

LOCAL
GOVERNMENT
COMMISSION
FOR ENGLAND

FINAL
RECOMMENDATIONS
ON THE FUTURE
ELECTORAL
ARRANGEMENTS FOR
BERWICK-UPON-TWEED
IN NORTHUMBERLAND

*Report to the Secretary of State for
the Environment*

March 1997

LOCAL GOVERNMENT COMMISSION FOR ENGLAND

This report sets out the Commission's final recommendations on the electoral arrangements for Berwick-upon-Tweed borough in Northumberland.

Members of the Commission are:

Professor Malcolm Grant (Chairman)

Helena Shovelton (Deputy Chairman)

Peter Brokenshire

Professor Michael Clarke

Robin Gray

Bob Scruton

David Thomas

Adrian Stungo (Chief Executive)

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Local Government Commission for England

25 March 1997

Dear Secretary of State

On 19 March 1996 the Commission commenced a periodic electoral review of the borough of Berwick-upon-Tweed under the Local Government Act 1992. It published its draft recommendations in October 1996 and undertook a nine-week period of consultation.

The Commission has now formulated its final recommendations in the light of the consultation. It has, for the most part, confirmed its draft recommendations, although it has modified some of its initial warding proposals in the light of further evidence. This report sets out the Commission's final recommendations for changes to electoral arrangements in the area.

The Commission is therefore recommending to you that Berwick-upon-Tweed should be served by 29 councillors representing 17 wards, but that some changes should be made to ward boundaries in order to improve electoral equality, having regard to the Commission's statutory criteria. It is recommended that the whole Council should continue to be elected together every four years.

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 Berwick-upon-Tweed on 19 March 1996. It published its draft recommendations on electoral arrangements on 31 October 1996, after which it undertook a nine-week period of consultation.

- **This report summarises the submissions received by the Commission during consultation on its draft recommendations, and offers its final recommendations to the Secretary of State.**

The Commission found that the existing electoral arrangements provide unequal representation of electors in Berwick-upon-Tweed because:

- **in 11 of the 16 wards, the number of electors represented by each councillor varies by more than 10 per cent from the average for the borough;**
- **in eight of these wards, the number of electors represented by each councillor varies by more than 20 per cent from the average;**
- **in one ward, Islandshire, the number of electors represented by each councillor varies from the average by 46 per cent;**
- **by 2001, the number of electors per councillor is likely to vary by more than 10 per cent from the average in 11 of the wards.**

The Commission's final recommendations for the Borough Council's electoral arrangements (Figure 1) are that:

- **Berwick-upon-Tweed should be served by 29 councillors, compared with 28 at present;**
- **there should be 17 wards, rather than 16 as at present;**
- **the ward boundaries of 11 of the existing wards should be modified, while five wards should retain their existing boundaries;**
- **elections should continue to take place every four years, with the next elections taking place in 1999.**

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 13 of the 17 wards the number of electors per councillor would vary by no more than 10 per cent from the borough average, both initially and in 2001.**

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

- **they provide for changes to the electoral arrangements of the parish councils of Ancroft, Chatton, Duddo, Horncliffe, Kyloe and Wooler.**

All further correspondence on these recommendations and the matters discussed in this report should be addressed to the Secretary of State for the Environment, who will not make an Order implementing the Commission's recommendations before 5 May 1997.

Figure 1:
The Commission's Final Recommendations: Summary

Ward name	Number of councillors	Constituent areas	Map reference
1 Bamburgh	1	Bamburgh ward (the parishes of Bamburgh and Easington); Beadnell ward (part - the parish of Adderstone with Lucker)	Map 2
2 Beadnell	1	Beadnell ward (part - the parishes of Beadnell and Ellingham)	Map 2
3 Belford	1	Belford ward (part - the parish of Belford)	Map 2
4 Cheviot	1	Cheviot ward (the parishes of Bewick, Earle, Ilderton, Ingram, Lilburn and Roddam); Chatton ward (part - the parish of Chillingham and the proposed parish ward of Chatton)	Map 2/Map A4
5 Edward	2	Edward ward; Elizabeth ward (part)	Map 2/Map A3
6 Elizabeth	3	Elizabeth ward (part)	Map 2/Map A3
7 Flodden	1	Wooler ward (part - the parish of Akeld); Milfield ward (part - the parishes of Branxton, Carham, Kilham and Kirknewton)	Map 2
8 Ford	1	Ford ward (part - the parish of Ford); Milfield ward (part - the parishes of Ewart and Milfield); Chatton ward (part - the parish of Doddington)	Map 2
9 Islandshire	3	<i>Unchanged</i> (the parishes of Ancroft, Holy Island, Kyoie and Ord)	Map 2
10 Lowick	1	Belford ward (part - the parish of Middleton); Ford ward (part - the parishes of Bowsden and Lowick); Chatton ward (part - the proposed parish ward of Hetton)	Map 2/Map A4
11 Norhamshire	2	<i>Unchanged</i> (the parishes of Cornhill, Duddo, Horncliffe, Norham and Shoreswood)	Map 2
12 North Sunderland	2	<i>Unchanged</i> (the parish of North Sunderland)	Map 2
13 Prior	2	Tower ward (part)	Map 2/Map A2
14 Seton	2	<i>Unchanged</i>	Map 2/Map A1
15 Shielfield	1	Tower ward (part)	Map 2/Map A2
16 Spittal	3	<i>Unchanged</i>	Map 2/Map A1
17 Wooler	2	Wooler ward (part - the parish of Wooler)	Map 2

Note: Berwick-upon-Tweed borough is entirely parished except for the town wards of Edward, Elizabeth, Prior, Seton, Shielfield and Spittal.

1. INTRODUCTION

1 This report contains the Commission's final recommendations on the electoral arrangements for the borough of Berwick-upon-Tweed in Northumberland.

2 The Commission has now reviewed the districts in Northumberland as part of its programme of periodic electoral reviews of all principal local authority areas in England. This is the Commission's first review of the electoral arrangements for Berwick-upon-Tweed. The last such review was undertaken by the Commission's predecessor, the Local Government Boundary Commission (LGBC), which reported to the Secretary of State in October 1975 (Report No. 72). The electoral arrangements of Northumberland County Council were last reviewed in January 1980 (Report No. 370). It is intended that a review of the County Council's electoral arrangements will follow in due course.

3 In undertaking these reviews, the Commission is required to have regard to:

- the statutory criteria contained in section 13 (5) of the Local Government Act 1992:
 - (a) to reflect the identities and interests of local communities; and
 - (b) to 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 The Commission has also had regard to its own *Guidance and Procedural Advice for Local Authorities and Other Interested Parties* (published in March 1996 and supplemented in September 1996). This sets out its approach to the reviews.

5 The review of Berwick-upon-Tweed was in four stages (Figure 2).

6 Stage One commenced on 19 March 1996. The Commission wrote to Berwick-upon-Tweed Borough Council inviting it to make proposals for its future electoral arrangements. Copies of that letter were sent to Northumberland County Council, the other borough and district councils in Northumberland, the Northumbria Police Authority, the local authority associations, the Northumberland Association of Local Councils, parish councils in the area, Members of Parliament and Members of the European Parliament with constituency interests in the borough, and the headquarters of the main political parties. The Commission also placed a notice in the local press, issued a press release and invited the Borough Council itself to publicise the review.

7 At Stage Two the Commission considered all the representations received during Stage One and formulated its draft recommendations.

8 Stage Three began on 31 October 1996 with the publication of the Commission's report, *Draft Recommendations on the Future Electoral Arrangements for Berwick-upon-Tweed in Northumberland*. Copies were sent to all those to whom the Commission wrote at the start of the review as well as to those who had written to the Commission during Stage One, inviting comments on the preliminary conclusions. Again the Commission placed a notice in the local newspapers, issued a press release and invited the Borough Council to publicise the report more widely.

9 Finally, during Stage Four, the Commission reconsidered its draft recommendations in the light of the Stage Three consultation.

