

Final recommendations on the  
future electoral arrangements for  
Darlington in County Durham

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

*May 2001*

# LOCAL GOVERNMENT COMMISSION FOR ENGLAND

This report sets out the Commission's final recommendations on the electoral arrangements for the borough of Darlington in County Durham.

Members of the Commission are:

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A large map illustrating the proposed ward boundaries for Darlington is inserted inside the back cover of the report.





## Local Government Commission for England

15 May 2001

Dear Secretary of State

On 16 May 2000 the Commission began a periodic electoral review of Darlington under the Local Government Act 1992. We published our draft recommendations in December 2000 and undertook an eight-week period of consultation.

We have now prepared our final recommendations in the light of the consultation. We have substantially confirmed our draft recommendations, although some modifications have been made (see paragraph 113-114) in the light of further evidence. This report sets out our final recommendations for changes to electoral arrangements in Darlington.

We recommend that Darlington Borough Council should be served by 53 councillors representing 24 wards, and that changes should be made to ward boundaries in order to improve electoral equality, having regard to the statutory criteria. We recommend that elections for the Council should continue to be held every four years.

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

I would like to thank members and officers of the 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

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

PROFESSOR MALCOLM GRANT  
Chairman



## SUMMARY

The Commission began a review of Darlington on 16 May 2000. We published our draft recommendations for electoral arrangements on 12 December 2000, after which we undertook an eight-week period of consultation.

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

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

- **in 14 of the 25 wards the number of electors represented by each councillor varies by more than 10 per cent from the average for the borough and six wards vary by more than 20 per cent from the average;**
- **by 2005 electoral equality is not expected to improve, with the number of electors per councillor forecast to vary by more than 10 per cent from the average in 17 wards and by more than 20 per cent in nine wards.**

Our main final recommendations for future electoral arrangements (Figures 1 and 2 and paragraphs 113-114) are that:

- **Darlington Borough Council should have 53 councillors, one more than at present;**
- **there should be 24 wards, instead of 25 as at present;**
- **the boundaries of 22 of the existing wards should be modified and two wards should retain their existing boundaries;**
- **whole-council elections should continue to take place every four years.**

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 20 of the proposed 24 wards the number of electors per councillor would vary by no more than 10 per cent from the borough average.**
- **This improved level of electoral equality is forecast to continue, with the number of electors per councillor in only one ward expected to vary by more than 10 per cent from the average for the borough in 2005.**

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

- **new warding arrangements for Archdeacon Newton and Whessoe parishes.**

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 26 June 2001:

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

Figure 1: The Commission's Final Recommendations: Summary

Ward name	Number of councillors	Constituent areas
1 Bank Top	2	Bank Top ward (part); Lingfield ward (part); Lascelles ward (part)
2 Central	2	Central ward (part); College ward (part); Haughton East ward (part); Northgate North ward (part)
3 Cockerton East	3	Cockerton East ward (part)
4 Cockerton West	2	Cockerton East ward (part); Cockerton West ward
5 College	2	College ward (part); Pierremont ward (part)
6 Eastbourne	3	Eastbourne North ward; Eastbourne South ward
7 Faverdale	1	Cockerton East ward (part); Whessoe ward (part – urban ward of Archdeacon Newton parish as proposed)
8 Harrowgate Hill	3	Harrowgate Hill ward (part); Whessoe ward (part – Harrowgate ward of Whessoe parish as proposed)
9 Haughton East	2	Haughton East ward (part); Haughton West ward (part)
10 Haughton North	2	Haughton East ward (part)
11 Haughton West	3	Haughton West ward (part)
12 Heighington & Coniscliffe	2	Heighington ward (Heighington parish); Whessoe ward (part – Denton, High Coniscliffe, Houghton-le-Side, Killerby, Low Coniscliffe & Merrybent, Piercebridge, Summerhouse and Walworth parishes and rural ward of Archdeacon Newton parish as proposed )
13 Hummersknott	2	Hummersknott ward (part); Mowden ward (part)
14 Hurworth	2	<i>Unchanged</i> (Hurworth, Neasham and Sockburn parishes)
15 Lascelles	2	Lascelles ward (part); Bank Top ward (part)
16 Lingfield	2	Central ward (part); Lingfield ward (part)
17 Middleton St George	2	<i>Unchanged</i> (Middleton St George and Low Dinsdale parishes)
18 Mowden	2	Mowden ward (part)
19 Northgate	2	Northgate South ward; Northgate North ward (part); Pierremont ward (part)
20 North Road	3	Harrowgate Hill ward (part); Northgate North ward (part); North Road ward
21 Park East	3	Park East ward; Park West ward (part); Central ward (part)
22 Park West	2	Park West ward (part); Hummersknott ward (part)
23 Pierremont	3	Northgate North (part); Pierremont ward (part)

	<b>Ward name</b>	<b>Number of councillors</b>	<b>Constituent areas</b>
24	Sadberge & Whessoe	1	Sadberge ward (Barmpton, Bishopton, Brafferton, East & West Newbiggin, Great Burdon, Great Stainton, Little Stainton, Morton Palms and Sadberge parishes); Whessoe ward (part – Coatham Mundeville parish and Whessoe Rural ward of Whessoe parish as proposed)

*Notes: 1 The borough contains 26 parishes. The urban area of Darlington is not parished and comprises 20 wards, under existing arrangements.*

*2 Map 2 and the large map at the back of this report illustrate the proposed wards outlined above.*

Figure 2: The Commission's Final Recommendations for Darlington

Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2000)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2005)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
1 Bank Top	2	2,895	1,448	1	2,827	1,414	-2
2 Central	2	2,812	1,406	-2	2,750	1,375	-4
3 Cockerton East	3	3,793	1,264	-12	4,060	1,353	-6
4 Cockerton West	2	3,109	1,555	9	2,959	1,480	3
5 College	2	2,973	1,487	4	3,003	1,502	4
6 Eastbourne	3	4,100	1,367	-5	4,109	1,370	-5
7 Faverdale	1	861	861	-40	1,335	1,335	-7
8 Harrowgate Hill	3	4,109	1,370	-4	4,431	1,477	3
9 Haughton East	2	3,002	1,501	5	2,904	1,452	1
10 Haughton North	2	2,974	1,487	4	2,877	1,439	0
11 Haughton West	3	4,163	1,388	-3	4,168	1,389	-3
12 Heighington & Coniscliffe	2	2,501	1,251	-13	2,791	1,396	-3
13 Hummersknott	2	2,974	1,487	4	2,958	1,479	3
14 Hurworth	2	2,867	1,434	0	3,074	1,537	7
15 Lascelles	2	2,724	1,362	-5	2,768	1,384	-4
16 Lingfield	2	2,782	1,391	-3	2,752	1,376	-4
17 Middleton St George	2	2,870	1,435	0	2,885	1,443	0
18 Mowden	2	3,123	1,562	9	3,015	1,508	5
19 Northgate	2	3,156	1,578	10	2,963	1,482	3
20 North Road	3	4,677	1,559	9	4,485	1,495	4
21 Park East	3	4,432	1,477	3	4,388	1,463	2
22 Park West	2	2,912	1,456	2	2,775	1,388	-3
23 Pierremont	3	4,426	1,475	3	4,305	1,435	0

Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2000)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2005)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
24 Sadberge & Whessoe	1	1,615	1,615	13	1,621	1,621	13
<b>Totals</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>75,850</b>	–	–	<b>76,203</b>	–	–
<b>Averages</b>	–	–	<b>1,431</b>	–	–	<b>1,438</b>	–

Source: Electorate figures are based on information provided by Darlington Borough Council.

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

# 1 INTRODUCTION

1 This report contains our final recommendations on the electoral arrangements for the borough of Darlington in County Durham. We have now reviewed the seven two-tier districts in County Durham and Durham County Council as part of our programme of periodic electoral reviews (PERs) of all 386 principal local authority areas in England. Our programme started in 1996 and is currently expected to be completed by 2004.

2 This was our first review of the electoral arrangements of Darlington. The last such review was undertaken by our predecessor, the Local Government Boundary Commission (LGBC), which reported to the Secretary of State in February 1976 (Report No. 136). Since undertaking that review, Darlington has become a unitary authority on its existing boundaries (1 April 1997).

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

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

4 We are required to make recommendations to the Secretary of State on the number of councillors who should serve on the Borough Council, and the number, boundaries and names of wards. We can also make recommendations on the electoral arrangements for parish [and town] councils in the district.

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

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

7 The broad objective of PERs is to achieve, so far as practicable, equality of representation across the district as a whole. Having regard to the statutory criteria, our aim is to achieve as low a level of electoral imbalance as is practicable. We will require particular justification for schemes which would result in, or retain, an electoral imbalance of over 10 per cent in any ward. Any imbalances of 20 per cent or more should only arise in the most exceptional circumstances, and will require the strongest justification.

