

LOCAL  
GOVERNMENT  
COMMISSION  
FOR ENGLAND

FINAL  
RECOMMENDATIONS  
ON THE FUTURE  
ELECTORAL  
ARRANGEMENTS FOR  
DERWENTSIDE  
IN COUNTY DURHAM

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

*October 1998*

# LOCAL GOVERNMENT COMMISSION FOR ENGLAND

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

Members of the Commission are:

Professor Malcolm Grant (Chairman)

Helena Shovelton (Deputy Chairman)

Peter Brokenshire

Professor Michael Clarke

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Barbara Stephens (Chief Executive)

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## Local Government Commission for England

20 October 1998

Dear Secretary of State

On 14 October 1997 the Commission began a periodic electoral review of Derwentside under the Local Government Act 1992. We published our draft recommendations in April 1998 and undertook an eight-week period of consultation.

We have now prepared our final recommendations in the light of the consultation. We have confirmed our draft recommendations, subject to one change to the name of a ward in the light of further comments (see paragraph 76). This report sets out our final recommendations for changes to electoral arrangements in Derwentside.

We recommend that Derwentside District Council should be served by 55 councillors representing 22 wards, and that changes should be made to ward boundaries in order to improve electoral equality, having regard to the statutory criteria. We recommend that the Council should continue to be elected together every four years.

We note that you have now set out in the White Paper *Modern Local Government – In Touch with the People* (Cm 4014, HMSO), legislative proposals for a number of changes to local authority electoral arrangements. However, until such time as that new legislation is in place we are obliged to conduct our work in accordance with current legislation, and to continue our current approach to periodic electoral reviews.

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

Yours sincerely

PROFESSOR MALCOLM GRANT  
Chairman



# SUMMARY

The Commission began a review of Derwentside on 14 October 1997. We published our draft recommendations for electoral arrangements on 28 April 1998, after which we undertook an eight-week period of consultation.

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

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

- **in 12 of the 23 wards the number of electors represented by each councillor varies by more than 10 per cent from the average for the district, and in five wards by more than 20 per cent from the average;**
- **by 2002 electoral equality is expected to worsen, with the number of electors per councillor forecast to vary by more than 10 per cent from the average in 13 wards, and by more than 20 per cent in five wards.**

Our main final recommendations for future electoral arrangements (Figure 1 and paragraph 76) are that:

- **Derwentside District Council should be served by 55 councillors, the same as at present;**
- **there should be 22 wards, one less than at present;**
- **changes should be made to the boundaries of 18 of the existing wards, including abolishing one ward, while five wards should retain their existing boundaries;**
- **elections for the whole Council should continue to take place every four years.**

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

- **In all except one of the wards, the number of electors per councillor would vary by no more than 10 per cent from the district average. Burnhope ward would vary by 12 per cent.**
- **This improved electoral equality is forecast to continue, with the number of electors per councillor in all wards, except Burnhope, expected to vary by no more than 10 per cent from the average for the district by 2002. Burnhope ward would continue to vary by 12 per cent from the average.**

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 30 November 1998:

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

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

<b>Ward name</b>	<b>Number of councillors</b>	<b>Constituent areas</b>	<b>Map reference</b>
1 Annfield Plain	3	Annfield Plain ward (part); South Moor ward (part)	Large map
2 Benfieldside	3	Benfieldside ward (part)	Large map
3 Blackhill	3	Benfieldside ward (part); Blackhill ward (part)	Large map
4 Burnhope	1	<i>Unchanged</i> (Burnhope parish)	Map 2
5 Burnopfield	3	Burnopfield ward (part)	Large map
6 Castleside	1	<i>Unchanged</i> (Healeyfield and Muggleswick parishes)	Map 2
7 Catchgate	2	Annfield Plain ward (part); Catchgate ward	Large map
8 Consett East	1	Crookhall ward (part)	Large map
9 Consett North	3	Blackhill ward (part); Consett North ward; Consett South ward (part); Ebchester & Medomsley ward (part); Leadgate ward (part)	Large map
10 Consett South	2	Consett South ward (part); Crookhall ward (part); Delves Lane ward (part)	Large map
11 Cornsay	1	<i>Unchanged</i> (Cornsay, Hedleyhope and Satley parishes)	Map 2
12 Craghead & South Stanley	3	Craghead ward; South Stanley ward (part); Stanley Hall ward (part)	Large map
13 Delves Lane	3	Crookhall ward (part); Delves Lane ward (part)	Large map
14 Dipton	2	Burnopfield ward (part); Dipton ward	Large map
15 Ebchester & Medomsley	3	Benfieldside ward (part); Ebchester & Medomsley ward (part)	Large map
16 Esh	3	<i>Unchanged</i> (Esh parish)	Map 2
17 Havannah	3	Havannah ward (part); Tanfield ward (part)	Large map

Figure 1 (continued):  
 The Commission's Final Recommendations: Summary

	<b>Ward name</b>	<b>Number of councillors</b>	<b>Constituent areas</b>	<b>Map reference</b>
18	Lanchester	3	<i>Unchanged</i> (Greencroft and Lanchester parishes)	Map 2
19	Leadgate	3	Crookhall ward (part); Ebchester & Medomsley ward (part); Leadgate ward (part)	Large map
20	South Moor	3	Havannah ward (part); South Moor ward (part); South Stanley ward (part)	Large map
21	Stanley Hall	3	South Stanley ward (part); Stanley Hall ward (part)	Large map
22	Tanfield	3	Burnopfield ward (part); Havannah ward (part); Tanfield ward (part)	Large map

Notes: 1 The district of Derwentside is unparished except for the wards of Burnhope, Castleside, Cornsay, Esh and Lanchester.

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



# 1. INTRODUCTION

1 This report contains our final recommendations on the electoral arrangements for the district of Derwentside in County Durham. We have now reviewed all the districts in County Durham (except Darlington) as part of our programme of periodic electoral reviews of all principal local authority areas in England.

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

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

3 We have also had regard to our *Guidance and Procedural Advice for Local Authorities and Other Interested Parties* (published in March 1996, supplemented in September 1996 and updated in March 1998), which sets out our approach to the reviews.

4 This review was in four stages. Stage One began on 14 October 1997, when we wrote to Derwentside District Council inviting proposals for future electoral arrangements. Our letter was copied to Durham County Council, Durham Police Authority, the local authority associations, Durham Association of Parish & Town Councils, parish councils in the district, Members of Parliament and the Member of the European Parliament with constituency interests in the district, and the headquarters of the main political parties. At the start of the review and following publication of our draft recommendations, we published notices in the local press, issued a press release and invited the District Council to publicise the review more

widely. The closing date for receipt of representations was 19 January 1998. At Stage Two we considered all the representations received during Stage One and prepared our draft recommendations.

