

Draft recommendations on the  
future electoral arrangements for  
Fenland in Cambridgeshire

*November 2001*

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# WHAT IS THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT COMMISSION FOR ENGLAND?

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

Members of the Commission:

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

Barbara Stephens (Chief Executive)

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



## SUMMARY

We began a review of Fenland's electoral arrangements on 17 April 2001.

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

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

- **In 19 of the 25 wards the number of electors represented by each councillor varies by more than 10 per cent from the average for the district, and 10 wards vary by more than 20 per cent.**
- **By 2006 this situation is expected to worsen, with the number of electors per councillor forecast to vary by more than 10 per cent from the average in 14 wards and by more than 20 per cent in 11 wards.**

Our main proposals for Fenland's future electoral arrangements (see Tables 1 and 2 and paragraphs 81- 82) are that:

- **Fenland District Council should have 40 councillors, the same number as at present;**
- **there should be 28 wards, instead of 25 as at present;**
- **the boundaries of 22 of the existing wards should be modified, resulting in a net increase of three, and three 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 11 of the proposed 28 wards the number of electors per councillor would vary by no more than 10 per cent from the district average.**
- **This level of electoral equality is expected to improve further, with the number of electors per councillor in all wards expected to vary by no more than 10 per cent from the average for the district in 2006.**

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

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

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

- **We will consult on these proposals for eight weeks from 27 November 2001. We take this consultation very seriously. We may decide to move away from our draft recommendations in the light of comments or suggestions that we receive. It is therefore important that all interested parties let us have their views and evidence, *whether or not* they agree with our draft recommendations.**
- **After considering local views, we will decide whether to modify our draft recommendations. We will then submit our final recommendations to the Electoral Commission which, subject to Parliamentary approval, with effect from 1 April 2002 will be responsible for implementing change to local authority electoral arrangements.**
- **The Electoral Commission will decide whether to accept, modify or reject our final recommendations. It will also decide when any changes come into effect.**

You should express your views by writing directly to us at the address below by 28 January 2002:

**Review Manager  
Fenland Review  
LGCE  
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**Fax: 020 7404 6142  
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Website: [www.lgce.gov.uk](http://www.lgce.gov.uk)**



Table 1: Draft Recommendations: Summary

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Constituent areas	Map reference
1	Bassenhally	1	The proposed Bassenhally parish ward of Whittlesey parish,	Map 2, Map A1 and the large map
2	Benwick, Coates & Eastrea	2	The parish of Benwick; the proposed Whittlesey South parish ward of Whittlesey parish,	Map 2, Map A1 and the large map
3	Birch	1	The proposed Birch parish ward of Chatteris parish,	Map 2, Map A1 and Map A2
4	Burrowmoor	1	The proposed Burrowmoor parish ward of March parish,	Map 2, Map A1 and the large map
5	Clarkson	1	The proposed Clarkson parish ward of Wisbech parish,	Map 2, Map A1 and the large map
6	Delph	1	The proposed Delph parish ward of Whittlesey parish,	Map 2, Map A1 and the large map
7	Doddington	1	The parish of Doddington,	Map 2 and Map A1
8	Elm & Christchurch	2	The parishes of Christchurch and Elm,	Map 2 and Map A1
9	Estover	2	The proposed Estover parish ward of March parish,	Map 2, Map A1 and the large map
10	Hill	2	The proposed Hill parish ward of Wisbech parish,	Map 2, Map A1 and the large map
11	Kingsmoor	1	The proposed Kingsmoor parish ward of Whittlesey parish,	Map 2, Map A1 and the large map
12	Kirkgate	1	The proposed Kirkgate parish ward of Wisbech parish,	Map 2, Map A1 and the large map
13	Lattersey	1	The proposed Lattersey parish ward of Whittlesey parish,	Map 2, Map A1 and the large map
14	Manea	1	<i>Unchanged:</i> the parish of Manea,	Map 2 and Map A1
15	Medworth	1	The proposed Medworth parish ward of Wisbech parish,	Map 2, Map A1 and the large map
16	Norwood	3	The proposed Norwood parish ward of March parish,	Map 2, Map A1 and the large map
17	Parson Drove & Wisbech	2	<i>Unchanged:</i> the parishes of Parson Drove and Wisbech St Mary,	Map 2 and Map A1
18	Peckover	1	The proposed Peckover parish ward of Wisbech parish,	Map 2, Map A1 and the large map
19	Roman Bank	3	The parishes of Gorefield, Leverington, Newton and Tydd St Giles,	Map 2 and Map A1
20	St Andrews	1	The proposed St Andrews parish ward of Whittlesey parish,	Map 2, Map A1 and the large map
21	St Marys	1	The proposed St Marys parish ward of Whittlesey parish,	Map 2, Map A1 and the large map

<b>Ward name</b>	<b>Number of councillors</b>	<b>Constituent areas</b>	<b>Map reference</b>
22 Slade Lode	1	The proposed Slade Lode parish ward of Chatteris parish,	Map 2, Map A1 and Map A2
23 Staithe	1	The proposed Staithe parish ward of Wisbech parish,	Map 2, Map A1 and the large map
24 The Mills	1	The proposed The Mills parish ward of Chatteris parish,	Map 2, Map A1 and Map A2
25 Town End	3	The proposed Town End parish ward of March parish,	Map 2, Map A1 and the large map
26 Waterlees	2	The proposed Waterlees parish ward of Wisbech parish,	Map 2, Map A1 and the large map
27 Wenneye	1	The proposed Wenneye parish ward of Chatteris parish,	Map 2, Map A1 and Map A2
28 Wimblington	1	<i>Unchanged:</i> the parish of Wimblington,	Map 2 and Map A1