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

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

10 This review was in four stages. Stage One began on 16 May 2000, when we wrote to Darlington Borough Council inviting proposals for future electoral arrangements. We also notified Durham Police Authority, the local authority associations, Durham Association of Parish & Town Councils, parish councils in the borough, the Members of Parliament with constituency interests in the district, the Members of the European Parliament for the North East region, and the headquarters of the main political parties. We placed a notice in the local press, issued a press release and invited the Borough Council to publicise the review further. The closing date for receipt of representations, the end of Stage One, was 21 August 2000. At Stage Two we considered all the representations received during Stage One and prepared our draft recommendations.

11 Stage Three began on 12 December 2000 with the publication of our report, *Draft recommendations on the future electoral arrangements for Darlington in County Durham*, and ended on 19 February 2001. 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

12 The borough of Darlington is a unitary authority located in north-eastern England. The River Tees forms the borough boundary with North Yorkshire and it is bounded to the north and west by the County Durham districts of Sedgefield and Teesdale and to the east by Stockton-on-Tees. It is a compact and cohesive authority, covering an area of 19,800 hectares. The town of Darlington is the focal point for the borough, with a population of 87,900, and is surrounded by rural countryside containing a number of villages, including Hurworth, Middleton St George and Heighington. The borough is served by the East Coast main railway line and a well-developed road network, including the A1 Motorway and the A66 linking the M6 to Teesside. There are 26 parishes in the borough, although Darlington town itself is not parished.

13 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 borough average in percentage terms. In the text which follows this calculation may also be described using the shorthand term 'electoral variance'.

14 The electorate of the borough is 75,850 (February 2000). The Council presently has 52 members who are elected from 25 wards, 20 of which are relatively urban with the remainder being predominantly rural. Three of the wards are each represented by one councillor, 17 are each represented by two councillors and five are three-member wards. Elections are held for the whole council every four years.

15 Since the last electoral review there has been a moderate increase in the electorate in Darlington borough, with around 4 per cent more electors than two decades ago as a result of new housing developments. The most notable increases have been in Haughton West and Whessoe wards.

16 At present, each councillor represents an average of 1,459 electors, which the Borough Council forecasts will increase to 1,465 by the year 2005 if the present number of councillors is maintained. However, due to demographic and other changes over the past two decades, the number of electors per councillor in 14 of the 25 wards varies by more than 10 per cent from the borough average and in six wards by more than 20 per cent. The worst imbalances are in Haughton West and Whessoe wards where each of the councillors represents 44 per cent more electors than the borough average.

*Map 1: Existing Wards in Darlington*

Figure 3: Existing Electoral Arrangements

Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2000)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2005)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
1 Bank Top	2	2,688	1,344	-8	2,620	1,310	-11
2 Central	2	2,350	1,175	-19	2,280	1,140	-22
3 Cockerton East	3	5,197	1,732	19	5,859	1,953	33
4 Cockerton West	2	2,297	1,149	-21	2,225	1,113	-24
5 College	2	2,556	1,278	-12	2,602	1,301	-11
6 Eastbourne North	2	1,838	919	-37	1,908	954	-35
7 Eastbourne South	2	2,262	1,131	-22	2,201	1,101	-25
8 Harrowgate Hill	3	4,107	1,369	-6	4,001	1,334	-9
9 Haughton East	3	5,959	1,986	36	5,764	1,921	31
10 Haughton West	2	4,204	2,102	44	4,209	2,105	44
11 Heighington	1	1,444	1,444	-1	1,707	1,707	16
12 Hummersknott	2	3,371	1,686	16	3,365	1,683	15
13 Hurworth	2	2,867	1,434	-2	3,074	1,537	5
14 Lascelles	2	2,638	1,319	-10	2,685	1,343	-8
15 Lingfield	2	3,075	1,538	5	3,042	1,521	4
16 Middleton St George	2	2,870	1,435	-2	2,885	1,443	-2
17 Mowden	2	3,433	1,717	18	3,314	1,657	13
18 North Road	2	3,181	1,591	9	3,036	1,518	4
19 Northgate North	2	2,744	1,372	-6	2,615	1,308	-11
20 Northgate South	2	2,480	1,240	-15	2,300	1,150	-22
21 Park East	3	3,772	1,257	-14	3,767	1,256	-14
22 Park West	2	2,865	1,433	-2	2,690	1,345	-8
23 Pierremont	3	4,309	1,436	-2	4,270	1,423	-3
24 Sadberge	1	1,242	1,242	-15	1,286	1,286	-12

Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2000)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2005)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
25 Whessoe	1	2,101	2,101	44	2,498	2,498	70
<b>Totals</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>75,850</b>	–	–	<b>76,203</b>	–	–
<b>Averages</b>	–	–	<b>1,459</b>	–	–	<b>1,465</b>	–

Source: Electorate figures are based on information provided by Darlington Borough Council.

Note: The 'variance from average' column shows by how far, in percentage terms, the number of electors per councillor varies from the average for the borough. The minus symbol (-) denotes a lower than average number of electors. For example, in 2000, electors in Whessoe ward were relatively over-represented by 44 per cent, while electors in Park East ward were significantly under-represented by 14 per cent. Figures have been rounded to the nearest whole number.

### 3 DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS

17 During Stage One we received a borough-wide scheme from Darlington Borough Council, and copies of 16 representations which the Council had received as part of its own consultation exercise. 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 Darlington in County Durham*.

18 Our draft recommendations were largely based on the Borough Council's proposals, which provided for significant improvements in electoral equality, and provided a mixed pattern wards throughout the borough. However, we moved away from the Council's scheme in the rural area to the north of the borough and we also proposed a number of amendments to ward boundaries in Darlington town itself. We proposed that:

- Darlington Borough Council should be served by 53 councillors, compared with the current 52, representing 24 wards, one more than at present;
- the boundaries of 23 of the existing wards should be modified, while one ward should retain its existing boundaries;
- there should be new warding arrangements for Whessoe parish.

**Draft Recommendation**

Darlington Borough Council should comprise 53 councillors, serving 24 wards. The whole council should continue to be elected every four years.

19 Our proposals would result in a significant improvement in electoral equality, with the number of electors per councillor in 20 of the 24 wards varying by no more than 10 per cent from the borough average. This level of electoral equality was forecast to improve further, with only one ward varying by more than 10 per cent from the average in 2005.



## 4 RESPONSES TO CONSULTATION

20 During the consultation on our draft recommendations report, 11 representations were received. A list of all respondents is available on request from the Commission. All representations may be inspected at the offices of Darlington Borough Council and the Commission.

### **Darlington Borough Council**

21 The Borough Council supported our draft recommendations for Darlington subject to one amendment proposed by the Council's Special Committee on electoral arrangements. The Council proposed dividing the recently formed parish of Archdeacon Newton between the proposed Heighington & Coniscliffe ward and the proposed Faverdale ward. The Council put forward three options for the boundary between the two wards, but expressed no clear preference for any one option.

### **Darlington Borough Council Conservative Group**

22 The Darlington Borough Council Conservative Group ('the Conservative Group') expressed broad support for our draft recommendations and stated that our proposals would form "the basis of a better solution for Darlington". The Conservative Group supported our proposal to create a new single-member Faverdale ward and proposed dividing Archdeacon Newton parish between Faverdale and Heighington & Coniscliffe wards. It expressed a preference for a boundary which would run to the west of the proposed development which is expected in Faverdale. The Conservative Group objected to our proposed Haughton North and Haughton West wards and reiterated their Stage One proposal for a three-member Haughton North ward and a two-member Haughton West ward.

### **The Darlington Conservative Association**

23 The Darlington Conservative Association expressed broad support for our draft recommendations but argued that the new Faverdale ward containing Archdeacon Newton parish needed "further review". It proposed that the part of Archdeacon Newton parish to the west of the A1 Motorway, should be included in the proposed Heighington & Coniscliffe ward and favoured the A1 Motorway as the western boundray of Faverdale ward. The Conservative Association also stated that Haughton West and Haughton North wards should be represented by two and three members respectively, arguing that Haughton North is "a new community and is best served if it has three members" and that "Haughton West is predominantly south of Salters Lane North/Whinfield Road and should continue with two members".

### **Sedgefield Constituency Conservative Association**

24 Sedgefield Constituency Conservative Association broadly supported our proposals for Harrogate Hill, Whessoe, Sadberge, Middleton St George and Hurworth wards. While it stated that it would have preferred separate Coniscliffe and Heighington wards, the Conservative Association accepted that "the numbers would not make this viable". It also stated that it would

prefer Archdeacon Newton parish to be included in the Heighington & Coniscliffe ward, and expressed its support for the A1 Motorway as the western boundary of the proposed Faverdale ward.

## **Darlington Liberal Democrats**

25 Councillor Ken Walker (North Road ward) stated that our proposed North Road ward had the full support of the current ward councillors and the Executive members of Darlington Liberal Democrats. He also stated that the Liberal Democrats supported the proposed southern boundary of the railway bridge that separates North Road from High Northgate since it “includes clearly identifiable communities who share the problems and features of existing communities already located in North Road ward”.

