by 2005).

73 As a consequence of its proposed Newland & St Briavels ward, the Council proposed that the remainder of the current Bream ward should form a revised two-member Bream ward. It further proposed retaining the existing two-member Pall ward unchanged. The number of electors per councillor in the Council's proposed two-member Bream and Pall wards would be 9 per cent below and 3 per cent above the district average initially (10 per cent below and 2 per cent above by 2005).

74 To the north of Coleford, the Council proposed dividing the current Broadwell ward between two new single-member wards, Berry Hill (comprising the Berry Hill area of Broadwell ward) and Christchurch & English Bicknor (comprising the Christchurch area of Broadwell ward and the parishes of English Bicknor and Staunton Coleford). The northern boundary of the Council's proposed Berry Hill ward would follow the centre of the majority of Grove Road and the majority of Park Road, before running behind the properties on the western side of Belmont Lane and along the centre of The Long and Joyford Hill. It would then run eastwards behind the properties on the northern side of Park Road, northwards along the western edge of the playing fields and then eastwards along the centre of Nine Wells Road to Monmouth Road and the parish boundary. The number of electors per councillor in the Council's proposed Berry Hill and Christchurch & English Bicknor wards would be 3 per cent below the district average in both wards initially (2 per cent below and 5 per cent below by 2005).

75 In Coleford itself, the Council proposed creating two new wards; a three-member Coleford East ward and a two-member Coleford Central ward. Its proposed Coleford East ward would comprise the residential areas in the east of Coleford parish centred along Woodgate Road/North Road/South Road/New Road, together with the areas to the south of the golf course, to the south-west of the dismantled railway and from around Cinder Hill and High Nash. The remainder of Coleford parish would form the new Coleford Central ward. The number of electors per councillor in the Council's proposed Coleford East and Coleford Central wards would be 3 per cent above and 5 per cent below the district average initially (equal to and 1 per cent below by 2005).

76 The Labour Group opposed the Council's proposed two-member Newland & St Briavels ward, stating that it was "concerned that the new two-member ward lacks a community of interest". It proposed that the Council's proposed two-member Newland & St Briavels ward should be divided into two single-member wards in order to better reflect local community identity. It proposed that Newland parish should be warded and that the eastern area containing Clearwell and Newland villages should be linked with Sling and Ellwood (from the northern part of the current Bream ward) to form a new Newland & Sling ward. It further proposed that the remainder of Newland parish should be linked with St Briavels parish to form a new St Briavels & Redbrook ward.

77 Having carefully considered all the representations received, we were persuaded that the Council's proposals would provide for the most appropriate warding arrangements for this part of the district. We noted that the Labour Group's proposed St Briavels & Redbrook and Newland

& Sling wards would secure reasonable electoral equality; however, we were of the view that the division of Newland parish between two wards would not provide for a better reflection of the identities and interests of local communities, nor would it receive support locally. Therefore we proposed adopting the Council's proposals in this area as part of our draft recommendations, albeit with two minor modifications to secure more identifiable boundaries.

78 We proposed modifying the boundary between the Council's proposed Berry Hill and Christchurch & English Bicknor wards so that Marians Walk/Marians Lane are included in Berry Hill ward and that the remainder of the boundary follows the centre of Grove Road and Park Road. The number of electors per councillor in our revised single-member Berry Hill and Christchurch & English Bicknor wards would be equal to and 6 per cent below the district average initially (1 per cent above and 7 per cent below by 2005). We also proposed modifying the boundary between the Council's proposed Newland & St Briavels and Bream wards so that it was tied to more identifiable ground detail to the west of Ellwood, however, this would not affect any electors.

79 At Stage Three the district council expressed broad support for our draft recommendations as a whole.

80 Coleford Town Council expressed support for our proposed Coleford wards. West Dean Parish Council objected to our proposed Christchurch & English Bicknor ward, arguing that Christchurch, Berry Hill, Joyford, Nine Wells, Edge End and Coannop, settlements that it considers to be part of Berry Hill, should not be warded with English Bicknor and Staunton parishes but should be included in an enlarged Berry Hill ward. It stated that our proposed ward "ignored the unique social, economic and cultural heritage of those communities contained within West Dean parish". West Dean Parish Council also objected to our proposed Newland & St Briavels ward, arguing that the Ellwood & Sling area should not be included in the ward and should remain part of a revised Bream ward. They stated that it would be "difficult for elected representatives for these largely agricultural communities to understand the problems which beset the communities in the statutory Forest".