*Notes: 1 The wards in the above table are illustrated on Map 2, Maps A1-A2 in Appendix A and the large map at the back of the report.*

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

Table 2: Draft Recommendations for Fenland

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2001)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2006)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
1	Bassenhally	1	1,270	1,270	-22	1,790	1,790	4
2	Benwick, Coates & Eastrea	2	3,094	1,547	-5	3,140	1,570	-9
3	Birch	1	1,575	1,575	-4	1,848	1,848	7
4	Burrowmoor	1	1,766	1,766	8	1,841	1,841	7
5	Clarkson	1	1,568	1,568	-4	1,632	1,632	-5
6	Delph	1	1,456	1,456	-11	1,810	1,810	5
7	Doddington	1	1,621	1,621	-1	1,560	1,560	-9
8	Elm & Christchurch	2	3,281	1,641	0	3,440	1,720	0
9	Estover	2	2,747	1,374	-16	3,197	1,599	-7
10	Hill	2	3,497	1,749	7	3,477	1,739	1
11	Kingsmoor	1	1,280	1,280	-22	1,850	1,850	7
12	Kirkgate	1	1,672	1,672	2	1,614	1,614	-6
13	Lattersey	1	1,913	1,913	17	1,810	1,810	5
14	Manea	1	1,243	1,243	-24	1,600	1,600	-7
15	Medworth	1	1,769	1,769	8	1,774	1,774	3
16	Norwood	3	4,774	1,591	-3	4,851	1,617	-6
17	Parson Drove & Wisbech St Mary	2	3,191	1,596	-2	3,340	1,670	-3
18	Peckover	1	1,654	1,654	1	1,659	1,659	-4
19	Roman Bank	3	4,698	1,566	-4	4,880	1,627	-6
20	St Andrews	1	1,975	1,975	21	1,870	1,870	9
21	St Marys	1	1,867	1,867	14	1,840	1,840	7
22	Slade Lode	1	1,761	1,761	8	1,782	1,782	3
23	Staithe	1	1,789	1,789	9	1,763	1,763	2
24	The Mills	1	1,868	1,868	14	1,780	1,780	3
25	Town End	3	5,527	1,842	13	5,591	1,864	8

	<b>Ward name</b>	<b>Number of councillors</b>	<b>Electorate (2001)</b>	<b>Number of electors per councillor</b>	<b>Variance from average %</b>	<b>Electorate (2006)</b>	<b>Number of electors per councillor</b>	<b>Variance from average %</b>
26	Waterlees	2	3,452	1,726	6	3,701	1,851	7
27	Wenneye	1	1,698	1,698	4	1,850	1,850	7
28	Wimblington	1	1,365	1,365	-16	1,620	1,620	-6
	<b>Totals</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>65,371</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>68,910</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>
	<b>Averages</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>1,634</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>1,723</b>	<b>-</b>

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

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

# 1 INTRODUCTION

1 This report contains our proposals for the electoral arrangements for the district of Fenland in Cambridgeshire, on which we are now consulting. We are reviewing the five districts in Cambridgeshire as part of our programme of periodic electoral reviews (PERs) of all 386 principal local authority areas in England. Our programme started in 1996 and is expected to finish in 2004.

2 This is our first review of the electoral arrangements of Fenland. Fenland's last review was carried out by our predecessor, the Local Government Boundary Commission (LGBC), which reported to the Secretary of State in August 1975 (Report no. 56). The electoral arrangements of Cambridgeshire County Council were last reviewed in March 1988 (Report no. 546). We expect to review the County Council's electoral arrangements in 2002.

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

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

4 Full details of the legislation under which we work are set out in a document entitled *Guidance and Procedural Advice for Local Authorities and Other Interested Parties* (fourth edition published in December 2000). This *Guidance* sets out our approach to the reviews.

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

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

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

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

to look carefully at arguments why this might not be so. However, we have found it necessary to safeguard against upward drift in the number of councillors, and we believe that any proposal for an increase in council size will need to be fully justified. In particular, we do not accept that an increase in electorate should automatically result in an increase in the number of councillors, or that changes should be made to the size of a council simply to make it more consistent with the size of other similar councils.

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

*Table 3: Stages of the Review*

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

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

11 Stage One began on 17 April 2001, when we wrote to Fenland District Council inviting proposals for future electoral arrangements. We also notified Cambridgeshire County Council, Cambridgeshire Police Authority, the local authority associations, Cambridgeshire Local Councils Association, parish and town councils in the district, the Members of Parliament with constituencies in the district, the Members of the European Parliament for the Eastern Region and the headquarters of the main political parties. We placed a notice in the local press, issued a press release and invited Fenland District Council to publicise the review further. The closing date for receipt of submissions (the end of Stage One) was 13 August 2001.

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

13 We are currently at Stage Three. This stage, which began on 27 November 2001 and will end on 28 January 2002, involves publishing the draft proposals in this report and public consultation on them. **We take this consultation very seriously and it is therefore important that all those interested in the review should let us have their views and evidence, whether or not they agree with these draft proposals.**

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

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





## 2 CURRENT ELECTORAL ARRANGEMENTS

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

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

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

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

*Map 1: Existing Wards in Fenland*

Table 4: Existing Electoral Arrangements

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

Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2001)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2006)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
23 Wisbech North East	2	2,314	1,157	-29	2,240	1,120	-35
24 Wisbech North	3	4,241	1,414	-13	4,570	1,523	-12
25 Wisbech South West	3	5,305	1,768	8	5,320	1,773	3
<b>Totals</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>65,371</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>68,910</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>
<b>Averages</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>1,634</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>1,723</b>	<b>-</b>

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

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

### 3 SUBMISSIONS RECEIVED

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

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

#### **Fenland District Council**

22 The District Council proposed retaining the current council size of 40 members, serving 36 wards, compared to the existing 25 wards. However, following its initial submission, the Council withdrew the part of its scheme that related to the warding of March. Disregarding their proposals for March, the District Council proposed a system of one three-member ward, two two-member wards and 24 single-member wards, with just one ward having an electoral variance of more than 10 per cent by 2006. The Council proposed retaining the current system of whole-council elections.