5 Stage Three began on 28 April 1998 with the publication of our report, *Draft Recommendations on the Future Electoral Arrangements for Derwentside in County Durham*, and ended on 22 June 1998. 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

<sup>6</sup> Derwentside district is situated in the north-west of County Durham with its northern boundary following the River Derwent along the border between Northumberland and County Durham. The area has a history of coal-mining and steel production. The demise of the coal industry, situated around the east of the district, was followed by the closure of the Consett steelworks in 1981, since when there has been a rapid build-up of new industrial investment as part of the regeneration programme, creating 5,300 jobs. The latest initiatives include the 'Genesis' project to redevelop the 700-acre site of the former steelworks. This industrial regeneration has helped to prevent a substantial reduction in the district's population which is currently just under 88,000. The majority of people live in the two main towns of Consett and Stanley, which are unparished, with the south of the district being predominantly rural, and covered by nine parishes.

<sup>7</sup> To compare levels of electoral inequality between wards, we calculated the extent to which the number of electors per councillor in each ward (the councillor:elector ratio) varies from the average for the district in percentage terms. In the report, this calculation may also be described as 'electoral variance'.

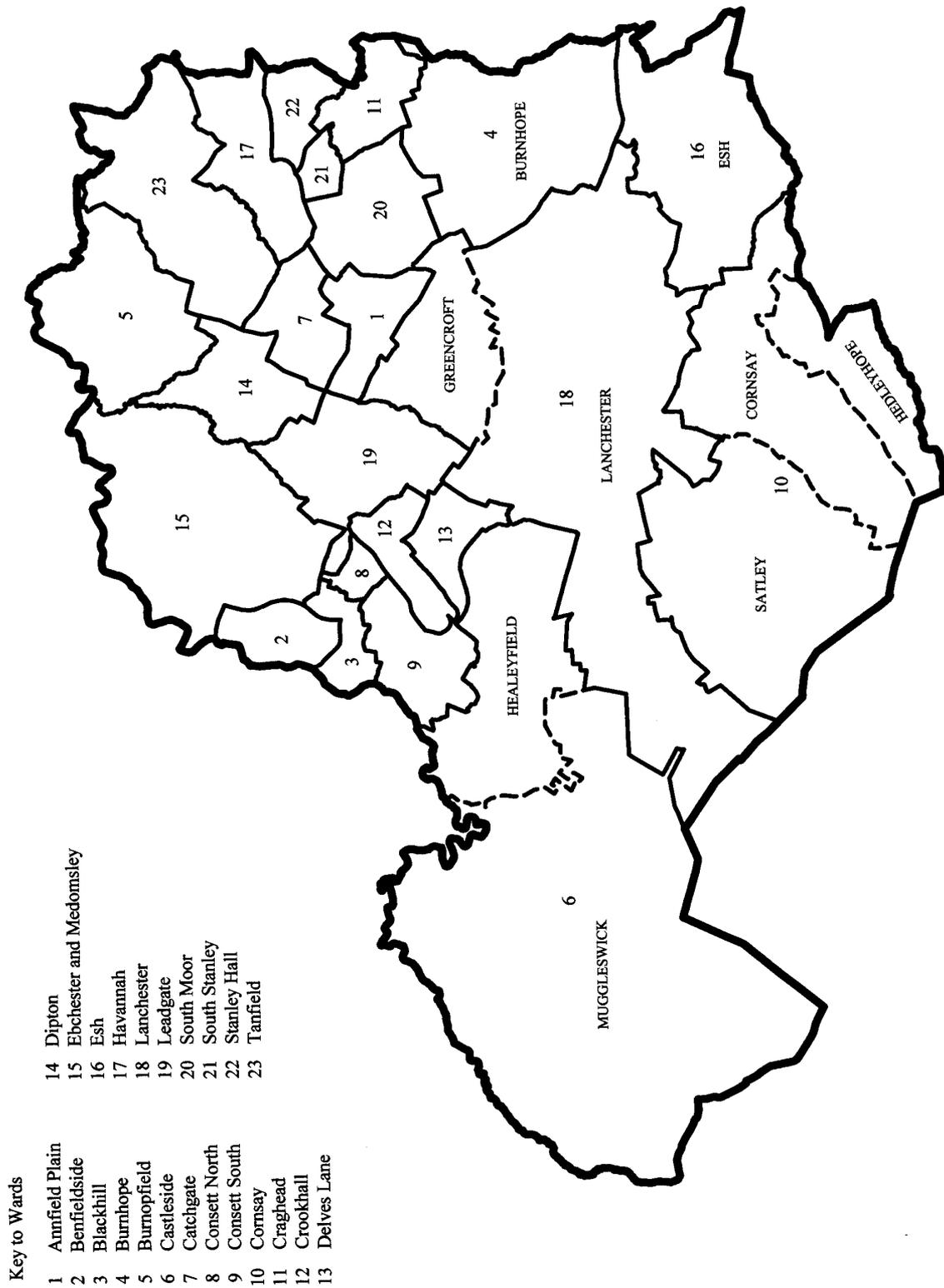
<sup>8</sup> The electorate of the district (February 1997) is 68,138. The Council presently has 55 councillors who are elected from 23 wards (Map 1 and Figure 2). Seventeen wards are urban and six primarily rural, including the parished area in the south together with Ebchester & Medomsley ward in the north-west. Thirteen of the 23 wards are each represented by three councillors, six wards elect two councillors each, while the remaining four are single-member wards. The whole Council is elected every four years.

<sup>9</sup> Since the last electoral review in 1976, there has been a slight reduction in the electorate in

Derwentside, with around 1 per cent fewer electors. However, the District Council forecasts a small increase in the electorate over the five-year period to 2002.

<sup>10</sup> At present, each councillor represents an average of 1,239 electors, which the District Council forecasts would increase to 1,255 by the year 2002 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 12 of the 23 wards varies by more than 10 per cent from the district average and in five wards by more than 20 per cent. The worst imbalance is in Tanfield ward where the councillor represents 35 per cent more electors than the district average.

Map 1:  
Existing Wards in Derwentside



- Key to Wards**
- 1 Annfield Plain
  - 2 Benfieldside
  - 3 Blackhill
  - 4 Burnhope
  - 5 Burnopfield
  - 6 Castleside
  - 7 Catchgate
  - 8 Consett North
  - 9 Consett South
  - 10 Cornsay
  - 11 Craghead
  - 12 Crookhall
  - 13 Delves Lane
  - 14 Dipton
  - 15 Ebchester and Medomsley
  - 16 Esh
  - 17 Havannah
  - 18 Lanchester
  - 19 Leadgate
  - 20 South Moor
  - 21 South Stanley
  - 22 Stanley Hall
  - 23 Tanfield

**KEY**

- EXISTING WARD BOUNDARY
- EXISTING PARISH BOUNDARY

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Figure 2:  
Existing Electoral Arrangements

Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (1997)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2002)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
1 Annfield Plain	2	3,228	1,614	30	3,234	1,617	29
2 Benfieldside	3	4,535	1,512	22	4,592	1,531	22
3 Blackhill	3	3,351	1,117	-10	3,433	1,144	-9
4 Burnhope	1	1,096	1,096	-12	1,109	1,109	-12
5 Burnopfield	3	4,018	1,339	8	4,060	1,353	8
6 Castleside	1	1,153	1,153	-7	1,172	1,172	-7
7 Catchgate	2	2,212	1,106	-11	2,240	1,120	-11
8 Consett North	2	2,449	1,225	-1	2,461	1,231	-2
9 Consett South	3	3,216	1,072	-13	3,288	1,096	-13
10 Cornsay	1	1,247	1,247	1	1,251	1,251	0
11 Craghead	2	2,242	1,121	-10	2,335	1,168	-7
12 Crookhall	1	1,518	1,518	23	1,590	1,590	27
13 Delves Lane	3	3,354	1,118	-10	3,361	1,120	-11
14 Dipton	2	2,189	1,095	-12	2,212	1,106	-12
15 Ebchester & Medomsley	3	3,823	1,274	3	3,901	1,300	4
16 Esh	3	3,877	1,292	4	3,925	1,308	4
17 Havannah	3	4,591	1,530	24	4,624	1,541	23
18 Lanchester	3	3,710	1,237	0	3,717	1,239	-1
19 Leadgate	3	3,313	1,104	-11	3,330	1,110	-12
20 South Moor	3	3,097	1,032	-17	3,106	1,035	-18
21 South Stanley	3	3,454	1,151	-7	3,474	1,158	-8

*continued overleaf*

Figure 2 (continued):  
Existing Electoral Arrangements

Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (1997)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2002)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
22 Stanley Hall	3	3,130	1,043	-16	3,270	1,090	-13
23 Tanfield	2	3,335	1,668	35	3,348	1,674	33
<b>Totals</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>68,138</b>	—	—	<b>69,033</b>	—	—
<b>Averages</b>	—	—	<b>1,239</b>	—	—	<b>1,255</b>	—

Source: Electorate figures are based on Derwentside District Council's submission.

Note: The 'variance from average' column shows by how far, in percentage terms, the number of electors per councillor varies from the average for the district. The minus symbol (-) denotes a lower than average number of electors. For example, in 1997, electors in South Moor ward were relatively over-represented by 17 per cent, while electors in Tanfield ward were relatively under-represented by 35 per cent. Figures have been rounded to the nearest whole number.

### 3. DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS

<sup>11</sup> During Stage One we received representations from Derwentside District Council, one parish council, five councillors and a local residents' association. In the light of these representations and evidence available to us, we reached preliminary conclusions which were set out in our report, *Draft Recommendations on the Future Electoral Arrangements for Derwentside in County Durham*. Our draft recommendations endorsed the District Council's scheme which would achieve improved electoral equality, provide good boundaries, having regard to the statutory criteria, and maintain the present mix of single-and multi-member wards. We proposed that:

- (a) Derwentside District Council should be served by 55 councillors representing 22 wards;
- (b) the boundaries of all wards in the towns of Consett and Stanley should be modified;
- (c) the boundaries of 18 of the existing 23 wards should be modified, with no change to the five rural wards in the southern part of the district.

#### **Draft Recommendation**

Derwentside District Council should comprise 55 councillors, serving 22 wards. The whole Council should continue to be elected together every four years.

<sup>12</sup> Our proposals would have resulted in significant improvements in electoral equality, with the number of electors per councillor in 21 of the 22 wards varying by no more than 10 per cent from the district average. By 2002, Burnhope ward would continue to be the only ward with a variance of more than 10 per cent from the average.



## 4. RESPONSES TO CONSULTATION

13 During the consultation on our draft recommendations report, eight representations were received. A list of all respondents is available on request from the Commission. All representations may be inspected at the offices of Derwentside District Council and the Commission.

### **Derwentside District Council**

14 The District Council unanimously agreed to accept our draft recommendations with the exception that the proposed Templetown ward should be renamed Consett East ward.

### **West Derwentside Liberal Democrats**

15 The West Derwentside Liberal Democrats agreed with most of the draft recommendations acknowledging that changes to individual boundaries would have a knock-on effect on other wards. However, they made detailed comments on the proposed boundaries for Benfieldside, Ebchester & Medomsley, Blackhill, Burnopfield and Dipton wards, stating that they did not reflect community identities. The Liberal Democrats also expressed a preference for annual elections.

### **Parish Councils**

16 Lanchester Parish Council agreed with the draft recommendations, which reflected its Stage One representation. Durham Association of Parish & Town Councils stated that it would support any recommendations which would provide a “sensible and common sense approach” to the districts in the county.

### **Other Representations**

17 We received four further representations. The Ebchester & Medomsley ward Labour Party objected to our draft recommendation to transfer part of Benfieldside ward, north of Snows Green Burn, to Ebchester & Medomsley ward on community identity grounds. The Leadgate South West Residents and Neighbourhood Watch Association enclosed a petition containing 23 signatures objecting to our draft recommendation to include the Villa Real bungalows in Consett North ward on community identity grounds.

18 A resident of Stanley commented on our draft recommendations for Annfield Plain, Tanfield, Dipton, Craghead, Havannah and South Stanley wards, stating that the proposed grouping of settlements in each of these wards did not reflect community identity. A resident of Consett objected to the proposals for a three-member Consett North ward and a two-member Consett South ward, instead preferring to retain the current level of representation, with a two-member Consett North ward and a three-member Consett South ward.



## 5. ANALYSIS AND FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS

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

20 However, our function is not merely arithmetical. First, our recommendations are not intended to be based solely on existing electorate figures, but also on assumptions as to changes in the number and distribution of local government electors likely to take place within the ensuing five years. Second, we must have regard to the desirability of fixing identifiable boundaries, and to maintaining local ties which might otherwise be broken. Third, we must consider the need to secure effective and convenient local government, and reflect the interests and identities of local communities.

21 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.

22 Our *Guidance* states that, while we accept that the achievement of absolute electoral equality for the authority as a whole is likely to be unattainable, 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. Regard must also be had to five-year forecasts of change in electorates. We will require

particular justification for schemes which result in, or retain, an imbalance of over 10 per cent in any ward. Any imbalances of 20 per cent and over should arise only in the most exceptional of circumstances, and will require the strongest justification.

### **Electorate Forecasts**

23 During Stage One the District Council submitted electorate forecasts for the period 1997 to 2002, projecting an increase in the electorate of about 1 per cent over the five-year period from 68,138 to 69,033. The Council estimated rates and locations of housing development with regard to structure and local plans, the expected rate of building over the five-year period and assumed occupancy rates. Advice from the District Council on the likely effect on electorates of ward boundary changes has been obtained. In our draft recommendations report we accepted that this was an inexact science and, having given consideration to projected electorates, were content that they represented the best estimates that could reasonably be made at the time.

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

### **Council Size**

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

26 Derwentside District Council is at present served by 55 councillors. The Council did not propose any change to council size during Stage One. In our draft recommendations report we considered the size and distribution of the electorate, the geography and other characteristics of the area, together with the representations

received. We concluded that the achievement of electoral equality, having regard to the statutory criteria, would best be met by a council of 55 members. At Stage Three, the District Council agreed with our draft recommendation and no alternative proposals were received. We are therefore confirming it as final.

