

LOCAL
GOVERNMENT
COMMISSION
FOR ENGLAND

FINAL
RECOMMENDATIONS
ON THE FUTURE
ELECTORAL
ARRANGEMENTS FOR
WATFORD
IN HERTFORDSHIRE

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

February 1998

LOCAL GOVERNMENT COMMISSION FOR ENGLAND

This report sets out the Commission's final recommendations on the electoral arrangements for Watford in Hertfordshire.

Members of the Commission are:

Professor Malcolm Grant (Chairman)

Helena Shovelton (Deputy Chairman)

Peter Brokenshire

Professor Michael Clarke

Robin Gray

Bob Scruton

David Thomas

Adrian Stungo (Chief Executive)

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Local Government Commission for England

3 February 1998

Dear Secretary of State

On 10 December 1996 the Commission began a periodic electoral review of the borough of Watford under the Local Government Act 1992. We published our draft recommendations in July 1997 and undertook an 11-week period of consultation.

We have now prepared our final recommendations in the light of the consultation and have confirmed our draft recommendations in full. This report sets out our final recommendations for changes to electoral arrangements in Watford.

We recommend that Watford Borough Council should be served by 36 councillors representing 12 wards, and that some 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 be elected by thirds.

I would like to thank members and officers of the Borough 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

PROFESSOR MALCOLM GRANT
Chairman

SUMMARY

The Commission began a review of Watford on 10 December 1996. We published our draft recommendations for electoral arrangements on 2 July 1997, after which we undertook an 11-week period of consultation.

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

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

- **in five of the 12 wards the number of electors represented by each councillor varies by more than 10 per cent from the average for the borough;**
- **by 2001 the number of electors per councillor in six of the 12 wards is expected to vary by more than 10 per cent from the borough average.**

Our main final recommendations for future electoral arrangements (Figure 1) are that:

- **Watford Borough Council should be served by 36 councillors, the same as at present;**
- **there should continue to be 12 wards;**
- **the boundaries of eight of the existing wards should be modified, while four wards, Meriden, Oxhey, Stanborough and Woodside, should retain their existing boundaries;**
- **elections should continue to take place by thirds.**

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

- **In only two of the 12 wards, Meriden and Tudor, the number of electors per councillor would vary by more than 10 per cent from the borough average.**

- **By 2001 the number of electors per councillor is projected to vary by no more than 10 per cent from the average in all 12 wards.**

All further correspondence on these recommendations and the matters discussed in this report should be addressed to the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, who will not make an order implementing the Commission's recommendations before 17 March 1998:

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

*Figure 1:
The Commission's Final Recommendations: Summary*

Ward name	Number of councillors	Constituent areas
1 Callowland	3	Callowland ward (part); Central ward (part); Tudor ward (part)
2 Central	3	Central ward (part)
3 Holywell	3	Holywell ward (part)
4 Leggatts	3	Leggatts ward (part); Callowland ward (part); Nascot ward (part)
5 Meriden	3	<i>Unchanged</i>
6 Nascot	3	Nascot ward (part); Callowland ward (part); Leggatts ward (part)
7 Oxhey	3	<i>Unchanged</i>
8 Park	3	Park ward; Holywell ward (part); Nascot ward (part); Vicarage ward (part)
9 Stanborough	3	<i>Unchanged</i>
10 Tudor	3	Tudor ward (part); Central ward (part)
11 Vicarage	3	Vicarage ward (part)
12 Woodside	3	<i>Unchanged</i>

Notes: 1 All the wards are illustrated on the large map inserted in the back of the report.

2 The borough of Watford is unparished.

1. INTRODUCTION

1 This report contains our final recommendations on the electoral arrangements for the borough of Watford in Hertfordshire. We have now reviewed all the districts in Hertfordshire as part of our programme of periodic electoral reviews of all principal local authority areas in England.

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

- the statutory criteria contained in section 13(5) of the Local Government Act 1992;
- the *Rules to be Observed in Considering Electoral Arrangements* contained in Schedule 11 to the Local Government Act 1972.