23 The Council proposed a scheme of predominantly single-member wards except in those areas where it realised that single-member wards would lead to unacceptably high levels of electoral inequality. It stated that a single-member ward scheme would mean that “electors would clearly understand that this one councillor was their representative, and there would be no blurring of responsibilities, such as does occur in multiple member wards”.

#### **Whittlesey Branch Labour Party**

24 Whittlesey Branch Labour Party proposed a scheme for Whittlesey town and included comments on certain aspects of the District Council’s proposals with which it did not agree. It proposed one two-member ward and six single-member wards in Whittlesey and also proposed a three-member ward containing the parishes of Benwick, Doddington, Manea and Wimblington. The Labour Party scheme for Whittlesey provided a good level of electoral equality, with no ward having an electoral variance of more than 10 per cent by 2006. It considered that some of the boundaries used in the District Council’s proposals were “bizarre and in some cases outrageous”, commenting that the District Council’s proposal to split the Parson Drove & Wisbech St Mary ward was “a nonsense”, and therefore proposed retaining the existing two-member ward. Whittlesey Branch Labour Party also proposed that “in the interest of democracy the Council should switch to retirement by thirds”.

#### **Fenland District Labour Party**

25 Fenland District Labour Party proposed a scheme of nine single-member wards for Wisbech town. This scheme provided a good level of electoral equality, with no ward having an electoral variance of more than 10 per cent by 2006. Fenland District Labour Party also proposed the introduction of elections by thirds or halves for Fenland District Council.

## **Parish and Town Councils**

26 Chatteris Town Council supported the single-member ward scheme for Chatteris proposed by the District Council. However, the Town Council expressed reservations over the proposed growth and future development of Chatteris and was “convinced that the projected electorate figures for 2006 are far too low, particularly in the Birch and Wenneye wards”. It felt that a fifth district councillor covering the East ward of the town would be a better solution than having four slightly under-represented wards.

27 March Town Council stated a preference for three three-member district wards in March, with each ward returning four town councillors, but did not provide any details of such a scheme. It considered that “our option would ensure that each ward had at least one elected official at all times and [would] best suit democracy within the town”.

## 4 ANALYSIS AND DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS

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

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

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

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

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

### **Electorate Forecasts**

33 Since 1975 there has been a 32 per cent increase in the electorate of Fenland district. The District Council submitted electorate forecasts for the year 2006, projecting an increase in the electorate of approximately 5 per cent, from 65,371 to 68,910, over the five-year period from 2001 to 2006. It expects most of the growth to be in Whittlesey and March, although a significant amount is also expected in the more rural Manea and Wimblington wards. In order to prepare these forecasts, the Council estimated rates and locations of housing development with regard to structure and local plans, the expected rate of building over the five-year period and assumed occupancy rates. Figures obtained from the District Council regarding planned population growth sites were used to determine the effect on electorates of changes to ward boundaries.

34 Chatteris Town Council expressed reservations about the proposed growth figures for Chatteris and considered that the projected electorate figures for 2006 were far too low. The District Council commented that while “there was speculation about the possibility of substantial growth in the ‘Greater Cambridge Area’...This was in addition to the scheduled growth in the development plan” and therefore these figures could not be taken into account as part of a periodic electoral review.

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

## **Council Size**

36 As explained earlier, we start by assuming that the current council size facilitates effective and convenient local government, although we are willing to look carefully at arguments why this might not be the case.

37 Fenland District Council presently has 40 members, and the District Council proposed retaining this council size. It stated that it had considered whether an increase was necessary to account for the growth in the district since the last review but felt that “taking into account the rapid growth in the development of communications technology, and the improvements in transport and infrastructure, it was possible for a councillor to represent a larger number of electors than was possible a quarter of a century ago”. The Council also felt that “a larger Council would be unwieldy, more expensive and unnecessary”. No other representations were received regarding council size at Stage One.

38 Having looked at the size and distribution of the electorate, the geography and other characteristics of the area, together with the responses received, we conclude that the achievement of electoral equality and the statutory criteria would best be met by a council of 40 members.

## **Electoral Arrangements**

39 The District Council’s proposed scheme was the only district-wide scheme that we received but it later withdrew the part of its scheme relating to the warding arrangements in March. Fenland District Council proposed a system of largely single-member wards giving a reasonable level of electoral equality, with only one ward having an electoral variance of over 10 per cent by 2006. The Council considered that the “fundamental electoral principle of equality of electoral representation was best achieved by designing a system of single-member wards, wherever possible”. However, it also “recognised that adhering to this desired democratic focus might be difficult in the more rural areas of the District and accepted that a small number of multi-member wards might be necessary”. The Council undertook a consultation process with interested local bodies and took the results of this process into account when formulating its submission.



40 Whittlesey Branch Labour Party proposed a scheme for Whittlesey comprising six single-member wards and one two-member ward. This scheme provided for good levels of electoral equality, with no ward having an electoral variance of more than 10 per cent by 2006. Whittlesey Branch Labour Party felt that “the wards proposed by the district council are rather like the ‘curate’s egg’, good in parts, but overall we find them unacceptable”.