*Figure 2:
Stages of the Review*

Stage	Description
One	Submission of proposals to the Commission
Two	The Commission's analysis and deliberation
Three	Publication of draft recommendations and consultation
Four	Final deliberation and report to the Secretary of State for the Environment

2. CURRENT ELECTORAL ARRANGEMENTS

¹⁰ Berwick-upon-Tweed is a large, predominantly rural area, with a total population of 26,700. It is the second smallest district by population in England. It is generally sparsely populated, the main settlement being the town of Berwick with the associated communities of Spittal and Tweedmouth, with a total of 9,600 electors. The next largest settlements are North Sunderland and Wooler, with around 1,500 electors each. With the exception of the town of Berwick the borough is fully parished with a total of 37 parishes, 26 of which have parish councils.

¹¹ The Council presently has 28 councillors who are elected from 16 wards (Map 1 and Figure 3). Six wards are represented by a single councillor, eight wards by two councillors, and two wards by three councillors. The total electorate of the borough is 21,826 (February 1996), which is projected by the Borough Council to increase to around 22,500 by the year 2001. There have been changes in population in the period since the last review, with new housing developments and other social and economic changes creating some variations in electoral equality at borough level. The whole council is elected every four years, with the next elections taking place in May 1999.

¹² In order to compare levels of electoral inequality between wards, the Commission calculated the extent to which the number of electors per councillor in each ward (the councillor:elector ratio) varies from the average for the borough in percentage terms. In the text which follows, this calculation may be described using the shorthand term 'electoral variance'.

¹³ At present, each councillor represents an average of 780 electors, which the Council forecasts would increase to 804 by the year 2001. The number of electors per councillor varies in 11 wards by more than 10 per cent from the borough average and in eight wards by more than 20 per cent. Currently, the average number of electors per councillor in the two-member Islandshire ward, immediately to the south of Berwick town, varies by 46 per cent from the average and there are four other wards - Bamburgh, Beadnell, Cheviot and Tower - which have variances in excess of 30 per cent.

Map 1:
Existing Wards in Berwick-upon-Tweed



KEY	
EXISTING WARD BOUNDARY	—————
EXISTING PARISH BOUNDARY	- - - - -

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Key To Wards

1	Bamburgh	7	Elzabeth	12	North Sunderland
2	Beadnell	8	Ford	13	Ord
3	Belford	9	Holy Island	14	Ord
4	Chatton	10	Kilham	15	Ord
5	Ilderton	11	Duddo	16	Akeld
6	Elzabeth	12	North Sunderland		

Figure 3:
Existing Electoral Arrangements

Ward name	1996				2001 (Projected)		
	Number of councillors	Electorate	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
1 Bamburgh	1	528	528	-32	559	559	-30
2 Beadnell	2	1,014	507	-35	1,078	539	-33
3 Belford	1	994	994	27	1,024	1,024	22
4 Chatton	1	566	566	-27	574	574	-28
5 Cheviot	1	522	522	-33	522	522	-35
6 Edward	2	1,355	678	-13	1,355	678	-16
7 Elizabeth	3	2,183	728	-6	2,234	745	-7
8 Ford	1	968	968	24	988	988	23
9 Islandshire	2	2,270	1,135	46	2,446	1,223	52
10 Milfield	1	915	915	17	923	923	15
11 Norhamshire	2	1,317	659	-15	1,349	675	-16
12 North Sunderland	2	1,496	748	-4	1,588	794	-1
13 Seton	2	1,461	731	-6	1,461	731	-9
14 Spittal	3	2,476	825	6	2,491	830	3
15 Tower	2	2,106	1,053	35	2,174	1,087	35
16 Wooler	2	1,655	828	6	1,743	872	9
Totals	28	21,826	—	—	22,509	—	—
Averages	—	—	780	—	—	804	—

Source: Electorate figures are based on Berwick-upon-Tweed Borough Council's submission.

Notes: 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, electors in Bamburgh ward are relatively over-represented by 32 per cent, while those in Islandshire are relatively under-represented by 46 per cent. Figures have been rounded to the nearest whole number.

The wards of Edward, Elizabeth, Seton, Spittal and Tower are in the town of Berwick.

3. DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS

14 During Stage One, the Commission received submissions from Berwick-upon-Tweed Borough Council, Chatton Parish Council, a borough councillor and one member of the public. In the light of these representations, the Commission formulated its preliminary conclusions which were set out in its report, *Draft Recommendations on the Future Electoral Arrangements for Berwick-upon-Tweed in Northumberland*. The Commission proposed that the borough should be served by 29 councillors, serving 16 wards. It also proposed that:

- (a) in the town of Berwick, a new two-member Prior ward and a new single-member Shielfield ward should be created from the existing two-member Tower ward, and the boundary between the existing wards of Edward and Elizabeth should be revised;
- (b) the existing ward of Islandshire should have an additional councillor, so that it would be represented by three councillors;
- (c) the existing wards of North Sunderland and Beadnell should be combined to create a new ward represented by three councillors;
- (d) the pattern of parishes constituting the existing wards of Bamburgh, Belford, Chatton, Cheviot, Ford, Milfield and Wooler should be reconfigured;
- (e) the parish of Chatton should be divided into two parish wards, Chatton and Hetton, which would respectively form part of the revised borough ward of Cheviot and the new borough ward of Lowick;
- (f) there should be no change to the boundaries of Islandshire, Norhamshire, Seton and Spittal wards.

15 The Commission's proposals would have resulted in significant improvements to electoral equality, with the number of electors per councillor in 14 of the 16 wards varying by no more than 10 per cent from the average. This high level of electoral equality was projected to continue over the ensuing five years.

16 The Commission's draft recommendations are summarised in Appendix B.

Draft Recommendation

Berwick-upon-Tweed Borough Council should comprise 29 councillors, serving 16 wards. The whole Council should continue to be elected together every four years.

4. RESPONSES TO CONSULTATION

17 During the consultation on the Commission's draft recommendations report, nine submissions were received. A list of all respondents is available on request from the Commission.

Berwick-upon-Tweed Borough Council

18 The Council's submission "welcomed the Commission's endorsement of the majority of the Council's proposals for borough and parish electoral arrangements", but objected to the draft recommendations for Middleton parish, the Belford parish ward of Warenton and the merger of North Sunderland and Beadnell borough wards.

19 The Council argued that the parish of Middleton should be placed in a ward with the parishes of Adderstone with Lucker, Bamburgh and Easington, and not in a ward with the parishes of Bowsden, Chatton (part) and Lowick as proposed by the Commission. The Council accepted that, in terms of electoral equality, the Commission's proposal had merit: "the mathematics of this proposal are unchallenged". It contended, however, that Middleton was a sparsely populated, largely coastal parish which looked towards the larger community of Belford - characteristics shared, it stated, by the parishes of Adderstone with Lucker, Bamburgh and Easington. The Council maintained the view that its Stage One proposal to the Commission "reflected a clear, strong and shared community identity" in this part of the borough.

20 The Council further contended that the parish ward of Warenton identified "most definitely" with the rest of the parish of Belford, and that the proposal that it should form part of the Bamburgh ward "clearly offends against the principle of community identity". The Council continued: "It is suggested that if the Commission withdraws its proposals with respect to Middleton, the proposals for Warenton may also be abandoned as unnecessary".

21 The Council acknowledged that the Commission's proposal to merge the existing wards of North Sunderland and Beadnell into a new three-member ward would, as in the case of Middleton, improve electoral equality. However, it

argued that "there is strong feeling in both Beadnell and, more particularly Ellingham, that the numerical dominance of the proposed new ward's main centre of population, at Seahouses/North Sunderland, is likely to result in the return of three borough councillors from the larger community at the expense of representation from either Beadnell or Ellingham... [Those two parish councils] have accepted the inevitability that they would lose one of their two existing borough councillors [so] concern is all the greater, therefore, at the prospect of losing effective influence over the choice of the one councillor which remains".

