

Final recommendations on the future electoral arrangements for Welwyn Hatfield in Hertfordshire

Further electoral review

June 2007

Translations and other formats

For information on obtaining this publication in another language or in a large-print or Braille version please contact the Boundary Committee for England:

Tel: 020 7271 0500

Email: publications@boundarycommittee.org.uk

The mapping in this report is reproduced from OS mapping by the Electoral Commission with the permission of the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office, © Crown Copyright. Unauthorised reproduction infringes Crown Copyright and may lead to prosecution or civil proceedings.

Licence Number: GD 03114G

Contents

What is the Boundary Committee for England?	5
Summary	7
1 Introduction	11
2 Current electoral arrangements	15
3 Draft recommendations	19
4 Responses to consultation	21
5 Analysis and final recommendations	23
Electorate figures	23
Council size	24
Electoral equality	24
General analysis	25
Warding arrangements	26
Welwyn North and Welwyn South wards	26
Welwyn Garden City: Haldens, Handside, Hollybush, Howlands, Panshanger, Peartree and Sherrards wards	27
Hatfield town: Hatfield Central, Hatfield East, Hatfield North, Hatfield South and Hatfield West wards	31
Brookmans Park & Little Heath, Northaw and Welham Green wards	35
Conclusions	37
Parish electoral arrangements	37
6 What happens next?	41
7 Mapping	43
Appendices	
A Glossary and abbreviations	45
B Code of practice on written consultation	49

What is the Boundary Committee for England?

The Boundary Committee for England is a committee of the Electoral Commission, an independent body set up by Parliament under the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000. It is responsible for conducting reviews as directed by the Electoral Commission or the Secretary of State.

Members of the Committee are:

Pamela Gordon (Chair)
Robin Gray
Joan Jones CBE
Ann M. Kelly
Professor Colin Mellors

Director:

Archie Gall

When conducting reviews 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 and ward names. We can also recommend changes to the electoral arrangements of parish and town councils.

Summary

The Boundary Committee for England is the body responsible for conducting electoral reviews of local authorities. A further electoral review of Welwyn Hatfield was undertaken to provide improved levels of electoral equality across the district. It aimed to ensure that the number of voters represented by each district councillor is approximately the same. The Electoral Commission directed the Boundary Committee to undertake this review on 12 May 2005.

Current electoral arrangements

Under the existing arrangements, seven wards currently have electoral variances of more than 10% from the district average. Due to development in Hatfield North ward it currently has 23% more electors than the district average; by 2009 this is expected to rise to 59% more electors than the district average if the existing arrangements remain in place.

This review was conducted in four stages:

Stage	Stage starts	Description
One	6 September 2005	Submission of proposals to us
Two	13 December 2005	Our analysis and deliberation
Three	7 November 2006	Publication of draft recommendations and consultation on them
Four	13 February 2007	Analysis of submissions received and formulation of final recommendations

Draft recommendations

During Stage One we proposed to retain the council size of 48. We made amendments to 13 of the districts ward boundaries in order to improve electoral equality based on the District Council's proposals with amendments from the Labour Party, the Liberal Democrats as well as some of our own. We received limited community identity argument at Stage One and therefore made amendments to the existing warding arrangements in order to improve electoral equality.

Responses to consultation

During Stage Three we received five submissions. The District Council agreed in principle with our draft recommendations. The Labour Party and Councillor O'Brien put forward alternative proposals for Hatfield town. The Labour Party and Councillor Jones also proposed alternative Peartree and Hollybush wards in Welwyn Garden City. Hatfield Town Council stated that it had no comments.

Analysis and final recommendations

Electorate figures

The District Council has forecast an increase in electorate of approximately 7% between 2004 and 2009, most of which is anticipated in Hatfield North ward. We have discussed these figures with the council officers and noted the development which is currently underway. We also received details of how the District Council calculated these figures and are satisfied that they currently provide the best estimation of the 2009 electorate of Welwyn Hatfield that can reasonably be made at this time. We have therefore used them when making our final recommendations.

Council size

During Stage One we received proposals from the District Council, the Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats for council sizes of 48, 48 and 49 members respectively. After further investigation we were satisfied that the District Council's proposed council size of 48 would provide for the best representation for the district. We did not receive any comments regarding council size at Stage Three. We are therefore confirming our draft recommendation of 48 members as final.

General analysis

We are confirming our draft recommendations as final in all but two areas in the district. We are recommending small changes in Hatfield town and Welwyn Garden City.

What happens next?

All further correspondence on these final recommendations and the matters discussed in this report should be sent to the Electoral Commission through the contact details below. The Commission will not make an Order implementing them before 7 August 2007. The information in the representations will be available for public access once the Order has been made.

**The Secretary
The Electoral Commission
Trevelyan House
Great Peter Street
London SW1P 2HW**

Fax: 020 7271 0667

Email: implementation@electoralcommission.org.uk

The contact details above should only be used for implementation purpose.

The full report is available to download at www.boundarycommittee.org.uk.

Table 1: Final recommendations for Welwyn Hatfield district

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2004)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2009)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
1	Brookmans Park & Little Heath	3	4,452	1,484	2	4,532	1,511	-3
2	Haldens	3	4,647	1,549	6	4,651	1,550	-1
3	Handside	3	4,982	1,661	14	5,103	1,701	9
4	Hatfield Central	3	4,224	1,408	-4	4,687	1,562	0
5	Hatfield East	3	4,150	1,383	-5	4,482	1,494	-4
6	Hatfield South	2	3,342	1,671	14	3,344	1,672	7
7	Hatfield Villages	3	2,468	823	-44	4,490	1,497	-4
8	Hatfield West	3	5,157	1,719	18	5,206	1,735	11
9	Hollybush	3	4,226	1,409	-4	4,991	1,664	6
10	Howlands	3	4,166	1,389	-5	4,848	1,616	3
11	Northaw & Cuffley	3	4,132	1,377	-6	4,182	1,394	-11
12	Panshanger	3	4,648	1,549	6	4,653	1,551	-1
13	Peartree	3	4,712	1,571	8	4,815	1,605	3

Table 1 (cont.): Final recommendations for Welwyn Hatfield district

Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2004)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2009)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
14 Sherrards	3	4,324	1,441	-1	4,388	1,463	-6
15 Welham Green	2	2,780	1,390	-5	2,788	1,394	-11
16 Welwyn East	3	4,728	1,576	8	4,831	1,610	3
17 Welwyn West	2	3,036	1,518	4	3,069	1,535	-2
Totals	48	70,174	-	-	75,060	-	-
Averages	-	-	1,462	-	-	1,564	-

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

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

1 Introduction

1 This report contains our final recommendations for the electoral arrangements for the district of Welwyn Hatfield.

2 At its meeting on 12 February 2004 the Electoral Commission agreed that the Boundary Committee should make on-going assessments of electoral variances in all local authorities where the five-year forecast period following a periodic electoral review (PER) has elapsed. More specifically, it was agreed that there should be closer scrutiny where either:

- 30% of wards in an authority had electoral variances of over 10% from the average, or
- any single ward had a variance of more than 30% from the average

3 The intention of such scrutiny was to establish the reasons behind the continuing imbalances, to consider likely future trends, and to assess what action, if any, was appropriate to rectify the situation.

4 This is our first review of the electoral arrangements of Welwyn Hatfield. Welwyn Hatfield's last review was carried out by the Local Government Commission for England (LGCE), which reported to the Secretary of State in February 1998. An electoral change Order implementing the new electoral arrangements was made on 16 October 1998 and the first elections on the new arrangements took place in May 1999.

5 In carrying out our work, the Boundary Committee has to work within a statutory framework.¹ This refers to the need to:

- reflect the identities and interests of local communities
- secure effective and convenient local government
- achieve equality of representation

In addition we are required to work within Schedule 11 to the Local Government Act 1972.

6 Details of the legislation under which the review of Welwyn Hatfield is being conducted are set out in a document entitled *Guidance and procedural advice for periodic electoral reviews* (published by the Electoral Commission in July 2002). This *Guidance* sets out the approach to the review and will be helpful in both understanding the approach taken by the Boundary Committee for England and in informing comments interested groups and individuals may wish to make about our recommendations.

7 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 any parish and town councils in the district. We cannot consider changes to the external boundaries of either the district or of parish areas as part of this review.