## **Parish Councils**

26 We received further comments at Stage Three from one parish council in Darlington. Piercebridge Parish Council opposed the proposed Heighington & Coniscliffe ward and argued that small villages such as Piercebridge would lose their identity if included in a ward with Heighington. The parish council suggested that Heighington and the smaller villages should form two separate single-member wards. Alternatively the parish council suggested retaining the current warding arrangements and increasing the number of councillors for the current Whessoe ward from one to two.

## **Other Representations**

27 A further five representations were received in response to our draft recommendations from local political groups, local organisations, councillors and residents. We received submissions from four Darlington Borough councillors. Councillor Burt (Hurworth ward) supported the submission by the Darlington Borough Council Conservative Group and reiterated that the Group were broadly in favour of our draft recommendations with the exceptions set out in their Stage Three submission. Councillor Roberts (Whessoe ward) accepted our draft recommendations, but highlighted concerns expressed by residents of Piercebridge that the larger conurbation of Heighington would dominate the proposed Heighington & Coniscliffe ward. Councillor Roberts also supported the appeal from the Chairman of Archdeacon Newton parish that the old parish not be included in Faverdale ward.

28 Councillor Ruck (Park West ward) expressed support for our draft recommendations. Councillor Scott (Park West ward) largely supported our draft recommendations for Darlington and expressed a preference for a boundary between Faverdale and Heighington & Coniscliffe wards which would run to the west of the proposed development in Faverdale. Councillor Scott also supported the Conservative Group’s proposals for the Haughton area.

29 We received one further submission at Stage One from Wesley Court Community Centre Action Group. The group opposed the transfer of the south-west corner of the current Lingfield ward to a revised Bank Top ward, arguing that it would divide the community and would not reflect the identities and interests of local residents. The Group stated that the Wesley Court Community centre is used by many residents from within Lingfield ward and that “there is a

strong feeling of identity with the residents and the Lingfield ward”. The Group proposed retaining the current warding arrangements, and its submission was accompanied by a petition containing 100 signatures.



## 5 ANALYSIS AND FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS

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

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

32 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.

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

### **Electorate Forecasts**

34 The Borough Council submitted electorate forecasts for the year 2005, projecting a small increase in the electorate of less than 1 per cent from 75,850 to 76,203 over the five-year period from 2000 to 2005. Notwithstanding this, significant growth is predicted for the current Cockerton East and Whessoe wards, due to new housing developments over the next five years. The Council has estimated rates and locations of housing development with regard to structure and local plans, the expected rate of building over the five-year period and assumed occupancy rates.

35 In our draft recommendations report we accepted that forecasting electorates is an inexact science and, having given consideration to the forecast electorates, we were satisfied that they represented the best estimates that could reasonably be made at the time. We received no comments on the Council’s electorate forecasts during Stage Three, and remain satisfied that they represent the best estimates presently available.

## **Council Size**

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

37 Darlington Borough Council is at present served by 52 councillors. At Stage One the Borough Council proposed increasing the size of the council from 52 to 53. It proposed allocating an additional councillor to a revised Sadberge ward “which would encompass significant recent and future residential development in the Harrowgate Village and Faverdale areas”, currently in Whessoe and Archdeacon Newton parishes. It argued that a small increase in council size of one would provide for improved electoral equality for the borough as a whole, whilst taking into account community identities.

38 In our draft recommendations report we considered all the evidence received, including the representations forwarded by the council, and noted the broad support for the Council’s proposal for a 53-member council. Having considered the size and distribution of the electorate, the geography and other characteristics of the area, together with representations received, we concluded that the achievement of electoral equality and the statutory criteria would best be met by a council size of 53.

39 During Stage Three we received no further representations in relation to council size, and are therefore content to confirm our draft recommendations for a council size of 53 as final.

## **Electoral Arrangements**

40 As set out in our draft recommendations report, we carefully considered all the representations received at Stage One, including the borough-wide scheme from the Borough Council. We considered that the Council’s proposals would provide for an improved level of electoral equality for the Borough as a whole, taking into account community identities and interests, and proposed basing our draft recommendations on its proposals.

41 However, we sought to build on these proposals in order to better reflect the pattern of development to the north of the town, and provide improved electoral equality, having regard to the statutory criteria. In particular, we proposed amending ward boundaries in the north of Darlington town and the rural area, as we considered that areas of urban development on the fringe of Darlington town should be included in urban wards rather than rural wards.

42 At Stage Three our draft recommendations received a degree of local support and we propose that they should be substantially endorsed, subject to one minor modification. In the light of further evidence received at Stage Three, we have decided to move away from our draft recommendations in one area in order to better reflect community identities and interests and provide a more clearly identifiable boundary. For borough warding purposes, the following areas, based on existing wards, are considered in turn:

(a) **Darlington Town**

- Hummersknott, Mowden, Park East and Park West wards;
- Cockerton East, Cockerton West, College and Pierremont wards;
- Central, Northgate North and Northgate South wards;
- Harrowgate Hill and North Road wards;
- Haughton East and Haughton West wards;
- Bank Top, Eastbourne North, Eastbourne South, Lascelles and Lingfield wards.

(b) **Rural wards**

- Hurworth and Middleton St George wards;
- Heighington, Sadberge and Whessoe wards.

43 Details of our final recommendations are set out in Figures 1 and 2, and illustrated on Map 2, Map A1 Appendix A and on the large map inserted at the back of this report.

### **Darlington Town (20 wards)**

44 Darlington town contains the majority of the borough's electorate and comprises 20 of the 25 existing wards. It is the focus of the borough's community in terms of work, shopping, business, leisure, culture and administration, with all principal roads and public transport radiating out from the town centre. Our proposals for the urban area of the borough are illustrated on Map 2 and the large map inside the back cover of this report.

#### **Hummersknott, Mowden, Park East and Park West wards**

45 These four wards are located in the south-west of Darlington. Hummersknott, Mowden and Park West wards are each represented by two councillors, while Park East ward is represented by three councillors. Under existing arrangements, Hummersknott and Mowden wards are under-represented, with 16 per cent and 18 per cent more electors per councillor than the borough average respectively (15 per cent and 13 per cent more by 2005). Park East and Park West are relatively over-represented, with 14 per cent and 2 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the borough average (14 per cent and 8 per cent fewer by 2005).

46 At Stage One the Borough Council proposed broadly retaining the existing Mowden ward, with the exception of transferring the Baydale Meadows Estate to a revised two-member Hummersknott ward. Its proposed Hummersknott ward would also comprise the existing ward less the area to the south of and including Coniscliffe Road, which it proposed transferring to a revised two-member Park West ward. It argued that this change would ensure "that the major part of Blackwell lies in one ward (Park West) rather than being split into two by Carmel Road South". The Council proposed amending the boundary between Park East and Park West wards to follow Oakdene Avenue, Grange Road and the River Skerne to the south of Parkside, thereby transferring around 600 electors from Park West ward to a three-member Park East ward. Under the Council's proposals, Hummersknott, Mowden and Park East wards would have 4 per cent, 9 per cent and 3 per cent more electors per councillor than the borough average (3 per cent, 5 per cent and 1 per cent more by 2005). Park West ward would have 3 per cent more electors per councillor than the (3 per cent fewer by 2005).

47 As part of the Borough Council's own consultation exercise, Darlington Constituency Labour Party supported the Borough Council's proposed changes to Park East, Park West and Hummersknott wards while Darlington Borough Council Conservative Group supported the use of Coniscliffe Road as a boundary between Park West and Hummersknott wards.

48 In our draft recommendations report we considered that the Borough Council's proposals for this area would provide for improved electoral equality in all four wards by 2005, while broadly retaining the existing warding arrangements. We considered that they would provide for a reasonable balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria, and having received no further views regarding this area, we were content to put them forward as part of our draft recommendations, subject to one minor boundary amendment. We considered that the whole of Oakdene Avenue should be located within one ward and proposed transferring 22 electors on the west side of Oakdene Avenue, currently in Park West ward, to a revised Park East ward. This amendment would not significantly affect electoral equality in either of the proposed wards.

49 Under our draft recommendations Hummersknott and Mowden wards, each represented by two councillors, would have 4 per cent and 9 per cent more electors per councillor than the borough average respectively (3 per cent and 5 per cent more by 2005). The three-member Park East and two-member Park West wards would have 3 per cent and 2 per cent more electors per councillor than the borough average respectively (2 per cent more and 3 per cent fewer than the average by 2005).

50 At Stage Three the Borough Council expressed general support for our draft recommendations, but made no specific reference to the proposed Hummersknott, Mowden, Park East and Park West wards. The Conservative Group and Darlington Conservative Association also supported our draft recommendations for this area.

51 Having carefully considered the representations received at Stage Three, we remain content that our proposed Hummersknott, Mowden, Park East and Park West wards would provide the most appropriate balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria in this area, and note that our draft recommendations have received a degree of local support. We are therefore content to confirm our draft recommendations as final.