41 Fenland District Labour Party proposed a scheme for Wisbech comprising nine single-member wards. This scheme provided a good level of electoral equality, with no ward having an electoral variance of more than 10 per cent by 2006. Fenland District Labour Party considered “that many of the [District Council’s] proposed ward boundaries have no real logic [and] also many boundaries could not be considered to be permanent and easily definable”.

42 Having carefully considered all the representations received, and in order to secure the best balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria, we propose basing our draft recommendations on the District Council’s scheme. However, in order to improve electoral equality further and to provide strong and easily identifiable boundaries whilst having regard to local community identities and interests, we have decided to move away from the Council’s proposals in Wisbech and in Parson Drove & Wisbech St Mary where, with two amendments, we are adopting the Fenland District Labour Party and Whittlesey Branch Labour Party’s proposals. Due to the lack of any detailed representations at Stage One regarding the warding of March we are proposing our own scheme for March. For district warding purposes, the following areas, based on existing wards, are considered in turn:

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

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

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

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

45 The District Council proposed a system of nine single-member wards for Wisbech. It proposed a new Peckover ward containing all the electors west of the River Nene and retaining the existing western boundary with Parson Drove & Wisbech St Mary ward. It proposed a new Weasenham ward which would be bounded to the west by the River Nene, including all the electors on and to the south of Queens Road, Station Drive and Railway Road. The District Council also proposed a new Westmead ward centred on the Ramnoth Road and Elm Road area and extending north to Norwich Road and east to Meadowgate Lane. It also proposed a new Castle ward centred on the northern end of Churchill Road, The Crescent and the North Cambridgeshire Hospital. It proposed a new Avenues ward containing all the electors in and to the east of the Avenues housing estate. It proposed a new Clarkson ward containing all the electors in the Clarkson Avenue and Clarkson Infants School area. It also proposed a new Kirkgate ward with Kirkgate Street as the focal point, extending to Staithe Road in the south and Walton Road in the west. Finally it proposed splitting the majority of the area to the east of Walton Road and the north of Lynn Road into two separate wards, with a proposed Waterlees ward including all the electors in the Tinkers Drove and St Michael's Avenue area and a proposed Osborne ward including all the electors in the Mount Pleasant and Brigstock Road area.

46 Under the Council's proposals the number of electors per councillor in the proposed Avenues, Clarkson, Waterlees and Westmead wards would be 3 per cent, 2 per cent, 4 per cent and 3 per cent above the district average respectively (1 per cent below, 3 per cent below, 9 per cent above and 5 per cent above the district average by 2006). The number of electors per councillor in the proposed Castle, Kirkgate, Osborne, Peckover and Weasenham wards would be 5 per cent below, equal to the district average, 2 per cent, 4 per cent and 7 per cent below the district average respectively (2 per cent above, 2 per cent below, 3 per cent above, 7 per cent below and equal to the district average by 2006).

47 Fenland District Labour Party proposed an alternative scheme of nine single-member wards for the town of Wisbech. It proposed a Peckover ward following the same boundaries as those proposed by the District Council, but the rest of its wards followed a different pattern. It proposed a new Young ward with boundaries running down the centre of Brigstock and Mount Pleasant Roads and behind the properties on the west side of Tinkers Drove. It proposed a new Waterlees ward with a boundary running down the centre of Lynn Road and behind the properties to the west of Tinkers Drove. It proposed a new Clarkson ward which would include all the electors in the area bordered by Brigstock and Mount Pleasant Roads to the north, the River Nene to the west and Churchill and Norwich Roads to the south. This ward would also include all properties on and to the west of Colville Road and all properties on Clarkson Avenue. The Labour Party also proposed a new Kirkgate ward with boundaries of Lynn Road, Norwich Road and the district boundary. The southern boundary of this proposed ward would run behind the properties on the south side of York Road and then behind the properties to the north of Colville Road. It proposed a new Staithe ward which would contain all the electors to the east of Norwich Road, Boyces Road, Money Bank, Quakers Lane and Meadowgate Lane. It proposed an Arles ward which would contain all the electors in the area bordered by Meadowgate Lane, Quakers Lane, Money Bank, Boyces Road, Norwich Road, Ramnoth Road and Elm High Road. This ward would also contain all the electors in and to the north of the Westmead Avenue area. It also proposed a new Hill ward with boundaries of Elm High Road, Ramnoth Road, Norwich Road, Churchill Road, Victoria Road, Railway Road, Sandall Road, Weasenham Lane and New Drove. Finally, it proposed a Medworth ward containing all the electors in the area east of the River Nene and

west of Churchill Road, Victoria Road, Railway Road, Sandall Road, Weasenham Lane and New Drove. The Labour Party considered that under the District Council's scheme "many of the proposed ward boundaries have no real logic also many boundaries could not be considered to be permanent and easily definable".

48 Under the Labour Party proposals the number of electors per councillor in the proposed Arles, Hill, Kirkgate, Medworth and Staithe wards would be 7 per cent, 7 per cent, 2 per cent, 8 per cent and 9 per cent above the district average respectively (equal to the district average, 2 per cent above, 6 per cent below, 3 per cent above and 2 per cent above the district average by 2006). The number of electors per councillor in the proposed Clarkson, Peckover, Waterlees and Young wards would be 4 per cent below, 1 per cent above, 4 per cent above and 7 per cent above the district average respectively (5 per cent below, 4 per cent below, 9 per cent above and 6 per cent above the district average by 2006).