Berwick-upon-Tweed Constituency Liberal Democrats

22 A submission was received from the Berwick-upon-Tweed Constituency Liberal Democrats, stating that it was "happy to accept and endorse, along with the Liberal Democrat Group on Berwick Borough Council, the Commission's proposals for Berwick borough".

Members of Parliament

23 Alan Beith, MP for Berwick-upon-Tweed, had "reservations about amalgamating villages which could otherwise have their own councillor", and was therefore concerned about the draft recommendation to merge the Beadnell and North Sunderland wards. He considered the Commission's other electoral proposals for the borough to be both reasonable and fair.

24 Mr Beith also expressed concerns over the boundary between the parish of Ord and the unparished area of Berwick town, although he acknowledged that this issue was outside the Commission's terms of reference for this review.

Parish and Town Councils

25 Representations were received from three parish councils - Beadnell, Chatton and Ellingham - during Stage Three. Each opposed the Commission's draft recommendations in relation to their own particular areas.

26 Beadnell Parish Council expressed concerns over the proposal to merge it with North Sunderland and Ellingham parishes to form a new borough ward, preferring instead no change. However, it commented that, if the draft recommendation were to be confirmed as final, the name of the new ward should also include a reference to Ellingham.

27 Chatton Parish Council objected to the Commission's proposal to ward it and to place the two parish wards in different district wards. It reiterated its previously stated concerns over the possible impact that such a change might have on school catchment boundaries.

28 Ellingham Parish Council strongly opposed the proposal to place it in a three-member ward with the parishes of North Sunderland and Beadnell. The Council felt that it was "most unlikely that an election candidate from the rural parishes would draw enough votes from North Sunderland electors to win one of the three seats". The Parish Council agreed with the Borough Council that a higher than average variance should be tolerated in this instance, and pointed out that in areas where the electorate is low, it required only a relatively minor change in the absolute numbers of electors to have a disproportionate effect on the percentage variance.

Other Representations

29 The Commission received three other submissions during Stage Three. The Northumberland Association of Local Councils opposed the warding of Chatton parish, believing that an artificial divide would be created between the communities of Chatton and Hetton "as a means of hiving-off the Hetton area into a borough ward based on Lowick".

30 Councillor Patricia Scott, representing the Bamburgh county electoral division, opposed the proposal to transfer Middleton from the Belford ward to the Lowick ward. She stated that Middleton residents were opposed to the proposal and that they regarded Belford as their local village, while "almost all the Lowick ward is difficult to access and such a change would go counter to the Commission's own guidelines to keep natural links".

31 Two parish councillors representing the Middleton parish - which has a grouped parish council with the parish of Belford - opposed the Commission's draft proposals for the Belford and Lowick borough wards. They considered that the parish of Middleton should be retained within the Belford borough ward, as at present, and not transferred into the proposed Lowick ward. The councillors argued that Middleton has more affinity with the village of Belford, to which it looks for its services. They also pointed out that the two areas are within walking distance of each other, while Lowick, despite being in an adjoining ward, is not directly connected to Middleton by road.

5. ANALYSIS AND FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS

32 As indicated previously, the Commission's prime objective in considering the most appropriate electoral arrangements for Berwick-upon-Tweed was to achieve electoral equality, having regard to the statutory criteria and to Schedule 11 to the Local Government Act 1972, which refers to the ratio of electors being "as nearly as may be, the same in every ward of the district or borough".

33 However, the Commission's function is not merely arithmetical, for three reasons. First, its 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 it must have regard to the desirability of fixing identifiable boundaries, and to maintaining local ties which might otherwise be broken. Third, the Commission has had to consider the desirability of servicing effective and convenient local government, and reflecting the interests and identities of local communities.

34 It is therefore impractical to design an electoral system which provides for exactly the same number of electors per councillor in every ward of an authority. There must be a degree of flexibility. In conducting its electoral reviews, the Commission's predecessor, the LGBC, considered that variations from the average number of electors per councillor for an authority as a whole should be kept to the absolute minimum: a variation of up to plus or minus 10 per cent in a particular ward may be regarded as being "acceptable", although variations in excess of plus or minus 20 per cent were generally accepted only in very exceptional circumstances.

35 The Commission's view is that the LGBC's approach to this issue had merit insofar as it combined a clearly defined tolerance threshold with the degree of flexibility necessary to achieve reasonable levels of electoral equality across a local authority's area. Accordingly, the Commission has decided to adopt this approach for the purposes of its reviews.

36 In its March 1996 *Guidance*, the Commission expressed the view that "proposals for changes in electoral arrangements should therefore be based on variations in each ward of no more than plus or minus 10 per cent from the average councillor:elector ratio for the authority, having regard to five-year forecasts of changes in electorates. Imbalances in excess of plus or minus 20 per cent may be acceptable, but only in highly exceptional circumstances, and will have to be justified in full". However, as the Commission emphasised in its September 1996 supplement to the *Guidance*: "While the Commission accepts that absolute equality of representation is likely to be unattainable, it considers that, if electoral imbalances are to be kept to the minimum, such equality should be the starting point in any electoral review".

Electorate Projections

37 The Borough Council submitted electorate forecasts for the year 2001, projecting an increase in the electorate of 683 over the five-year period, from 21,826 to 22,509. The Council has estimated rates and locations of housing development with regard to structure and local plans, and the expected rate of building over the five-year period. Reasonable estimates have been made of the change in electorate that will arise. The Commission accepts that this is an inexact science and, having given consideration to projected electorates, is content that they represent the best estimates that can be reasonably be made at this time.

Council Size

38 The Commission indicated in its March 1996 *Guidance* that it would normally expect the number of councillors serving a district council to be in the range of 30 to 60.

39 Berwick-upon-Tweed Borough Council is at present served by 28 councillors. The Council proposed an increase in council size to 29 during Stage One of the review. In its draft

recommendations report the Commission considered the size and distribution of the electorate, the geography and other characteristics of the area, together with the representations received. The Commission concluded that the statutory criteria and the achievement of electoral equality would best be served by a council size of 29 members. Although this falls just below the Commission's indicative size range, Berwick-upon-Tweed borough does have a relatively low number of electors, and the Commission is satisfied that the council size proposed provides for proper representation of the electorate. The Commission received support for this council size from the Borough Council and other respondents during Stage Three, and has not received evidence to persuade it to move away from its view.

Electoral Arrangements

40 Having considered all representations received during both Stage One and Stage Three of the review, the Commission has further considered its draft recommendations. The following areas are covered in turn:

- (a) Berwick town (five wards);
- (b) Islandshire ward;
- (c) Chatton and Cheviot wards;
- (d) Bamburgh, Beadnell, Belford and North Sunderland wards;
- (e) Ford, Milfield, Norhamshire and Wooler wards.

Berwick Town

41 In its draft recommendations report, the Commission adopted the Borough Council's proposal to replace the present two-member Tower ward with a new two-member Prior ward and a new single-member Shielfield ward. It also proposed the retention of the present Seton and Spittal wards on existing boundaries, but recommended a modification to the boundary between Edward and Elizabeth wards.

42 These draft recommendations would achieve a good level of electoral equality, with the number of electors per councillor in each of the Berwick town wards varying from the borough average by 10 per cent or less, both in 1996 and 2001.

43 During Stage Three, the Commission's draft recommendations in respect of the town wards

were supported by the Borough Council, the Berwick-upon-Tweed Constituency Liberal Democrats and by Alan Beith MP. No other specific comments were received. With this broad support for its proposals, the Commission has decided to confirm its draft recommendations for Berwick-upon-Tweed town wards as final.

Islandshire Ward

44 The Commission's draft recommendation for the Islandshire ward was that proposed at Stage One by the Borough Council, namely an increase in representation for the ward from two to three members. Under current arrangements, the ward, comprising the parishes of Ancroft, Holy Island, Kylee and Ord, suffers the worst electoral imbalance in the borough, with the number of electors per councillor varying from the borough average by 46 per cent. Such a high variance has in the main been caused by recent housing development which, though to all intents and purposes forming a natural part of Berwick-upon-Tweed town, is in fact contained within the parish of Ord.