## Electoral Arrangements

27 At Stage One we received a district-wide scheme from the District Council proposing 55 councillors representing 22 wards, and involving changes to the boundaries of 18 of the 23 existing wards, with no change to the wards of Burnhope, Castleside, Cornsay, Esh and Lanchester. Under the Council's proposals, the number of wards with an electoral variance over 10 per cent would reduce from 12 to one. As a result of this improved electoral equality, and in the absence of alternative district-wide proposals, we endorsed the District Council's scheme in its entirety as our draft recommendations.

28 At Stage Three, the District Council unanimously supported our draft recommendations in their entirety, subject to renaming one ward. We received seven other representations, most of which objected to specific ward boundaries in the unparished part of the district on the grounds of the effect they would have on community identity.

29 We recognise that the geography of the district, its urban and rural diversity together with the settlement patterns, limits the options available to improving electoral equality on a district-wide basis, while having regard to the statutory criteria. Nevertheless, the main objective of the review is to achieve equality of representation across the whole district. We have reconsidered our draft recommendations in the light of the representations received during Stage Three. The following areas, based on existing wards, are considered in turn:

- (a) Benfieldside, Blackhill and Ebchester & Medomsley wards;
- (b) Consett North, Consett South, Crookhall, Delves Lane and Leadgate wards;
- (c) Annfield Plain, Burnopfield, Catchgate, Dipton and Tanfield wards;

- (d) Craghead, Havannah, South Moor, South Stanley and Stanley Hall wards;
- (e) Burnhope, Castleside, Cornsay, Esh and Lanchester wards.

30 Details of our final recommendations are summarised in Figures 1 and 4 and illustrated on Map 2 and the large map inserted at the back of the report.

### **Benfieldside, Blackhill and Ebchester & Medomsley wards**

31 The number of electors per councillor in the three-member wards of Benfieldside, Blackhill and Ebchester & Medomsley are 22 per cent above, 10 per cent below and 3 per cent above the district average respectively (22 per cent above, 9 per cent below and 4 per cent above in 2002).

32 At Stage One, the District Council proposed that each of these three wards should retain three councillors but that there should be changes to the boundaries to reduce electoral inequality in Benfieldside and Blackhill wards. Specifically, the District Council proposed to transfer 541 electors in the Thomas Street area from Benfieldside ward to Blackhill ward, stating that "there is a strong community link between Thomas Street and Blackhill". The Council also proposed that 450 electors in the area north of Snow's Green Burn should be transferred from Benfieldside ward to Ebchester & Medomsley ward, arguing that this would not have an "adverse effect on community/social allegiance". The District Council also proposed to modify the boundary between Blackhill and Consett North wards affecting 75 electors in Clarence Gardens.

33 Additionally, the Council proposed to include in Leadgate ward a total of 628 additional electors from the Bradley and Pont areas together with Pleasant View in Ebchester & Medomsley ward which it considered have "a strong community link with Leadgate". However, the three councillors representing Ebchester & Medomsley ward proposed that there should be no change to the existing ward.

34 We considered that the electoral inequality in this area is too large to be allowed to continue and that the area covered by these wards must be

considered in its entirety since boundary changes to one ward would have a consequential effect on the electoral equality of neighbouring wards. The District Council's proposals would provide good electoral equality having regard to the statutory criteria. Accordingly, we endorsed its proposals for Benfieldside, Blackhill and Ebchester & Medomsley wards as part of our draft recommendations. The number of electors in Benfieldside, Blackhill and Ebchester & Medomsley wards would be 1 per cent above, 3 per cent below and 2 per cent below the district average respectively (1 per cent above, 2 per cent below and 1 per cent below in 2002).

35 At Stage Three, the District Council agreed with our draft recommendations. The Ebchester & Medomsley Ward Labour Party and the South West Derwentside Liberal Democrats objected to the proposed ward boundaries in this area. Specifically, the local Labour Party considered that the transfer of 450 electors from Benfieldside ward to Ebchester & Medomsley ward would not reflect the geography and community identity of the area. The Liberal Democrats argued that the Shotley Bridge area (relating to the area north of Snow's Green Burn which would be affected under the draft recommendations) "in no way belongs to either Ebchester or Medomsley". They also considered that the George Street area (referred to as the Thomas Street area under the Council's proposals and the draft recommendations) does not identify with Blackhill and that the Links Estate could be included in Benfieldside ward.

36 We recognise that the pattern of settlements in Ebchester & Medomsley ward leads to difficulties in drawing boundaries for the purposes of electoral equality. However, as stated in our draft recommendations report, in order to provide a more balanced representation across the district, changes need to be made to ward boundaries in this area. While some opposition has been received to our draft recommendations for this area, no alternative proposals were submitted which would adequately address the current electoral imbalances which exist at present. We therefore conclude that our draft recommendations for Benfieldside, Blackhill and Ebchester & Medomsley wards would provide the best electoral equality, having regard to the statutory criteria, and confirm them as final.

## **Consett North, Consett South, Crookhall, Delves Lane and Leadgate wards**

37 Under the current arrangements, the number of electors per councillor is 1 per cent below the district average in Consett North, 13 per cent below in Consett South, 23 per cent above in Crookhall, 10 per cent below in Delves Lane and 11 per cent below in Leadgate ward, with little or no improvement expected by 2002. Consett South, Delves Lane and Leadgate wards are each represented by three councillors, while Crookhall and Consett North wards are represented by one and two councillors respectively.

38 Although Consett North ward currently has good electoral equality, at Stage One the District Council proposed a number of boundary changes in order to improve the electoral imbalances in the surrounding wards, having regard to community identities. As part of this reconfiguration the Council proposed that Crookhall ward be abolished and the electors redistributed to neighbouring wards, and a new single-member ward of Templetown be created. Specifically, the Council proposed that 75 electors in Clarence Gardens should be transferred from Blackhill ward to Consett North ward; 232 electors from Villa Real, currently in Leadgate ward, should be included in Consett North ward, together with 819 electors from part of the town centre currently in Consett South ward (the Genesis Project site would remain in Consett South ward); and the remainder of the Number One Industrial Estate, containing no electors, should be transferred from Ebchester & Medomsley ward to Consett North ward. The Council also proposed to transfer 628 electors from the Bradley, Pont and Pleasant View areas in Ebchester & Medomsley ward to Leadgate ward, arguing that they have a "strong community link with Leadgate".

39 Leadgate South West Residents' and Neighbourhood Watch Association forwarded the results of a survey of residents in the Villa Real bungalows. They indicated that, of the 29 of the 52 households which responded, 22 preferred to remain in Leadgate ward and seven households preferred to be included in Consett North ward. Councillors Huntley and Richardson, two of the three members for Leadgate ward, also proposed

that Villa Real bungalows (comprising 88 electors) should remain in Leadgate ward on community identity grounds.

40 While we recognised that there was some disagreement over the transfer of the Villa Real bungalows, the District Council's proposal for change would provide better electoral equality in this area and an identifiable boundary between Consett North and Leadgate wards. The improved electoral equality was expected to continue in 2002. The Council's proposals for Consett North and Leadgate wards formed part of our draft recommendations.