52 Under our final recommendations, Hummersknott and Mowden wards, each represented by two councillors, would have 4 per cent and 9 per cent more electors per councillor than the borough average initially (3 per cent and 5 per cent more than the average respectively by 2005). Park East and Park West wards would have 3 per cent and 2 per cent more electors per councillor than the borough average (2 per cent more and 3 per cent fewer than the average respectively by 2005). Details of our final recommendations are set out in Figures 1 and 2, and illustrated on Map 2, Appendix A and on the large map inserted at the back of this report.

### **Cockerton East, Cockerton West, College and Pierremont wards**

53 The two wards of Cockerton East and Cockerton West are located in the north-western part of Darlington, while College and Pierremont wards are located to the west of the town centre. Cockerton West and College wards are each represented by two councillors, while Cockerton East and Pierremont wards are each represented by three councillors. Under existing

arrangements, Cockerton East and Cockerton West wards have 19 per cent more and 21 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the borough average (33 per cent more and 24 per cent fewer than the average by 2005). College and Pierremont wards currently have 12 per cent and 2 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the borough average respectively (11 per cent and 3 per cent fewer by 2005).

54 At Stage One the Borough Council proposed amending the boundary between Cockerton East and Cockerton West ward to follow Bowen Road and West Auckland Road, thereby transferring around 2,400 electors from Cockerton East to a revised three-member Cockerton West ward. It proposed a revised two-member Cockerton East ward comprising the remaining part of the existing ward, less the Brinkburn Road development and Lady Kathryn Grove, which it proposed transferring to a revised Northgate North ward, as detailed below. The Council proposed a revised two-member College ward comprising the majority of the existing ward to the west of Stanhope Road North and the part of Pierremont ward to the south of Woodland Road. It also proposed a revised two-member Pierremont ward comprising the part of the existing ward to the north of Woodland Road, Hollyhurst Road and Reid Street. Under its proposals, the area to the south and east of Reid Street and Hollyhurst Road would be transferred from Pierremont ward to a revised Northgate South ward, as discussed in further detail below. Under the Council's proposals, Cockerton West, College and Pierremont wards would each have 4 per cent more electors per councillor than the borough average initially (8 per cent, 4 per cent and 3 per cent more by 2005 respectively). Its proposed Cockerton East ward would have 13 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the borough average (2 per cent fewer than average by 2005).

55 As part of the Borough Council's own consultation exercise, the Conservative Group expressed broad support for the Borough Council's proposals, but proposed retaining a two-member Cockerton West ward and a three-member Cockerton East ward, with the boundary between these two wards following Nickstream Avenue. Under the Conservative Group's proposals, Cockerton East and Cockerton West wards would have 10 per cent fewer and 9 per cent more electors per councillor than the borough average respectively, improving to 5 per cent and 3 per cent more by 2005. Darlington Constituency Labour Party supported the use of Auckland Road as a boundary between Cockerton East and Cockerton West wards.

56 In our draft recommendations report we noted that while both the Borough Council's and the Conservatives' proposals would provide for improved electoral equality in this area, neither proposal would address the issue of urban overspill to the north of Darlington town. Due to recent housing developments in Faverdale (High Grange), urban development now straddles the boundary between the unparished ward of Cockerton East and Archdeacon Newton parish (in Whessoe ward). As a consequence, the electors located in the Faverdale housing development would remain divided between borough wards, with a number of streets being located in Sadberge ward but only having access to their ward through Cockerton East ward. We considered that such an electoral arrangement was not conducive to effective and convenient local government.

57 However, we noted that our ability to propose alternative warding arrangements in this area was limited by the status of Archdeacon Newton parish, which did not have a parish council and therefore could not be divided between wards. As a result of recent development, the electorate of Archdeacon Newton parish, has grown from 35 in 1995 to 317 at present. Under Section 16(2)

of the Local Government Act 1997, a parish council must be created for any area with more than 200 electors. Archdeacon Newton did not have a parish council, but as the area now contains 317 electors, we noted that the Borough Council had a statutory duty to create a parish council for Archdeacon Newton.

58 At the time that we formulated our draft recommendations, the Borough Council had yet to create a parish council for Archdeacon Newton, and we were only able to make recommendations based upon the current parishing arrangements. We noted that, had a parish council been formed, we could have recommended alternative warding arrangements whereby the rural hamlet of Archdeacon Newton would form part of a rural ward and the Faverdale area would be combined with unparished area of Darlington. However, in the absence of such a situation, we proposed including the whole of Archdeacon Newton parish in a new single-member Faverdale ward, together with the part of Cockerton East ward to the north of the dismantled railway line. We also proposed a revised two-member Cockerton West ward, as proposed by the Conservative Group, and a revised three-member Cockerton East ward, covering the remainder of the existing ward to the east of Nickstream Avenue and to the south of the Faverdale industrial estate. Under our proposals, the existing southern boundaries of Cockerton East and Cockerton West wards would be retained.

59 We considered that the Borough Council's proposal to amend the southern boundary of Pierremont ward had some merit and put it forward as part of our draft recommendations. However, as a consequence of our proposals in the Faverdale and Cockerton areas, we proposed including the area to the west of and including Hopetown Lane, currently located in Northgate North ward, in a revised Pierremont ward, and increasing the number of councillors for the ward from two to three. We considered that our proposals would unite similar communities around Brinkburn Dene and Cocker Beck, in addition to providing for reasonable levels of electoral equality both now and in five years' time. We also noted that the Borough Council's proposed two-member College ward would provide for reasonable levels of electoral equality both now and in 2005, and considered that it reflected community ties well. We were content therefore to put it forward as part of our draft recommendations.

60 Under our draft recommendations, the two-member wards of Cockerton West and College and the three-member Pierremont ward would have 9 per cent more, 4 per cent more and 3 per cent more electors per councillor than the borough average respectively (3 per cent more, 4 per cent more and equal to the average by 2005). Cockerton East ward, represented by three councillors, would have 12 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the borough average (6 per cent fewer by 2005). The single-member Faverdale ward would have 36 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the borough average initially, ( 4 per cent fewer by 2005).

61 At Stage Three the Borough Council broadly supported our proposals for this area. It stated that it had fulfilled its statutory duty and created a parish council for Archdeacon Newton parish. The Council suggested one amendment to the new Faverdale and Heighington & Coniscliffe wards in the light of the formation of a parish council for Archdeacon Newton. It proposed transferring the rural area of Archdeacon Newton to the proposed Heighington & Coniscliffe ward and retaining the urban area in the new Faverdale ward. The Council also put forward three boundary options for the boundary between the two wards but expressed no clear preference for any one option. Option A followed the Parliamentary constituency boundary south to

Faverdale link road, proceeded west to the A68 then south-west towards Mount Pleasant to the route of the former railway line. Option B followed the line of the A1 Motorway. Option C followed the Parliamentary Constituency boundary south to Faverdale link road, proceeded west to the A68 then south-east along the A68 to meet and follow the Parliamentary Constituency boundary south to the route of the former railway line.

62 We received five other submissions in relation to our draft recommendations for this area at Stage Three. Darlington Borough Council Conservative Group, Darlington Conservative Association, Sedgfield Conservative Constituency Association and Councillors Burt and Scott largely supported the Council's proposals to divide Archdeacon Newton parish between Faverdale and Heighington & Coniscliffe wards. The Conservative Group on the Council and Councillor Burt all favoured dividing Archdeacon Newton parish into 2 wards, with the rural area to be included in the proposed Heighington & Coniscliffe ward and an urban area included in the proposed Faverdale ward. They expressed a preference for Darlington Borough Council's boundary Option C. Darlington Conservative Association and Sedgfield Conservative Constituency Association considered that Archdeacon Newton parish should be included in the Heighington & Coniscliffe ward and favoured the A1 Motorway as the boundary between the proposed Faverdale and Heighington & Coniscliffe ward. Councillor Roberts considered that the old Archdeacon Newton parish should be included in the Heighington & Coniscliffe ward, but expressed no preference for a boundary option.

63 Having carefully considered all the evidence received, we are content that the proposal to divide Archdeacon Newton between the rural ward of Heighinton & Coniscliffe and the new urban ward of Faverdale would reflect local community identities in the rural area and would also address the issue of urban growth in the northern part of Darlington town. We also note that the proposal to divide Archdeacon Newton parish between Faverdale and Heighington & Coniscliffe wards has received a degree of local support and we are therefore content to put it forward as part of our final recommendations. We have considered the various proposals for the revised boundary between Faverdale and Heighington & Coniscliffe wards, and note that there is a lack of consensus as to the most appropriate boundary. We consider that the A1 Motorway would form a strong and easily identifiable boundary between the urban and rural communities in this area and propose adopting it as part of our final recommendations. We are also content to confirm as final our draft recommendations, subject to the amendment as outlined above, for Cockerton East, Cockerton West, College and Pierremont wards.

64 Under our final recommendations the single-member Faverdale ward would have 40 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the borough average initially, (7 per cent fewer by 2005). Cockerton West, College and Pierremont wards would have 9 per cent, 4 per cent and 3 per cent more electors per councillor than the borough average respectively (3 per cent more, 4 per cent more and equal to the average by 2005). Cockerton East ward would have 12 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the borough average initially, (6 per cent fewer by 2005). Details of our final recommendations are set out in Figures 1 and 2, and illustrated on Map 2, Appendix A and on the large map inserted at the back of this report.