81 St Briavels Parish Council objected to our proposed Newland & St Briavels ward, arguing that St Briavels should be warded with Hewelsfield rather than Newland parish and citing that there are community links between St Briavels and Hewelsfield & Brockweir parish. St Briavels Parish Council expressed support for Councillors Boait and Dalziel's proposed 44-member district-wide scheme

82 We have noted the objections to our proposed Berry Hill, Bream, Christchurch & English Bicknor and Newland & St Briavels wards. We acknowledge the nature of the concerns expressed and have considered alternative configurations of parishes in the area. However, given that we cannot view any area in isolation and must have a view to the electoral arrangements in the district as a whole, we consider the levels of electoral inequality that result from each of these various alternative configurations are unacceptable. Given this and the support for our proposed Coleford wards, we propose fully endorsing our draft recommendations in this area as final.

## **Cinderford, Lydbrook, Ruardean, Drybrook and Mitcheldean wards**

83 These five wards are situated in the west of the district to the north-east of Coleford. The existing Cinderford ward (comprising the parish of Cinderford) is currently represented by five councillors and is slightly over-represented by 6 per cent. However, by 2005 it will be slightly under-represented by 3 per cent as a result of housing development. The two-member wards of Drybrook and Lydbrook (comprising the parishes of Drybrook and Lydbrook respectively), and the single-member Ruardean ward (comprising the parish of Ruardean) are all currently over-represented, by 6 per cent, 26 per cent and 11 per cent respectively (4 per cent, 22 per cent and 10 per cent respectively by 2005).

84 The Council proposed dividing the current five-member Cinderford ward into two new wards, as proposed by Cinderford Town Council during its local consultation exercise. It proposed a new two-member Cinderford East ward comprising the current polling districts of NIZ, NIXB and NIY. It further proposed that the remainder of the Cinderford parish (the current polling districts of NIX, NIXA and NIXC) should form a new three-member Cinderford West ward. The number of electors per councillor in the Council's proposed Cinderford East and Cinderford West wards would be 12 per cent below and 2 per cent below the district average initially (12 per cent below and 3 per cent above by 2005).

85 To the north of Cinderford, the Council proposed a new three-member Lydbrook & Ruardean ward, comprising the parishes of Lydbrook and Ruardean and the eastern part of Drybrook parish (containing the settlements of Ruardean Woodside, Ruardean Hill and Brierley). The Council further proposed that the remainder of Drybrook parish, containing the village of Drybrook, should form a new single-member Drybrook ward. The number of electors per councillor in the Council's proposed Lydbrook & Ruardean and Drybrook wards would be equal to and 1 per cent above the district average initially (2 per cent above and 5 per cent above by 2005).

86 The Council also proposed retaining the current two-member Mitcheldean ward unchanged, arguing that "Mitcheldean is a strong community" and "is surrounded by geographical features that make it difficult to either increase the size of the ward or transfer part of it to another ward". Under a council size of 48 the two-member Mitcheldean ward would be over-represented by 19 per cent initially (18 per cent by 2005).

87 We carefully considered the Council's scheme and proposed basing our draft recommendations on it, albeit with two modifications. We noted that the Council's proposed Mitcheldean ward would be significantly over-represented. We therefore proposed linking the Council's proposed two-member Mitcheldean ward with its proposed single-member Drybrook ward, to form a new three-member Mitcheldean & Drybrook ward. The number of electors per councillor in our proposed ward would be 13 per cent below the district average initially (11 per cent below by 2005). While we acknowledged that this would result in a slightly higher level of electoral imbalance than we would ideally seek, we were of the view that this proposal would secure the best balance currently available between electoral equality and the statutory criteria.

88 We also considered the Council's proposed three-member Lydbrook & Ruardean ward and were of the view that it would secure the best balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria in this area.

89 However, we proposed modifying the Council’s proposals for Cinderford in order to secure better electoral equality and a more identifiable boundary, while also having regard to local communities. We proposed that all of polling district NIY should be transferred into Cinderford West ward, and that the remainder of the boundary between the two wards should be modified so that it follows southwards from Trinity Way behind the properties on the western side of Mountjoys Lane End until Woodgate Road, along the centre of the High Street before following southwards behind the properties on the eastern side of Commercial Street, eastwards behind the properties on the southern side of Flaxley Street and southwards behind the properties on the eastern side of Woodside Avenue. The number of electors per councillor in our revised two-member Cinderford East and three-member Cinderford West wards would be equal to and 10 per cent below the district average initially (2 per cent below and 4 per cent below by 2005).