3 We have also had regard to our *Guidance and Procedural Advice for Local Authorities and Other Interested Parties* (published in March 1996 and supplemented in September 1996), which sets out our approach to the reviews.

4 This review was in four stages. Stage One began on 10 December 1996, when we wrote to Watford Borough Council inviting proposals for future electoral arrangements. Our letter was copied to Hertfordshire County Council, Hertfordshire Police Authority, the local authority associations, Hertfordshire Association of Local Councils, the Member of Parliament and the Member of the European Parliament with constituency interests in the borough, and the headquarters of the main political parties. At the start of the review and following publication of our draft recommendations, we published notices in the local press, issued a press release and invited the Borough Council to publicise the review more widely. The closing date for receipt of representations was 10 March 1997. At Stage Two we considered all the representations received during Stage One and prepared our draft recommendations.

5 Stage Three began on 2 July 1997 with the publication of our report, *Draft Recommendations on the Future Electoral Arrangements for Watford in Hertfordshire*, and ended on 22 September 1997. Comments were sought on our preliminary conclusions. Finally, during Stage Four we reconsidered our draft recommendations in the light of the Stage Three consultation and now publish our final recommendations.

2. CURRENT ELECTORAL ARRANGEMENTS

⁶ Watford is a compact, urban borough located in south-west Hertfordshire, covering an area of 2,144 hectares. It is enclosed by the Hertfordshire green belt and contains some parkland. The town constitutes an important shopping and leisure centre for the region. It is situated on the West Coast mainline railway and the M1 motorway and is close to the M25, all of which provide extensive communication links with other parts of the country. The borough is also bisected by a number of other primary roads and secondary railway lines. It is unparished.

⁷ 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 average for the borough in percentage terms. In the report, this calculation may also be described as 'electoral variance'.

⁸ The Borough Council has 36 councillors elected from 12 wards (Map 1 and Figure 2). Each ward is represented by three councillors. The Council is elected by thirds, with the next elections due in May 1998. The electorate of the borough is 57,645 (February 1996) and each councillor represents an average of 1,601 electors. The Borough Council forecasts that the electorate will increase by 6 per cent to 61,240 by the year 2001, which would change the average number of electors per councillor to 1,701 (Figure 2).

⁹ Since the last electoral review was completed in 1974 by our predecessor, the Local Government Boundary Commission (LGBC), changes in population and electorate have been unevenly spread across the borough. As a result, in five of the 12 wards the number of electors per councillor varies by more than 10 per cent from the borough average. The most significant electoral imbalance is in Callowland ward where each councillor represents on average 1,317 electors, 18 per cent fewer than the borough average.

Figure 2:
Existing Electoral Arrangements

Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (1996)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2001)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
1 Callowland	3	3,951	1,317	-18	4,090	1,363	-20
2 Central	3	5,034	1,678	5	5,980	1,993	17
3 Holywell	3	4,658	1,553	-3	5,720	1,907	12
4 Leggatts	3	4,164	1,388	-13	4,290	1,430	-16
5 Meriden	3	5,354	1,785	11	5,380	1,793	5
6 Nascot	3	5,438	1,813	13	5,970	1,990	17
7 Oxhey	3	4,684	1,561	-2	4,760	1,587	-7
8 Park	3	4,125	1,375	-14	4,240	1,413	-17
9 Stanborough	3	4,874	1,625	1	4,960	1,653	-3
10 Tudor	3	5,101	1,700	6	5,190	1,730	2
11 Vicarage	3	5,274	1,758	10	5,480	1,827	7
12 Woodside	3	4,988	1,663	4	5,180	1,727	2
Totals	36	57,645	—	—	61,240	—	—
Averages	—	—	1,601	—	—	1,701	—

Source: Electorate figures are based on Watford Borough Council's submission.

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 borough. The minus symbol (-) denotes a lower than average number of electors. For example, in 1996, electors in Callowland ward were relatively over-represented by 18 per cent, while electors in Nascot ward were relatively under-represented by 13 per cent. Figures have been rounded to the nearest whole number.

3. DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS

¹⁰ During Stage One we received representations from Watford Borough Council, Watford Borough Council Liberal Democrat Group and Watford Conservative Association. 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 Watford in Hertfordshire*. Our draft recommendations built on the Borough Council's scheme, which retained the integrity of the existing ward pattern, and proposed that:

- (a) Watford Borough Council should be served by 36 councillors representing 12 wards;
- (b) the boundaries of eight wards should be modified;
- (c) there should be no change to Meriden, Oxhey, Stanborough and Woodside wards.

Draft Recommendation

Watford Borough Council should comprise 36 councillors, serving 12 wards. The Council should continue to be elected by thirds.

¹¹ Our proposals would have resulted in significant improvements in electoral equality, with the number of electors per councillor in 10 of the 12 wards varying by no more than 10 per cent from the borough average. This level of electoral equality was expected to improve further by 2001.

4. RESPONSES TO CONSULTATION

¹² During the consultation on our draft recommendations report, only two representations were received.

Watford Borough Council

¹³ The Borough Council fully endorsed our draft recommendations for the retention of 12 wards represented by 36 councillors, with modifications to the boundaries of eight of the existing wards. It also supported the continuation of elections by thirds.

Watford Labour Party

¹⁴ Watford Labour Party also supported our draft recommendations.

5. ANALYSIS AND FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS

15 As indicated previously, our prime objective in considering the most appropriate electoral arrangements for Watford is to achieve electoral equality, having regard to the statutory criteria set out in the Local Government Act 1992 and to Schedule 11 to the Local Government Act 1972, which refers to the ratio of electors to councillors being “as nearly as may be, the same in every ward of the district or borough”.

16 However, our function is not merely arithmetical. First, 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. Second, we must have regard to the desirability of fixing identifiable boundaries, and to maintaining local ties which might otherwise be broken. Third, we must consider the need to secure effective and convenient local government, and reflect the interests and identities of local communities.

17 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.

18 In our March 1996 *Guidance*, we expressed the view that “proposals for changes in electoral arrangements should therefore be based on variations in each ward of no more than plus or minus 10 per cent from the average councillor:elector ratio for the authority, having regard to five-year forecasts of changes in electorates. Imbalances in excess of plus or minus 20 per cent may be acceptable, but only in highly exceptional circumstances ... and will have to be justified in full”. However, as emphasised in our September 1996 supplement to the *Guidance*, while we accept that absolute equality of representation is likely to be unattainable, we consider that, if electoral imbalances are to be kept

to the minimum, such equality should be the starting point in any electoral review.

Electorate Projections

19 During Stage One the Borough Council submitted electorate forecasts for the period 1996 to 2001, projecting an increase in the electorate of 6 per cent over the five-year period from 57,645 to 61,240. 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. The Borough Council provided details of the likely effect on electorates of ward boundary changes. In our draft recommendations report we accepted that this is an inexact science and, having given consideration to projected electorates, were content that they represented the best estimates that could reasonably be made at the time.

20 We received no comments on the Council's electorate projections during Stage Three, and remain satisfied that they provide the best estimates presently available.

Council Size

21 Our March 1996 *Guidance* indicated that we would normally expect the number of councillors serving a district or borough council to be in the range of 30 to 60.

22 Watford Borough Council is at present served by 36 councillors. During Stage One the Borough Council, the Liberal Democrat Group and the Conservative Association all proposed retaining the existing council size. 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 statutory criteria and the achievement of electoral equality would best be met by retaining a council of 36 members.

23 In its Stage Three submission the Borough Council reiterated its support for this proposal, and we have not received any evidence to persuade us to move away from this view.

Electoral Arrangements

24 At Stage One we received borough-wide schemes from the Borough Council, the Liberal Democrat Group and the Conservative Association. All three schemes proposed that there should continue to be 12 wards represented by a total of 36 councillors. Each scheme would have provided for improved levels of electoral equality with no wards varying by more than 10 per cent from the borough average in 2001.

25 Each scheme also proposed no change for Woodside ward in the north of the borough. The Borough Council left Meriden, Stanborough and Oxhey wards unchanged, and the Liberal Democrat Group's only change to these three wards was a minor amendment to the boundary between Meriden and Stanborough wards.