45 An additional (third) councillor for Islandshire ward would reduce electoral variance in the ward to just 1 per cent (5 per cent in 2001). During Stage Three of the review, the Commission received support for this proposal from the Borough Council, the Berwick-upon-Tweed Constituency Liberal Democrats and Alan Beith MP. The Commission therefore confirms its draft recommendation in respect of this ward as final.

Chatton and Cheviot

46 In its draft recommendations report, the Commission adopted the Borough Council's proposal that the parish of Chatton be warded, with the northern part of the parish, Hetton, forming part of the proposed ward of Lowick (see below). The southern part of the parish, which includes Chatton village, would form part of Cheviot borough ward, together with the parish of Chillingham. The number of electors per councillor in the 'expanded' Cheviot ward would be 14 per cent above the borough average, improving to 12 per cent by 2001. It would comprise the parishes of Bewick, Chatton (part), Chillingham, Earle, Ilderton, Ingram, Lilburn and Roddam. As a consequence of this and other proposals, there would no longer be a borough ward of Chatton.

47 The Commission's draft recommendation was supported by the Borough Council, the Berwick-upon-Tweed Constituency Liberal Democrats and Alan Beith MP. However, Chatton Parish Council and the Northumberland Association of Local Councils opposed the proposed warding of Chatton. Both submissions expressed the view that an artificial divide would be created between the communities of Chatton and Hetton. The Commission acknowledges these views. However, the warding of Chatton is key to creating a good level of electoral equality in this part of the borough, and the Commission concurs with the Borough Council that, in any event, a geographical split already exists between the communities of Hetton and Chatton village. In the circumstances, the Commission has decided to confirm its draft recommendations as final.

48 The Commission is proposing alternative arrangements for the parish of Doddington, presently in the Chatton ward. These are discussed later in this chapter, in relation to Ford ward.

Bamburgh, Beadnell, Belford and North Sunderland

49 The Commission's draft recommendations for these four existing wards, in the south-east of the borough, elicited the majority of the representations that were received during Stage Three. The main areas of contention were the proposal to form a new three-member North Sunderland and Beadnell ward, and the proposal to place the parish of Middleton in a separate ward from its near neighbour Belford. This latter issue is discussed below.

50 In its draft recommendations report, the Commission proposed that the parish of Adderstone with Lucker (currently in Beadnell ward) along with the parish ward of Warenton (of Belford parish) form part of Bamburgh ward. Such a proposal would leave the modified Bamburgh ward with 730 electors, 3 per cent below the average number of electors per councillor. At Stage Three, the Borough Council, while concurring with the proposal in principle (although preferring that the parish of Middleton should also be included in the ward), opposed the parish ward of Warenton being separated from Belford.

51 The Commission has considered the Borough Council's views and, on reflection, agrees that, on community grounds, the parish ward of Warenton should remain with Belford, and not be transferred

to the revised Bamburgh ward. Only 38 electors are affected by this modification, which has the effect of leaving the revised Bamburgh ward (the parishes of Adderstone with Lucker, Bamburgh and Easington) with 692 electors, 8 per cent below the borough average (7 per cent in 2001). The Commission has therefore decided to confirm its draft recommendation as final, subject to this modification.

52 The Commission recommended that the existing borough ward (and parish) of North Sunderland be placed in a new three-member ward with the parishes of Beadnell and Ellingham, which together make up the majority of the present Beadnell ward. The proposed 'North Sunderland and Beadnell' ward would have 2,346 electors, with 4 per cent above the borough average number of electors per councillor, becoming 7 per cent in 2001.

53 The draft recommendation was opposed by the Borough Council, Beadnell Parish Council, Ellingham Parish Council, and by Alan Beith MP. The Berwick-upon-Tweed Constituency Liberal Democrats, however, supported the proposal. The main reason put forward in opposition was the perceived dominance that North Sunderland would have within the ward. Ellingham Parish Council, in particular, believed that it was "most unlikely that an election candidate from the rural parishes [Beadnell and Ellingham] would draw enough votes from North Sunderland electors to win one of the three seats".

54 The Commission has re-assessed its draft recommendation in the light of the views expressed. Given that the distinction between the relatively urban community of North Sunderland and its more rural neighbours has now been made more clear to the Commission, and that there is an alternative available with adequate (though by no means perfect) electoral equality it is now proposed that the existing ward (and parish) of North Sunderland be retained on its own as a two-member ward. It is also proposed that the parishes of Beadnell and Ellingham together form a modified Beadnell ward.

55 The two-member North Sunderland ward would initially be just 1 per cent below the borough average number of electors per councillor, 2 per cent in 2001, while the single-member Beadnell ward would initially be 13 per cent above the average number of electors per councillor, 18 per cent in 2001. However, the Commission has decided to recommend these two wards to the

Secretary of State mindful that, although Beadnell's level of representation is not ideal, the ward only contains around a hundred electors more than the borough average for a single-member ward, and that the level of under-representation is justified as an expression of community identities and interests in this area.

56 The Commission's draft recommendation for the Belford borough ward also elicited some opposition mostly relating to the 'Middleton' issue, described below. Another issue which concerned respondents was the proposed transfer of the Belford parish ward of Warenton to the ward of Bamburgh. The rationale behind the draft recommendation was that Belford parish ward, on its own, contains 816 electors, and to include Warenton would increase the level of electoral imbalance from 8 per cent to 13 per cent.

57 In borough council areas such as Berwick-upon-Tweed, where there is a relatively low number of electors per councillor overall, large percentage imbalances can result from the transfer of a relatively small number of electors to another ward. For example, the difference in Belford ward between Warenton being included or excluded is, as described, an 8 per cent or a 13 per cent variance. However, this difference is caused by only 38 electors.

58 In the light of this, and the arguments put forward by respondents during Stage Three, the Commission has decided to modify its draft proposal, and recommends that Belford ward should consist solely of the parish of Belford (including the Warenton parish ward). The single-member Belford borough ward would vary from the average number of electors per councillor by 13 per cent in 1996, projected to be 14 per cent in 2001.

Ford, Milfield, Norhamshire and Wooler

59 In this part of the borough, the Commission's draft recommendations were largely based on the Borough Council's Stage One submission. It recommended the following wards:

- (a) a new single-member Flodden ward, comprising the parishes of Akeld, Branxton, Carham, Kilham and Kirknewton;
- (b) a modified single-member Ford ward, comprising the parishes of Doddington, Ewart, Ford and Milfield;

- (c) a modified two-member Wooler ward, comprising only the parish of that name.

60 In all three of these wards, the number of electors per councillor would vary by less than 10 per cent, both initially and in 2001.

61 The Commission also adopted as its draft recommendation the Borough Council's proposal for an unchanged two-member Norhamshire ward, comprising the parishes of Cornhill, Duddo, Horncliffe, Norham and Shoreswood. Although the number of electors per councillor in this ward would be 13 per cent below the borough average both initially and in 2001, the Commission agreed with the Borough Council that such an electoral variance appeared unavoidable if the improved electoral arrangements in the rest of the borough were to be maintained.

62 The Commission received support for its draft recommendations in respect of these four wards from the Borough Council, the Berwick-upon-Tweed Constituency Liberal Democrat Party and Alan Beith MP. No other comments were received. The Commission has therefore decided to confirm its draft recommendations for the wards of Flodden, Ford, Norhamshire and Wooler as final.

63 The Commission also proposed that a new ward of Lowick be established comprising the parishes of Bowsden and Lowick (at present in Ford borough ward), Middleton (in Belford ward) and the northern (Hetton) part of Chatton parish (in Chatton ward). This elicited a number of comments during Stage Three, mostly in opposition to the proposal. The number of electors per councillor in the ward would vary by 8 per cent from the borough average, 6 per cent in 2001.