90 At Stage Three the District Council expressed broad support for our draft recommendations as a whole.

91 County Councillor Gardiner objected to our proposed Mitcheldean & Drybrook and Lydbrook & Ruardean wards. He argued that warding Drybrook parish would confuse voters who would be left “looking to Drybrook for Parish Councillors and Ruardean and Lydbrook for District Councillors “. Councillor Smith also objected to our proposed Mitcheldean & Drybrook, ward, arguing that the parish of Drybrook should not be split between two district wards. He stated that “The very idea of this large parish with all its social structures could be suddenly split totally asunder and lose its identity of wardhood, yet incongruously retaining its parish functions is ridiculous, abhorrent and totally unacceptable”.

92 Drybrook and Mitcheldean Parish Councils both opposed our proposed Mitcheldean & Drybrook and Lydbrook & Ruardean wards. Drybrook Parish Council argued that the parish should not be warded and split between two district wards and placed with a community with which it has no ties. It stated “it is no good trying to join up traditionally distinct communities for the sake of tidying numbers to satisfy bureaucratic demands”. Mitcheldean Parish Council stated similar reasons for objecting to our proposed Mitcheldean & Drybrook ward, arguing that Mitcheldean and Drybrook have completely different village characteristics and to alter the existing arrangements would mean losing the distinct village communities.

93 We have noted the objections to our proposed Mitcheldean & Drybrook and Lydbrook & Ruardean wards. We acknowledge the nature of the concerns expressed and have attempted various alternative configurations of parishes in the area. However, retaining Mitcheldean in a separate two-member ward would result in an electoral variance of 19 per cent, and retaining the parish of Lydbrook as a single-member ward would result in an electoral variance of 40 per cent. We remain of the opinion that these very high levels of electoral inequality need to be addressed. Given that we have received no proposals for alternative warding patterns that would provide comparable levels of electoral equality to those resulting from our draft recommendations, and that we have received no comments regarding our proposed Cinderford ward, we have decided to endorse our draft recommendations in this area as final. Our final recommendations are illustrated on Map 2 and Map 3 in Appendix A

## **Awre, Ruspidge, Littledean, Newnham, Westbury-on-Severn, Blaisdon & Longhope and Churcham & Huntley wards**

94 These seven wards cover the central and eastern parts of the district. The single-member Awre ward (comprising the parish of Awre) is currently under-represented by 12 per cent (10 per cent by 2005). The single-member Newnham ward (comprising the parish of Newnham) is currently over-represented by 12 per cent (15 per cent by 2005). The single-member Westbury-on-Severn ward (comprising the parish of Westbury-on-Severn) is currently under-represented by 17 per cent (15 per cent by 2005). The two-member Ruspidge ward (comprising the parish of Ruspidge & Soudley) and the single-member Littledean ward (comprising the parish of Littledean) are both currently over-represented by 21 per cent and 19 per cent respectively (21 per cent and 20 per cent by 2005). The single-member wards of Blaisdon & Longhope (comprising the parishes of Blaisdon and Longhope) and Churcham & Huntley (comprising the parishes of Churcham and Huntley) are currently under-represented by 14 per cent and 13 per cent respectively (11 per cent and 8 per cent by 2005).

95 At Stage One the Council proposed retaining the current single-member Awre ward unchanged. Under a council size of 48 the number of electors per councillor in the single-member Awre ward would be 5 per cent above the district average initially (4 per cent above by 2005). The Council further proposed that, in order to secure improved electoral equality, the existing single-member Newnham and Westbury-on-Severn wards should be joined to form a new two-member Newnham & Westbury ward. The number of electors per councillor in this new ward would be 4 per cent below the district average initially (5 per cent below by 2005).

96 The Council further proposed a new two-member Littledean & Ruspidge ward (comprising the current single-member wards of Littledean and Ruspidge), which would be under-represented by 12 per cent both initially and by 2005. It argued that while this proposal would result in a higher than ideal level of electoral imbalance, it would mean that neither Littledean nor Ruspidge & Soudley parish would need to be warded, therefore providing for more identifiable boundaries and a better reflection of the identities and interests of local communities.