¹ As set out in section 13(5) of the Local Government Act 1992 (as amended by SI 2001 No. 3962).

8 The broad objective of an electoral review is to achieve, as far as possible, equal representation across the district as a whole, i.e. that all councillors in the local authority represent similar numbers of electors. Schemes which would result in, or retain, an electoral imbalance of over 10% in any ward will have to be fully justified. Any imbalances of 20% or more should only arise in the most exceptional circumstances, and will require the strongest justification.

9 Electoral equality, in the sense of each elector in a local authority having a 'vote of equal weight' when it comes to the election of councillors, is a fundamental democratic principle. Accordingly, the objective of an electoral review is to ensure that the number of electors represented by each councillor is, as near as is possible, the same across a district. In practice, each councillor cannot represent exactly the same number of electors given geographic and other constraints, including the make up and distribution of communities. However, our aim in any review is to recommend wards that are as close to the district average as possible in terms of the number of electors per councillor, while also taking account of evidence in relation to community identity and effective and convenient local government.

10 We are not prescriptive about council size and acknowledge that there are valid reasons for variations between local authorities. However, we believe that any proposals relating to council size, whether these are for an increase, a reduction, or the retention of the existing size, should be supported by strong evidence and arguments. Indeed, we believe that consideration of the appropriate council size is the starting point for our reviews and whatever size of council is proposed to us should be developed and argued in the context of the authority's internal political management structures, put in place following the Local Government Act 2000. It should also reflect the changing role of councillors in the new structure.

11 As indicated in its *Guidance*, the Electoral Commission requires the decision on council size to be based on an overall view about what is right for the particular authority and not just by addressing any imbalances in small areas of the authority by simply adding or removing councillors from these areas. While we will consider ways of achieving the correct allocation of councillors between, say, a number of towns in an authority or between rural and urban areas, our starting point must always be that the recommended council size reflects the authority's optimum political management arrangements and best provides for convenient and effective local government and that there is evidence for this.

12 In addition, we do not accept that an increase or decrease in the electorate of the authority should automatically result in a consequent increase or decrease in the number of councillors. Similarly, we do not accept that changes should be made to the size of a council simply to make it more consistent with the size of neighbouring or similarly sized authorities; the circumstances of one authority may be very different from that of another. We will seek to ensure that our recommended council size recognises all the factors and achieves a good allocation of councillors across the district.

13 Where multi-member wards are proposed, we believe that the number of councillors to be returned from each ward should not exceed three, other than in very exceptional circumstances. Numbers in excess of three could result in an unacceptable dilution of accountability to the electorate and we have not, to date, prescribed any wards with more than three councillors.

14 The review is in four stages (see Table 2).

Table 2: Stages of the review

Stage	Stage starts	Description
One	6 September 2005	Submission of proposals to us
Two	13 December 2005	Our analysis and deliberation
Three	7 November 2006	Publication of draft recommendations and consultation on them
Four	13 February 2007	Analysis of submissions received and formulation of final recommendations

15 Stage One began on 6 September 2005, when we wrote to Welwyn Hatfield District Council inviting proposals for future electoral arrangements. We also notified Hertfordshire Police Authority, the Local Government Association, Hertfordshire Local Councils Association, parish and town councils in the district, Members of Parliament with constituency interests in the district, 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 Welwyn Hatfield District Council to publicise the review further. The closing date for receipt of representations, the end of Stage One, was 12 December 2005.

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

17 Stage Three began on 7 November 2006 with the publication of the report *Draft recommendations on the future electoral arrangements for Welwyn Hatfield in Hertfordshire*, and ended on 12 February 2007.

18 During Stage Four we reconsidered the draft recommendations in the light of the Stage Three consultation, decided whether to modify them, and now submit final recommendations to the Electoral Commission. It is now for the Commission to accept, modify or reject our final recommendations. If the Commission accepts the recommendations, with or without modification, it will make an electoral changes Order. The Commission will determine when any changes come into effect.

Equal opportunities

19 In preparing this report the Boundary Committee has had regard to the general duty set out in section 71(1) of the Race Relations Act 1976 and the statutory Code of Practice on the Duty to Promote Race Equality (Commission for Racial Equality, May 2002), i.e. to have due regard to the need to:

- eliminate unlawful racial discrimination
- promote equality of opportunity
- promote good relations between people of different racial groups

National Parks, Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and the Broads

20 The Boundary Committee has also had regard to:

- Section 11A(2) of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949 (as inserted by section 62 of the Environment Act 1995). This states that, in exercising or performing any functions in relation to, or so as to affect, land in a National Park, any relevant authority shall have regard to the Park's purposes. If there is a conflict between those purposes, a relevant authority shall attach greater weight to the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage of the Park.
- Section 85 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000. This states that, in exercising or performing any functions in relation to, or so as to affect, land in an AONB, a relevant authority shall have regard to the purpose of the AONB.
- Section 17A of the Norfolk and Suffolk Broads Act (as inserted by section 97 Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000). This states that, in exercising or performing any functions in relation to, or so as to affect, land in the Broads, a relevant authority shall have regard to the purposes of the Broads.

2 Current electoral arrangements

21 The district of Welwyn Hatfield is partially parished and comprises the large urban settlement of Welwyn Garden City to the east and the large parished town of Hatfield to the west. Welwyn Hatfield is unique in Britain in that it includes these two designated new towns, in addition to large rural areas. The district has excellent communication links, including the A1 (M) trunk road and the London-Edinburgh railway line.

22 The electorate of the district is 70,174 (December 2004). The District Council presently has 48 members who are elected from 17 wards. There are currently three two-member wards and 14 three-member wards. The district average councillor:elector ratio is calculated by dividing the total electorate of the district by the total number of councillors representing them on the council. At present, each councillor represents a district average of 1,462 electors (70,174 divided by 48), which the District Council forecasts will increase to 1,564 by the year 2009 if the present number of councillors is maintained (75,060 divided by 48).

23 During the last review of Welwyn Hatfield the District Council forecast there would be an increase of 1,511 electors between 1996 and 2001. However, a reduction in the electorate since that time has resulted in a significant amount of electoral inequality between wards. To compare levels of electoral inequality between wards, we calculated the extent to which the number of electors per councillor in each ward varies from the district average in percentage terms.

24 Data from the December 2004 electoral register showed that under these arrangements, electoral equality across the district met the criteria that the Electoral Commission agreed would warrant further investigation. The number of electors per councillor in seven of the 17 wards (41%) varies by more than 10% from the district average. This is forecast to worsen by 2009 where the worst imbalance will be in Hatfield North ward. The councillors in that ward are predicted to represent 59% more electors than the district average. Having noted that this level of electoral inequality is unlikely to improve, the Electoral Commission directed the Boundary Committee to undertake a review of the electoral arrangements of Welwyn Hatfield District Council on 12 May 2005.

Table 3: Existing electoral arrangements for Welwyn Hatfield district

Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2004)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2009)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
1 Brookmans Park & Little Heath	3	4,452	1,484	2	4,532	1,511	-3
2 Haldens	3	4,345	1,448	-1	4,349	1,450	-7
3 Handside	3	4,982	1,661	14	5,103	1,701	9
4 Hatfield Central	3	3,866	1,289	-12	4,323	1,441	-8
5 Hatfield East	3	3,889	1,296	-11	4,221	1,407	-10
6 Hatfield North	3	5,410	1,803	23	7,438	2,479	59
7 Hatfield South	2	2,334	1,167	-20	2,336	1,168	-25
8 Hatfield West	3	3,842	1,281	-12	3,891	1,297	-17
9 Hollybush	3	4,464	1,488	2	5,229	1,743	11
10 Howlands	3	4,405	1,468	0	5,087	1,696	8
11 Northaw	3	4,132	1,377	-6	4,182	1,394	-11
12 Panshanger	3	4,726	1,575	8	4,731	1,577	1

Table 3 (cont.): Existing electoral arrangements Welwyn Hatfield district

Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2004)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2009)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
13 Peartree	3	4,459	1,486	2	4,562	1,521	-3
14 Sherrards	3	4,324	1,441	-1	4,388	1,463	-6
15 Welham Green	2	2,780	1,390	-5	2,788	1,394	-11
16 Welwyn North	2	3,463	1,732	18	3,541	1,771	13
17 Welwyn South	3	4,301	1,434	-2	4,359	1,453	-7
Totals	48	70,174	-	-	75,060	-	-
Averages	-	-	1,462	-	-	1,564	-

Note: The 'variance from average' column shows by how far, in percentage terms, the number of electors per councillor in each ward 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.