41 At Stage Three the District Council supported our draft recommendations for these two wards which reflected its Stage One proposals. The Leadgate South West Residents' and Neighbourhood Watch Association attached a further petition of 23 signatures supporting its Stage One proposals to retain the Villa Real bungalows in Leadgate ward for community identity reasons. However, the alternative proposal would not provide quite as good electoral equality, and we have not been persuaded that it would provide a better boundary. In fact, the bungalows appear to be separated from both Consett North and Leadgate wards, particularly by the network of roads and the neighbouring industrial areas. We have therefore concluded that the best balance of representation would be achieved by confirming our draft recommendations for Consett North and Leadgate wards as final, noting that these received the full support of the District Council.

42 The number of electors per councillor in the three-member Delves Lane ward is 10 per cent below the district average (11 per cent in 2002). Under the District Council's Stage One proposals, Crookhall village (379 electors) which is currently in Crookhall ward would be transferred to Delves Lane ward. The Council stated that there is "a natural community link between the village and Delves Lane". The Council also proposed that five electors in the properties west of Knitsley Lane should be transferred to Consett South ward, giving a more suitable boundary between Delves Lane and Consett South wards.

43 Furthermore, the Council proposed that the remainder of Crookhall ward, polling district AW and part of polling district AX containing 1,139 electors, should form a new ward called Templetown, represented by one councillor. It

argued that Sherburn Terrace provides a distinct boundary between the proposed new ward and Consett North ward. The number of electors represented by the councillor for Templetown ward would initially be 8 per cent below the district average, although this would improve to 4 per cent by 2002, due to residential development in the Station Yard area. We noted that good electoral equality would be achieved by the reconfiguration of wards in this area, and therefore included the proposed new Templetown ward as part of our draft recommendations.

44 In addition to the proposed transfers affecting Consett North, Delves Lane and Consett South wards described above, the District Council proposed that the area west of Templetown in the current Crookhall ward, which does not contain any electors, should be included in Consett South ward to provide a clearer boundary along the A692 and Knitsley Lane. As a result of these boundary changes the total electorate in Consett South ward would be reduced from 3,216 to 2,397. The District Council therefore proposed that the number of councillors representing the ward should be reduced from three to two.

45 The District Council's proposals would significantly improve the electoral equality for these wards. The number of electors per councillor in the proposed Delves Lane and Consett South wards would be equal to the district average and 3 per cent below the average respectively (1 per cent below and 3 per cent below in 2002). We therefore put forward these proposals for consultation.

46 At Stage Three, the District Council agreed with our draft recommendations, subject to renaming Templetown ward as Consett East. We are content that the name Consett East accurately reflects the area covered by the proposed ward and therefore endorse it as part of our final recommendations.

47 One resident objected to our proposals for the representation for Consett North and Consett South wards, instead preferring a three-member Consett South ward and a two-member Consett North ward to provide what he/she considered to be better representation for a "deprived area". We consider that the proposed distribution of councillors provides the appropriate level of representation for the wards and therefore confirm our draft recommendations for Consett North and Consett South wards as final.

## **Annfield Plain, Burnopfield, Catchgate, Dipton and Tanfield wards**

48 Under the current arrangements, the two-member Annfield Plain ward is significantly under-represented with each councillor representing on average 30 per cent more electors than the district average. Little improvement in electoral equality is forecast by 2002.

49 At Stage One, to address the under-representation in the ward, the District Council proposed that there should be an increase in the number of councillors from two to three, together with two boundary changes to reflect community identity. It proposed that the area of Oakwood, containing 224 electors, should be transferred to Catchgate ward to reflect the "strong community link between Oakwood and Catchgate". It also proposed to transfer 805 electors from New Kyo village from South Moor ward to Annfield Plain ward, giving it an electorate for the ward of 3,809.

50 We were satisfied that the proposed boundary changes and increased representation for Annfield Plain ward would provide a better balance of representation, and that the reconfiguration of wards would contribute to better electoral equality across the district. Moreover, this increase would not give rise to an overall increase in council size due to the reconfiguration of wards in the Crookhall and South Stanley areas. We therefore consulted on the District Council's proposals for Annfield Plain ward where the number of electors per councillor would be 2 per cent above the district average (1 per cent in 2002).

51 In the three-member Burnopfield ward, the number of electors per councillor is 8 per cent above the district average in both 1997 and 2002. The District Council proposed to improve the level of representation in the ward by transferring 252 electors from the Hobson and Pickering Nook areas to Dipton ward, arguing that these settlements could be linked with either Burnopfield or Dipton. It also proposed that two electors from Clough Dene should be transferred to Tanfield ward to reflect community identity and provide a clearer boundary since the main part of Clough Dene is already in Tanfield ward. Given the improved electoral equality, we consulted on the District Council's proposal for Burnopfield ward, where the number of electors per councillor would be 1 per cent above the average in both 1997 and 2002.

52 The two wards of Catchgate and Dipton are each represented by two councillors and are both relatively over-represented, by 11 per cent and 12 per cent respectively. To improve electoral equality the District Council proposed that 224 electors in the Oakwood area should be transferred from Annfield Plain ward to Catchgate ward and that 252 electors in the Hobson area should be transferred from Burnopfield ward to Dipton ward. It stated that the Hobson area is situated midway between Burnopfield and Dipton villages and has no strong community ties with either settlement.

53 In view of the improved electoral equality, we included the District Council's proposals for both wards as part of our draft recommendations. The number of electors per councillor in Catchgate and Dipton wards would be 2 per cent below and 1 per cent below the district average respectively (2 per cent below in both wards in 2002).

54 Under the current arrangements, the two councillors for Tanfield ward represent on average 35 per cent more electors than the district average, with minimal improvement expected by 2002. To reduce this significant under-representation, the District Council proposed two changes to the boundary between Tanfield ward and Havannah ward: that 68 electors in the Causey area and 435 electors in the Good Street Estate area should be transferred from Havannah to Tanfield ward. These would provide a net increase of 367 electors in Tanfield ward. The Council also proposed to increase the number of councillors representing Tanfield ward from two to three. Furthermore, it proposed a minor boundary change with Burnopfield ward, affecting two electors in Clough Dene to reflect community identities and provide a clearer boundary. As a result, the number of electors per councillor in Tanfield ward would be equal to the district average (1 per cent below in 2002). We consulted on the Council's proposed three-member Tanfield ward.

55 At Stage Three, the District Council supported the draft recommendations. The West Derwentside Liberal Democrats considered that the Links Estate would be better placed in Benfieldside ward together with the George Street area, and that the Mountsett area should be retained in Burnopfield ward. However, the Liberal Democrats acknowledged that a solution in this area is difficult to achieve since change in one area has a knock-on effect elsewhere.

56 One local resident objected to the proposed boundary changes to Tanfield, Annfield Plain and Dipton wards for community identity reasons. In particular he argued that Tanfield ward should be represented by three councillors to reflect the increased electorate in the area, rather than making changes to the ward boundary. However, he supported the draft recommendation to retain New Kyo in Annfield Plain ward.