97 The Council proposed retaining the current single-member Blaisdon & Longhope and Churcham & Huntley wards unchanged. It argued that “there is a strong community and geographical argument to retain ... Blaisdon & Longhope as a single-member ward”. Under a council size of 48, the number of electors per councillor in each of the wards would be 7 per cent above and 6 per cent above the district average respectively (5 per cent above and 2 per cent above by 2005).

98 We considered the proposals put forward by the Council in this area and were persuaded that they would provide for the most appropriate warding arrangements in this part of the district. We agreed with the Council’s proposal to combine the current Littledean and Ruspidge wards to form a new two-member ward, as this would reduce the over-representation that currently exists in both wards. While we acknowledged that this would result in a slightly higher level of electoral imbalance than we would ideally seek, we were of the view that this proposal would secure the best balance currently available between electoral equality and the statutory criteria. Given the good level of electoral equality, identifiable boundaries and reflection of local communities that

would be secured, we also proposed adopting the Council's proposed Awre, Newnham & Westbury, Blaisdon & Longhope and Churcham & Huntley wards as part of our draft recommendations.

99 At Stage Three the District Council expressed broad support for our draft recommendations as a whole.

100 District Councillor Vidler objected to our proposed Littledean & Ruspidge ward, arguing that there are no community links between the parishes of Littledean and Ruspidge and that Littledean should be placed in a district ward with Blaisdon parish.

101 Littledean Parish Council also objected to our proposed Littledean & Ruspidge ward. It argued that there are no community links between Littledean & Ruspidge, stating that "Littledean has no links of any sort with Ruspidge/Soudley, but has historic links with Blaisdon and Flaxley". It also suggested an alternative warding arrangement in the area which involved linking Littledean parish with parts of the neighbouring parishes of Blaisdon and Westbury-on-Severn.

102 Newnham and Westbury-on-Severn parish councils both objected to our proposed Newnham & Westbury district ward, arguing that the two parishes have no community links and should not be warded together. Newnham Parish Council stated that "Newnham-on-Severn and Westbury-on-Severn are entirely different, equally attractive and historically separate." Westbury-on-Severn Parish Council also stated its support for the 44-member scheme of Councillors Boait and Dalziel.

103 We have noted the objections to our proposed Littledean & Ruspidge and Newnham & Westbury wards. We acknowledge the nature of the concerns expressed and have attempted alternative options, including the warding of Littledean with parts of Blaisdon and Westbury-on-Severn. However, as discussed earlier we have not been convinced that we should adopt a council size of 44 members and we consider that the levels of electoral inequality under a 48-member scheme that result from these alternative configurations are unacceptable in the light of our draft recommendations. Given that we are unable to consider any area in isolation and must have regard to the electoral arrangements in the district as a whole and the fact that we received no comments regarding our proposed Awre, Blaisdon & Longhope and Churcham & Huntley wards, we have decided to endorse our draft recommendations in this area as final. Consequently our final recommendations will provide the same levels of electoral equality as our draft recommendations as illustrated on Map 2.

### **Newent & Oxenhall, Newent Central, Tibberton, Hartpury, Redmarley and Dymock & Kempley wards**

104 These six wards are situated in the north of the district. The two-member Newent Central ward (comprising the Newent Central parish ward of Newent parish) is currently under-represented by 36 per cent (37 per cent by 2005). The single-member Newent & Oxenhall ward (comprising the Newent North East and Newent South West parish wards of Newent parish and the parishes of Oxenhall and Gorsley & Kilcote) is currently over-represented by 14 per cent (15

per cent by 2005). The single-member Tibberton ward (comprising the parishes of Tibberton, Taynton and Rudford & Highleadon) is currently over-represented by 11 per cent (14 per cent by 2005).

105 The number of electors per councillor in the single-member Hartpury ward (comprising the parishes of Hartpury, Corse and Upleadon) is 6 per cent above the district average (3 per cent above by 2005). The single-member Redmarley ward (comprising the parishes of Redmarley D’Abitot, Staunton, Pauntley and Bromesberrow) is currently the most under-represented ward in the district with an electoral imbalance of 40 per cent (36 per cent by 2005). The number of electors per councillor in the single-member Dymock & Kempsey ward is currently 6 per cent below the district average (9 per cent below by 2005).