26 While the Borough Council proposed relatively minor changes to the remaining eight wards in the borough, the Liberal Democrat Group and the Conservative Association submitted different reconfigurations of the remaining area which would result in substantial changes to the pattern of wards in the centre of the borough. The Borough Council's proposals aimed to retain the basis of the existing arrangements, arguing that "any alterations to boundaries would affect existing community settlements and relationships".

27 Having taken into account all the representations received, we considered that, although all three proposals would achieve better electoral equality than the current arrangements, the Borough Council's scheme also appeared to reflect community identities while retaining well-defined boundaries. In our draft recommendations report we therefore proposed to retain the integrity of the existing ward pattern, building on the Borough Council's proposals.

28 Having considered the representations received during Stage Three of the review, we have re-considered our draft recommendations. The

following areas, based on existing wards, are considered in turn:

- (a) Woodside, Stanborough and Meriden wards;
- (b) Callowland, Central, Leggatts and Tudor wards;
- (c) Holywell, Nascot, Park and Vicarage wards;
- (d) Oxhey ward.

29 Details of our final recommendations are set out in Figures 1 and 4, and illustrated on Map 2 and the large map at the back of the report.

Woodside, Stanborough and Meriden wards

30 Woodside, Stanborough and Meriden wards are situated in the north of the borough. They are separated from the rest of the borough by the A41 dual-carriageway, which forms the southern boundary of the three wards. The number of electors per councillor is currently 4 per cent above the borough average in Woodside ward, 1 per cent above in Stanborough ward and 11 per cent above in Meriden ward (2 per cent above, 3 per cent above and 5 per cent above respectively in 2001).

31 At Stage One the Borough Council proposed no change to the boundaries of the three wards, stating that "the current ward boundaries are effectively defined by the A405, the A412 and the A41 which are all extremely busy trunk roads with limited crossing points". Both the Liberal Democrat Group and the Conservative Association also supported no change for Woodside ward. The Liberal Democrat Group proposed a slight modification to the boundary between Stanborough and Meriden wards, while the Conservative Association proposed considerable boundary changes to Stanborough and Meriden wards which would involve crossing the A41.

32 In view of the clearly defined boundaries which the roads in this area provide, and the reasonable level of electoral equality in Meriden and Woodside wards, which is projected to improve further by the year 2001, we proposed no change to these wards as our draft recommendation.

33 At Stage Three we received support for our draft recommendation from the Borough Council and the Labour Party, and confirm the recommendation for no change to these wards as final.

Callowland, Central, Leggatts and Tudor wards

34 The wards of Callowland, Central, Leggatts and Tudor are located in the centre and east of the borough. In Central ward, development which is currently taking place is projected to lead to significant electoral inequality in 2001.

35 The number of electors per councillor is 18 per cent below the borough average in Callowland ward, 5 per cent above in Central ward, 13 per cent below in Leggatts ward and 6 per cent above in Tudor ward (20 per cent below, 17 per cent above, 16 per cent below and 2 per cent above respectively in 2001).

36 At Stage One the Borough Council addressed the imbalance resulting from the projected increase of almost one thousand electors in Central ward by proposing that the Reeds School site, now based in Reeds Crescent (currently incorporating 330 electors), be included in a modified Tudor ward. The Conservative Association also proposed that this new development site should be combined in a ward with the area to the north. The Liberal Democrat Group proposed a reconfiguration of the wards in the eastern part of the borough, with the area covered by the existing wards of Central and Tudor being divided between three wards.

37 After considering community identity and electoral equality, we endorsed the Borough Council's scheme as our draft recommendation. We also proposed a further modification to the boundary between Central and Callowland wards, so that it follows the West Coast mainline railway, which would not affect any electors, but would provide a more recognisable boundary. The number of electors per councillor would be 2 per cent below the average in both 1996 and 2001. Additionally, after consulting with both the Borough Council and Ordnance Survey, we are proposing, as part of our final recommendations, a further minor modification to the boundary between Central and Tudor wards so that it follows ground detail. This modification would not affect any electors.