57 We conclude that the profile of the area, with small settlements separated by rural areas, means that electoral equality can only be achieved by including a number of these settlements in the same ward. Furthermore, we must consider the district as a whole and, as recognised by the Liberal Democrats, changes to the boundaries of one ward have a consequential effect on neighbouring wards. Accordingly, we are content that our proposed warding arrangements in this area would achieve good electoral equality, having regard to the statutory criteria, and therefore confirm them as final.

### **Craghead, Havannah, South Moor, South Stanley and Stanley Hall wards**

58 In the two-member Craghead ward and the three-member South Stanley ward, the number of electors per councillor is 10 per cent below and 7 per cent below the district average respectively (7 per cent below and 8 per cent below in 2002).

59 At Stage One the District Council proposed that these wards should be abolished and a new three-member Craghead & South Stanley ward created. Specifically, it proposed that the whole of the existing Craghead ward be included in the new ward, together with 791 electors in the Hollyhill Gardens area, currently in South Stanley ward, and 664 electors from the Hills Estate, currently in Stanley Hall ward. The Council argued that the inclusion of both these areas would not adversely affect the statutory criteria. In view of the improved electoral equality, we put forward the proposed new ward for consultation. The number of electors per councillor in the new three-member Craghead & South Stanley ward would be 1 per cent below the district average (4 per cent above in 2002).

60 The three wards of Havannah, South Moor and Stanley Hall are each represented by three councillors. The number of electors per councillor

is 24 per cent above the district average in Havannah ward, 17 per cent below in South Moor ward and 16 per cent below in Stanley Hall ward (23 per cent above, 18 per cent below and 13 per cent below in 2002).

61 At Stage One, the District Council submitted a number of boundary changes to South Moor ward. It proposed that 805 electors in the New Kyo area should be transferred from South Moor ward to Annfield Plain ward. Additionally, it proposed that a further 307 electors from the Coniscliffe Estate should be transferred from Havannah ward to South Moor ward. It also proposed that a number of electors should be transferred from the former South Stanley ward to South Moor ward: 527 electors in Eastfields, Westfields and Towneley Court; 524 electors from the east side of South Moor village; and 203 electors from Southfields and Thames Crescent.

62 In addition to the proposed boundary change between South Moor and Havannah wards, the District Council proposed modifications to the boundary between Havannah and Tanfield wards, to improve the balance of representation. As mentioned earlier, it proposed that 68 electors in the Causey area and 435 electors in the Good Street Estate area should be transferred to Tanfield ward from Havannah ward. The Council stated that both areas have strong community links with the wards in which they would be included.

63 To reduce the relative over-representation in Stanley Hall ward, the District Council proposed a net increase of 681 electors by transferring 664 electors from the Hills Estate to the new Craghead & South Stanley ward, described earlier, and incorporating 1,345 electors from the area bounded by Tyne Road and Durham Road, currently in South Stanley ward.

64 We considered that the District Council's proposed changes to each of these three wards would provide a better balance of representation while having regard to the statutory criteria, and therefore included them as part of our draft recommendations. The number of electors per councillor in these wards would be 5 per cent above the district average in Havannah ward, 4 per cent above in South Moor ward and 4 per cent above in Stanley Hall ward (5 per cent, 3 per cent and 3 per cent in 2002).

65 At Stage Three the District Council supported our draft recommendations for these wards. A resident of Stanley considered that Good Street should be retained in Tanfield ward as under our draft recommendations, but that Coniscliffe should be retained in Havannah ward and not form part of South Moor ward, arguing that the A693 Consett to Stanley road is a natural boundary.

66 We carefully considered the representations received and judge that our draft recommendations would provide the best level of electoral equality, and have the support of the District Council. We therefore confirm our proposals for Craghead & South Stanley, Stanley Hall, Havannah and South Moor wards as final.

### **Burnhope, Castleside, Cornsay, Esh and Lanchester wards**

67 These five wards cover the nine parishes in the south of the district. The single-member Burnhope ward (coterminous with the parish of the same name) has 12 per cent fewer electors than the district average, in both 1997 and 2002.

68 Although Burnhope ward is relatively over-represented, the District Council proposed no change to the ward's boundaries (which also form the parish boundary) in its Stage One submission, arguing that Burnhope is a "unique settlement with a separate and distinct community identity". The Council had considered a number of alternative proposals to improve electoral equality, including combining the existing ward with either Craghead or South Moor wards, but it noted that both these proposals would mean that the new ward would be split between two parliamentary constituencies. It also considered combining Burnhope ward with part of Lanchester ward, which would involve warding part of Greencroft parish and consequently splitting Maiden Law village. In consulting locally on its draft submission, the District Council received objections to this proposal from both Burnhope and Greencroft parish councils. We also received a submission directly from Greencroft Parish Council opposing such a proposal, preferring to retain the whole of Maiden Law village in one ward.

69 Having carefully considered the representations received at Stage One and the options submitted for change, we noted that any improvement to electoral equality in this ward would have a

detrimental effect on the good electoral equality achieved in the unparished area to the north, and that which already exists in the neighbouring parished areas to its west and south. While the Commission is not required to take into account parliamentary constituency boundaries in formulating its proposals, we considered that the statutory criteria would best be met by retaining Burnhope ward on its existing boundaries, as proposed by the District Council and both parish councils. We proposed no change to Burnhope ward as part of our draft recommendations.

70 Castleside ward covers the parishes of Healeyfield and Muggleswick. The number of electors represented by the councillor for the ward is 7 per cent below the district average both now and in 2002. The District Council stated that the village of Castleside "is considered a separate community with its own identity". The Council also considered linking the ward with part of Consett South ward which, it stated, would result in "only part of the ward being parished". It received objections to this draft proposal from Healeyfield Parish Council and Councillor Golightly, member for Castleside ward. Accordingly, the Council proposed no change to this ward. In light of the reasonable electoral equality which exists, and in the absence of alternative options, we included the District Council's proposal for no change to Castleside ward as part of our draft recommendations.

71 Cornsay ward covers the three southern parishes of Cornsay, Hedleyhope and Satley, and the number of electors represented by the councillor for the ward is 1 per cent above the district average (equal to the average in 2002). The three-member Esh ward (covering the parish of the same name) has 4 per cent more electors per councillor than the district average (unchanged in 2002). Lanchester ward is represented by three members and covers Greencroft and Lanchester parishes. The number of electors per councillor is equal to the district average (1 per cent below in 2002).

72 In our consultation report, we noted that good electoral equality exists in Cornsay, Esh and Lanchester wards, and is expected to continue over the five-year period. We therefore included the proposal for no change to these wards as part of our draft recommendations.

73 At Stage Three the District Council and Lanchester Parish Council agreed with our draft recommendations in the area and no other representations were received. We therefore confirm our draft recommendations for no change to Burnhope, Castleside, Cornsay, Esh and Lanchester wards as final.