64 The Borough Council argued that the parish of Middleton is a "sparsely populated, largely coastal parish, bordering the larger community at Belford but without a well defined principal community of its own, and is dissected by the A1 trunk road". It further contended that the parish shares characteristics with the parishes of Adderstone with Lucker, Bamburgh and Easington, unlike its relationship with the remainder of the proposed Lowick ward.

65 The County Councillor representing the Bamburgh division, and two parish councillors representing Middleton (which is in a grouped parish with Belford) expressed the view that Middleton looks to Belford for its service needs and that local people regard Belford as their local village

and generally possess a shared sense of community with it.

66 The Commission has carefully considered the submissions it has received concerning Middleton, and acknowledges that the parish has clearer community links with Belford than with the remainder of the proposed Lowick ward. However, the draft recommendation would provide a good level of electoral equality and any linking of Middleton with Belford in a single-member ward would produce, in the Commission's view, an unacceptable level of electoral inequality in both Belford and the remaining area of Lowick ward.

67 The Commission has also considered the likely impact of an alternative proposal, which would be for the creation of a two-member ward combining the proposed Belford and Lowick wards. While this might reflect the wishes of respondents from Middleton and Belford, as it would keep those communities in the same ward, it would be likely to cut across the identities and interests of local communities in the remainder of the proposed Lowick ward. Overall, the Commission is not sufficiently persuaded that placing Middleton with Belford, with or without the remainder of the proposed Lowick ward, outweighs the merits that would result from its draft recommendations.

68 As indicated above, the Commission also received representations from Chatton Parish Council and the Northumberland Association of Local Councils, objecting to the proposed warding of Chatton, part of which would be placed in Lowick ward.

69 For the reasons stated earlier, the warding of Chatton is key to creating a good level of electoral equality in this part of the borough, and in the circumstances, the Commission has decided to confirm its draft recommendations as final.

Electoral Cycle

70 In its draft recommendations report, the Commission proposed that the present system of whole-council elections be retained. During Stage Three, the Commission received no specific comments regarding this issue. Consequently, and in the absence of any opposition to this proposal, the Commission has therefore decided to confirm its draft recommendation as final.

Parish Council Electoral Arrangements

71 Following consultation with parish councils, the Borough Council put forward proposals for changes to the electoral arrangements of certain parish councils. The Commission therefore invited views on the following proposals:

- (a) to increase the number of councillors serving Ancroft Parish Council from ten to 11;
- (b) to return three parish councillors in the Duddo ward, and two parish councillors in the Twizel ward of Duddo Parish Council;
- (c) to increase the number of councillors serving Horncliffe Parish Council from seven to eight;
- (d) to ward the parish of Kyloe by creating a Berrington ward, comprising 49 electors and returning one councillor, and a Kyloe ward comprising 227 electors and returning six councillors;
- (e) to increase the number of councillors serving Wooler Parish Council from nine to ten.

72 The Commission also put forward a proposal to ward the parish of Chatton by creating a Hetton ward, comprising 118 electors served by three members, and a Chatton ward, comprising 280 electors served by six members. The proposal, as described above in this chapter, was consequential to the Commission's draft recommendations for borough council electoral arrangements.

73 The Borough Council welcomed the Commission's endorsement of its proposals for parish council electoral arrangements. The only affected parish council which responded was Chatton, reiterating its opposition to the Commission's proposal to ward it.

74 However, as the Commission's final recommendations for borough council electoral arrangements remain, in relation to Chatton, the same as the draft recommendations, the Commission confirms its proposal to ward the parish of Chatton as a final recommendation. Given the support of the Borough Council for the other parish council electoral arrangements proposed, and given the lack of any opposition to them, the Commission also confirms those draft recommendations as final.

Conclusions

75 The Commission has examined alternative configurations of parishes and communities in order to assess whether further improvement to electoral equality could be obtained. However, it has concluded that any further improvements to electoral equality may be at the expense of the statutory criteria, namely the need to reflect community identities and secure convenient and effective local government. It is also mindful that, because overall there is a relatively low number of electors represented by each councillor in Berwick-upon-Tweed, a small change in electorate can have a proportionately greater effect on the percentage of electoral imbalance.

76 Having considered all the evidence and representations it has received on its draft recommendations, the Commission has concluded that there should be an increase in council size from 28 to 29; that there should be 17 wards rather than 16 as at present; that elections should remain on a whole-council basis; and that the boundaries of 11 of the existing wards should be modified. Figure 4 shows the impact of the Commission's final recommendations on electoral equality, comparing them with the current arrangements, as based on 1996 electorate figures, and with projected electorates in the year 2001.

77 As Figure 4 shows, the Commission's recommendations would result in a reduction from 11 to four in the number of wards in which the number of electors per councillor varies by more than 10 per cent from the borough average, both initially and in 2001. Under these proposals, the average number of electors per councillor would fall from 780 to 753. The Commission concludes that its recommendations would best meet the need for electoral equality, having regard to the statutory criteria.

Final Recommendation

Berwick-upon-Tweed Borough Council should comprise 29 councillors serving 17 wards as detailed and named in Figures 1 and 5 and Map 2. The whole Council should continue to be elected every four years.

78 As indicated above, changes in parish electoral arrangements will be required either as a consequence of the Commission's final recommendations on the electoral arrangements for the Borough Council, or to reflect local preferences.

Figure 4:
Comparison of Current and Recommended Arrangements

	1996 electorate		2001 projected electorate	
	Current arrangements	Final recommendations	Current arrangements	Final recommendations
Number of councillors	28	29	28	29
Number of wards	16	17	16	17
Average number of electors per councillor	780	753	804	776
Number of wards with a variance more than 10 per cent from the average	11	4	11	4
Number of wards with a variance more than 20 per cent from the average	8	0	8	0