38 Currently, the boundary between Vicarage and Central wards follows the A4178. At Stage One the Borough Council proposed that sections of Cassio Road and Merton Road, currently in Vicarage ward, be included in Central ward to improve electoral equality. The Conservative Association

proposed that this area be covered by a substantially reduced Central ward and a new St Michael's ward. The Liberal Democrat Group proposed a new Kings ward for this area.

39 While acknowledging the improved electoral equality provided by the Borough Council's proposal, we considered that it would not provide such a satisfactory boundary, and therefore put forward no change to this boundary as part of our draft recommendation.

40 At Stage One the Borough Council also proposed the transfer of an area containing 1,209 electors from Tudor ward to Callowland ward in order to reduce the over-representation in Callowland. It proposed that the boundary between Tudor and Callowland wards should continue further north along the railway line as far as Bushey Mill Lane, rejoining the existing boundary at St Albans Road. The Borough Council stated that this would transfer an area which "naturally focuses towards Callowland, being part of the hinterland to the North Watford shopping catchment area which runs along the St Albans Road".

41 The Conservative Association proposed the inclusion of some areas on either side of St Albans Road within the same ('North') ward, but also extended the boundary further north, incorporating the area west of the railway line as far as the A41. The Liberal Democrat Group proposed a minor amendment to the boundary between Tudor and Callowland wards.

42 We considered that the Borough Council's proposals had regard to local ties and would achieve satisfactory electoral equality by 2001, although there would be some electoral imbalance initially. Accordingly, we endorsed them as part of our draft recommendation. The number of electors per councillor in Tudor ward would initially be 12 per cent below the average, but is projected to improve to 6 per cent in 2001.

43 At Stage One the Borough Council proposed that Ashby Road and part of Sussex Road be transferred from Callowland to Leggatts ward, to improve electoral equality further in Callowland ward. Both the Liberal Democrat Group and the Conservative Association also proposed boundary changes between Callowland and Leggatts wards as part of their overall changes in the borough.

44 We considered, however, that in seeking electoral equality, ward boundaries should also be well-defined. We therefore proposed to modify the Borough Council's proposed boundary between Callowland and Leggatts wards, and consulted on the inclusion of 365 electors from Ashby Road, Brighton Road, part of Gammons Lane (numbers 61 to 93 odds) and Sussex Road in Leggatts ward. Under our draft recommendation, the number of electors per councillor in Callowland ward would be equal to the borough average (4 per cent above in 2001).

45 Leggatts ward is currently over-represented and, at Stage One, the Borough Council proposed to extend the ward's western boundary to include parts of Nascot ward. It proposed to transfer 505 electors from Courtlands Close, Courtlands Drive (numbers 111 to 143 odds), Gammons Lane (numbers 229 to 293 odds) and the whole of Goodwood Avenue from Nascot ward to Leggatts ward. It also proposed transferring an area of new development at Tunnel Wood Road from Leggatts ward to Nascot ward, as the "only access [to the new development] is via Nascot ward". The Conservative Association proposed to extend Leggatts ward to the north to straddle the A41. The Liberal Democrat Group proposed that the western boundary of the ward should be extended to include a larger part of Nascot ward than in the Borough Council's proposal. In view of the improved electoral equality, we endorsed the Borough Council's proposals as our draft recommendation. The number of electors per councillor in Leggatts ward would be 5 per cent above the average (2 per cent in 2001).

46 At Stage Three the Borough Council and the Labour Party supported our draft recommendations for Callowland, Central, Leggatts and Tudor wards, and we confirm them as final, subject to the additional minor boundary modification between Central and Tudor wards to follow ground detail, as indicated earlier.

Holywell, Nascot, Park and Vicarage wards

47 These four wards are situated in the south and west of the borough. The number of electors per councillor is currently 3 per cent below the borough average in Holywell ward, 13 per cent above in Nascot ward, 14 per cent below in Park ward and 10 per cent above in Vicarage ward (12 per cent above, 17 per cent above, 17 per cent below and 7 per cent above respectively in 2001).