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

3 Draft recommendations

25 During Stage One nine submissions were received, including district-wide schemes from the District Council and Welwyn Hatfield Liberal Democrats (the Liberal Democrats). We also received representations from Welwyn Hatfield Conservatives (the Conservatives) and Welwyn Hatfield Labour Party (the Labour Party) who submitted partial schemes. Welwyn Parish Council and a parish councillor submitted proposals for the parish wards in Welwyn parish. Northaw & Cuffley Parish Council and Charles Walker MP considered that the existing arrangements should be retained for the current Northaw ward.

26 We received one submission jointly from two local residents who considered that Northaw ward should be moved into the Broxbourne constituency and district. However, as explained in paragraph 39, it is not within the remit of this review to alter external district boundaries. We were therefore not able to take this submission into account when formulating our draft recommendations. 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 Welwyn Hatfield in Hertfordshire*.

27 Our draft recommendations were based on a combination of the District Council's proposals and some of our own in order to improve electoral equality. We also adopted changes proposed by the Liberal Democrats and the Labour Party, as well as some of our own in Hatfield town and Welwyn Garden City in order to form wards that secured good levels of electoral equality and strong boundaries. We adopted the District Council's proposals in full in the rural areas to the north and south of the district. We proposed that:

- Welwyn Hatfield District Council should be served by 48 councillors, the same as at present, representing 17 wards as at present.
- The boundaries of 13 of the existing wards should be modified, while four wards should retain their existing boundaries.
- There should be new warding arrangements for the parishes of Welwyn, Hatfield and Woolmer Green.

28 Our proposals would have resulted in significant improvements in electoral equality, with the number of electors per councillor in four of the 17 wards varying by no more than 10% from the district average. This level of electoral equality was forecast to improve further, with only three wards varying by more than 10% from the average by 2009.

4 Response to consultation

29 During the consultation on the draft recommendations report five representations were received, all of which may be inspected at both our offices and those of the District Council. Representations may also be viewed on our website at www.boundarycommittee.org.uk.

Welwyn Hatfield District Council

30 The District Council stated that it agreed in principle that our draft recommendations for the entire district would provide a sound basis for securing effective and convenient local government.

Political groups

31 The Labour Party supported our proposals for the two Welwyn wards. It also supported all our proposals in Welwyn Garden City with the exception of the boundary between Peartree and Hollybush wards. It proposed amendments and name changes to the wards in Hatfield town.

Town councils

32 Hatfield Town Council stated that it had no comments on our draft recommendations.

Other representations

33 A further two representations were received from local councillors. Councillor Jones (Welwyn Garden City South division) proposed a different boundary between Peartree and Hollybush wards. Councillor O'Brien (Welham Green ward) supported our proposed boundaries for Hatfield town but proposed alternative names for the wards.

5 Analysis and final recommendations

34 We have now finalised our conclusions on the electoral arrangements for Welwyn Hatfield District Council.

35 As described earlier, the prime aim in considering the most appropriate electoral arrangements for Welwyn Hatfield is to achieve electoral equality. In doing so we have regard to section 13(5) of the Local Government Act 1992 (as amended), with the need to:

- secure effective and convenient local government
- reflect the identities and interests of local communities
- secure the matters in respect of equality of representation referred to in paragraph 3(2)(a) of Schedule 11 to the Local Government Act 1972

36 Schedule 11 to the Local Government Act 1972 refers to the number of electors per councillor being 'as nearly as may be, the same in every ward of the district or borough'. 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 clearly identifiable boundaries and to maintaining local ties.

37 In reality, the achievement of absolute electoral equality is unlikely to be attainable. There must be a degree of flexibility. However, our approach, in the context of the statutory criteria, is to keep variances to a minimum.

38 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 should also be taken into account and we aim to recommend a scheme which provides improved electoral equality over this period.

39 The recommendations do not affect county, district or parish external boundaries, local taxes, or result in changes to postcodes. Nor is there any evidence that these recommendations will have an adverse effect on house prices, or car and house insurance premiums. Our proposals do not take account of parliamentary boundaries, and we are not, therefore, able to take into account any representations which are based on these issues.

Electorate figures

40 As part of the previous review of Welwyn Hatfield district, the District Council forecast an increase in the electorate of 2% between 1996 and 2001. However, there was in fact a decrease in the electorate of just less than 1%. Between 2001 and the start of this review the electorate has further decreased by just under 2%. The District Council submitted electorate forecasts for the year 2009, projecting an increase in the electorate of approximately 7% from 70,174 to 75,060 over the five-year period from 2004 to 2009. It expects most of the growth to be in Hatfield North ward, although a significant amount is also expected in Hollybush ward.

41 We recognise that forecasting electorates is difficult and, having considered the District Council's figures, discussed the development which is currently under construction and received details of how the District Council calculated these figures from the council officers, we accept that they are the best estimates that can reasonably be made at this time.

42 We received no comments on the District Council's electorate forecasts during Stage Three, and we remain satisfied that they represent the best estimates currently available.

Council size

43 Welwyn Hatfield District Council presently has 48 members. At Stage One the District Council proposed to retain the existing council size of 48 members. We also received proposals for a council size of 49 and, latterly, 32 and 33. After seeking further evidence on this issue, we concluded in our draft recommendations that 48 members was the most appropriate for Welwyn Hatfield District Council.

44 At Stage Three we received no comments to our proposed council size. Therefore, having looked at the size and distribution of the electorate, the geography and other characteristics of the area, together with the responses received, we are confirming our draft recommendation that the statutory criteria would best be met by a council of 48 members.

Electoral equality

45 Electoral equality, in the sense of each elector in a local authority having a vote of equal weight when it comes to the election of councillors, is a fundamental democratic principle. The Electoral Commission expects the Boundary Committee's recommendations to provide for high levels of electoral equality, with variances normally well below 10%. Therefore, when making recommendations we will not simply aim for electoral variances of under 10%. Where inadequate justification is provided for specific ward proposals we will look to improve electoral equality seeking to ensure that each councillor represents as close to the same number of electors as is possible, providing this can be achieved without compromising the reflection of the identities and interests of local communities and securing effective and convenient local government. We take the view that any proposals that would result in, or retain, electoral imbalances of over 10% from the average in any ward will have to be fully justified, and evidence provided which would justify such imbalances in terms of community identity or effective and convenient local government. We will rarely recommend wards with electoral variances of 20% or more, and any such variances proposed by local interested parties will require the strongest justification in terms of the other two statutory criteria.

46 In the absence of strong community identity argument or evidence at Stage One we sought to improve electoral equality in Welwyn Hatfield. The District Council, the Conservatives, the Liberal Democrats and the Labour Party all took the approach of using the existing wards as a starting point and making amendments to these in order to improve electoral equality. We also used the existing wards as a starting point and improved upon them as far as electoral equality is concerned while having regard for communities where evidence was provided. However, due to strong

ground and geographical features it was not always possible to improve the existing electoral variances.

47 In our draft recommendations we proposed two wards with electoral variances of more than 10% from the district average by 2009. However, given the geographical and parish constraints in these areas of the district we considered the variances to be acceptable given the circumstances. We also noted that one of our proposed wards (Hatfield Garden Village & Lemsford) would initially have 44% fewer electors than the district average. However, having spoken to the officers at the District Council regarding growth in Hatfield we were content that the projected electoral variance of this ward (-4%) would have been achieved by 2009.

48 During Stage Three we received slightly greater levels of community identity evidence, which has meant that in two areas we have moved away from electoral equality in order to better reflect communities within the district.

49 The district average (councillor:elector ratio) is calculated by dividing the total electorate of the district (70,174) by the total number of councillors representing them on the council (48 under our final proposals). Therefore, the average number of electors per councillor under our final recommendations is 1,462, rising to 1,564 by 2009 (75,060 divided by 48).