## **Central, Northgate North and Northgate South wards**

65 The two-member Central ward broadly covers the Darlington town centre area. Northgate North and Northgate South wards, each represented by two councillors, are located to the north and north-west of the town centre. Under existing arrangements, Central, Northgate North and Northgate South wards have 19 per cent, 6 per cent and 15 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the borough average respectively (22 per cent, 11 per cent and 22 per cent fewer by 2005).

66 At Stage One the Borough Council proposed broadly retaining the existing two-member Central ward, but expanding it to include the part of College ward to the east of Stanhope Road North and Stanhope Road South and the part of Northgate North ward to the east of High Northgate. It argued that Stanhope Road and High Northgate constitute “more natural boundaries” for the ward. The Council also proposed a revised two-member Northgate North and Northgate South wards. Under its proposals, Northgate South ward would comprise the existing ward, together with the part of Pierremont ward to the south-east of Hollyhurst Road and around 190 electors located around the North Road Railway Centre and Museum area, currently in Northgate North ward. The revised Northgate North ward would comprise the existing ward less the area around High Northgate and an area containing 180 electors in the north-east of the ward, which it proposed transferring to North Road ward in order to unite the whole of the Northwood estate in one ward. It would also include the Brinkburn Road development area of Cockerton East ward, as previously discussed.

67 Under the Borough Council’s proposals, Central, Northgate North and Northgate South wards would have 1 per cent fewer, 1 per cent fewer and 10 per cent more electors per councillor than the borough average respectively (3 per cent fewer, 3 per cent fewer and 3 per cent more than the average by 2005).

68 As part of the Borough Council’s own consultation exercise, Darlington Constituency Labour Party welcomed the retention of the well-established wards of Northgate South and Central and the correction of the anomalous boundary between North Road and Northgate North wards.

69 In our draft recommendations report we carefully considered the Borough Council’s proposals for this area. As discussed previously, our proposals for the north-west of the Darlington town area limited the extent to which we were able to consider the Council’s proposals in the adjoining areas, including its proposed Northgate North ward. We noted that the Council’s proposed Northgate North ward would provide a reasonable level of electoral equality, but considered that it would combine a number of distinct communities with few direct links. We also considered that the Darlington to Bishop Auckland railway line constituted a significant boundary between areas to its north and south, as a number of light industrial and retail developments neighbour it, particularly to the north. In the light of these considerations, we proposed transferring the whole of the area to the north of the railway line to a revised three-member North Road ward, as discussed in further detail below. We also proposed transferring the part of Northgate North ward to the west of and including Hopetown Lane to a revised three-member Pierremont ward as detailed above.

70 We considered that the Borough Council’s proposed Central and Northgate South wards would reflect community ties reasonably well, and noted that they would provide for improved

levels of electoral equality both now and in 2005. We therefore proposed putting them forward as part of our draft recommendations, subject to two minor boundary amendments. We proposed that all properties on High Northgate should be located in Northgate South ward, rather than transferring the electors on the eastern side of the road to Central ward, where they would be relatively isolated. Similarly, we proposed transferring a part of Haughton Road containing 24 electors from Haughton East ward to Central ward, as this area is relatively isolated from the remainder of Haughton East ward. We recognised that, as a result of our proposals, Northgate North ward would no longer exist. To reflect this change we proposed renaming Northgate South ward as Northgate ward.

71 Under our draft recommendations, Central and Northgate wards would each continue to be represented by two councillors, and would have 2 per cent fewer and 10 per cent more electors per councillor respectively (4 per cent fewer and 3 per cent more by 2005).

72 At Stage Three the Borough Council expressed broad support for our draft recommendations, but made no specific comment in relation to this area. The Conservative Group and Darlington Conservative Association also supported our draft recommendations and we received no further representations in relation to this area.

73 We have carefully considered the representations received during the consultation period and note that there is broad local support for our draft recommendations. We are content therefore to confirm our draft recommendations for Central and Northgate wards as final. Under our final recommendations the two-member Central and Northgate wards would have 2 per cent fewer and 10 per cent more electors per councillor respectively (4 per cent fewer and 3 per cent more by 2005). Details of our final recommendations are set out in Figures 1 and 2, and illustrated on Map 2, in Appendix A and on the large map inserted at the back of this report.

### **Harrowgate Hill and North Road wards**

74 The two wards of Harrowgate Hill and North Road are located in the northern part of Darlington town. Harrowgate Hill ward is currently represented by three councillors and has 6 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the borough average (9 per cent fewer by 2005). North Road ward is represented by two councillors and has 9 per cent more electors per councillor than the borough average (4 per cent more by 2005).

75 At Stage One the Borough Council proposed a revised three-member Harrowgate Hill ward, comprising the existing ward, together with some 300 electors on Thompson Street West, Ruby Street, Peabody Street, China Street and Dublin Street, currently located in North Road ward. It argued that the proposed boundary change would not adversely affect community identities in either Harrowgate Hill or North Road wards. The Council also proposed a revised two-member North Road ward, comprising the remaining part of the existing ward, together with an area containing 180 electors in the north-east of the existing Northgate North ward, in order to unite the whole of the Northwood Park estate in one ward. Under the Borough Council's proposals Harrowgate Hill and North Road wards would have 2 per cent and 8 per cent more electors per councillor than the borough average respectively (1 per cent fewer and 2 per cent more than the average by 2005). The Council also noted that, as part of its own consultation exercise, Darlington Constituency Labour Party had argued that the proposed adjustment to Harrowgate

Hill ward would largely retain the well-established ward. It also supported the Council's proposal to modify the boundary between North Road and Northgate North wards, which it regarded as currently anomalous.

76 In our draft recommendations report we noted that while the Borough Council's proposals for this area would provide for improved electoral equality, they did not address the issue of urban overspill to the north of Darlington town. Due to recent housing developments, the Harrowgate (Burtree Lane) community now straddles the boundary between Harrowgate Hill ward and Whessoe parish in Sadberge ward, with a number of roads being arbitrarily divided between wards, and the parish and ward boundary no longer being tied to identifiable ground detail.

77 We considered that the existing defaced boundary between Harrowgate Hill ward and the adjoining parished area of Whessoe did not reflect local community ties appropriately, nor was it conducive to effective and convenient local government in this area. We were not therefore persuaded to put forward the Borough Council's proposals in this area. We considered that the whole of the Harrowgate (Burtree Lane) community should be united within one ward and proposed combining the existing Harrowgate Hill ward with the area around Burtree Lane and Harrowgate Village in Whessoe parish (currently located in Whessoe ward) to form a revised three-member Harrowgate Hill ward. We recognised that as a result of this change Whessoe parish would be divided between borough wards, but considered such an arrangement would enable the more urban and rural parts of the parish to be represented separately. To improve electoral equality in our proposed ward, we proposed transferring around 400 electors located on Crosby Street, Fulford Place and the northern side of Thompson Street West from Harrowgate Hill ward to a revised North Road ward.

78 We considered that the Borough Council's proposal to transfer the north-eastern part of Northgate North ward to a revised North Road ward had some merit and were content to put it forward as part of our draft recommendations. However, in the light of our proposals for Harrowgate Hill ward, as well as our proposals for a new Northgate ward and a revised Pierremont ward, as previously discussed, we proposed amending the southern boundary of North Road ward to include the part of the existing Northgate North ward to the north-east of the Darlington to Bishop Auckland railway line. We considered that the railway line would provide a clearly identifiable boundary and act as a division between the central and northern parts of the town. Under our draft recommendations, North Road ward would be represented by three councillors.

79 We considered that our proposals in this area would reflect the identities and interests of local communities well, as well as utilising strong boundaries such as the River Skerne and the East Coast main railway line and Darlington to Bishop Auckland railway line. We also noted that our proposed warding arrangements would provide for reasonable levels of electoral equality both now and in five years' time. Under our draft recommendations, the three-member Harrowgate Hill and North Road wards would have 4 per cent fewer and 9 per cent more electors per councillor than the borough average initially (3 per cent and 4 per cent more than the average respectively by 2005).

80 At Stage Three the Borough Council, the Conservative Group and Darlington Conservative Association expressed broad support for our draft recommendations, but made no specific comment in relation to this area. We received one further submission regarding the North Road ward area. Councillor Walker (North Road ward) stated that the councillors from North Road ward and the Executive Members of the Darlington Liberal Democrats supported our recommendations “based largely on their commitment to maintain and strengthen the role of communities, which are clearly identifiable in the proposed North Road ward”.

81 Having carefully considered the evidence received, we remain content that our draft recommendations for this area would provide the most appropriate balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria, and propose confirming them as final. We also note that our draft recommendations have received a degree of local support. Under our final recommendations the three-member Harrowgate Hill and North Road wards would have 4 per cent fewer and 9 per cent more electors per councillor than the borough average initially (3 per cent and 4 per cent more than the average respectively by 2005). Details of our final recommendations are set out in Figures 1 and 2, and illustrated on Map 2, Appendix A and on the large map inserted at the back of this report.