106 We received only one submission regarding this area, from the District Council. It outlined the detailed consideration it had given to the creation of wards in the Newent area. It acknowledged that the current Newent Central ward was significantly under-represented and that modifications to the existing arrangements would therefore need to be made. It discussed a number of alternative options, putting forward as part of its final scheme a modified two-member Newent Central ward and a modified single-member Oxenhall & Newent ward. It proposed transferring an area from the north of Newent town (including Lakeside, the area to the north of the Newent by-pass, Ross Road and some properties around the southern end of Glebe Road) from the current Newent Central ward into a revised Oxenhall & Newent North East ward, further proposing that the current Newent South West parish ward of Newent parish should be transferred from the Oxenhall & Newent ward into a revised Tibberton ward. The number of electors per councillor in the Council’s proposed Newent Central ward (comprising the majority of the current Newent Central parish ward) and Oxenhall & Newent North east ward (comprising the parishes of Oxenhall and Gorsley & Kilcott, the Newent North East parish ward and part of the Newent Central parish ward from Newent parish) would be 6 per cent above and 3 per cent above the district average respectively (both 5 per cent above by 2005).

107 As a consequence of its proposals for Newent, the Council proposed a revised single-member Tibberton ward, comprising the current ward together with the Newent South West parish ward of Newent parish. It further proposed retaining the current single-member Hartpury ward unchanged, which was supported by Hartpury Parish Council. Under the Council’s proposals the number of electors per councillor in the revised Tibberton ward and the existing Hartpury ward would be 7 per cent above and 1 per cent below the district average initially (5 per cent above and 3 per cent below by 2005).

108 In the very northern part of this area the Council proposed a revised single-member Redmarley ward (comprising the parishes of Redmarley D’Abitot, Pauntley and Staunton) and a revised single-member Bromesberrow & Dymock ward (comprising the parishes of Bromesberrow, Dymock and Kempsey). The number of electors per councillor in the Council’s proposed Redmarley and Bromesberrow & Dymock wards would be 5 per cent above and 14 per cent above the district average initially (2 per cent above and 12 per cent above by 2005). The Council argued that the higher electoral variance in its proposed Bromesberrow & Dymock ward could be justified “in these special circumstances” as “the options for this community on the northern edge of the district, divided by the M50, are limited”.

109 We carefully considered the scheme received at Stage One. We noted the alternative option of forming a district ward from the whole of Newent parish. However, we considered that such a warding arrangement would have a detrimental effect on the reflection of local communities as it would combine the town of Newent with its more rural hinterland, while also having the effect that the parishes of Oxenhall and Gorsley & Kilcott, which look towards Newent as their main commercial centre and service provider, would have to be linked northwards with the parish of Dymock, with which they share limited links. We therefore decided to adopt the Council's proposals with a minor modification in order to secure a more identifiable boundary. We considered that this warding arrangement provided the best balance between electoral equality and community identity.

110 At Stage Three the District Council expressed broad support for our draft recommendations as a whole.

111 District Councillor Vick objected to our proposed Newent Central and Oxenhall & Newent North East wards. He argued that the Commission's proposals failed to recognise the clearly defined urban boundaries of Newent and that they resulted in part of the town of Newent being warded with the rural areas of Newent and Oxenhall. He argued that the defined urban boundaries should be retained and suggested alternative warding arrangements in the area, consisting of a three-member Newent Central ward and two rural wards; a two-member Dymock ward and a one-member Newent & Oxenhall ward. He argued that a proposed increase in residential dwellings in Newent Town, as stated in the Forest of Dean's District Plan, justifies Newent Central ward keeping its existing boundaries and gaining an extra councillor.

112 Gorsley & Kilcott Parish Council expressed support for our proposed Oxenhall & Newent North East ward. However it objected to our proposed Newent Central ward, arguing that Newent Central should be represented by three members and retaining its existing boundaries. Newent Town Council also objected to our proposed Newent Central, and Oxenhall & Newent North East wards. It argued that Newent Central ward should be represented by three councillors citing the fact that the Forest of Dean District Plan will add another 150 dwellings and 300 electors to the electoral roll. It also argued that our proposed Oxenhall & Newent North East ward would result in semi-urban dwellings being included in a predominantly rural ward.

113 A local resident also objected to our proposals for this area. She argued that the existing Newent Central ward should be represented by three councillors and that the existing Newent & Oxenhall ward should be merged with Pauntley ward, thereby placing the whole urban area of Newent within one district ward and the whole of the rural area of Newent within the same district ward

114 Hartpury Parish Council and Redmarley Parish Council expressed support for our proposed Hartpury and Redmarley wards respectively.