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

50 Under our draft recommendations the number of electors per councillor in our proposed Hill, Kirkgate, Medworth, Peckover, Staithe and Waterlees wards would be 7 per cent, 2 per cent, 8 per cent, 1 per cent, 9 per cent and 6 per cent above the district average respectively (1 per cent above, 6 per cent below, 3 per cent above, 4 per cent below, 2 per cent and 7 per cent above the district average by 2006). The number of electors per councillor in our proposed Clarkson ward would be 4 per cent below the district average (5 per cent below the district average by 2006). We would welcome the views of interested parties regarding these proposals at Stage Three. Our draft proposals are illustrated on Map 2 and the large map at the back of the report.

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

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

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

52 The District Council proposed a scheme of six single-member wards and one two-member ward for the town of Whittlesey. It proposed a new St Andrews ward largely based on the existing Whittlesey West ward. This St Andrews ward would contain all the electors in the area south of Stonald Road, west of Low Cross and Church Street and north of Briggate West and Kings Dyke. It also proposed a new Delph ward containing all the electors north of Stonald Road and on and to the west of Norman Close. Its proposed new Bassenhally ward would include all the electors north of Drybread Road and on and to the east of White Acres. It proposed a new Kingsmoor ward which would contain all the electors north of Eastrea Road, east of Cemetery Road and south of Drybread Road. This ward would also contain all those electors on Elm Park. The District Council also proposed a new Lattersey ward, with a northern boundary of the centre of Eastrea Road and a western boundary of the centre of Inhams Road. The southern boundary would run behind the properties on Station Road and Marne Road and then east along the railway. It proposed a new St Marys ward which would be bordered by the railway to the south, by Kings Dyke, Briggate West, Church Street and Low Cross to the west and by Bassenhally Road to the north. This ward would also include all the electors to the west of Cemetery Road and Inhams Road with the exception of those on Elm Park. It would also include all the electors on Station Road north of the railway and all the electors on Marne Road. Finally, the District Council proposed a two-member Benwick, Coates & Eastrea ward largely based on the existing Whittlesey South ward together with Benwick parish (currently in Benwick & Doddington ward).

53 Whittlesey Branch Labour Party proposed a fairly similar scheme to that of the District Council consisting of six single-member wards and one two-member ward. It proposed a West ward largely based on the existing Whittlesey West ward but utilising Plough Road, Horsegate Lane and Park Lane as the eastern boundary. It also proposed a two-member Bassenhally ward including all the electors to the north of Stonald Road, Bassenhally Road and Drybread Road. It proposed a new Kingsmoor ward which would have boundaries of Cemetery Road, Eastrea Road and Drybread Road. The Labour Party also proposed a new East ward with boundaries of Half Acre Drove, Eastrea Road, Eastfield Drive, Millfield Way, New Road, Inhams Road, Station Road and the railway. Its proposed new Central ward would contain all the electors in the Whitmore Street and Syers Lane area as well as some to the east of Inhams Road. It also proposed a new South ward which would include electors to the south of Market Street and Station Road and, finally, a Coates & Eastrea ward which would contain the villages of Coates and Eastrea.

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

55 Under our draft recommendations the number of electors per councillor in our proposed Lattersey, St Andrews and St Marys wards would be 17 per cent, 21 per cent and 14 per cent

above the district average respectively (5 per cent, 9 per cent and 7 per cent above the district average by 2006). The number of electors per councillor in our proposed Bassenhally, Delph and Kingsmoor wards would be 22 per cent, 11 per cent and 22 per cent below the district average respectively (4 per cent, 5 per cent and 7 per cent above the district average by 2006). Our draft proposals are illustrated on Map 2 and the large map at the back of the report.

### **March East, March North and March West wards**

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

57 The District Council initially provided a scheme for March but later withdrew this scheme when it realised that its proposals did not conform to our statutory criteria as it had proposed nine district wards, but only three parish wards covering the same area. Both Fenland District Labour Party and Whittlesey Branch Labour Party considered that an arrangement of three-member wards would provide the best possible solution in March but neither party submitted a detailed proposal. March Town Council proposed an arrangement of three three-member wards, with each ward electing four town councillors, as the best solution for March, but again no detailed submission was received. In the light of the fact that no detailed scheme has been submitted for the warding of March we have formulated our own proposals which, we consider, provide a good balance between electoral equality, the provision of strong, easily identifiable boundaries and the recognition of community identity.

58 We are proposing a scheme for March comprising two three-member wards, one two-member ward and one single-member ward. The southern boundary of our proposed three-member Norwood ward would consist of the railway line to the west of March town, the Isle of Ely road and the River Nene. This ward would include all the electors in the area north of the River Nene, west of Broad Street and west of Station Road. The eastern boundary of our proposed Norwood ward would consist of Station Road and the railway line, running briefly west, before turning north to the existing boundary with Elm ward. Our proposed two-member Estover ward would also use the River Nene for its southern boundary for the most part, and Broad Street, Station Road and the railway line would form the western boundary of this ward. However, our proposed ward would extend south of the River Nene to include all properties on either side of the High Street down to the junction with St Peters Road. This proposed ward would also include all the electors on Acre Road, City Road, George Street, Chapel Street and Causeway Gardens as well as those on Scargells Yard, Old Court Place and Bevills Place. The inclusion of this area south of the river in our proposed ward would not only provide improved electoral equality but also unite all properties in the centre of the town in one single ward and therefore, we consider, would recognise community identity. Our proposed Town End three-member ward would contain all the electors south of the River Nene and east of the High Street, The Causeway, The Avenue and Wimblington Road with the exception of those electors on Scargells Yard, Old Court Place and Bevills Place. This proposed ward would also contain all the electors to the south of Springfield Avenue and would have, as its southern boundary, the existing boundary with Wimblington ward. Finally, our proposed single-member Burrowmoor ward would contain all the electors to the south of

the River Nene, the east of the High Street and The Causeway except those electors on Acre Road, City Road, George Street, Chapel Street and Causeway Gardens. This proposed ward would also include all the electors on and to the north of Springfield Avenue.