### **Haughton East and Haughton West wards**

82 The two wards of Haughton East and Haughton West are located in the north-eastern part of Darlington town and are represented by three and two councillors respectively. This area has been subject to significant growth since the last review. As a result, under existing arrangements Haughton East and Haughton West wards have 36 per cent and 44 per cent more electors per councillor than the borough average respectively. This level of electoral inequality is expected to remain relatively constant over the next five years.

83 At Stage One the Borough Council proposed retaining the existing Haughton West ward, but proposed increasing its representation from two to three councillors. It argued that Haughton West ward has a “separate community identity and relatively strong ward boundaries”. The Council proposed dividing the existing Haughton East ward between two two-member wards, utilising Whinfield Road as a ward boundary. The Council proposed a new Haughton North ward, covering the area to the north of Whinfield Road, and a revised Haughton East ward, covering the remaining part of the existing ward. Under the Council’s proposals, Haughton East and Haughton North wards would both have 4 per cent more electors per councillor than the borough average (equal to the average by 2005). Haughton West ward would have 2 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the borough average both now and in five years’ time.

84 As part of the Borough Council’s own consultation exercise, the Conservative Group submitted alternative warding arrangements for the Haughton area. They proposed a new Haughton North ward, but proposed also including the part of the current Haughton West ward to the north of Salters Lane North and Whinfield Road, and allocating three councillors to the new ward. The Conservative Group also proposed a revised two-member Haughton West ward comprising the remaining part of the existing ward, and a revised Haughton East ward, identical to the Borough Council’s proposed ward. Under the Conservative Group’s proposals, Haughton North and Haughton West wards would have 6 per cent fewer and 9 per cent more electors per

councillor than the borough average respectively (8 per cent fewer and 9 per cent more than the average by 2005).

85 In our draft recommendations report, we noted that the Borough Council and the Conservative Group concurred with regard to their proposals for a revised two-member Haughton East ward. We noted that the proposed ward would have reasonable levels of electoral equality both now and in five years' time, based on a council size of 53, and having received no further views regarding this area, were content to put it forward as part of our draft recommendations, subject to two minor amendments. We proposed amending the boundary between Haughton West and Haughton East wards in order to include the whole of Springwell Terrace in Haughton East ward. In addition, we proposed transferring an area containing 24 electors on Haughton Road to Central ward, as we considered that this area is relatively isolated from the remainder of the Haughton East ward.

86 We also noted that while both the Borough Council and the Conservative Group had proposed a new Haughton North ward, the proposals differed with respect to their boundary of the new ward. The Borough Council proposed retaining the existing Haughton West ward, which would achieve a reasonable level of electoral equality, while the Conservative Group's proposals would modify this ward and would result in a poorer level of electoral equality for this area as a whole. We noted that the area to the north of Whinfield Road and Salters Lane North is relatively self-contained and were not persuaded that it has greater links with the area to its east than with that to its north, nor that a case for significant change to current ward boundaries had been made. We were therefore content, for the purposes of consultation, to put forward the Borough Council's proposals for a revised Haughton West ward and a new Haughton North ward, subject to one minor boundary amendment as outlined above.

87 Under our draft recommendations, the two-member Haughton East and Haughton North wards would have 5 per cent and 4 per cent more electors per councillor than the borough average initially, (1 per cent more and equal to the borough average respectively by 2005). Haughton West ward would have 3 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the borough average both now and in five years' time.

88 At Stage Three the Borough Council expressed support for our draft recommendations but made no specific comments in relation to this area. We received four further submissions in relation to our draft recommendations in this area. The Conservative Group reiterated its Stage One proposal to create a new three-member Haughton North ward and a revised two-member Haughton West ward, arguing that "all the houses to the north of Salters Lane/Whinfield Road are new, and have no historic or community link with the houses south of the road". Darlington Conservative Association also supported creating a two-member Haughton West ward and a three-member Haughton North ward. Councillors Burt (Hurworth Ward) and Scott (Park West ward) both supported the Conservative Group's Stage One proposals for the Haughton area.

89 Having carefully considered the evidence received, we have not been persuaded that the Conservative Group's proposal to create a three-member Haughton North ward and a two-member Haughton West ward would provide a better balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria than our draft recommendations. In particular we note that under the Conservatives' proposals, Haughton North ward would have 6 per cent fewer electors than the

borough average now (8 per cent fewer electors than the borough average in 2005), while Haughton West ward would have 9 per cent more electors than the borough average both now and in 2005. We have not been persuaded that the Conservative Group has provided any significant further evidence to support its proposals and justify such a relatively high level of electoral inequality. We are content to confirm our draft recommendations for a revised three-member Haughton West ward and a new two-member Haughton North ward as final. Under our final recommendations the two-member Haughton East and Haughton North wards would have 5 per cent and 4 per cent more electors per councillor than the borough average initially, (1 per cent more and equal to the borough average respectively by 2005). The three-member Haughton West ward would have 3 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the borough average both now and in five years' time. Details of our final recommendations are set out in Figures 1 and 2, and illustrated on Map 2, Appendix A and on the large map inserted at the back of this report.

### **Bank Top, Eastbourne North, Eastbourne South, Lascelles and Lingfield wards**

90 The five wards of Bank Top, Eastbourne North, Eastbourne South, Lascelles and Lingfield are located in the south-eastern part of Darlington town, to the east of the East Coast main railway line, and are each represented by two borough councillors. Under existing arrangements, Bank Top and Lascelles wards have 8 per cent and 10 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the borough average respectively (11 per cent and 8 per cent fewer than the average by 2005). Eastbourne North and Eastbourne South wards are also significantly over-represented, with 37 per cent and 22 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the average respectively (35 per cent and 25 per cent fewer by 2005). Lingfield ward currently has 5 per cent more electors per councillor than the borough average (4 per cent more than the average by 2005).

91 At Stage One the Borough Council proposed broadly retaining the existing Bank Top, Lascelles and Lingfield wards, with some minor changes in order to improve electoral equality and provide clearer ward boundaries. It proposed a revised two-member Bank Top ward comprising the existing ward, less 99 electors on Falmer Road (including the Darlington Manor Nursing Home) which it proposed transferring to a revised two-member Lascelles ward. The revised Bank Top ward would also include an area containing 290 electors to the west of Hundens Lane, currently located in the south-western corner of Lingfield ward, and the southern part of Bank Top Mews, currently located in Lascelles ward. The Council proposed revised two-member Lascelles and Lingfield wards, comprising the remaining part of the respective existing wards.

92 The Council proposed combining Eastbourne North and Eastbourne South wards to form a new three-member Eastbourne ward. It argued that "the new ward has the strong boundaries of Yarm Road and Geneva Road and the whole area can be regarded as a self-contained unit with a separate corporate identity". Under the Borough Council's proposals, Bank Top, Lascelles and Lingfield wards would have 1 per cent more, 5 per cent fewer and 3 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the borough average respectively (2 per cent, 4 per cent and 4 per cent fewer by 2005). Eastbourne ward would have 5 per cent fewer electors per councillor both now and in five years' time.

93 As part of the Borough Council's own consultation exercise, Wesley Court Residents opposed the Council's proposals for their area, arguing that the area should not be transferred

from Lingfield ward to Bank Top ward. Darlington Constituency Labour Party supported the Council's proposals for Bank Top, Lingfield, Lascelles and Eastbourne wards.

94 In our draft recommendations report we adopted the Council's proposed Bank Top, Lascelles and Lingfield wards without amendment. We noted that its proposals would broadly retain the existing arrangements in the south-east of Darlington town, with the exception of the Eastbourne area which it proposed combining in one ward. We also noted that the Council's proposed wards would provide for improved electoral equality both now and in five years' time, and considered that they would reflect community interests and identities in this area well. We noted the views expressed by Wesley Court Residents, as part of the Borough Council's consultation exercise, but in the absence of any detailed argumentation or alternative proposals at Stage One, we considered that this area should be transferred to a revised Bank Top ward.

95 At Stage Three the Borough Council broadly supported our draft recommendations but made no specific comments in relation to this area. We received one further representation in relation to the Bank Top area, from the Wesley Court Community Centre Action Group. They objected to our proposed Bank Top and Lingfield wards, arguing that our proposals would divide the community and would not reflect the identities and interests of local residents. The Action Group stated that the Wesley Court Community centre is used by many residents from within Lingfield ward and that "there is a strong feeling of identity with the residents and the Lingfield ward". They proposed retaining the current warding arrangements. This submission was accompanied by a petition containing 100 signatures.