General analysis

50 Our draft recommendations were based broadly on the District Council's and the Conservatives' proposals, taking account of proposals from the Liberal Democrats and the Labour Party, as well as some of our own. All the proposed schemes suggested some boundary amendments to the existing wards in the urban areas of Welwyn Garden City and Hatfield. We also proposed changes in the rural Welwyn area. We proposed retaining the existing rural wards in the southern part of the district as proposed by the District Council, the Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats; the particular geography and settlement pattern meant that it was not possible to improve variances in that area without creating parish wards that would not have enough electors to justify a single parish councillor.

51 There was a general lack of argument and evidence in support of the proposed wards. The District Council, the Conservatives, the Liberal Democrats and the Labour Party all provided some argument, although it was not always compelling. We used the A1 (M) and the railway line as strong ground features by which to delineate wards. We consider that these provide strong boundaries and reflect existing communities.

52 We received alternative parish warding arrangements for Welwyn Parish. We considered that these proposals were supported by strong community identity evidence. We therefore recommended Welwyn Parish Council's proposed parish wards.

53 During Stage Three we received support for our proposed rural wards in the south and north of the district. We also received support for the majority of our wards in Welwyn Garden City. However, we received alternatives for the boundary between Peartree and Hollybush wards from the Labour Party and Councillor Jones. Additionally, we received some counter-proposals for our recommendations in

Hatfield town where the Labour Party proposed alternative wards for three of the five wards, and Councillor O'Brien put forward alternative district and parish ward names.

54 Having looked at the size and distribution of the electorate, the geography and other characteristics of the area, together with responses received, we conclude that the statutory criteria would best be met by our final recommendations.

Warding arrangements

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

- Welwyn North and Welwyn South wards (page 26)
- Welwyn Garden City: Haldens, Handside, Hollybush, Howlands, Panshanger, Peartree and Sherrards wards (page 27)
- Hatfield town: Hatfield Central, Hatfield East, Hatfield North, Hatfield South and Hatfield West wards (page 31)
- Brookmans Park & Little Heath, Northaw and Welham Green wards (page 35)

56 Details of our final recommendations are set out in Table 1 (on page 9), and illustrated on the large maps accompanying this report.

Welwyn North and Welwyn South wards

57 Under the existing arrangements Welwyn North and Welwyn South wards are currently parished. Table 4 below shows the constituent parts of these wards. Table 3 (page 16) outlines the existing electoral variances for 2004 and the variances which the wards are forecast to have by 2009 if the existing arrangements were to remain in place.

Table 4: Existing arrangements

Ward	Constituent areas	Councillors
Welwyn North	Woolmer Green Parish; Mardley Heath parish ward of Welwyn Parish	2
Welwyn South	Ayot St Lawrence Parish; Ayot St Peter Parish; Digswell, Danesbury, Hawbush and Queensway parish wards of Welwyn Parish	3

58 During Stage One we received three submissions in relation to the two Welwyn district wards, from the District Council, the Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats. Welwyn Parish Council and Councillor Neville put forward proposals for Welwyn Parish Council that are discussed in the parish warding section of this report. The District Council proposed creating two new wards named Welwyn East and Welwyn West. The Conservatives supported this proposal, commenting that the proposed wards of Welwyn East and Welwyn West 'naturally form one single community.' The Liberal Democrats also expressed support for the District Council's proposal for the area, considering it to 'make a great deal of sense.'

59 Having considered the evidence received we adopted the District Council's proposals for Welwyn East and Welwyn West wards in full. We considered that the

use of the A1 (M) to divide the area uses a strong and identifiable boundary, whilst causing minimal disruption to existing communities. We also noted the good level of electoral equality these wards would have by 2009.

60 Under our draft recommendations the proposed Welwyn East and Welwyn West wards would have 3% more and 2% fewer electors per councillor than the district average by 2009.

61 During Stage Three we received support for our draft recommendations from the District Council and the Labour Party. Having considered this general support for our recommendations we have decided to confirm them as final for Welwyn East and Welwyn West wards.

62 Welwyn East and Welwyn West wards would have 3% more and 2% fewer electors per councillor than the district average by 2009. Table 1 (on page 9) provides details of the electoral variances of our final recommendations. Our final recommendations are shown on Map 1 and 2 accompanying this report.

Welwyn Garden City: Haldens, Handside, Hollybush, Howlands, Panshanger, Peartree and Sherrards wards

63 Under the existing arrangements the seven wards that make up Welwyn Garden City (Haldens, Handside, Hollybush, Howlands, Panshanger, Peartree and Sherrards) are currently unparished. Table 3 (on page 16) outlines the existing electoral variances for 2004 and also the variances which the wards are forecast to have by 2009 if the existing arrangements remained in place.

64 During Stage One we received four submissions regarding the Welwyn Garden City area, from the District Council, the Conservatives, the Liberal Democrats and the Labour Party. The District Council stated that in forming its proposals it took account of natural features and attempted to keep existing communities together. It proposed to retain the existing Handside, Howlands and Sherrards wards and proposed a number of amendments to the remaining four wards in Welwyn Garden City.

65 The District Council proposed transferring electors from Hollybush ward into Peartree ward, transferring properties on Woodhall Lane and Moss Green, as well as properties on Cole Green Lane, Gooseacre and Hyde Valley. The District Council provided no detailed community identity argument for its proposals. Under the District Council's Stage One proposal no ward had an electoral variance of more than 9% from the district average by 2009. The Conservatives expressed broad agreement with the District Council's proposals.

66 The Liberal Democrats proposed to retain the existing warding arrangements for the Welwyn Garden City wards with the exception of Peartree, Hollybush and Howlands wards to which they proposed small amendments.

67 The Liberal Democrats proposed transferring Moss Green and Woodhall from Hollybush ward into Peartree ward as well as Beehive Green, Beehive Lane and Marley Road. They considered these were appropriate areas to transfer between wards as they are situated on the borders of the existing Peartree ward.

68 The Liberal Democrats also considered that Bennett Close and Wyndhams End in Hatfield East ward should be transferred into Hollybush ward, as this area is considered to be part of Welwyn Garden City and therefore should be part of Hollybush ward.

69 The Labour Party considered that part of Panshanger ward should be transferred into the existing Haldens ward, but it did not specify a particular area to transfer. It also considered that two areas of housing, to the west of Black Fan Road focused around Beauchamps and Cypress Avenue, should be transferred from the existing Howlands ward into Panshanger ward.

70 The Labour Party proposed to transfer properties on the west of Chequers into Handside ward from Hollybush ward. However, it noted that this was not its final opinion as possible changes to Hatfield North ward could affect this proposal. It did not discuss the other wards in the Welwyn Garden City area.

71 We carefully considered the representations received during Stage One for Welwyn Garden City. We noted that we had received no substantial community identity evidence from either the District Council or the Liberal Democrats, and only limited evidence from the Labour Party. We did not consider that the Labour Party had provided any strong or compelling argument to suggest why the area to the west of Chequers should be moved into Handside ward, particularly as it is separated from this ward by the railway line. Therefore we proposed retaining the existing Handside and Sherrards wards, but with one small amendment to better tie the boundary to ground detail. This amendment affected no electors.

72 We considered that the area of Panshanger ward which the District Council proposed transferring into Haldens ward was fairly self-contained with good links to the remainder of Haldens ward. We therefore proposed adopting the District Council's amendment in this area. We also proposed a small amendment between Haldens and Howlands wards to better tie the boundary to ground detail; this affected no electors.

73 We noted the Labour Party's proposal to transfer the housing to the west of Black Fan Road into Panshanger ward from Howlands ward. We noted that these areas faced on to, and had good road access into, Panshanger ward, and in fact had no direct access into Howlands ward in which they are currently placed. We also noted that these amendments would further improve electoral equality in our proposed Panshanger ward. We therefore adopted this proposal as part of our draft recommendations.

74 We carefully considered the opposing opinions from the District Council and the Liberal Democrats regarding Hollybush, Howlands and Peartree wards. However, having visited the area, we considered that the District Council's proposals would better reflect communities in the area. We found reaching conclusions on the best warding arrangement for this area particularly difficult given the limited community identity argument and the similar levels of electoral equality each proposal provided. We therefore specifically asked for comments on our draft recommendations during Stage Three.

75 We also adopted the Liberal Democrats' amendment to transfer Green Vale into Peartree ward from Howlands ward. We considered that Green Vale had better

communication links to Peartree ward and used a stronger boundary of the edge of the school playing field.