Final Recommendation

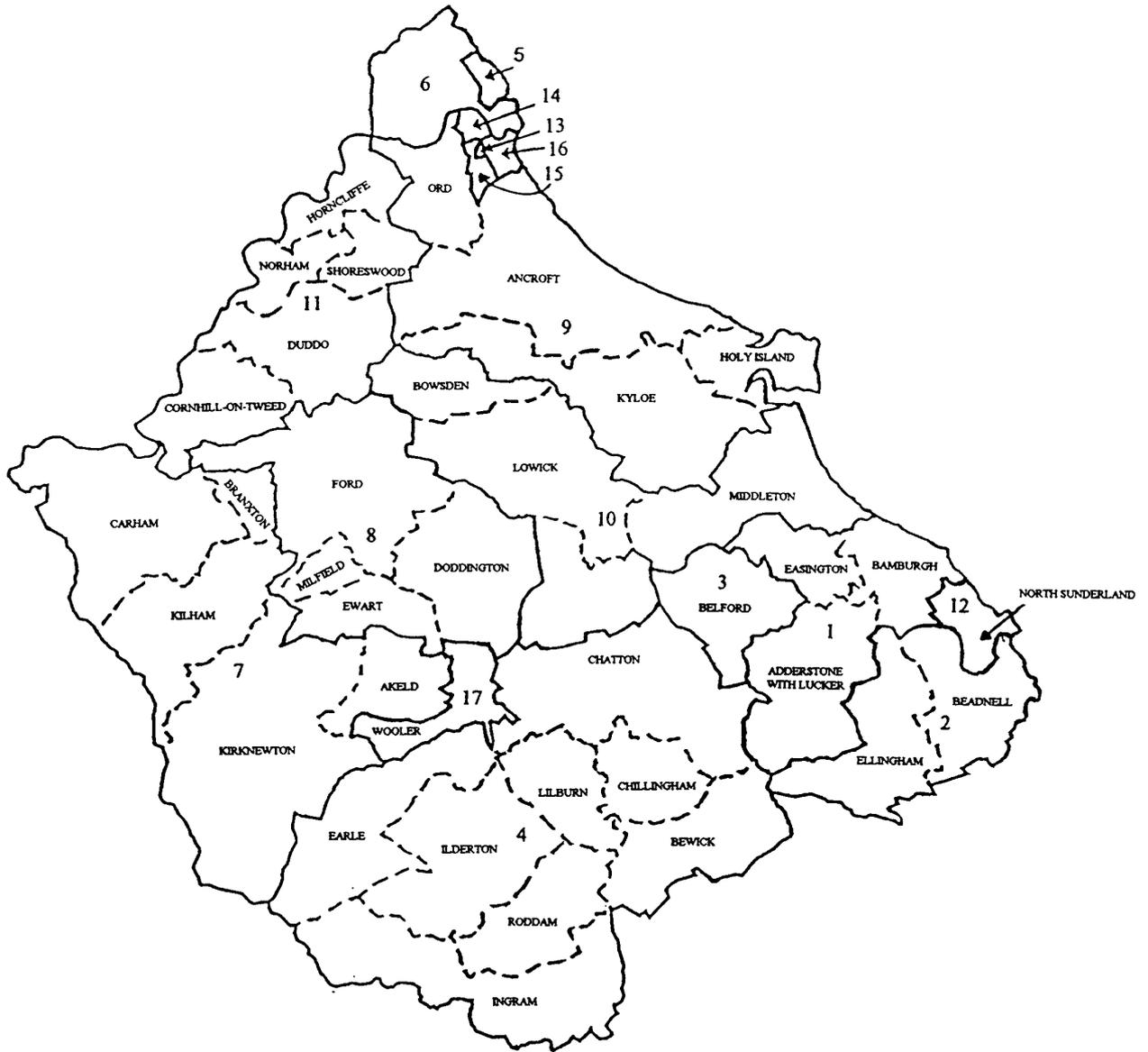
- (a) the number of councillors representing the parish of Ancroft should be increased from ten to 11;
- (b) the parish of Chatton should be divided into two wards as illustrated in Map A4 at Appendix A: Hetton, to be represented by three councillors, and Chatton, to be represented by six councillors;
- (c) the parish of Duddo should continue to have five councillors: two councillors should represent the Twizel ward, and three councillors the Duddo ward;
- (d) the number of councillors representing the parish of Horncliffe should be increased from seven to eight;
- (e) the parish of Kyloe should be divided into two wards: Berrington ward, to be represented by one councillor, and Kyloe ward, to be represented by six councillors;
- (f) the number of councillors representing the parish of Wooler should be increased from nine to ten.

⁷⁹ The Commission also proposes that there should be no change to the electoral cycle of parish councils in the borough.

Final Recommendation

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

Map 2:
The Commission's Final Recommendations for Berwick-upon-Tweed



KEY
 PROPOSED WARD BOUNDARY —————
 EXISTING PARISH BOUNDARY - - - - -

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Key to Wards

- | | | |
|------------|-----------|----------|
| 1 Bamburgh | 7 Flodden | 13 Prior |
| 2 Beadnell | 8 Ford | 14 Seton |

Figure 5:
The Commission's Final Recommendations for Berwick-upon-Tweed

Ward name	1996				2001 (Projected)		
	Number of councillors	Electorate	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
1 Bamburgh	1	692	692	-8	723	723	-7
2 Beadnell	1	850	850	13	914	914	18
3 Belford	1	854	854	13	884	884	14
4 Cheviot	1	858	858	14	866	866	12
5 Edward	2	1,451	726	-4	1,451	726	-7
6 Elizabeth	3	2,087	696	-8	2,138	713	-8
7 Flodden	1	714	714	-5	714	714	-8
8 Ford	1	809	809	7	825	825	6
9 Islandshire	3	2,270	757	1	2,446	815	5
10 Lowick	1	813	813	8	825	825	6
11 Norhamshire	2	1,317	659	-13	1,349	675	-13
12 North Sunderland	2	1,496	748	-1	1,588	794	2
13 Prior	2	1,394	697	-7	1,394	697	-10
14 Seton	2	1,461	731	-3	1,461	731	-6
15 Shielfield	1	712	712	-5	780	780	0
16 Spittal	3	2,476	825	10	2,491	830	7
17 Wooler	2	1,572	786	4	1,660	830	7
Totals	29	21,826	—	—	22,509	—	—
Averages	—	—	753	—	—	776	—

Source: Electorate figures are based on Berwick-upon-Tweed Borough Council's submission

Notes: 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.

The wards of Edward, Elizabeth, Seton, Spittal, Prior and Shielfield are in the Berwick town area.

6. NEXT STEPS

80 Having completed its review of electoral arrangements in Berwick-upon-Tweed and submitted its final recommendations to the Secretary of State, the Commission has fulfilled its statutory role under the Local Government Act 1992.

81 It now falls to the Secretary of State to decide whether to give effect to the Commission's 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 the Commission's recommendations are submitted to the Secretary of State.

82 All further correspondence concerning the Commission's recommendations and the matters discussed in this report should be addressed to the Secretary of State at the following address:

The Secretary of State for the Environment
Local Government Review
Department of the Environment
Eland House
Bressenden Place
London SW1E 5DU

APPENDIX A

Final Recommendations for Berwick-upon-Tweed: Detailed Mapping

The following maps illustrate the Commission's proposed ward boundaries for the Berwick-upon-Tweed area.

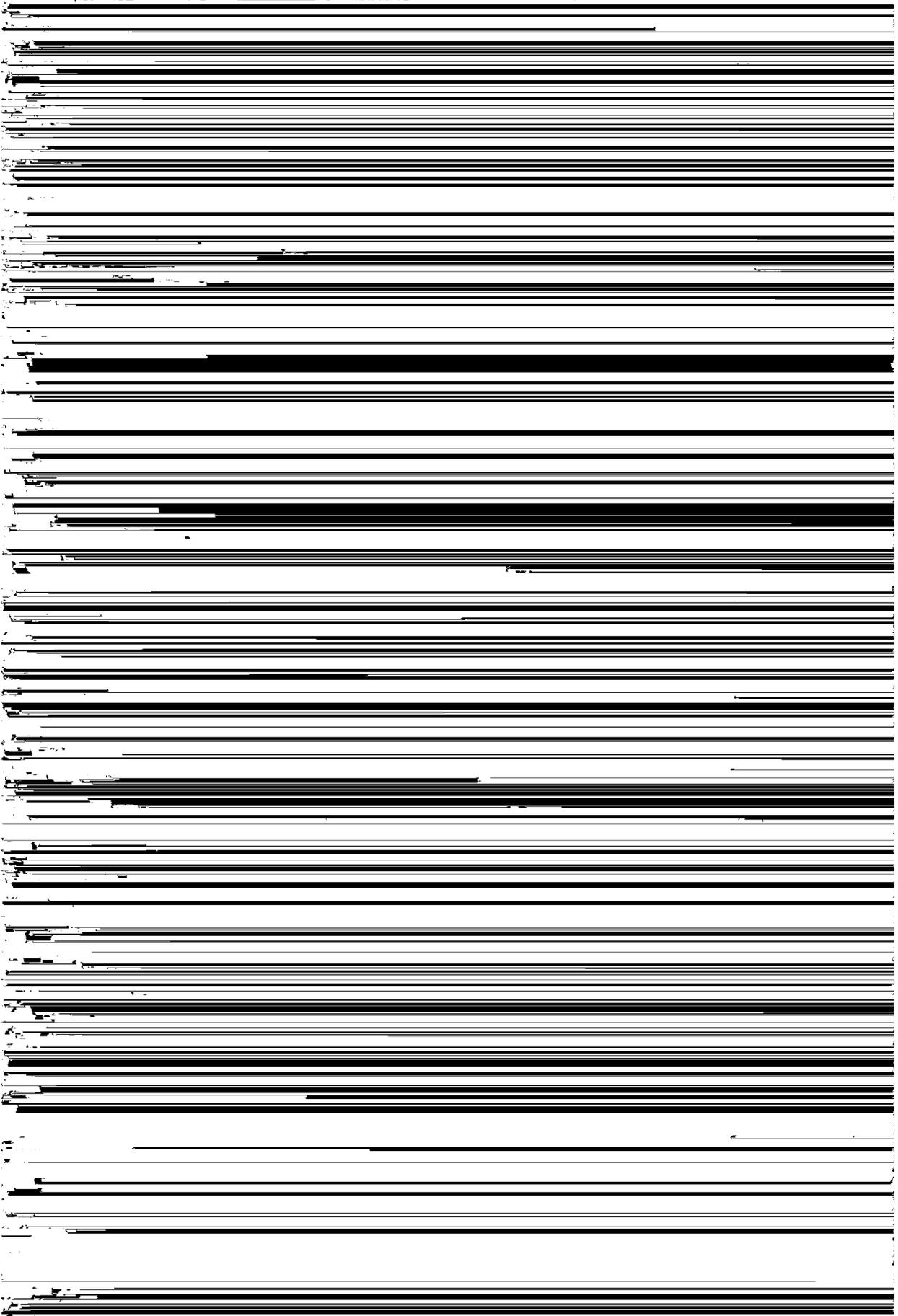
Map A1 illustrates the Commission's proposed warding arrangements in the town of Berwick.