48 At Stage One, in addition to the boundary changes between Nascot and Leggatts wards detailed above, the Borough Council proposed to modify the boundary between Nascot ward and Park ward in two places. It proposed that the northern part of the boundary should be revised to include 122 electors from part of Courtlands Drive (numbers 1 to 11 odds) and part of Hempstead Road (numbers 264 to 364 evens) in Park from Nascot; in the south of the area, some 120 electors from part of Hempstead Road (numbers 34 to 78 evens), part of Stratford Road (numbers 53 and 57) and part of The Avenue (numbers 33 to 77 odds) would be transferred from Nascot to Park ward. Both the Liberal Democrat Group and the Conservative Association put forward alternative configurations for the wards in this area.

49 However, we considered that the A411 Hempstead Road provides a well-defined boundary between the two wards. To the north, the properties on the eastern side of Hempstead Road are set back from the main road, physically separating them from the boundary with Park ward, and appear to have closer links to Nascot ward in which they are currently located. We therefore proposed that the existing boundary should be retained in the north, but to the south, due to the easier access between the two wards, we proposed to consult on the transfer of some 120 electors from the south of Nascot ward to Park ward, as detailed earlier.

50 In addition, our draft recommendation endorsed the Borough Council's proposal for a minor modification to the boundary between Callowland and Nascot wards to follow the eastern railway line, which would not effect any electors. Taken together, these boundary changes would result in the number of electors per councillor in Nascot ward being equal to the borough average (5 per cent above in 2001).

51 At Stage Three we received no opposition to our draft recommendation for Nascot ward and confirm it as final.

52 The current level of over-representation in Park ward is projected to increase by 2001, mainly due to the overall growth in the borough's electorate. At Stage One the Borough Council proposed a number of boundary adjustments to include small parts of the neighbouring wards in Park ward. In addition to the transfers from Nascot ward, detailed above, it also proposed to include an area of Holywell ward. The electorate of Holywell ward

is projected to increase by over a thousand during the five-year period to 2001. In order to address the under-representation which this growth would cause, the Borough Council proposed the transfer of an area with 305 electors from Cassiobridge Road, Gade Close, Maythorne Close and part of Rickmansworth Road (numbers 131 to 213 odds) from Holywell ward to Park ward. The Council also proposed that 169 electors on Rickmansworth Road (numbers 25 to 129B odds) be transferred from Vicarage ward to Park ward. The Conservative Association and the Liberal Democrat Group each proposed substantially new warding arrangements for this area.

53 We considered that, in view of the apparent similarity of the properties on either side of Rickmansworth Road, the Borough Council's proposal would reflect community identity and improve electoral equality in Park ward. However, we proposed an additional boundary modification between Vicarage ward and Park ward to improve further electoral equality in both wards. We proposed that an area with a further 241 electors in Bowling Court, Denham Place, part of Hagden Lane (numbers 346 and 348), part of Harwoods Road (number 212), Mildred Avenue (numbers 10 to 136 evens) and part of Park Avenue (numbers 2 to 5) be transferred from Vicarage ward to Park ward. The Council also proposed a minor amendment to the boundary between Vicarage and Holywell wards, detailed below. Under our draft recommendation, the number of electors per councillor in Park and Vicarage wards would be 3 per cent above and 1 per cent above the borough average respectively (2 per cent below and 3 per cent below in 2001).

54 The Conservative Association and the Liberal Democrat Group each proposed to extend the current Holywell ward eastwards. While the Borough Council's proposal to transfer 111 electors on the eastern side of Queen's Avenue from Vicarage ward to Holywell ward would improve electoral equality, we considered that the present defined boundary of Queen's Avenue should be retained. Under our draft recommendation, the number of electors per councillor in Holywell ward would be 9 per cent below the borough average (5 per cent above in 2001).

55 At Stage Three we received no opposition to our draft recommendations for Park, Vicarage and Holywell wards and therefore confirm them as final.

Oxhey ward

56 Oxhey ward, situated in the south of the borough, is separated from its neighbouring wards by the River Colne. The number of electors per councillor is currently 2 per cent below the average (7 per cent below in 2001). At Stage One the Borough Council proposed that there should be no change to Oxhey ward, stating that it "has long been considered to have its own separate identity". The Liberal Democrat Group also supported the retention of this ward on its existing boundaries. However, the Conservative Association proposed an extension of the ward to include part of the existing Central, Holywell and Vicarage wards.