96 Having carefully considered the evidence received, we propose confirming our draft recommendations for this area as final. While we recognise that there has been some local opposition to our proposed warding arrangements in the Lingfield area, we have not been persuaded by the evidence received that the Wesley Court area is sufficiently separate and distinct from the Bank Top community to justify retaining the relatively high level of electoral inequality in the current wards as previously discussed. In particular, we note that the Centre is adjacent to the boundary between Bank Top and Lingfield wards, and consider that it forms the focus of community identity for residents in both wards.

97 In the absence of any alternative proposals we are content to confirm our draft recommendations as final. We are content that our proposals would address the levels of electoral inequality in Bank Top ward, and would reflect an appropriate balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria. Under our draft recommendations, Bank Top, Lascelles and Lingfield wards would have 1 per cent more, 5 per cent fewer and 3 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the borough average respectively (2 per cent, 4 per cent and 4 per cent fewer by 2005). Eastbourne ward would have 5 per cent fewer electors per councillor both now and in five years' time. Details of our final recommendations are set out in Figures 1 and 2, and illustrated on Map 2, Appendix A and on the large map inserted at the back of this report.

### **Rural wards (five wards)**

98 There are currently five rural wards in Darlington borough, containing 26 parishes and comprising 13 per cent of the area's electorate.

## **Hurworth and Middleton St George wards**

99 Hurworth and Middleton St George wards are located in the south-eastern part of the borough and are each represented by two councillors. Hurworth ward comprises the three parishes of Hurworth, Neasham and Sockburn, and has 2 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the borough average (5 per cent more by 2005). Middleton St George ward comprises Low Dinsdale and Middleton St George parishes, and has 2 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the borough average. This level of electoral equality is projected to remain unchanged in five years' time.

100 At Stage One the Council proposed retaining the existing Hurworth and Middleton St George wards without amendment, arguing that they provide for reasonable levels of electoral equality and that there was no reason to change the existing arrangements in this area. Under a council size of 53, Hurworth and Middleton St George wards would both have equal to the average number of electors per councillor than the borough average (7 per cent more and equal to the average respectively by 2005). As part of the Borough Council's own consultation exercise, Hurworth Parish Council and Sedgfield Constituency Conservative Party supported the Borough Council's proposals.

101 In our draft recommendations report, we were content to put forward the Borough Council's proposal to retain the existing Hurworth and Middleton St George wards without amendment in view of the reasonable level of electoral equality in these wards and support for their retention. Under our draft recommendations, Hurworth and Middleton St George wards would each have equal to the average number of electors per councillor than the borough average (7 per cent more and equal to the average respectively by 2005), based on a council size of 53.

102 At Stage Three, the Borough Council, the Conservative Group and the Darlington Conservative Association expressed broad support for our draft recommendations but made no specific comments in relation to this area. Sedgfield Conservative Association supported our draft recommendations for the proposed Hurworth and Middleton St George wards. We received no further representations in relation to this area, and we are content to confirm our draft recommendations for Hurworth and Middleton St George wards as final. Under our final recommendations, Hurworth and Middleton St George wards would each have equal to the average number of electors per councillor than the borough average (7 per cent more and equal to the average respectively by 2005). Details of our final recommendations are set out in Figures 1 and 2, and illustrated on Map 2, Appendix A and on the large map inserted at the back of this report.

## **Heighington, Sadberge and Whessoe wards**

103 The three single-member Heighington, Sadberge and Whessoe wards cover the northern and the western areas of the borough. Under existing arrangements Heighington ward comprises the parish of the same name and has 1 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the borough average. By 2005, however, this level of electoral equality is projected to deteriorate to 16 per cent more than the average, due to new housing developments. Sadberge ward comprises the nine parishes of Barmpton, Bishopton, Brafferton, East & West Newbiggin, Great Burdon, Great Stainton, Little Stainton, Morton Palms and Sadberge, and has 15 per cent fewer electors per

councillor than the borough average (12 per cent fewer by 2005). Whessoe wards contains 11 parishes – Archdeacon Newton, Coatham Mundeville, Denton, High Coniscliffe, Houghton Le Side, Killerby, Low Coniscliffe, Piercebridge, Summerhouse, Walworth and Whessoe – and has 44 per cent more electors per councillor than the borough average. This is projected to increase to 70 per cent more than the average due to new housing developments at Harrowgate (Burtree Lane) in Whessoe parish.

104 At Stage One the Borough Council proposed a revised two-member Sadberge ward comprising the existing ward together with Archdeacon Newton, Coatham Mundeville and Whessoe parishes, currently located in Whessoe ward. It proposed combining the remaining part of Whessoe ward with Heighington ward to form a new two-member Heighington & Whessoe ward. The Council argued that its proposals were “brought about primarily by the significant recent and future residential development in the Harrowgate Village [Whessoe parish] and Faverdale [Archdeacon Newton parish] areas”. Under the Borough Council’s proposals, Heighington & Whessoe and Sadberge wards would have 14 per cent and 18 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the borough average respectively (5 per cent and 4 per cent fewer than the average by 2005).

105 As part of the Borough Council’s own consultation exercise, Archdeacon Newton Parish opposed the proposal to transfer the parish to a revised Sadberge ward and proposed combining the parish with the areas to its west. Sedgefield Constituency Conservative Association and Councillor Roberts (Whessoe ward) argued that Archdeacon Newton parish strongly identifies with the neighbouring parish of Walworth and should therefore form part of a ward with Heighington ward (albeit that the ward should be renamed). Whessoe Parish Council proposed that Sadberge ward should be renamed Whessoe & Sadberge ward. Heighington Parish Council favoured retaining the existing Heighington ward, while Low Coniscliffe & Merrybent Parish Council generally supported the Borough Council’s proposals, but favoured renaming Heighington ward to reflect the area covered by the new ward.

106 As previously discussed, we noted that the Borough Council’s proposals did not address the issue of urban growth in the northern part of Darlington town. We were not persuaded that the Council’s proposals would be conducive to effective and convenient local government nor that they would adequately reflect community interests and identities in this area. We therefore proposed including the urban fringe developments at Faverdale (Archdeacon Newton parish) and Harrowgate Hill (Whessoe parish) in a new Faverdale ward and a revised Harrowgate Hill ward respectively, as part of our draft recommendations.

107 In the light of our proposals for a new Faverdale ward and a revised Harrowgate Hill ward, we were unable to put forward the Borough Council’s proposals for these rural wards. We proposed a new single-member Sadberge & Whessoe ward, comprising the existing Sadberge ward together with Coatham Mundeville parish and the majority of Whessoe parish, excluding the Burtree Lane and Harrowgate Village areas, which we proposed transferring to Harrowgate Hill ward, as discussed previously. The transfer of the developments on the fringe of Darlington would significantly reduce the number of electors in the ward and would, in our view, lead to the new ward retaining a rural focus. It would also mean that the ward would continue to be represented by a single councillor. We proposed a new two-member Heighington & Coniscliffe ward, comprising the existing Heighington ward, as well as Denton, High Coniscliffe, Houghton

Le Side, Killerby, Low Coniscliffe & Merrybent, Piercebridge, Summerhouse and Walworth parishes, currently located in Whessoe ward. As discussed previously, in the absence of a parish council for Archdeacon Newton we were unable to divide the parish as part of our draft recommendations, and therefore proposed including the whole parish in Faverdale ward.

108 Under our draft recommendations the proposed Heighington & Coniscliffe and Sadberge & Whessoe wards would have 14 per cent fewer and 13 per cent more electors per councillor than the borough average (5 per cent fewer and 13 per cent more by 2005). While we recognised that our proposed Sadberge & Whessoe ward would have a relatively high electoral variance, we considered that in the light of our proposals in the adjoining areas of the borough, it would provide for the most reasonable balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria. We recognised, however, that our proposals differed from those submitted by the Borough Council, and invited further local views regarding this area at Stage Three, particularly in the light of the possible creation of a parish council for Archdeacon Newton.

109 At Stage Three the Council accepted our draft recommendations for Heighington & Coniscliffe and Sadberge & Whessoe wards. The Council stated that it had taken the necessary steps to create a parish council for Archdeacon Newton and proposed dividing Archdeacon Newton parish between Heighington & Coniscliffe and Faverdale wards, as previously discussed.

We received five other submissions in relation to our draft recommendations for this area at Stage Three. Darlington Borough Council Conservative Group, Darlington Conservative Association, Sedgfield Conservative Constituency Association and Councillors Burt and Scott largely supported the Council's proposals to ward Archdeacon Newton parish between Faverdale and Heighington & Coniscliffe wards. The Conservative Group on the Council and Councillor Burt both favoured dividing Archdeacon Newton parish into two wards, with the rural area included in the proposed Heighington & Coniscliffe ward and the urban area included in the proposed Faverdale ward, and expressed a preference for Darlington Borough Council's boundary Option C. Darlington Conservative Association and Sedgfield Conservative Constituency Association considered that Archdeacon Newton parish should be included in the Heighington & Coniscliffe ward and favoured the A1 Motorway as the boundary between the proposed Faverdale and Heighington & Coniscliffe ward. Councillor Roberts considered that the old Archdeacon Newton parish should be included in the Heighington & Coniscliffe ward, but expressed no preference for a boundary option.