76 Under our draft recommendations our proposed Haldens, Handside, Hollybush, Howlands, Panshanger, Peartree and Sherrards wards would have electoral variances within 9% of the district average by 2009.

77 During Stage Three we received three representations in relation to the Welwyn Garden City wards. The District Council agreed in principle that the wards would secure effective and convenient local government. The Labour Party supported all our proposed amendments with the exception of the boundary between Hollybush and Peartree wards. It objected to the transfer of electors in the Gooseacre area from Hollybush ward into Peartree ward. It considered that 'this would split the community in this area, particularly as the public open spaces and footpaths from Gooseacre would remain in Hollybush [ward] although the residents who use this space and walkways would be in Peartree ward.' It therefore considered that the Gooseacre area should remain in Hollybush. The Labour Party did however support our recommendations to transfer the area round Our Lady's School into Peartree wards as it 'creates a natural boundary'.

78 Councillor Jones supported our draft recommendations to transfer those properties off the Black Fan Road from Howlands into Panshanger wards. She also noted that those properties currently in Hatfield East ward should be transferred into Hollybush ward, as noted by the Liberal Democrats during Stage One, but acknowledged that this would require amending the Hatfield parish boundary.

79 Councillor Jones also proposed an alternative boundary between Hollybush and Peartree wards which she considered would maintain the existing shape of the wards and would not 'snake back and forth' through the Hyde Valley area of Hollybush ward. She proposed to transfer Cole Green Lane (even numbers 2–136 including Beaumont House), Gooseacre (even numbers 2–24), Hyde Valley (even numbers 2–12 including Hanover House) and Woodhall Lane (numbers 1–141). Councillor Jones' proposal retained the Moss Green area in Hollybush ward, meaning that it would still be with the Chequersfield area onto which the '75 year anniversary wall' faces. She stated that it is hoped that residents in the Chequersfield area would use the facilities and schools such as Our Lady's School in the existing Hollybush ward. However, she also noted that the Chequersfield residents are 'more likely to look to the town centre within Handside ward' than to Hollybush. By retaining this area in Hollybush ward she also stated that it would mean that Hollybush, Howlands and Peartree wards would 'each have two primary schools within their ward boundaries'.

80 We carefully considered the responses to our draft recommendations. In particular, we examined the alternative proposals for the Peartree and Hollybush boundary. As detailed previously, we had specifically asked for comments regarding this boundary in our draft recommendations. We note the conflicting views of Councillor Jones and the Labour Party regarding the Moss Green area. We considered the comments from Councillor Jones about the Chequersfield area looking onto Moss Green and hopefully using Hollybush ward for facilities. However, the Moss Green area we propose to transfer, with the exception of the school, is entirely residential. Therefore residents of Chequersfield would still be within the Hollybush ward. We also note that Councillor Jones herself states that these residents are more likely to use Welwyn Garden City town centre.

81 We do not consider that the argument that residents who face on to the anniversary wall should be in the same ward as the wall to be particularly persuasive. In particular, we do not consider that this suggestion over-rides the benefits of using the strong boundary of the Chequers A-road. We also note the specific support we had for the transfer of the Moss Green area with its 'natural' boundaries from the Labour Party, as well as the general agreement from the District Council. Given the conflicting views received, we visited the area again at during Stage Four of the review process. Following this visit, we remain content with our draft recommendations for this area.

82 We examined the arguments and proposals put forward for the Cole Green Lane, Gooseacre and Hyde Valley area of the Hollybush and Peartree boundary. We considered Councillor Jones' proposal to transfer Cole Green Lane except Cole Green House and Woodhall Lane from the existing Hollybush ward into Peartree ward. However, on visiting the area we were not persuaded that having Hanover House and Cole Green House in separate wards would be a good reflection of local communities as these buildings share access. We also noted that given the confirmation of our draft recommendations for Moss Green, as noted above, Councillor Jones' proposal transferred more electors than necessary to secure good electoral equality.

83 However, we note that the Labour Party considered that the Gooseacre area should remain in Hollybush ward as it has links to public open spaces (King George V Park), and that Councillor Jones considered that the Hyde Valley area should remain in Hollybush ward. We observe also that Hyde Valley is in fact closer to the King George V Park than Gooseacre and therefore would also share these community links. Having revisited the area, and in light of the new evidence put to us during Stage Three, we consider that Gooseacre and Hyde Valley should remain in Hollybush ward. In making this amendment we consider that it would be logical and would provide for more convenient local government, to also retain Cole Green Lane (even numbers 2-28) in Hollybush ward. These houses follow on from properties on Gooseacre and would therefore remain in a ward with the other even numbered properties from Cole Green Lane.

84 This modification to our draft recommendations would have a minor effect on electoral equality, resulting in Hollybush and Peartree wards having 6% and 3% more electors than the district average by 2009 respectively, compared to 4% and 5% respectively, under our draft recommendations. We consider that this deviation from electoral equality is justified given the evidence we received at Stage Three and the strong boundary that our final recommendation would provide.

85 Therefore, given the support we received for the other wards in Welwyn Garden City we have decided to confirm the draft recommendation for Haldens, Handside, Howlands, Panshanger and Sherrards wards. We propose to move away from our draft recommendations for Hollybush and Peartree as described above and illustrated on the accompanying maps.

86 Under our final recommendations our proposed Haldens, Handside, Hollybush, Howlands, Panshanger, Peartree and Sherrards wards would have electoral variances within 9% of the district average by 2009. Table 1 (on page 9) provide details of the electoral variances of our final recommendations. Our final recommendations are shown on Maps 1, 2 and 3 accompanying this report.

Hatfield town: Hatfield Central, Hatfield East, Hatfield North, Hatfield South and Hatfield West wards

87 Under the existing arrangements Hatfield Central, Hatfield East, Hatfield North, Hatfield South and Hatfield West wards are currently parished. Table 5, shows the constituent parts of these wards. Table 3 (page 16) outlines the existing electoral variances for 2004 and the variances which the wards are forecast to have by 2009 if the existing arrangements were to remain in place.

Table 5: Existing arrangements

Ward	Constituent areas	Councillors
Hatfield Central	Central parish ward of Hatfield parish	3
Hatfield East	East parish ward of Hatfield parish; Essendon parish	3
Hatfield North	North parish ward of Hatfield parish	3
Hatfield South	South parish ward of Hatfield parish	2
Hatfield West	West parish ward of Hatfield parish	3

88 During Stage One we received four submissions in relation to the five Hatfield wards, from the District Council, the Conservatives, the Liberal Democrats and the Labour Party. The District Council proposed boundary amendments to all the existing Hatfield wards in order to take account of the extensive development occurring in the existing Hatfield North ward. Under its proposals no ward would have an electoral variance of more than 7% from the district average by 2009.

89 The Conservatives supported the District Council's proposals. The Liberal Democrats proposed an alternative scheme for Hatfield town based on a council size of 49, allocating 15 councillors to the town. The Labour Party proposed some alternative warding patterns for Hatfield.

90 We carefully considered the representations received during Stage One for the Hatfield wards. It was difficult to adopt the Liberal Democrats' proposals as they were based on a different councillor allocation for the town, as under a council size of 48 Hatfield is only entitled to 14 councillors. However, we attempted to take account of their community identity arguments where possible.

91 We agreed with the District Council that the A1 (M) formed a strong eastern boundary to its proposed Hatfield Garden & Lemsford ward, and would allow for distinct communities to be maintained. However, we were concerned that the proposed ward would initially have 44% fewer electors per councillor than the district average. We therefore contacted officers at the District Council to obtain details of the current electorate figures for Hatfield. From the information provided it is possible to see that growth has already occurred in the areas affected by the development in Hatfield North and, having examined the figures, we were content that the expected electorate growth for this ward will have occurred by 2009. We therefore adopted the District Council's Hatfield Garden Village & Lemsford ward. We also adopted the District Council's Hatfield North ward.

92 We adopted the District Council's proposed Hatfield South ward, with one amendment. The District Council proposed to transfer part of Welham Green into its proposed Hatfield South ward. This is part of North Mymms parish and would be required to be parish warded in order to be transferred into Hatfield South ward. However, the area was too small to justify the allocation of a parish councillor. We noted that the District Council's proposed ward still incorporates some of the area proposed by the Liberal Democrats so therefore attempted to recognise the community identified by the Liberal Democrats in this area.

