

LOCAL
GOVERNMENT
COMMISSION
FOR ENGLAND

FINAL
RECOMMENDATIONS
ON THE FUTURE
ELECTORAL
ARRANGEMENTS FOR
WANSBECK 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 Wansbeck 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 district of Wansbeck 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 Wansbeck should be served by 45 councillors representing 16 wards, and 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 every four years.

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

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

PROFESSOR MALCOLM GRANT
Chairman

SUMMARY

The Commission began a review of Wansbeck 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 Wansbeck 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 district;**
- **six wards vary by more than 20 per cent from the average;**
- **one ward varies by 49 per cent from the average for the district.**

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

- **Wansbeck should be served by 45 councillors, compared with 46 at present;**
- **there should be 16 wards, as at present;**
- **the boundaries of 14 of the existing 16 wards should be modified while two wards should retain their existing boundaries;**
- **one ward (Newbiggin West) should be represented by one councillor fewer than at present;**
- **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 district councillor is as nearly as possible the same, having regard to local circumstances.

- **In all wards the number of electors per councillor would vary by no more than 10 per cent from the district average in 1996.**
- **By 2001 the number of electors per councillor would vary by no more than 10 per cent from the average in all but 2 wards.**

All further correspondence on these recommendations and the matters discussed in this report should be addressed to the Secretary of State for the Environment, 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 Bedlington Central	3	Bedlington Central (part)	Map A2
2 Bedlington East	3	Bedlington East (part); Bedlington Central (part)	Map A2
3 Bedlington West	3	<i>Unchanged</i>	Map 2
4 Bothal	3	Bothal (part)	Map A3 and A4
5 Central	3	Central (part); Bothal (part)	Map A4
6 Choppington	2	Choppington; Guide Post (part)	Map A3
7 College	3	College (part); Seaton (part)	Map A5
8 Guide Post	3	Guide Post (part); Stakeford (part)	Map A3
9 Haydon	3	Haydon; Bothal (part)	Map A3 and A4
10 Hirst	3	<i>Unchanged</i>	Map A4 and A5
11 Newbiggin East	3	Newbiggin East; Newbiggin West (part)	Map A6
12 Newbiggin West	2	Newbiggin West (part)	Map A6
13 Park	3	Park; Central (part); College (part)	Map A4 and A5
14 Seaton	3	Seaton (part)	Map A5
15 Sleekburn	3	Sleekburn; Bedlington East (part)	Map A2
16 Stakeford	2	Stakeford (part)	Map A3

1. INTRODUCTION

1 This report contains the Commission's final recommendations on the electoral arrangements for the district of Wansbeck 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 Wansbeck. 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. 78). 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 people; 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 Wansbeck was in four stages (Figure 2).

6 Stage One commenced on 19 March 1996. The Commission wrote to Wansbeck District 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, Members of Parliament and Members of the European Parliament with constituency interests in the district, 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 District 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 Wansbeck 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 Commission's preliminary conclusions. Again the Commission placed a notice in the local press, issued a press release and invited the District 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 Wansbeck is a compact district of some 25 square miles located in south-east Northumberland. It is a mixture of urban and rural communities, with the largest settlements being the towns of Ashington and Bedlington. There are no parishes in the district. The district takes its name from the River Wansbeck, which runs in a west-east direction through the centre of the district to the North Sea. The area, which until recently was heavily involved in the coal-mining industry, has suffered economic decline and consequently has relatively high levels of unemployment (particularly male unemployment) and other associated social problems.