110 We received two further representations in relation to this area at Stage Three. Councillor Roberts (Whessoe ward) accepted our draft recommendations, but noted that residents in Piercebridge parish were concerned that the larger conurbation of Heighington would dominate the proposed Heighington & Coniscliffe ward. Piercebridge Parish Council also opposed the proposed Heighington & Coniscliffe ward, arguing that small villages such as Piercebridge would lose their identity if included in a ward with Heighington. The Parish Council proposed a single-member Heighington ward, and a separate single-member ward comprising the smaller parishes.

111 Having carefully considered all the evidence received we are content to confirm our draft recommendations for Sadberge & Whessoe ward as final. We recognise the concerns expressed by Councillor Roberts and Piercebridge Parish Council in relation to our proposed Heighington & Coniscliffe ward. However, we note that while a separate single-member Heighington ward would have 1 per cent more electors per councillor than the borough average, both now and in

five years time, a single-member Coniscliffe ward would have 29 per cent fewer electors per councillor (10 per cent fewer by 2005). We have not been persuaded by the evidence received that Heighington is sufficiently separate and distinct from the parishes to its south to justify such high levels of electoral inequality, and propose confirming our two-member Heighington & Coniscliffe ward as final subject to one amendment. As discussed previously, we propose amending the western boundary of the new Faverdale ward to follow the A1 Motorway, thereby transferring the rural part of Archdeacon Newton parish to the proposed heighington & Coniscliffe ward. Under our final recommendations Heighington & Coniscliffe ward and the single-member Sadberge & Whessoe ward would have 13 per cent fewer and 13 per cent more electors per councillor than the borough average respectively (3 per cent fewer and 13 per cent more by 2005). Details of our final recommendations are set out in Figures 1 and 2, and illustrated on Map 2, in Appendix A and on the large map inserted at the back of this report.

## **Electoral Cycle**

112 At Stage One we received no proposals in relation to the electoral cycle of the district. Accordingly, we made no recommendation for change to the present system of whole council elections every four years. No further comments were received at Stage Three, and we confirm our draft recommendation as final.

## **Conclusions**

113 Having carefully considered all the representations and evidence received in response to our consultation report, we have decided substantially to endorse our draft recommendations, subject to the following amendments:

- we propose dividing Archdeacon Newton parish between the new urban ward of Faverdale and the rural ward of Heighington & Coniscliffe, and consider that the A1 Motorway would form a strong and easily identifiable boundary between the two wards.

114 We conclude that, in Darlington:

- there should be a increase in council size from 52 to 53;
- there should be 24 wards, one fewer than at present;
- the boundaries of 22 of the existing wards should be modified;
- the Council should continue to hold whole-council elections every four years.

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

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

	2000 electorate		2005 forecast electorate	
	Current arrangements	Final recommendations	Current arrangements	Final recommendations
Number of councillors	52	53	52	53
Number of wards	25	24	25	24
Average number of electors per councillor	1,459	1,431	1,465	1,438
Number of wards with a variance more than 10 per cent from the average	14	4	17	1
Number of wards with a variance more than 20 per cent from the average	6	1	9	0

116 As Figure 4 shows, our recommendations for Darlington Borough Council would result in a reduction in the number of wards with an electoral variance of more than 10 per cent from 14 to four, with only one ward varying by more than 20 per cent from the borough average. This level of electoral equality is expected to improve further by 2005, with only one ward varying by more than 10 per cent from the average. We conclude that our recommendations would best meet the need for electoral equality, having regard to the statutory criteria.

**Final Recommendation**  
 Darlington Borough Council should comprise 53 councillors serving 24 wards, as detailed and named in Figures 1 and 2, and illustrated on Map 2 and Appendix A and on the large map inside the back cover. The Council should continue to hold whole-council elections every four years.

**Parish Council Electoral Arrangements**

117 In undertaking reviews of electoral arrangements, we are required to comply as far as is reasonably practicable with the provisions set out in Schedule 11 to the 1972 Act. The Schedule provides that if a parish is to be divided between different borough wards, it must also be divided into parish wards, so that each parish ward lies wholly within a single ward of the borough. Accordingly, we propose consequential changes to the warding arrangements for Archdeacon Newton and Whessoe parish to reflect the proposed district wards.

118 The parish of Whessoe is currently served by seven councillors and is not warded. In our draft recommendations we proposed dividing Whessoe parish between a revised Harrowgate Hill ward and a new Sadberge & Whessoe ward. As a consequence, we proposed that Whessoe parish should be divided into two new parish wards – a four-member Harrowgate parish ward which would form part of our proposed Harrowgate Hill ward, and a three-member Whessoe Rural parish ward which would form part of our proposed Sadberge & Whessoe ward.

119 At Stage Three the Borough Council, the Conservative Group, Darlington Conservative Association and Sedgfield Constituency Conservative Association accepted our draft recommendation to divide the parish between two borough wards. Having considered all the evidence received, we propose confirming our Harrowgate Hill and Sadberge & Whessoe wards as final. In the light of the confirmation of our proposed borough wards in the area, we confirm our draft recommendation for warding Whessoe parish as final.

**Final Recommendation**  
Whessoe Parish Council should comprise seven councillors, as at present, representing two wards: Harrowgate parish ward should return four councillors and Whessoe Rural parish ward should return three councillors. The parish ward boundaries should reflect the proposed borough ward boundaries in the area, as illustrated and named on Map 2 and the large map at the back of this report.

120 The recently created parish of Archdeacon Newton will be served by seven councillors and is not warded. As discussed previously, in our draft recommendations report we noted that Archdeacon Newton parish did not have a parish council and we were therefore unable to divide the parish and transfer the Faverdale area to an urban Darlington town ward. We therefore proposed transferring the whole of Archdeacon Newton parish to the new Faverdale ward.

121 At Stage Three the Borough Council stated that it had created a parish council for Archdeacon Newton, and proposed dividing the parish between the new Faverdale and Heighington & Coniscliffe wards. As discussed previously, it put forward a number of proposals for dividing the parish, but expressed no preference. The Conservative Group, Darlington Conservative Association, Sedgfield Constituency Conservative Association and Councillors Burt, Roberts and Scott all expressed support for dividing the parish between Faverdale and Heighington & Coniscliffe wards.

122 Having considered all the evidence received, and in light of the support for our proposed borough wards in the area, we have confirmed the Borough Council’s proposal to divide Archdeacon Newton parish between Faverdale and Heighington & Coniscliffe as final. As a consequence, we proposed that Archdeacon Newton parish should be divided into two new parish wards – a one-member Archdeacon Newton Rural parish ward which would form part of our proposed Heighington & Coniscliffe ward, and a six-member Archdeacon Newton Urban parish ward which would form part of our proposed Faverdale ward.

**Final Recommendation**

Archdeacon Newton Parish Council should comprise seven councillors representing two wards: Archdeacon Newton Rural parish ward should return one councillor and Archdeacon Newton Urban parish ward should return six councillors. The parish ward boundaries should reflect the proposed borough ward boundaries in the area, as illustrated and named on Map 2 and the large map at the back of this report.

123 In our draft recommendations report we proposed that there should be no change to the electoral cycle of parish councils in the borough, and are confirming this as final.

**Final Recommendation**

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

*Map 2: The Commission's Final Recommendations for Darlington*

## 6 NEXT STEPS

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

125 It now falls to the Secretary of State to decide whether to give effect to our recommendations, with or without modification, and to implement them by means of an Order. Such an Order will not be made before 26 June 2001.

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

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



## APPENDIX A

### **Final Recommendations for Darlington: Detailed Mapping**

The following maps illustrate the Commission's proposed ward boundaries for the Darlington area.

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

The **large map** inserted in the back of the report illustrates the proposed warding arrangements for Darlington town.

*Map A1: Final Recommendations for Darlington: Key Map*

## APPENDIX B

### Draft Recommendations for Darlington

Our final recommendations, detailed in Figures 1 and 2, differ from those we put forward as draft recommendations in respect of only two wards, where our draft proposals are set out below.

*Figure B1: The Commission's Draft Recommendations: Constituent Areas*

Ward name	Constituent areas
Faverdale	Cockerton East ward (part); Whessoe ward (part – urban ward of Archdeacon Newton parish)
Heighington & Coniscliffe	Heighington ward (Heighington parish); Whessoe ward (part – Denton, High Coniscliffe, Houghton-le-Side, Killerby, Low Coniscliffe & Merrybent, Piercebirdge, Summerhouse and Walworth parishes and rural ward of Archdeacon Newton parish )

*Figure B2: The Commission's Draft Recommendations: Number of Councillors and Electors by Ward*

Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2000)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2005)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
Faverdale	1	861	861	-40	1,335	1,335	-7
Heighington & Coniscliffe	2	2,501	1,251	-13	2,791	1,396	-3

*Source: Electorate figures are based on information provided by Darlington Borough Council.*

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



## APPENDIX C

### Code of Practice on Written Consultation

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

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

*Table C1: Commission compliance with Code criteria*

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