115 We have carefully considered the representations we received at Stage Three. We note the objections to our proposed Newent Central and Oxenhall & Newent North East wards. Having visited the area we consider that there is some merit in the proposal to amend Newent Central ward and to make it a three-member ward. We also consider that there is some merit in the alternative configurations of rural parishes in the area as suggested by Councillor Vick. However,

the allocation of an additional councillor would result in an overall council size of 49 for the district council as a whole, the area being over-represented and a worsened balance of representation between the various areas within the district. We remain of the opinion that a council size of 48 delivers the best balance of representation for Forest of Dean District Council, and also note that a council size of 49 would lead to a deterioration in the levels of electoral equality elsewhere in the district. We also note that much of the projected increase in the electorate mentioned in the Forest of Dean District Plan, and used by various respondents to justify an increase in the number of councillors representing Newent Central, is not forecast to take place before 2005 and has not been included in the projected 2005 figures supplied to the Commission by the District Council.

116 In the light of this and given the fact that we have received support for our proposed Hartpury and Redmarley wards, and have received no comments regarding our proposed Bromesberrow & Dymock ward, we are content to endorse our draft recommendations as final in this area. Our final recommendations are illustrated on Map 2.

## **Electoral Cycle**

117 At Stage One we received one representation regarding the District Council's electoral cycle, from the District Council itself, which stated that it supported the retention of the existing cycle of whole council elections every four years. We therefore proposed no change to the current electoral cycle of whole-council elections.

118 At Stage Three no further comments were received to the contrary, and we therefore confirm our draft recommendations for the retention of whole-council elections every four years as final.

## **Conclusions**

119 Having carefully considered all the representations received in response to our consultation report, we have decided to fully endorse our draft recommendations as final.

120 We conclude that, in Forest of Dean:

- there should be a reduction in council size from 51 to 48;
- there should be 27 wards;
- the boundaries of 22 of the existing wards should be modified, resulting in a net reduction of one ward;
- elections should continue to be held for the whole council every four years.

121 Figure 4 shows the impact of our final recommendations on electoral equality, comparing them with the current arrangements, based on 2000 and 2005 electorate figures.

*Figure 4: Comparison of Current and Recommended Electoral Arrangements*

	2000 electorate		2005 forecast electorate	
	Current arrangements	Final recommendations	Current arrangements	Final recommendations
Number of councillors	51	48	51	48
Number of wards	28	27	28	27
Average number of electors per councillor	1,230	1,308	1,288	1,369
Number of wards with a variance more than 10 per cent from the average	20	3	17	3
Number of wards with a variance more than 20 per cent from the average	5	0	4	0

122 As shown in Figure 4, our final recommendations for the Forest of Dean District Council would result in a reduction in the number of wards varying by more than 10 per cent from the district average from 20 to three. By 2005 only three wards are forecast to vary by more than 10 per cent from the average for the district.

#### **Final Recommendation**

Forest of Dean District Council should comprise 48 councillors serving 27 wards, as detailed and named in Figures 1 and 2, and illustrated on Map 2 and in Appendix A, including the large map inside the back cover. The Council should continue to hold whole-council elections every four years.

### **Parish and Town Council Electoral Arrangements**

123 In undertaking reviews of electoral arrangements, we are required to comply as far as possible with the provisions set out in Schedule 11 to the 1972 Act. The Schedule provides that if a parish is to be divided between different district wards it must also be divided into parish wards, so that each parish ward lies wholly within a single ward of the district. Accordingly in our draft recommendations we proposed consequential warding arrangements for the parishes of Cinderford, Coleford, Drybrook, Lydney, Newent and West Dean.

124 The parish of Lydney is currently served by 15 councillors and is not warded. As outlined above, if a parish is divided between separate district wards, it should also be divided into wards.

In our draft recommendations we proposed that Lydney Town should be divided between the three district wards of Alvington, Aylburton & West Lydney ward, Lydney East ward and Lydney North ward, as suggested by the Labour Group and the District Council. As a consequence of our draft recommendations at district level we proposed that Lydney Town should be divided into three town wards, Lydney East, Lydney North and Lydney West, which would lie within Alvington, Aylburton and West Lydney district ward, Lydney North district ward and Lydney East district ward respectively. The three town wards would be represented by three, three and nine councillors respectively.

125 At Stage Three we received no representations regarding our proposals for Lydney Town Council. In the light of the confirmation of our proposed district wards in the area we are also confirming our draft recommendations for the Town Council as final.