59 We consider that these wards would provide a good level of electoral equality, utilise strong boundaries such as the River Nene and the railway line, and take account of community identity by ensuring that March town centre is entirely contained within a single ward. While we recognise that there is local support for three-member wards, we received no detailed proposals for any wards and were ourselves unable to come up with a uniform three-member scheme which provided a satisfactory level of electoral equality while also utilising strong boundaries and taking account of community identity. We consider that the scheme we are proposing provides the best balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria. We would, however, welcome local comment on our proposals during Stage Three, in particular the views of March Town Council.

60 Under our draft recommendations the number of electors in our proposed Burrowmoor and Town End wards would be 8 per cent and 13 per cent above the district average respectively (7 per cent and 8 per cent above the district average by 2006). The number of electors in our proposed Estover and Norwood wards would be 16 per cent and 3 per cent below the district average respectively (7 per cent and 6 per cent below the district average by 2006). Our draft proposals are illustrated on Map 2 and the large map at the back of the report.

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

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

62 The District Council proposed a system of four single-member wards largely based on the existing ward structure but with amendments to provide an improved level of electoral equality. It proposed retaining the existing Chatteris West ward with two slight amendments. The first of these would be to leave the existing boundary at the A141 and run the boundary north along Fenland Way before rejoining the existing boundary at Station Street. The other proposed change would be to include all the electors south of Station Street and west of Station Road in this proposed ward, to be called The Mills ward. The existing Chatteris South ward would be extended northwards and eastwards to include all the electors on The Hawthorns, Horsegate Gardens and Railway Lane. The boundary would then run east along the B1098 and behind the properties on St Peter's Drive, Birch Avenue and The Elms before running south along the Eastern Bypass. This ward would be called Wenneye ward. The District Council proposed that the existing Chatteris East ward be renamed Birch ward and should have an amended western boundary to provide a good level of electoral equality. This proposed ward would include all the electors on and to the east of St Paul's Drive, St Peter's Drive, St Martin's Close, Birch Avenue and The Elms and would utilise the Eastern Bypass to the north and Iretons Way to the south as the western boundary. Finally the District Council proposed an amended Chatteris North ward, to be renamed Slade Lode ward. This ward

would contain all the electors north of Station Street with the exception of those on Horsegate Gardens, The Hawthorns, Railway Lane and King Edward Road. This proposed ward would also include all the electors to the west of St Paul's Drive but would not include those electors on St Paul's Drive itself. To the north of the town this ward would use the Eastern Bypass as the eastern boundary.

63 Under the Council's proposals the number of electors per councillor in the proposed Slade Lode and The Mills wards would be 11 per cent and 14 per cent above the district average respectively (7 per cent and 3 per cent above the district average by 2006). The number of electors per councillor in the proposed Birch and Wenneye wards would be 7 per cent and 4 per cent below the district average respectively (4 per cent and 7 per cent above the district average by 2006).

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

65 We looked carefully at the scheme put forward by the District Council and concluded that this scheme provided good electoral equality as well as utilising strong, easily identifiable boundaries. Therefore, with one minor amendment, moving all the electors to the west of Doddington Road from Slade Lode ward into Birch ward to better reflect community identity, we endorse the Council's proposals for Chatteris in full.

66 Under our draft recommendations the number of electors per councillor in our proposed Slade Lode, The Mills and Wenneye wards would be 8 per cent, 14 per cent and 4 per cent above the district average respectively (3 per cent, 3 per cent and 7 per cent above the district average by 2006). The number of electors per councillor in our proposed Birch ward would be 4 per cent below the district average (7 per cent above the district average by 2006). Our draft proposals are illustrated on Map 2 and Map A2.

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

67 These three wards are all situated in the extreme north of the district. Leverington ward (comprising the parishes of Gorefield and Leverington) and Parson Drove & Wisbech St Mary ward (comprising the parishes of Parson Drove and Wisbech St Mary) are represented by two councillors while Newton & Tydd St Giles ward (comprising the parishes of Newton and Tydd St Giles) is represented by one councillor. The number of electors per councillor in

Leverington ward is 2 per cent above the district average (3 per cent above the district average by 2006). The number of electors per councillor in Newton & Tydd St Giles and Parson Drove & Wisbech St Mary wards is 17 per cent and 2 per cent below the district average respectively (22 per cent and 3 per cent below the average by 2006).

68 The District Council proposed a three-member Roman Bank ward covering the four parishes of Gorefield, Leverington, Newton and Tydd St Giles. It stated a wish to maintain a scheme of single-member wards but realised that a single-member Newton & Tydd St Giles ward would lead to an unacceptable level of electoral variance. As a result of this the Council proposed an alternative three-member ward and following local consultation “noted that the overwhelming preference expressed in the public consultation exercise is for the creation of a three-member ward to cover all four parishes”. The District Council also proposed splitting the existing two-member Parson Drove & Wisbech St Mary ward to create a single-member Parson Drove & Murrow ward and a single-member Wisbech St Mary ward. Under the District Council’s proposals the number of electors per councillor in the proposed Parson Drove & Murrow and Roman Bank wards would be 12 per cent and 4 per cent below the district average respectively (13 per cent below and 6 per cent below the district average by 2006). The number of electors per councillor in the proposed Wisbech St Mary ward would be 7 per cent above the district average (7 per cent above the district average by 2006).