57 In our draft recommendations report we concluded that, due to the separate identity of the area together with the reasonable electoral equality which exists, Oxhey ward would best be served by the retention of its existing boundaries. At Stage Three we received no alternative proposals for Oxhey ward and therefore confirm our draft recommendation as final.

Electoral Cycle

58 At Stage One we did not receive any proposals to change the Borough Council's electoral cycle and therefore, in our draft recommendations report, we proposed that the present system of elections by thirds in Watford be retained. At Stage Three the Borough Council reiterated its support for this proposal. No other representations were received on this issue, and we therefore confirm our draft recommendation as final.

Conclusions

59 Having considered carefully the evidence and representations we received in response to our consultation report, we have decided to endorse our draft recommendations in full. We have concluded that in Watford:

- (a) the council size should remain the same at 36;
- (b) there should be 12 wards, the same as at present;
- (c) the boundaries of eight of the 12 existing wards should be modified; and
- (d) elections should continue to be held by thirds.

Figure 3:
Comparison of Current and Recommended Electoral Arrangements

	1996 electorate		2001 projected electorate	
	Current arrangements	Final recommendations	Current arrangements	Final recommendations
Number of councillors	36	36	36	36
Number of wards	12	12	12	12
Average number of electors per councillor	1,601	1,601	1,701	1,701
Number of wards with a variance more than 10 per cent from the average	5	2	6	0
Number of wards with a variance more than 20 per cent from the average	0	0	0	0

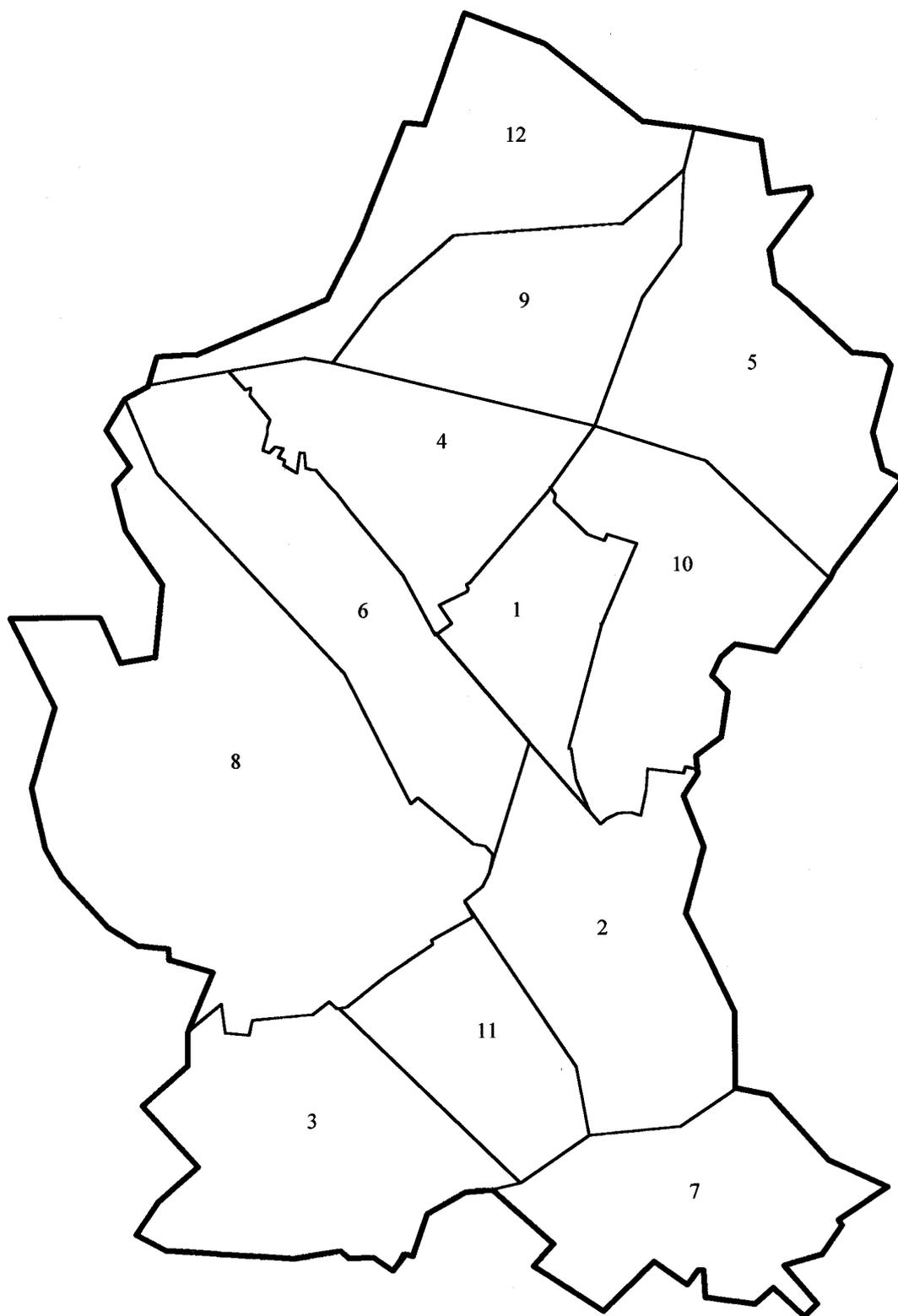
60 Figure 3 shows the impact of our final recommendations on electoral equality, comparing them with the current arrangements, based on 1996 and 2001 electorate figures.