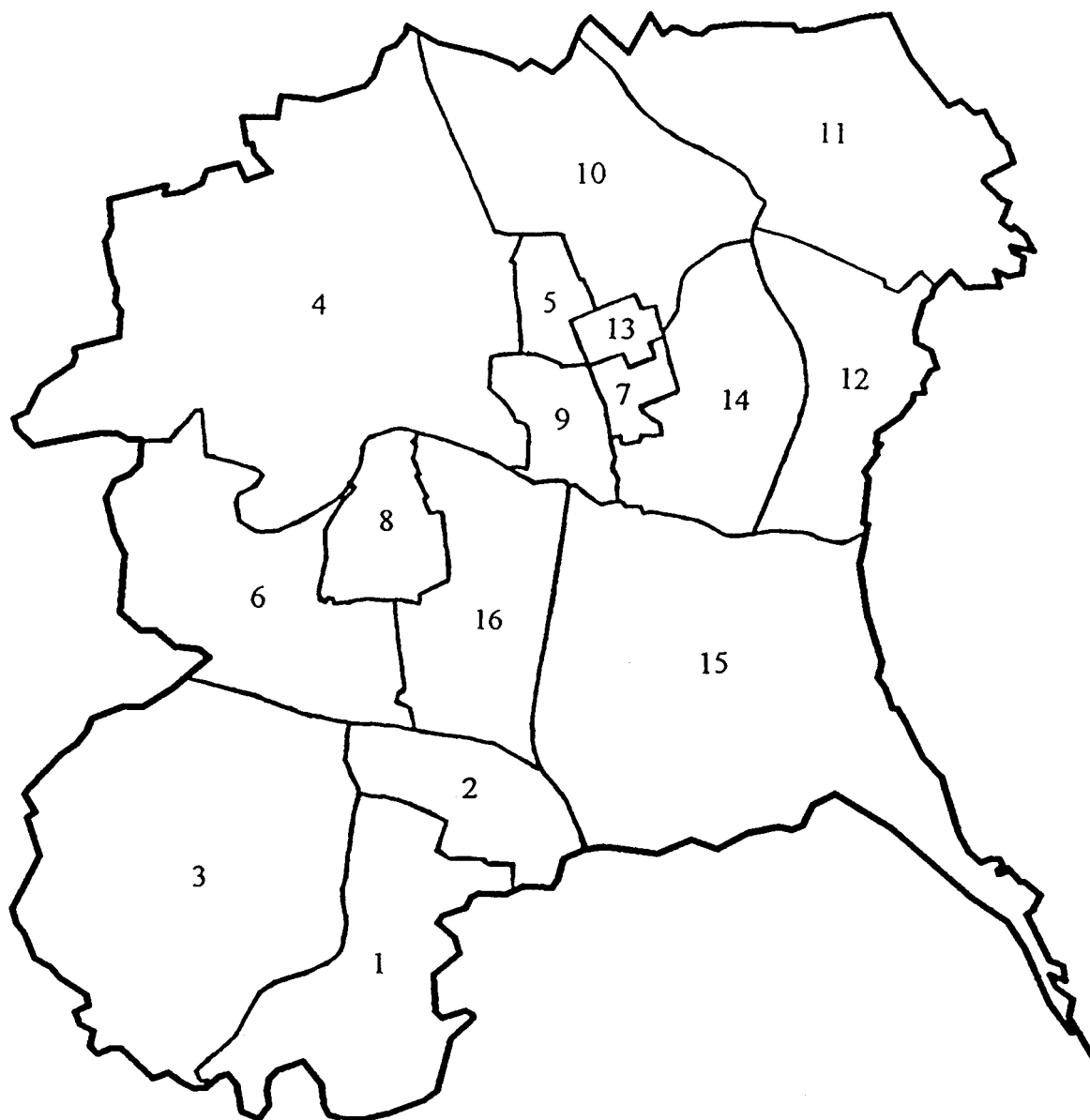
11 Since the last electoral review over two decades ago, there has been considerable housing development within the district, particularly on the outskirts of the two main towns, which has led to large electoral imbalances in some wards. Electors in the wards of Bothal, Seaton and Bedlington Central, for example, have become comparatively under-represented on the District Council; conversely those of Park, Newbiggin West and College are now relatively over-represented. The Council envisages further, but modest, development over the next five years.

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

13 The current electorate (February 1996) of the district is 48,568, which is projected by the District Council to increase by more than a thousand over the next five years. At present, the Council has 46 members who are elected from 16 wards (Map 1 and Figure 3). Fourteen of the sixteen wards are each represented by three councillors; the other two wards elect two members each. The whole Council is elected every four years, the same as for the other district councils in Northumberland, with the date of the next district council elections being May 1999.

14 At present each councillor represents an average of 1,056 electors, which the Council forecasts will increase to 1,080 by the year 2001 (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 11 of the 16 wards varies by more than 10 per cent from the district average; six wards vary by more than 20 per cent, with one of those - Bothal - being nearly 50 per cent above the average.

Map 1:
Existing Wards in Wansbeck



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Key To Wards

- | | | | | | |
|---|--------------------|----|----------------|----|----------------|
| 1 | Bedlington Central | 7 | College | 12 | Newbiggin West |
| 2 | Bedlington East | 8 | Guide Post | 13 | Park |
| 3 | Bedlington West | 9 | Haydon | 14 | Seaton |
| 4 | Bothal | 10 | Hirst | 15 | Sleekburn |
| 5 | Central | 11 | Newbiggin East | 16 | Stakeford |
| 6 | Choppington | | | | |