93 We therefore adopted the District Council's proposals for Hatfield Central ward, with our own amendment as discussed previously; this resulted in it having 7% more electors per councillor than the district average by 2009, whereas under the District Council's proposal it would have had 2% more electors by 2009. However, we were unable to find a suitable area to transfer without transferring the variance to another ward.

94 Under our draft recommendations our proposed Hatfield Central, Hatfield East, Hatfield Garden Village & Lemsford, Hatfield North and Hatfield South wards had electoral variances within 7% of the district average by 2009.

95 During Stage Three we received four representations regarding Hatfield Town. The District Council supported our draft recommendations in principle. Hatfield Town Council stated that it had no comments. The Labour Party supported our Hatfield East and Hatfield South wards as well as the transfer of properties south of Oxlease Drive into our proposed Hatfield Central ward from the existing Hatfield West ward. However, it proposed amendments to the other three Hatfield wards. It considered that the Ellenbrook area in our proposed Hatfield Central ward should be transferred into our proposed Hatfield Garden Village & Lemsford ward. It stated that Ellenbrook has 'a distinct individual identity, producing its own newsletter for residents and has no community affinity with Hatfield Central.' The Labour Party considered that it would be better placed in Hatfield Garden Village & Lemsford as it is geographically closer to this area and some residents are members of the sports club in the ward. It continued that Hatfield Garden Village and Ellenbrook have similar identities 'as both have their own particular communities.' The Labour Party objected to our proposal to include the area to the east of Woods Avenue into our proposed Hatfield Central ward. It considered that residents are 'affiliated with residents in the area around Briars Wood and families in this area send their children to New Briars School in Briars Lane.' It stated that a more natural boundary would follow Queensway to its junction with Woods Avenue.

96 The Labour Party also proposed to rename some of the Hatfield wards. It considered that its amended Hatfield Garden Village & Lemsford should be renamed Hatfield North. It considered that our proposed Hatfield North ward should be renamed Hatfield Central because it contains the town centre, and therefore our proposed Hatfield Central ward should be renamed Hatfield West, as it is in the west of Hatfield.

97 Councillor O'Brien supported our proposed boundaries in the Hatfield wards, but proposed alternative ward names for each. He considered that the ward names have no conformity, unlike in Welwyn Garden City where the ward names reflect the areas within the ward. He considered that if the ward names reflected the areas within them then they would be more identifiable to local residents.

98 He supported Hatfield Central as ‘residents of Ellenbrook and much of the eastern side [of the A1 (M)] have a commonality in the effects the UoH [University] has on their lives.’ He considered this ward should be renamed Hatfield Roe Hill and Ellenbrook. He stated that electors would not be able to ‘identify readily with an area that only exists in the ward name.’ He went on to say that ‘confusion’ would also come from the fact that the town centre is not in Central ward. He considered that residents would relate to his proposed name better as Ellenbrook and Roe Hill were recognised areas within the ward. He provided photographic evidence of street and buildings bearing these names. He considered that Hatfield East should be renamed Hatfield Station & Essendon as Hatfield East also only exists in ward name. He considered that the railway station is the ‘central point of the urban part of the ward’ and residents in the ward all have concerns with commuter parking relating to the station. He also stated that Essendon should be included as it is a village within the ward with its own school, church and parish council. He considered this ward and his proposed name made ‘sense’ as the ‘only regular bus service [in the ward] runs between Hatfield and Essendon.’

99 Councillor O’Brien supported the Hatfield Garden Village & Lemsford ward as he considered that the ‘motorway is a good boundary and much of the new urban villages face the same/common problems.’ He considered that the ward should be renamed The Hatfield Villages, as the ward is ‘rural in nature’ with farms and hamlets, as well as Hatfield Garden Village and newer developments that are already recognised, such as ‘Salisbury Village.’ He considered that our draft name excluded other areas within the ward such as Salisbury Village. However, he noted that ‘including all parts of the ward in the name would mean the name just gets longer and longer’ and that his name reflected the village nature ‘without identifying a single area.’ He also stated that ‘in general residents of Ellenbrook would not welcome an attachment to the draft [Hatfield Garden Village & Lemsbrook] ward’.

100 Councillor O’Brien considered that our proposed Hatfield North ward made sense as it links the major retail areas. However, he stated that the name ‘North’ made no sense as it is not the most northerly point in the town, and therefore proposed to rename it Hatfield Town Centres and Birchwood. He considered that using the word ‘Centres’ would account for the three retail areas in the ward, although he also stated that centre would be ‘acceptable.’ He continued that Birchwood was a distinct part of the ward and therefore should be acknowledged in the ward name. He considered Hatfield South used the ‘best boundaries’ and is ‘very well defined.’ However, he felt it should be renamed South Hatfield as people refer to living in South Hatfield. He also considered that as the County division name was also Hatfield South changing it would allow electors to make a ‘clear distinction’ between the tiers of representation.

101 Councillor O’Brien also proposed alternative names for five of the six parish wards in Hatfield. These are discussed in the parish section of this report.

102 Having considered the representations received, we propose to move away from our draft recommendations for Hatfield North, Hatfield Central and Hatfield Garden Village & Lemsford wards.

103 We carefully considered the argument put forward by the Labour Party regarding the inclusion of Ellenbrook in our proposed Hatfield Garden Village & Lemsford ward. We note that the Labour Party considers that these areas have their

own distinct communities and could therefore be represented in the same ward, and also that Ellenbrook residents use the leisure centre on the University campus. However, we did not consider that the Labour Party put forward persuasive argument for this amendment, particularly in light of the support we received from Councillor O'Brien for our draft recommendations. We note the direct opposition from Councillor O'Brien stating that Ellenbrook residents would not welcome being in our Hatfield Garden Village & Lemsford ward, and also the common links it has to the rest of the ward relating to issues regarding the University.

104 Given the support for our draft recommendations, we do not consider that we have received sufficient compelling evidence to move away from them in this area. We also note that the Labour Party's proposal would transfer 994 electors from Hatfield Central ward into Hatfield Garden Village & Lemsford ward. This would improve the electoral equality of Hatfield Garden Village & Lemsford initially, compared to our draft recommendations (-21% rather than -44% under our draft recommendations), however, by 2009 Hatfield Garden Village & Lemsford would have 17% more electors than the district average, and Hatfield Central would have 14% fewer electors. We did not consider that the evidence provided justified such imbalances, when our draft recommendations received support and provide better electoral equality.

105 We note both the alternative names put forward to us regarding our proposed Hatfield Garden Village & Lemsford ward. We note that the Labour Party's proposed Hatfield North would be more geographically correct for the parish. However, we do not consider that it provided compelling argument for this name change. However, we do propose to adopt Councillor O'Brien's proposal to rename the ward Hatfield Villages. We consider that he provided a persuasive rationale for name changes, which more readily identifies with all the areas within the ward.

106 We carefully considered the Labour Party's proposal to transfer properties from our proposed Hatfield North ward into Hatfield Central ward around the Briars Wood area. We note that the Labour Party consider that these properties are associated with the surrounding areas to the south and west. While our draft recommendations received support, this area was not mentioned in particular. We re-examined the boundaries in light of the evidence and consider that having the boundary follow Queensway would provide a stronger boundary. We note that the properties border the edge of the town centre and do not face towards it, and in fact look more towards the south and west. This amendment would result in Hatfield Central ward having an electoral variance of 11% more than the district average by 2009. However, we consider that the stronger boundary used and the better representation of community identity justifies this variance.

107 We also propose to adopt the Labour Party's name changes for our proposed Hatfield North and Hatfield Central wards. We note that Councillor O'Brien also proposed that Hatfield North ward be renamed to reflect the fact that the town centre is in the ward, and we agree with the logic of this argument from both the Labour Party and Councillor O'Brien. We therefore propose to rename our amended Hatfield North ward Hatfield Central ward. We also considered that the Labour Party's proposed name of Hatfield West would best reflect the area within the ward.

108 We note the proposals from Councillor O'Brien for new names in Hatfield. We acknowledge his desire for the ward names to reflect the local area names so that they are identifiable with areas known by local residents. However, given the proposals from the Labour Party for ward names similar to the existing and our draft ward names as well as the support our proposals receive from the District Council we do not propose adopting his names for our proposed Hatfield East, Hatfield South or Hatfield Central wards.