61 As Figure 3 shows, our recommendations would result in a reduction in the number of wards with an electoral variance of more than 10 per cent from five to two, with no wards over 10 per cent by 2001. We conclude that our recommendations would best meet the need for electoral equality, having regard to the statutory criteria.

Final Recommendation

Watford Borough Council should comprise 36 councillors serving 12 wards, as detailed and named in Figures 1 and 4, and illustrated on Map 2 and the large map in the back of the report. The Council should continue to be elected by thirds.

Map 2:
The Commission's Final Recommendations for Watford



Key to Wards

- | | |
|--------------|---------------|
| 1 Callowland | 7 Oxhey |
| 2 Central | 8 Park |
| 3 Holywell | 9 Stanborough |
| 4 Leggatts | 10 Tudor |
| 5 Meriden | 11 Vicarage |
| 6 Nascot | 12 Woodside |

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Figure 4:
The Commission's Final Recommendations for Watford

Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (1996)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2001)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
1 Callowland	3	4,795	1,598	0	5,294	1,765	4
2 Central	3	4,704	1,568	-2	5,003	1,668	-2
3 Holywell	3	4,353	1,451	-9	5,359	1,786	5
4 Leggatts	3	5,034	1,678	5	5,196	1,732	2
5 Meriden	3	5,354	1,785	11	5,380	1,793	5
6 Nascot	3	4,813	1,604	0	5,362	1,787	5
7 Oxhey	3	4,684	1,561	-2	4,760	1,587	-7
8 Park	3	4,960	1,653	3	5,009	1,670	-2
9 Stanborough	3	4,874	1,625	1	4,960	1,653	-3
10 Tudor	3	4,222	1,407	-12	4,800	1,600	-6
11 Vicarage	3	4,864	1,621	1	4,947	1,649	-3
12 Woodside	3	4,988	1,663	4	5,180	1,727	2
Totals	36	57,645	—	—	61,250	—	—
Averages	—	—	1,601	—	—	1,701	—

Source: Electorate figures are based on Watford Borough Council's submission.

Notes: 1 The 'variance from average' column shows by how far, in percentage terms, the number of electors per councillor varies from the average for the borough. The minus symbol (-) denotes a lower than average number of electors. Figures have been rounded to the nearest whole number.

2 The total projected electorate figure differs marginally from Figure 2; this has a negligible effect on electoral variances.

6. NEXT STEPS

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

63 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 earlier than six weeks from the date that our recommendations are submitted to the Secretary of State.

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

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

APPENDIX A

Final Recommendations for Watford: Detailed Mapping

The **large map** inserted in the back of the report illustrates the proposed ward boundaries within the borough of Watford.