Map A2 illustrates the proposed boundaries for the new wards of Prior and Shielfield.

Map A3 illustrates the proposed boundary change between Elizabeth and Edward wards.

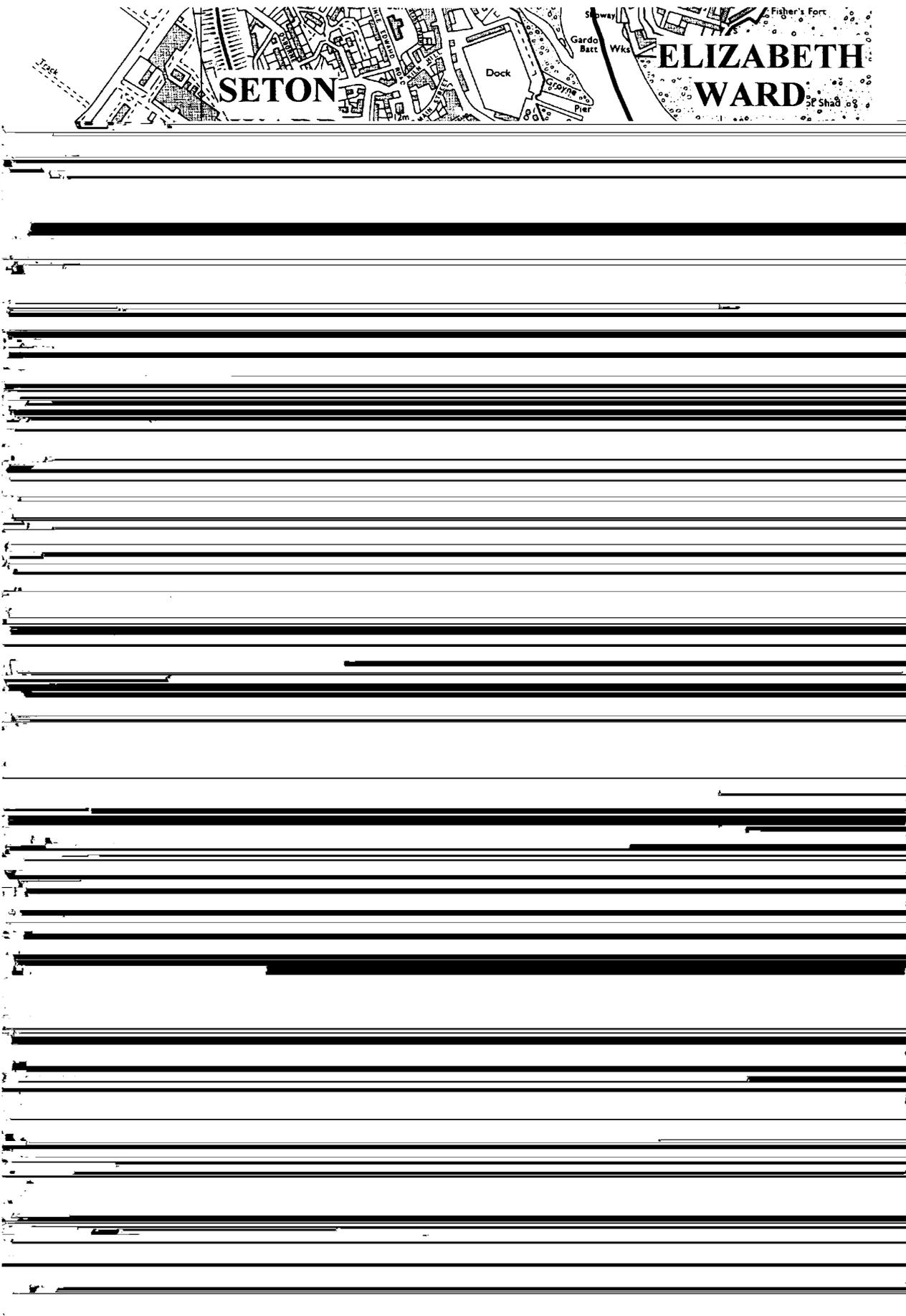
Map A4 illustrates the proposed split of Chatton parish into two parish wards.

*Map A1:
Proposed warding arrangements in the town of Berwick*



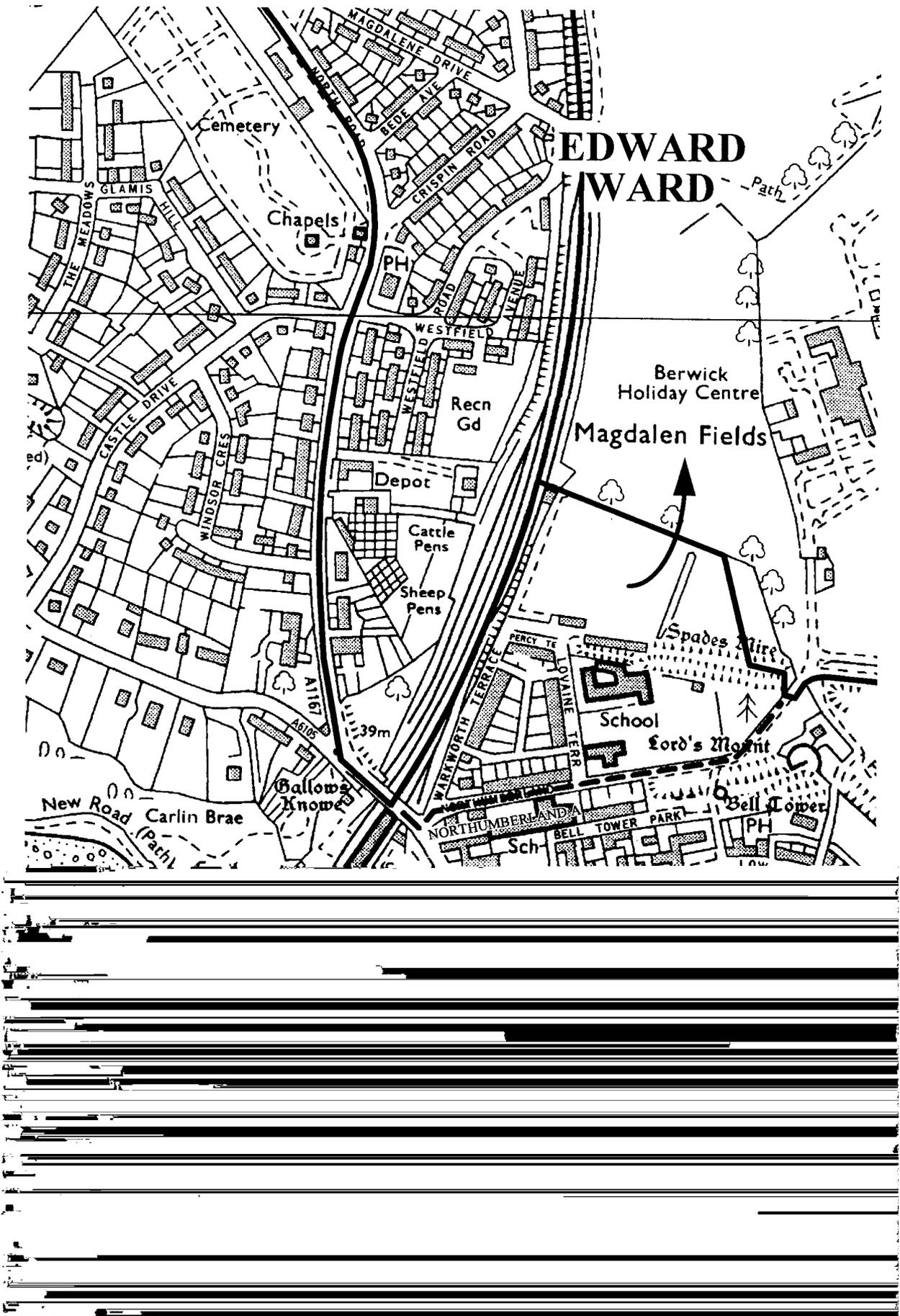
Map A2:

Proposed boundaries for the new wards of Prior and Shielfield in the town of Berwick

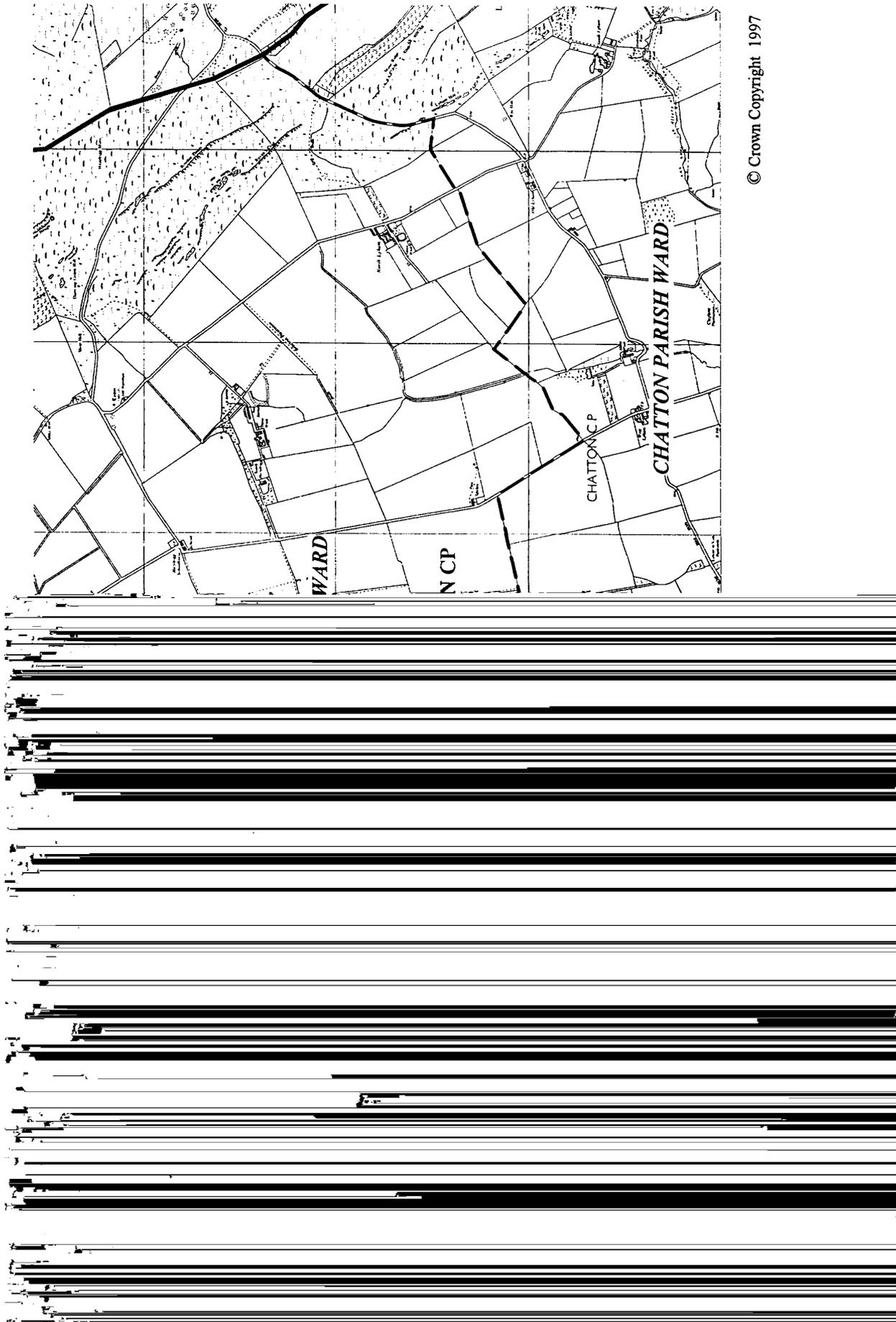


Map A3:

Proposed boundary change between Elizabeth and Edward wards in the town of Berwick



Map A4:
The boundary between the proposed parish wards of Chatton



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APPENDIX B

Draft Recommendations for Berwick-upon-Tweed

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

Ward name	Constituent areas
1 Bamburgh	Bamburgh ward (the parishes of Bamburgh and Easington); Beadnell ward (part - the parish of Adderstone with Lucker); Belford ward (part - the parish ward of Warenton)
2 Belford	Belford ward (part - the parish ward of Belford)
3 Cheviot	Cheviot ward (the parishes of Bewick, Earle, Ilderton, Ingram, Lilburn and Roddam); Chatton ward (part - the parish of Chillingham and the parish ward of Chatton)
4 Edward	Edward ward, Elizabeth ward (part)
5 Elizabeth	Elizabeth ward (part)
6 Flodden	Wooler ward (part - the parish of Akeld); Milfield ward (part - the parishes of Branxton, Carham, Kilham and Kirknewton)
7 Ford	Ford ward (part - the parish of Ford); Milfield ward (part - the parishes of Ewart and Milfield); Chatton ward (part - the parish of Doddington)
8 Islandshire	<i>Unchanged</i> (the parishes of Ancroft, Holy Island, Kyloe and Ord)
9 Lowick	Belford ward (part - the parish of Middleton); Ford ward (part - the parishes of Bowsden and Lowick); Chatton ward (part - the parish ward of Hetton)
10 Norhamshire	<i>Unchanged</i> (the parishes of Cornhill, Duddo, Horncliffe, Norham, and Shoreswood)
11 North Sunderland and Beadnell	North Sunderland ward (the parish of North Sunderland); Beadnell ward (part - the parishes of Beadnell and Ellingham)
12 Prior	Tower ward (part)
13 Seton	<i>Unchanged</i> (unparished)
14 Shielfield	Tower ward (part)
15 Spittal	<i>Unchanged</i> (unparished)
16 Wooler	Wooler ward (part - the parish of Wooler)

Figure B2:
The Commission's Draft Recommendations for Berwick-upon-Tweed

Ward name	1996				2001 (Projected)		
	Number of councillors	Electorate	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
1 Bamburgh	1	730	730	-3	761	761	-2
2 Belford	1	816	816	8	846	846	9
3 Cheviot	1	858	858	14	866	866	12
4 Edward	2	1,451	726	-4	1,451	726	-7
5 Elizabeth	3	2,087	696	-8	2,138	713	-8
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Totals	29	21,826	—	—	22,509	—	—
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Source: Electorate figures are based on Berwick-upon-Tweed Borough Council's Stage One submission

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The wards of Edward, Elizabeth, Seton, Spittal, Prior and Shielfield are in the Berwick town area.