**Final Recommendation**  
Lydney Town Council should comprise 15 councillors, as at present, representing three wards: Lydney West (returning three councillors), Lydney North (returning three councillors) and Lydney East (returning nine councillors). The town ward boundaries should reflect the proposed district ward boundaries in the area, as illustrated and named on the large map inserted at the back of this report.

126 The parish of Coleford is currently served by 13 councillors and is not warded. As outlined earlier, if a parish is divided between separate district wards, it should also be divided into parish wards. In our draft recommendations we proposed that Coleford Town should be divided between the two district wards of Coleford East and Coleford Central, as suggested by the District Council. As a consequence of these recommendations we proposed that the parish of Coleford Town should be divided into two town wards, Coleford East and Coleford Central, reflecting the proposed district wards, represented by eight and five councillors respectively.

127 At Stage Three we received no representations regarding our proposals for Coleford Town Council. In the light of the confirmation of our proposed district wards in the area we are also confirming our draft recommendations for the Town Council as final.

**Final Recommendation**  
Coleford Town Council should comprise 13 councillors, as at present, representing two wards: Coleford East (returning eight councillors) and Coleford Central (returning five councillors). The parish ward boundaries should reflect the proposed district ward boundaries in the area, as illustrated and named on the large map inserted at the back of this report.

128 The parish of West Dean is currently served by 15 councillors, representing three wards: Bream (returning six councillors), Berry Hill (returning four councillors) and Pillowell (returning

five councillors). In order to reflect our proposed district wards in this area, we proposed that the parish should be divided into five parish wards and that the existing number of parish councillors should be reallocated: Ellwood & Sling (returning two councillors), Bream (returning five councillors), Pillowell (returning five councillors), Christchurch (returning one councillor) and Berry Hill (returning two councillors).

129 In response to our consultation report West Dean Parish Council argued that the proposed Berry Hill parish ward of West Dean parish should include all of the area contained in the proposed Christchurch parish ward of West Dean Parish and that the Ellwood & Sling parish ward of West Dean Parish should be included in the proposed Bream district ward. We have noted the objections of West Dean Parish Council. However, as discussed earlier, we are unable to adopt their alternative arrangements for the area at district level due to the poor level of electoral equality that would result. We are therefore confirming our draft recommendations at district level in this area as final. Consequently, we propose confirming our draft recommendations for West Dean Parish Council’s electoral arrangements as final.

**Final Recommendation**  
West Dean Parish Council should comprise 15 councillors, as at present, representing five wards: Ellwood & Sling (returning two councillors), Bream (returning five councillors), Pillowell (returning five councillors), Christchurch (returning one councillor) and Berry Hill parish (returning two councillors). The boundaries between the five parish wards should reflect the proposed district ward boundaries, as illustrated and named on the large map inserted at the back of this report.

130 The parish of Cinderford is currently served by 15 councillors and is not warded. In our draft recommendations we proposed that Cinderford Town should be divided between the two district wards of Cinderford East and Cinderford West. As a consequence of our draft recommendations we proposed that Cinderford Town should be divided into two town wards, Cinderford East and Cinderford West, reflecting the proposed district wards, to be represented by six and nine councillors respectively.

131 At Stage Three we received no representations regarding our proposals for Cinderford Town Council. In the light of the confirmation of our proposed district wards in the area, we are also confirming our draft recommendations for the Cinderford Town Council as final.

**Final Recommendation**  
Cinderford Town Council should comprise 15 councillors, as at present, representing two wards: Cinderford East (returning six councillors) and Cinderford West (returning nine councillors). The parish ward boundaries should reflect the proposed district ward boundaries in the area, as illustrated and named on Map A2 in Appendix A.

132 The parish of Drybrook is currently served by 10 councillors and is not warded. In our draft recommendations we proposed that Drybrook parish should be divided between the two district wards of Lydbrook & Ruardean and Mitcheldean & Drybrook. As a consequence of our draft recommendations we proposed that Drybrook parish should be divided into two parish wards, Ruardean Hill and Drybrook Village, reflecting the proposed district wards, to be represented by four and six councillors respectively.

133 At Stage Three we received representations from County Councillor Gardiner, District Councillor Smith and Drybrook and Mitcheldean Parish Councils opposing our proposed parish warding of Drybrook parish. All the respondents argued that our proposals would lead to some residents looking to Drybrook for parish councillors and Lydbrook & Ruardean for district councillors and argued that Drybrook should not be warded and split between two district wards.