69 The Whittlesey Branch Labour Party stated that “the [District Council’s] proposals for wards 34 (Parsons Drove & Murrow) and 35 (Wisbech St Mary) are a nonsense, since these two wards are currently a two-member ward and combined they give an average electorate close to the norm”. It also stated that “we can see no sensible reason to amend this existing arrangement [which] would produce in 2006 a two-member ward only 3% below the quota”. Under the Whittlesey Branch Labour Party’s proposals the number of electors per councillor in the proposed Parson Drove & Wisbech St Mary ward would be 2 per cent below the district average (3 per cent below the district average by 2006).

70 We have carefully considered the representations received regarding these areas. Due to the public support shown during the consultation process undertaken by the District Council for its proposed Roman Bank ward, and the lack of any apparent opposition to this proposed ward, we are content to endorse the proposed three-member Roman Bank ward. We do not, however, consider that there is a strong case for splitting the existing two-member Parson Drove & Wisbech St Mary ward. Such a split would lead to a single-member Parson Drove & Murrow ward with an electoral variance of 13 per cent below the district average, and we consider that this is an unnecessarily high level of electoral inequality in this particular area, given the good electoral equality in the existing ward. Therefore we are supporting the Whittlesey Branch Labour Party’s proposal to maintain the existing two-member ward. We would, however, welcome local comments on our proposals at Stage Three.

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



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

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

73 The District Council proposed a two-member Benwick, Coates & Eastrea ward comprising the existing Whittlesey South ward and Benwick parish, currently in the existing Benwick & Doddington ward. Initially, the Council, wishing to submit a scheme of mainly single-member wards, proposed a single-member Coates & Eastrea ward and a single-member Benwick & Whittlesey Rural ward, but these wards led to unacceptable levels of electoral inequality. Hence the District Council proposed an alternative two-member ward which gained local support during the consultation exercise. The District Council proposed a new single-member Doddington ward comprising Doddington parish. To provide improved electoral equality, the District Council also proposed a two-member Elm & Christchurch ward comprising the existing single-member Elm ward and the existing single-member Outwell & Upwell ward. It proposed retaining the existing Manea and Wimblington wards. Under the Council's proposals the number of electors per councillor in the proposed Benwick, Coates & Eastrea, Doddington, Elm & Christchurch, Manea and Wimblington wards would be 5 per cent, 1 per cent, equal to the district average, 24 per cent and 16 per cent below the district average respectively (9 per cent below, 9 per cent below, equal to the district average, 7 per cent below and 6 per cent below the district average by 2006).

74 The Whittlesey Branch Labour Party stated that it felt that "the decision to include the parish of Benwick with Whittlesey is perverse". It felt that "it would make much more sense to create a three-member ward with Doddington, Wimblington and Manea". Under this proposal the number of electors per councillor in the proposed Benwick, Doddington, Wimblington & Manea ward would be equal to the district average (7 per cent above the district average by 2006).

75 We carefully considered both representations received regarding these areas. We looked at the Whittlesey Branch Labour Party's proposal for a three-member ward containing Benwick, Doddington, Wimblington and Manea parishes but considered that this ward would be unnecessarily large and, given the local support for the District Council's proposed two-member Benwick, Coates & Eastrea ward, are endorsing this proposal in our draft recommendations. We are also endorsing the District Council's proposals in the rest of this area as we consider that they provide a good balance between electoral equality and the recognition of community identities.

76 Under our draft recommendations the number of electors per councillor in our proposed Benwick, Coates & Eastrea ward (comprising the parish of Benwick and the proposed Whittlesey South parish ward of Whittlesey parish), Doddington ward (comprising the parish of Doddington), Elm & Christchurch ward (comprising the parishes of Elm and Christchurch), Manea ward (comprising the parish of Manea) and Wimblington ward (comprising the parish of Wimblington) would be 5 per cent below, 1 per cent below, equal to the district average, 24 per cent below and 16 per cent below the district average respectively (9 per cent below, 9 per cent below, equal to the district average, 7 per cent below and 6 per cent below the district average by 2006). We would, however, welcome local comment on our proposals at Stage Three. Our draft proposals are illustrated on Map 2 and the large map at the back of the report.

## **Electoral Cycle**

77 During Stage One we received three responses regarding the District Council's electoral cycle. The District Council itself stated that "the Council has considered whether there should be a change to the alternative system in which a third of the district councillors are elected every year, but has decided, principally on grounds of cost, to remain with the status quo".

78 Whittlesey Branch Labour Party "believe that the electoral cycle should be changed to retirement by thirds/50% as suggested in the White Paper *"Modern Local Government – in Touch with the People"*. It believed that such a change would be "in the interests of democracy" but did not provide any further argumentation for such a change.

79 Fenland District Labour Party also proposed a change to elections by thirds but did not provide any evidence or argumentation to support such a change

80 We considered carefully all the comments received. In light of the fact that there does not appear to be widespread support for elections by thirds, and given that we are unable to implement elections by halves, we are proposing that the existing electoral cycle of whole-council elections every four years be retained.

## **Conclusions**

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

- a council of 40 members should be retained;
- there should be 28 wards instead of 25 as at present;
- the boundaries of 22 of the existing wards should be modified, resulting in a net increase of three, and three wards should retain their existing boundaries;
- elections should continue to be held for the whole council.

82 Our draft recommendations would involve modifying all but three of the existing wards in Fenland district, as summarised below:

- In Wisbech, subject to two amendments, we propose adopting the Fenland District Labour Party’s proposals.
- In March we propose our own warding arrangement of two three-member, one two-member and one single-member wards.
- In Chatteris and Whittlesey, subject to minor boundary amendments, we propose adopting the District Council’s proposals.
- In Parson Drove & Wisbech St Mary we propose retaining the existing arrangements, as proposed by the Whittlesey Branch Labour Party.
- In the rest of the district we propose adopting the District Council’s proposals.