109 Therefore under our final recommendations Hatfield Central, Hatfield East, Hatfield South, Hatfield Villages and Hatfield West wards would have less than 1%, 4% fewer, 7% more, 4% fewer and 11% more electors per councillor than the district average by 2009.

110 Table 1 (on page 9) provide details of the electoral variances of our final recommendations for Hatfield Central, Hatfield East, Hatfield South, Hatfield Villages and Hatfield West wards. Our final recommendations are shown on Maps 1, 3 and 4 accompanying this report.

Brookmans Park & Little Heath, Northaw and Welham Green wards

111 Under the existing arrangements Brookmans Park & Little Heath, Northaw and Welham Green wards are currently parished. Table 6 below shows the constituent parts of these wards. Table 3 (page 16) outlines the existing electoral variances for 2004 and the variances which the wards are forecast to have by 2009 if the existing arrangements were to remain in place.

Table 6: Existing arrangements

Ward	Constituent areas	Councillors
Brookmans Park & Little Heath	Newgate Street/ Woodhill parish ward of Hatfield parish; Little Heath and Brookmans Park parish wards of North Mymms parish	3
Northaw	Northaw & Cuffley parish	3
Welham Green	Welham Green parish ward of North Mymms parish	2

112 During Stage One we received six submissions in relation to the three existing rural wards in the southern part of the district. The District Council proposed to retain the existing Brookmans Park & Little Heath and Welham Green wards. It noted that Welham Green ward would have 11% fewer electors per councillor than the district average by 2009. The Conservatives supported the District Council and considered that these wards are distinct areas that should remain unchanged. The Liberal Democrats also supported the District Council proposal.

113 The Labour Party proposed that the rural part of Hatfield East ward, east of Great North Road, be combined with Welham Green ward. Charles Walker MP considered that the existing arrangements should be retained in Northaw ward. Northaw & Cuffley Parish Council also shared this opinion. It stated that the ward has its own bowls and tennis clubs and recreation grounds as well as village halls, youth clubs schools, and church charities.

114 We carefully considered all the representations we received during Stage One in relation to these rural wards. We noted the strong support, from all but the Labour Party, to retain the existing wards. We considered that the Labour Party's proposal to combine part of Hatfield East ward and Welham Green ward. As a three-member ward its proposed ward would have 8% more electors per councillor than the district average. We noted that this was an improvement in electoral equality. However, we did not consider that the road links between the areas were strong enough, particularly as Millwards Park forms a significant boundary between Welham Green and Essendon villages. Additionally, we did not consider that the Labour Party had provided any strong compelling arguments to explain why the Ryde and old Hatfield should be detached from the rest of Hatfield town.

115 We noted that the councillors of the three wards of Welham Green, Northaw and Brookmans Park & Little Heath are all forecast to represent fewer electors than the district average by 2009. It was therefore difficult to improve on these variances because transferring electors from one ward into another would worsen the level of electoral equality in the Brookmans Park and Little Heath. We therefore considered alternative options to address the imbalances in this southern rural area. We looked at combining the rural areas of the existing Hatfield East ward with the three rural wards. We noted that in order to achieve reasonable levels of electoral equality it would be necessary to create new parish wards in Hatfield parish. However, these parish wards would have too few electors in them to justify representation by a parish councillor. We therefore proposed to retain the existing wards of Welham Green, Northaw and Brookmans Park & Little Heath as part of our draft recommendations.

116 We noted that this would result in Welham Green and Northaw wards having electoral variances of over 10% by 2009. However, in light of the difficulty in achieving improved electoral equality and retaining links between areas, as well as the location of these wards on the edge of the district, combined with the support to retain these wards, we considered that these wards would provide the best balance of the three criteria under which we make these recommendations. We also proposed to rename Northaw ward Northaw & Cuffley ward, as proposed by the District Council.

117 Under our draft recommendations our proposed Brookmans Park & Little Heath, Northaw & Cuffley and Welham Green wards would have electoral variances within 11% of the district average by 2009.

118 We received no comments relating specifically to these wards at Stage Three. The District Council stated that it supported our draft recommendations for the district in principle. The Labour Party stated that it had no comments to make regarding these wards.

119 Having considered the representations received we have decided to confirm the draft recommendations for Brookmans Park & Little Heath, Northaw & Cuffley and Welham Green wards. Our proposed Brookmans Park & Little Heath, Northaw & Cuffley and Welham Green wards would have electoral variances within 11% of the district average by 2009.

120 Table 1 (on page 9) provides details of the electoral variances of our final recommendations for these wards. Our final recommendations are shown on Map 1 and Map 4 accompanying this report.

Conclusions

121 Table 7 shows the impact of our final recommendations on electoral equality, comparing them with the current arrangements based on 2004 and 2009 electorate figures.

Table 7: Comparison of current and recommended electoral arrangements

	Current arrangements		Final recommendations	
	2004	2009	2004	2009
Number of councillors	48	48	48	48
Number of wards	17	17	17	17
Average number of electors per councillor	1,462	1,564	1,462	1,564
Number of wards with a variance more than 10% from the average	7	7	4	3
Number of wards with a variance more than 20% from the average	1	2	1	0

122 As shown in Table 7, our final recommendations for Welwyn Hatfield District Council would result in a reduction in the number of wards with an electoral variance of more than 10% from seven to four. By 2009 only three wards are forecast to have an electoral variance of more than 10%. We propose to retain the existing council size and are recommending a council size of 48 members.

Final recommendation

Welwyn Hatfield District Council should comprise 48 councillors serving 17 wards, as detailed and named in Table 1 and illustrated on the large maps accompanying this report.

Parish electoral arrangements

123 As part of an FER the Committee can make recommendations for new electoral arrangements for parishes. Where there is no impact on the district council's electoral arrangements, the Committee will generally be content to put forward for consideration proposals from parish and town councils for changes to parish electoral arrangements in FERs. However, the Boundary Committee will usually wish to see a degree of consensus between the district council and the parish council concerned. Proposals should be supported by evidence, illustrating why changes to parish

electoral arrangements are required. The Boundary Committee cannot recommend changes to the external boundaries of parishes as part of a FER.

124 Responsibility for reviewing and implementing changes to the electoral arrangements of existing parishes, outside of an electoral review conducted by the Boundary Committee, lies with district councils.² If a district council wishes to make an Order amending the electoral arrangements of a parish that has been subject to an electoral arrangements Order made by either the Secretary of State or the Electoral Commission within the past five years, the consent of the Commission is required.

125 During Stage One we received proposals for revised parish council electoral arrangements from the District Council, Welwyn Parish Council and Councillor Neville. The parish of Welwyn is currently divided into five parish wards: Danesbury, Digswell, Hawbush, Mardley Heath and Queensway. In agreement with the District Council, Welwyn Parish Council proposed to retain the existing boundaries and number of parish councillors (two) for Digswell parish ward. It proposed that Mardley Heath parish ward should be renamed Oaklands & Mardley Heath parish ward ‘in accordance with local usage’ and that the number of councillors for this parish ward should be increased by one from three to four. It proposed to amalgamate Danesbury, Hawbush and Queensway parish wards into a new parish ward to be called Welwyn Village, returning five parish councillors. It considered that this proposal would ‘accurately reflect the constituent communities of the parish, and the electors-per-councillor will be reasonably consistent throughout.’ It considered that its proposed wards would be separated by ‘clear geographic features’ that would be consistent with our proposed district wards in the area.

126 The District Council and Councillor Neville supported Welwyn Parish Council’s proposals in full. Our proposed district warding arrangements allowed for these amendments to the parish wards of Welwyn parish. We therefore we put forward the Parish Council’s proposals for consultation in our draft recommendations.

127 At Stage Three we received no further comments relating to Welwyn Parish and therefore confirm our draft recommendations as final.

Final recommendation
Welwyn Parish Council should comprise 11 parish councillors, as at present representing three wards: Digswell (returning two councillors), Oaklands & Mardley Heath ward (returning four councillors) and Welwyn Village (returning five councillors). The parish ward boundaries are illustrated and named on Maps 1 and 2.