134 We have carefully considered the objections raised to the parish warding of Drybrook parish. We have also considered the alternative suggestion of warding Drybrook and Mitcheldean parishes in district wards of their own. However, we are unable to adopt the alternative warding arrangements suggested for the area at district level due to the poor level of electoral equality that would result. As a result we have decided to confirm our draft recommendations at district level in this area as final. Given this we also confirm our parishing arrangements as final.

**Final Recommendations**

Drybrook Parish Council should comprise 10 councillors, as at present, representing two wards: Ruardean Hill (returning four councillors) and Drybrook Village (returning six councillors). The parish ward boundaries should reflect the proposed district ward boundaries in the area, as illustrated and named on Map A3 in Appendix A.

135 The parish of Newent is currently served by 13 councillors, representing three wards: Newent Central (returning nine councillors), Newent North East (returning two councillors) and Newent South West (returning two councillors). In order to reflect our proposed district wards in this area, we proposed that the parish should be divided into three town wards and that the existing number of parish councillors should be reallocated: Newent Central (returning nine councillors), Newent North East (returning three councillors) and Newent South West (returning one councillor).

136 At Stage Three we received representations from Gorsley & Kilcote Parish Council, Newent Town Council, Councillor Vick and a local resident all opposing our proposed re-warding of Newent Town Council. All the respondents argued that our proposals would result in the parish ward of Newent North East being warded at district level in a scattered rural area, Oxenhall & Newent North East district ward, with which it has little in common and suggested that the parish ward of Newent North East should remain within the existing Newent Central ward, a ward which should be given an additional district councillor. Gorsley & Kilcote Parish Council also objected to the placement of the proposed Newent South West ward of Newent Town Council in the district ward of Tibberton arguing that it would result in an area of Newent Town Council being placed in a ward with which it has nothing in common.

137 We have carefully considered the objections raised to the warding of Newent Town Council. However, we are unable to retain the urban area of Newent Town Council within a three member district ward as this would result in either a larger council size and worse electoral equality elsewhere in the district or poorer levels of electoral equality under a council size of 48. We are therefore confirming our warding arrangements at district level in this area as final and, consequently, we are also confirming our draft recommendations for Newent Town Council's electoral arrangements as final.

**Final Recommendation**

Newent Town Council should comprise 13 councillors, as at present, representing three wards: Newent Central (returning nine councillors), Newent North East (returning three councillors) and Newent South West (returning one councillor). The boundaries between the three town wards should reflect the proposed district ward boundaries, as illustrated and named on Maps A4 and A5 in Appendix A.

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

**Final Recommendation**

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

*Map 2: The Commission's Final Recommendations for Forest of Dean*

## 6 NEXT STEPS

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

140 It now falls to the Secretary of State to decide whether to give effect to our recommendations, with or without modification, and to implement them by means of an Order. Such an Order will not be made before 7 August 2001.

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

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



## APPENDIX A

### **Final Recommendations for the Forest of Dean: Detailed Mapping**

The following maps illustrate the Commission's proposed ward boundaries for the Forest of Dean area.

**Map A1** illustrates, in outline form, the proposed ward boundaries within the district and indicates the areas which are shown in more detail in Maps A2, A3, A4 and A5, and the large map at the back of the report.

**Map A2** illustrates the proposed district and parish warding of Cinderford.

**Map A3** illustrates the proposed district and parish warding of Drybrook parish.

**Map A4** illustrates the proposed district and parish warding of Newent.

**Map A5** illustrates the proposed district and parish warding of Newent.

The **large map** inserted in the back of the report illustrates the existing and proposed warding arrangements for Coleford, West Dean and Lydney.

*Map A1: Final Recommendations for the Forest of Dean: Key Map*

*Map A2: Proposed district and parish warding of Cinderford*

*Map A3: Proposed district and parish warding of Drybrook parish*

*Map A4: Proposed district and parish warding of Newent*

*Map A5: Proposed district and parish warding of Newent*

## 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](http://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, 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: Commission 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	The Commission complies with this requirement
It should be clear who is being consulted, about what questions, in what timescale and for what purpose	The Commission complies 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	The Commission complies 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	The Commission complies 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	The Commission consults 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	The Commission complies with this requirement
Departments should monitor and evaluate consultations, designating a consultation coordinator who will ensure the lessons are disseminated	The Commission complies with this requirement