## Electoral Cycle

74 In its Stage One submission, the District Council supported the retention of the current electoral cycle for the whole council every four years. We received no representations to the contrary and, in our draft recommendations report, we proposed that the present system of whole-council elections in Derwentside be retained.

75 At Stage Three the District Council reiterated its support for this proposal. The West Derwentside Liberal Democrats commented that proportional representation could help “revitalise” local government but recognised that this was outside the Commission’s remit. It also stated that annual elections would give “other parties a chance to build up their strength”. No further representations were received on this issue. We do not consider that there is sufficient evidence and support to propose changing the current electoral cycle and therefore confirm our draft recommendation as final.

## Conclusions

76 Having considered carefully all the evidence and representations we have received in response to our consultation report, we have decided substantially to endorse our draft recommendations, subject to renaming the proposed Templetown ward as Consett East ward as proposed by the District Council. We have concluded that:

- (a) the council size should remain the same at 55;
- (b) there should be 22 wards, one less than at present;
- (c) changes should be made to the boundaries of 18 of the existing wards, including abolishing one ward; and
- (d) elections should continue to be held for the whole council.

77 Figure 3 shows the impact of our final recommendations on electoral equality, comparing them with the current arrangements, based on 1997 and 2002 electorate figures.

78 As Figure 3 shows, our recommendations would result in a reduction in the number of wards with electoral variances of more than 10 per cent from 12 to one. By 2002 one ward, Burnhope, is forecast to continue to vary by more than 10 per cent from the average. We conclude that our

*Figure 3:  
Comparison of Current and Recommended Electoral Arrangements*

	1997 electorate		2002 forecast electorate	
	Current arrangements	Final recommendations	Current arrangements	Final recommendations
Number of councillors	55	55	55	55
Number of wards	23	22	23	22
Average number of electors per councillor	1,239	1,255	1,239	1,255
Number of wards with a variance more than 10 per cent from the average	12	1	13	1
Number of wards with a variance more than 20 per cent from the average	5	0	5	0

recommendations would best meet the need for electoral equality, having regard to the statutory criteria.

### **Final Recommendation**

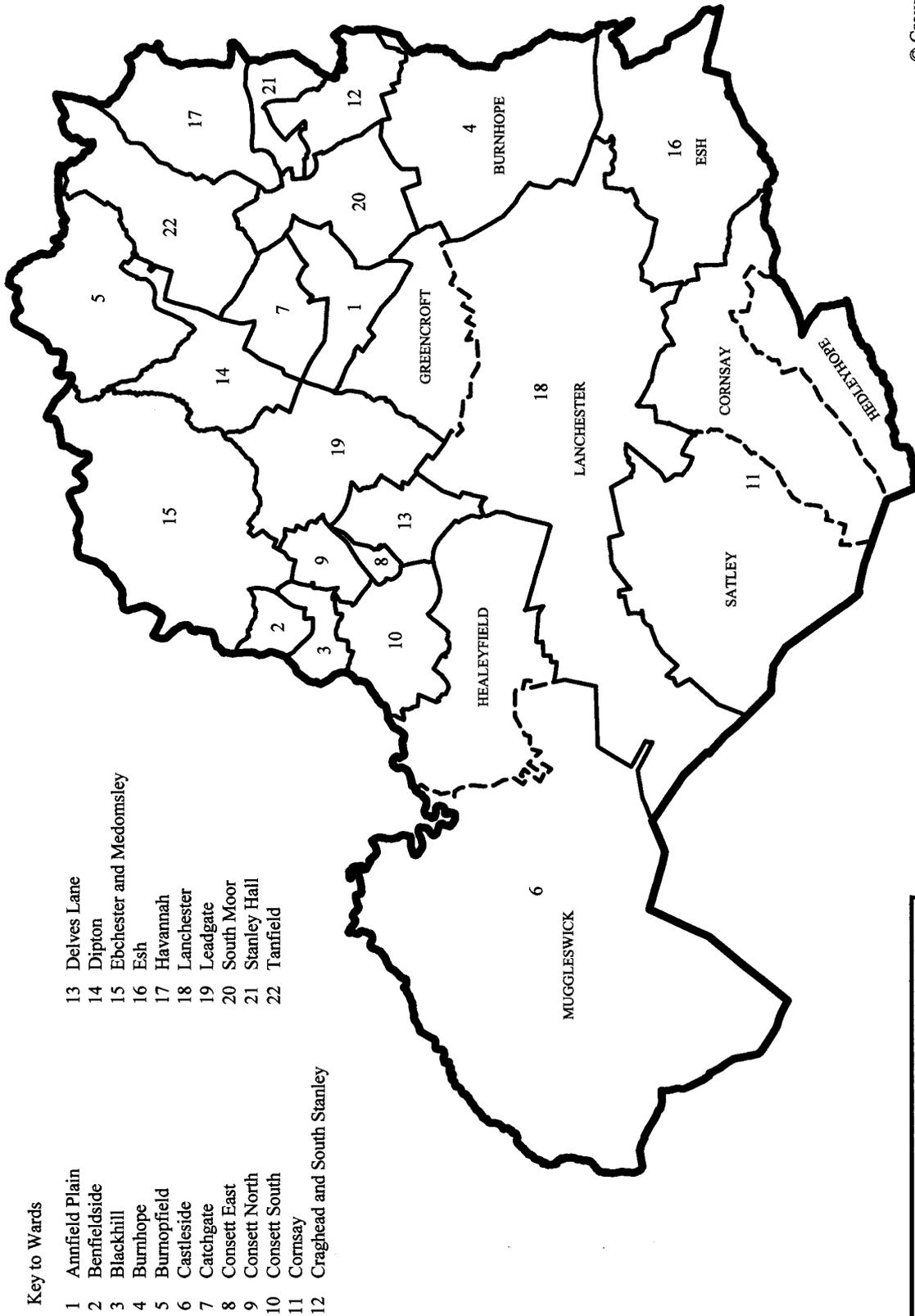
Derwentside District Council should comprise 55 councillors serving 22 wards, as detailed and named in Figures 1 and 4, and illustrated on Map 2 and the large map at the back of this report. The Council should continue to be elected together every four years.

<sup>79</sup> We received no proposals for changes to the electoral arrangements for parish councils in the district and no changes are proposed as a consequence of our proposed district wards. Furthermore, we are not proposing any change to the electoral cycle of parish councils in the district.

### **Final Recommendation**

For parish councils, whole-council elections should continue to take place every four years, on the same cycle as that for the District Council.