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

*Table 5: Comparison of Current and Recommended Electoral Arrangements*

	2001 electorate		2006 forecast electorate	
	Current arrangements	Draft recommendations	Current arrangements	Draft recommendations
Number of councillors	40	40	40	40
Number of wards	25	28	25	28
Average number of electors per councillor	1,634	1,634	1,723	1,723
Number of wards with a variance of more than 10 per cent from the average	19	11	14	0
Number of wards with a variance of more than 20 per cent from the average	10	4	11	0

84 As shown in Table 5, our draft recommendations for Fenland District Council would result in a reduction in the number of wards with an electoral variance of more than 10 per cent from 19 to 11. By 2006 no wards are forecast to have an electoral variance of more than 10 per cent.

**Draft Recommendation**

Fenland District Council should comprise 40 councillors serving 28 wards, as detailed and named in Tables 1 and 2, and illustrated on Map 2 and the maps 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**

85 When reviewing electoral arrangements we are required to comply as far as possible with the rules set out in Schedule 11 to the 1972 Local Government Act. The Schedule states that if a parish is to be divided between different district wards it must also be divided into parish wards, so that each parish ward lies wholly within a single ward of the district. Accordingly, we propose consequential warding arrangements for the parishes of Chatteris, March, Whittlesey and Wisbech to reflect the proposed district wards.

86 The parish of Chatteris is currently served by 10 councillors representing four wards: East, North, South and West wards. In the light of the scheme we have adopted for district warding in the area, and in line with the proposals put forward by the District Council, we propose amending the existing parish wards to create the four parish wards of Birch, Slade Lode, The Mills and Wenneye. We propose that each parish ward be represented by three councillors, an overall increase of two, in order to reflect the district wards of Birch, Slade Lode, The Mills and Wenneye.

**Draft Recommendation**

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

87 The parish of March is currently served by 12 councillors representing four wards: East, North East, North West and West wards. March Town Council proposed a pattern of three three-member wards, each returning four town councillors, but did not provide any detailed proposals for the area. As we did not receive any detailed warding arrangements for March, we are proposing two three-member wards (Norwood and Town End wards), one two-member ward (Estover ward) and one single-member ward (Burrowmoor ward), as we consider that these best reflect community identities at a district level. Having adopted our own scheme in this area, we are proposing four new parish wards: Burrowmoor, Estover, Norwood and Town End parish wards, which reflect the district wards of the same names. Norwood and Town End parish wards would each return four councillors while Burrowmoor and Estover parish wards would each return two councillors. While we recognise that this does not entirely reflect March Town Council's proposals for three wards each returning four town councillors, given the difficulty of producing such a scheme we are of the opinion that our proposals offer the best solution available in this area. We would, however, welcome views on these arrangements at Stage Three.

**Draft Recommendation**

March Town Council should comprise 12 councillors, as at present, representing four wards: Norwood and Town End parish wards (each returning four councillors), and Burrowmoor and Estover parish wards (each returning two councillors). The boundaries between the parish wards should reflect the proposed district ward boundaries, as illustrated and named on the large map at the back of the report.

88 The parish of Whittlesey is currently served by 12 councillors representing six parish wards: Bassenhally, Central, East, Kingsmoor, South and West wards. In the light of the scheme we have adopted for district warding in the area, and in line with the proposals put forward by the District Council, we are proposing an amended parishing arrangement with a total of seven parish wards: Bassenhally, Delph, Kingsmoor, Lattersey, St Andrews, St Marys and Whittlesey South parish wards, returning a total of 14 parish councillors, an increase of two councillors. Each of these proposed parish wards would return two councillors and the first six wards would be coterminous with the district wards of the same name, while Whittlesey South parish ward would comprise the part of Whittlesey parish that would lie within the proposed district ward of Benwick, Coates & Eastrea.

**Draft Recommendation**

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

89 The parish of Wisbech is currently served by 20 councillors, representing five parish wards: East, North East, North, South and West wards. In the light of the scheme we have adopted for district warding in the area, we are proposing an amended parishing arrangement which reflects the reduced council size of 18 councillors put forward by the District Council. Two parish wards, Hill and Waterlees wards, would return four councillors each, while the remaining five parish wards of Clarkson, Kirkgate, Medworth, Peckover and Staithe, would each return two councillors, making a total of 18 councillors, a decrease of two councillors.

**Draft Recommendation**

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

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

**Draft Recommendation**

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

*Map 2: Draft Recommendations for Fenland*





## 5 WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

91 There will now be a consultation period, during which everyone is invited to comment on the draft recommendations on future electoral arrangements for Fenland contained in this report. We will take fully into account all submissions received by 28 January 2002. Any received *after* this date may not be taken into account. All responses may be inspected at our offices and those of the District Council. A list of respondents will be available from us on request after the end of the consultation period.

92 Express your views by writing directly to us:

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

Fax: 020 7404 6142

E-mail: [reviews@lgce.gov.uk](mailto:reviews@lgce.gov.uk)

[www.lgce.gov.uk](http://www.lgce.gov.uk)

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



## APPENDIX A

### **Draft Recommendations for Fenland: Detailed Mapping**

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

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

**Map A2** illustrates the proposed warding of Chatteris parish.

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

*Map A1: Draft Recommendations for Fenland: Key Map*

*Map A2: Proposed Warding of Chatteris Parish*



## Appendix B

### Code of Practice on Written Consultation

The Cabinet Office's November 2000 *Code of Practice on Written Consultation*, [www.cabinet-office.gov.uk/servicefirst/index/consultation.htm](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 for England, are encouraged to follow the Code.

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

*Table B1: LGCE Compliance with Code Criteria*

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