128 When reviewing electoral arrangements, we are required to comply as far as possible with the rules set out in Schedule 11 to the 1972 Act. The Schedule provides that if a parish is to be divided between different district wards it must also be divided into parish wards, so that each parish ward lies wholly within a single ward of the district. Accordingly, we propose consequential warding arrangements for the town of Hatfield to reflect the proposed district wards.

² Such reviews must be conducted in accordance with section 17 of the Local Government and Rating Act 1997.

129 The town of Hatfield is currently served by 15 councillors representing six wards: Central, East, Newgate & Wildhill, North, South and West. During Stage One we did not propose changing the number of councillors but made amendments to reflect the district wards. We proposed the parish wards be given names that reflected the district wards, with the exception of Newgate & Wildhill.

130 At Stage Three Councillor O'Brien proposed name changes for the town wards. He considered that none of the wards should have the prefix Hatfield in the name as it is clear which parish the wards are within. He proposed that our proposed Central ward be renamed Roe Hill and Ellenbrook, that our proposed East ward be renamed Station & Rural, that our proposed Hatfield Garden Village & Lemsford be renamed The Villages, that our proposed Hatfield North ward be renamed Town Centres & Birchwood and that our proposed Hatfield South ward be renamed South. His reasons for these changes were the same as those given for his proposed district ward name changes as outlined previously in this report.

131 Given that we have not adopted Councillor O'Brien's proposals for the district wards, with the exception of his Hatfield Villages ward, we are only adopting this town ward name. We consider that his proposal to remove Hatfield from the names is suitable, particularly given some wards are already without the Hatfield prefix. We therefore propose the parish wards be given names that reflect the district wards, with the exception of Newgate & Wildhill.

Final recommendation

Hatfield Town Council should comprise 15 councillors, as at present, representing six wards: Central (returning three councillors), East (returning three councillors), Villages (returning three councillors), Newgate Street & Wildhill (returning one councillor), West (returning three councillors) and South (returning two councillors). The parish ward boundaries should reflect the proposed district ward boundaries in the area, as illustrated and named on Maps 1, 3 and 4.

132 Woolmer Green parish is currently served by six councillors and is not warded. We are recommending retaining the existing arrangements for this parish.

Final recommendation

Woolmer Green Parish Council should comprise six councillors, as at present, as illustrated and named on Map 1 and 2.

6 What happens next?

133 Having completed our review of electoral arrangements in Welwyn Hatfield and submitted our final recommendations to the Electoral Commission, we have fulfilled our statutory obligation.³

134 It is now up to the Electoral Commission to decide whether or not to endorse our recommendations, with or without modification, and to implement them by means of an Order. Such an Order will not be made before 7 August 2007 and the Electoral Commission will normally consider all written representation made to them by that date.

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

**The Secretary
The Electoral Commission
Trevelyan House
Great Peter Street
London SW1P 2HW**

Fax: 020 7271 0667

Email: implementation@electoralcommission.org.uk

The contact details above should only be used for queries about the implementation of these recommendations.

The full report is available to download at www.boundarycommittee.org.uk.

³ Under the Local Government Act 1992 (as amended by SI No. 2001/3962).

7 Mapping

Final recommendations for Welwyn Hatfield

The following maps illustrate our proposed ward boundaries for the district of Welwyn Hatfield.

- **Sheet 1, Map 1** illustrates in outline form the proposed wards for the district of Welwyn Hatfield including constituent parishes.
- **Sheet 2, Map 2** illustrates the proposed boundaries in the district of Welwyn Hatfield: Wards in Welwyn Parish and Welwyn Garden City.
- **Sheet 3, Map 3** illustrates the proposed boundaries in the district of Welwyn Hatfield: Wards in Welwyn Garden City and Hatfield parish.
- **Sheet 4, Map 4** illustrates the proposed boundaries in the district of Welwyn Hatfield: Wards in Hatfield parish and the southern rural areas.

Appendix A

Glossary and abbreviations

AONB (Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty)	A landscape whose distinctive character and natural beauty are so outstanding that it is in the nation's interest to safeguard it
Boundary Committee	The Boundary Committee for England is a committee of the Electoral Commission, responsible for undertaking electoral reviews
Constituent areas	The geographical areas that make up any one ward, expressed in parishes or existing wards, or parts of either
Consultation	An opportunity for interested parties to comment and make proposals at key stages during the review
Council size	The number of councillors elected to serve a council
Order (or electoral change Order)	A legal document which implements changes to the electoral arrangements of a local authority
Electoral Commission	An independent body that was set up by the UK Parliament. Its mission is to foster public confidence and participation by promoting integrity, involvement and effectiveness in the democratic process
Electoral equality	A measure of ensuring that every person's vote is of equal worth

Electoral imbalance	Where there is a large difference between the number of electors represented by a councillor and the average for the district
Electorate	People in the authority who are registered to vote in local government elections
FER (or further electoral review)	A further review of the electoral arrangements of a local authority following significant shifts in the electorate since the last periodic electoral review conducted between 1996 and 2004
Multi-member ward	A ward represented by more than one councillor and usually not more than three councillors
National Park	<p>The 12 National Parks in England and Wales were designated under the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act of 1949 and will soon be joined by the new designation of the South Downs. The definition of a National Park is:</p> <p>‘An extensive area of beautiful and relatively wild country in which, for the nation’s benefit and by appropriate national decision and action:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – the characteristic landscape beauty is strictly preserved; – access and facilities for open-air enjoyment are amply provided; – wildlife and buildings and places of architectural and historic interest are suitably protected; – established farming use is effectively maintained’
Number of electors per councillor	The total number of electors in a local authority divided by the number of councillors

Over-represented	Where there are fewer electors per councillor in a ward than the average the electors can be described as being over-represented
Parish	A specific and defined area of land within a single district enclosed within a parish boundary. There are over 10,000 parishes in England, which provide the first tier of representation to their local residents
Parish council	A body elected by residents of the parish who are on the electoral register, which serves and represents the area defined by the parish boundaries
Parish electoral arrangements	The total number of parish councillors; the number, names and boundaries of parish wards; and the number of councillors for each ward
Parish ward	A particular area of a parish, defined for electoral, administrative and representational purposes. Eligible electors vote in whichever parish ward they live for candidate or candidates they wish to represent them on the parish council
PER (or periodic electoral review)	A review of the electoral arrangements of all local authorities in England, undertaken periodically. The last programme of PERs was undertaken between 1996 and 2004 by the Boundary Committee for England and its predecessor, the now-defunct Local Government Commission for England

Political management arrangements	The Local Government Act 2000 enabled local authorities to modernise their decision making process. Councils could choose from three broad categories; a directly elected mayor and cabinet, a cabinet with a leader, or a directly elected mayor and council manager. Whichever of the categories it adopted became the new political management structure for the council
Under-represented	Where there are more electors per councillor in a ward than the average the electors can be described as being under-represented
Variance (or electoral variance)	How far the number of electors per councillor in a ward varies in percentage terms from the district average
Ward	A specific area of a district or borough, defined for electoral, administrative and representational purposes. Eligible electors vote in whichever ward they are registered for the candidate or candidates they wish to represent them on the district council

Appendix B

Code of practice on written consultation

The Cabinet Office's November 2000 *Code of Practice on Written Consultation* (available at www.cabinet-office.gov.uk/regulation/Consultation/Code.htm), requires all Government Departments and Agencies to adhere to certain criteria, set out below, on the conduct of public consultations. Public bodies, such as the Boundary Committee 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: The Boundary Committee for England's compliance with Code criteria

Criteria	Compliance/departure
Timing of consultation should be built into the planning process for a policy (including legislation) or service from the start, so that it has the best prospect of improving the proposals concerned, and so that sufficient time is left for it at each stage.	We comply with this requirement.
It should be clear who is being consulted, about what questions, in what timescale and for what purpose.	We comply with this requirement.
A consultation document should be as simple and concise as possible. It should include a summary, in two pages at most, of the main questions it seeks views on. It should make it as easy as possible for readers to respond, make contact or complain.	We comply with this requirement.
Documents should be made widely available, with the fullest use of electronic means (though not to the exclusion of others), and effectively drawn to the attention of all interested groups and individuals.	We comply with this requirement.
Sufficient time should be allowed for considered responses from all groups with an interest. Twelve weeks should be the standard minimum period for a consultation.	We comply with this requirement.
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.