Map 2:  
The Commission's Final Recommendations for Derwentside



Key to Wards

- |    |                            |    |                         |
|----|----------------------------|----|-------------------------|
| 1  | Annfield Plain             | 13 | Delves Lane             |
| 2  | Benfieldside               | 14 | Dipton                  |
| 3  | Blackhill                  | 15 | Ebchester and Medomsley |
| 4  | Burnhope                   | 16 | Esh                     |
| 5  | Burnopfield                | 17 | Havannah                |
| 6  | Castleside                 | 18 | Lanchester              |
| 7  | Catchgate                  | 19 | Leadgate                |
| 8  | Consett East               | 20 | South Moor              |
| 9  | Consett North              | 21 | Stanley Hall            |
| 10 | Consett South              | 22 | Tanfield                |
| 11 | Cornsay                    |    |                         |
| 12 | Craghead and South Stanley |    |                         |

KEY

PROPOSED WARD BOUNDARY ———

EXISTING PARISH BOUNDARY - - - - -

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Figure 4:  
The Commission's Final Recommendations for Derwentside

Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (1997)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2002)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
1 Annfield Plain	3	3,809	1,270	2	3,817	1,272	1
2 Benfieldside	3	3,757	1,252	1	3,814	1,271	1
3 Blackhill	3	3,604	1,201	-3	3,686	1,229	-2
4 Burnhope	1	1,096	1,096	-12	1,109	1,109	-12
5 Burnopfield	3	3,766	1,255	1	3,808	1,269	1
6 Castleside	1	1,153	1,153	-7	1,172	1,172	-7
7 Catchgate	2	2,436	1,218	-2	2,464	1,232	-2
8 Consett East	1	1,139	1,139	-8	1,210	1,210	-4
9 Consett North	3	3,575	1,192	-4	3,654	1,218	-3
10 Consett South	2	2,397	1,199	-3	2,402	1,201	-4
11 Cornsay	1	1,247	1,247	1	1,251	1,251	0
12 Craghead & South Stanley	3	3,697	1,232	-1	3,925	1,308	4
13 Delves Lane	3	3,733	1,244	0	3,741	1,247	-1
14 Dipton	2	2,441	1,221	-1	2,464	1,232	-2
15 Ebchester & Medomsley	3	3,645	1,215	-2	3,722	1,241	-1
16 Esh	3	3,877	1,292	4	3,925	1,308	4
17 Havannah	3	3,917	1,306	5	3,948	1,316	5
18 Lanchester	3	3,710	1,237	0	3,717	1,239	-1
19 Leadgate	3	3,709	1,236	0	3,727	1,242	-1
20 South Moor	3	3,853	1,284	4	3,864	1,288	3

*continued overleaf*

Figure 4 (continued):

*The Commission's Final Recommendations for Derwentside*

Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (1997)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2002)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
21 Stanley Hall	3	3,875	1,292	4	3,897	1,299	3
22 Tanfield	3	3,702	1,234	0	3,716	1,239	-1
<b>Totals</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>68,138</b>	—	—	<b>69,033</b>	—	—
<b>Averages</b>	—	—	<b>1,239</b>	—	—	<b>1,255</b>	—

Source: Electorate figures are based on Derwentside District Council's submission.

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

## 6. NEXT STEPS

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

81 It now falls to the Secretary of State to decide whether to give effect to our recommendations, with or without modification, and to implement them by means of an order. Such an order will not be made earlier than six weeks from the date that our recommendations are submitted to the Secretary of State.

82 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 Review  
Eland House  
Bressenden Place  
London SW1E 5DU



# APPENDIX A

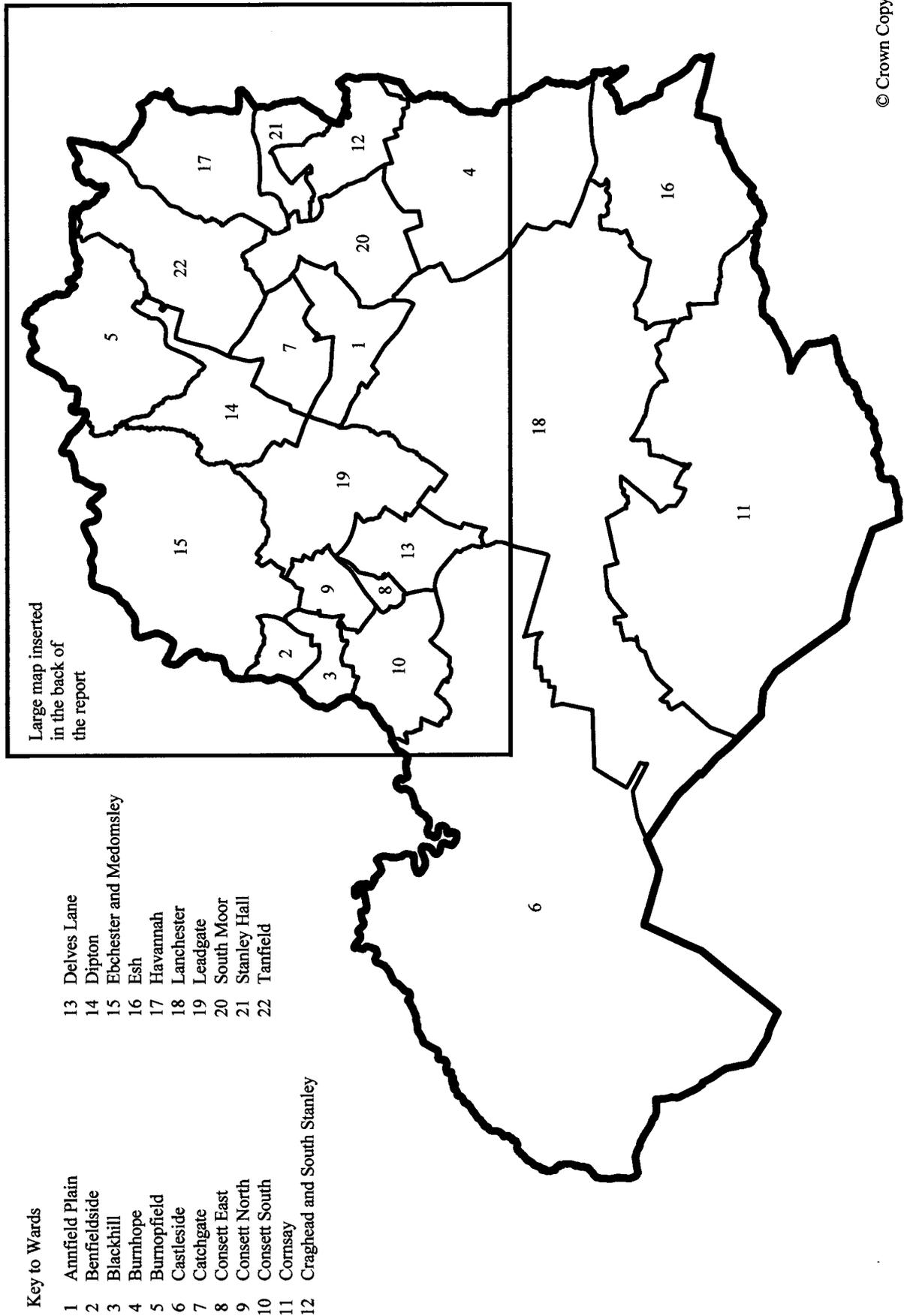
## Final Recommendations for Derwentside: Detailed Mapping

The following maps illustrate the Commission's proposed ward boundaries for the Derwentside 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 at the back of the report.

The **large map** inserted in the back of the report illustrates the Commission's proposed warding arrangements for the unparished area, including Consett and Stanley.

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



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