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 Bedlington Central	3	4,046	1,349	28	4,144	1,381	28
2 Bedlington East	3	3,298	1,099	4	3,305	1,102	2
3 Bedlington West	3	3,405	1,135	7	3,751	1,250	16
4 Bothal	3	4,728	1,576	49	4,785	1,595	48
5 Central	3	2,584	861	-18	2,584	861	-20
6 Choppington	2	1,830	915	-13	1,860	930	-14
7 College	3	2,491	830	-21	2,493	831	-23
8 Guide Post	3	3,085	1,028	-3	3,231	1,077	0
9 Haydon	3	2,779	926	-12	2,818	939	-13
10 Hirst	3	2,956	985	-7	2,979	993	-8
11 Newbiggin East	3	2,947	982	-7	3,113	1,038	-4
12 Newbiggin West	3	2,413	804	-24	2,413	804	-25
13 Park	3	2,372	791	-25	2,372	791	-27
14 Seaton	3	4,324	1,441	37	4,426	1,475	37
15 Sleekburn	3	2,785	928	-12	2,865	955	-12
16 Stakeford	2	2,525	1,263	20	2,527	1,264	17
Totals	46	48,568	—	—	49,666	—	—
Averages	—	—	1,056	—	—	1,080	—

Source: Electorate figures are based on Wansbeck 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 1996 electors in Haydon ward are relatively over-represented by 12 per cent, while electors in Stakeford are relatively under-represented by 20 per cent. Figures have been rounded to the nearest whole number.

3. DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS

¹⁵ During Stage One, the Commission received a submission from Wansbeck District Council proposing a scheme for future electoral arrangements in the district. The only other submission received was from the Wansbeck Constituency Conservative Association. 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 Wansbeck in Northumberland*. The Commission proposed that Wansbeck should be served by 45 councillors, representing 16 wards. It also recommended:

- (a) in the Ashington area, ward boundary changes affecting the Bothal, Central, College, Haydon, Park and Seaton wards;
- (b) in the Bedlington area, boundary changes between the Bedlington Central and Bedlington East wards, and between the Bedlington East and Sleekburn wards;
- (c) in the centre of the district, ward boundary changes between Choppington and Guide Post, and between Guide Post and Stakeford;
- (d) in the town of Newbiggin-by-the-Sea, that the ward of Newbiggin West be served by two rather than three councillors.

Draft Recommendation

Wansbeck District Council should comprise 45 councillors, serving 16 wards. The whole Council should continue to be elected together every four years.

¹⁶ The Commission's proposals would have resulted in significant improvements in electoral equality, with the number of electors per councillor in 13 of the 16 wards varying by no more than 10 per cent from the average. By 2001, the number of electors per councillor was projected to vary by no more than 10 per cent from the average in 12 wards.

¹⁷ The Commission's draft recommendations are summarised in Appendix B.

4. RESPONSES TO CONSULTATION

18 During the consultation on the Commission's draft recommendations report, two submissions were received.

Wansbeck District Council

19 Wansbeck District Council broadly accepted the majority of wards proposed in the Commission's draft recommendations. The Council concurred with the recommendations insofar as they would affect wards in the towns of Ashington and Bedlington. However, having originally (during Stage One) proposed no change for the wards of Choppington, Guide Post and Stakeford, the Council stated that it would, ideally, still prefer that option. Nevertheless, it expressed the view that the Commission's draft recommendations for modifications to the boundaries of those wards were "broadly acceptable".

20 However, the Council "disagreed fundamentally" with the Commission's draft recommendations for the Newbiggin-by-the-Sea area, specifically the proposal to reduce the representation in Newbiggin West from three members to two. The Council contended that "extra pressures are placed on ward councillors in Newbiggin due to the concentration of problems in [the] area". Evidence was submitted which sought to demonstrate that "Newbiggin is consistently in the highest ranking in respect of deprivation and poverty indicators". The Commission was asked to re-consider its draft recommendations in the light of this evidence, and to recommend the retention of three councillors in each of the two Newbiggin wards.

Wansbeck Constituency Conservative Association

21 Wansbeck Constituency Conservative Association expressed its disappointment that the Commission had not recommended single-member wards across the district, but acknowledged that the draft recommendations would improve the electoral imbalances which presently exist. It therefore supported the draft recommendations.

5. ANALYSIS AND FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS

22 As indicated previously, the Commission's prime objective in considering the most appropriate electoral arrangements for Wansbeck 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 to councillors being "as nearly as may be, the same in every ward of the district or borough".

23 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.

24 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. 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", but variations in excess of plus or minus 20 per cent were generally accepted only in very exceptional circumstances.

25 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.

26 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

27 The District Council submitted electorate forecasts for the year 2001, projecting an increase in the electorate of around 2 per cent over the five-year period, from 48,568 to 49,666. The Council 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 changes in electorate that will arise. Advice from the District Council on the likely effect on electorates of ward boundary changes has been obtained. 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 reasonably be made at this time.

Council Size

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

29 Wansbeck District Council is at present served by 46 councillors. The Council proposed no change to this number 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 of 45 members. At Stage Three, Wansbeck District Council, by virtue of its preference for six councillors (rather than five) for the town of Newbiggin, maintained its view that a council size of 46 would be more appropriate. However, as the next chapter explains, the Commission does not concur with the District Council's view, and has not been persuaded to move away from its draft recommendation for a council size of 45.

Electoral Arrangements

30 Having considered the representations received during both Stage One and Stage Three of the review, and all other evidence available to it, the Commission has further considered its draft recommendations. For ease of reference the following areas are covered in turn:

- (a) the Ashington area;
- (b) the Bedlington area;
- (c) the Choppington, Guide Post and Stakeford area;
- (d) the Newbiggin-by-the-Sea area.

Ashington

31 In its consultation report, the Commission adopted as its draft recommendations the District Council's proposals for the seven wards in or around the town of Ashington. These wards are Bothal, Central, College, Haydon, Hirst, Park and Seaton. The Commission considered that the proposals would produce a good level of electoral equality. The number of electors per councillor in six of those wards - Bothal, Central, College, Haydon, Hirst and Seaton - would vary from the district average by less than 10 per cent, a good level of electoral equality which was forecast to be maintained by the year 2001. However, the Commission sought further information on how the electoral variance in the Park ward (11 per cent in 1996 increasing to 13 per cent by 2001) might be improved.

32 During Stage Three, the District Council broadly supported the Commission's draft recommendations insofar as they would affect Ashington. However, the Council opposed any change to the Commission's draft recommendation for Park ward. In referring to the possibility of a boundary change with the neighbouring Central ward, an issue raised by the Commission in its draft recommendations report, the Council commented that "this is a densely populated area of terraced houses where the main divisions of houses [are] the cross avenues and to alter these would lead to confusion... [The Council] would not wish to see the boundary line altered from that proposed [in the draft recommendations]".

33 The Commission had stated in its draft recommendations report: "Based upon the evidence so far available to it, the Commission is content to put forward for consultation the Council's warding proposals for Ashington... [but it] believes that in such an urban setting, it may well be possible to improve electoral equality without any adverse effects on the statutory criteria by modifications to certain ward boundaries". The Commission has now had an opportunity to consider the matter further. Based on information subsequently provided by the Council, and viewed at first hand by Commission officers, the Commission has concluded that a relatively minor boundary change between the Park and Central wards, affecting 332 electors, would improve electoral equality in that area while not adversely affecting the statutory criteria.

34 The boundary change, shown in detail at Appendix A (Map A4) would improve electoral equality in Park ward; it would have just 1 per cent from the district average number of electors per councillor on 1996 figures, rising to 3 per cent from the average by 2001. Central ward would have 3 per cent from the average, rising to 5 per cent by 2001.

35 The Commission has therefore decided to confirm as final its draft recommendations for Ashington, subject to the boundary modification, as described, between Central and Park wards. All seven wards in this area would have electoral variances of under 10 per cent on 1996 figures, with this level of equality projected to be maintained by 2001.

Bedlington

36 In its consultation report, the Commission adopted as its draft recommendation the District

Council's proposals for the four wards in and around the town of Bedlington. In the Commission's view, the proposals would produce a reasonable level of electoral equality. The number of electors per councillor in each of the wards of Bedlington East, Bedlington West and Sleekburn would vary from the district average by less than 10 per cent in 1996. It was forecast that Bedlington West would have a variance of 13 per cent by the year 2001, but that the other two wards would remain below 10 per cent. The Commission considered that the projected inequality in Bedlington West ward (caused by likely housing development in that area of the town) was unavoidable on the grounds that any alteration to its boundary - necessarily with Bedlington Central - would have the effect of simply transferring the imbalance to that neighbouring ward.

37 The Commission adopted the Council's proposal for Bedlington Central ward, which would produce an electoral variance of 11 per cent, both on 1996 and 2001 figures. As with the Park ward in Ashington (see above), the Commission invited further views and information as to how electoral equality might be further improved in the Bedlington area.

38 During Stage Three, the District Council expressed the view that "the Commission's proposals are in line with the Council's submission and there are no further comments to make". However, further information provided by the District Council leads the Commission to conclude that improved electoral equality can be achieved by relatively minor modifications to certain ward boundaries, without adversely effecting the statutory criteria.

39 By transferring a larger number of electors than proposed in its draft recommendations between Bedlington Central and Bedlington East, and between Bedlington East and Sleekburn, improved electoral equality can be achieved between those wards. Officers from the Commission have visited the areas concerned to assess the impact the new boundaries might have on local ties.

40 Map A2 in Appendix A illustrates the Commission's final recommendations for boundary changes between the wards. These changes produce electoral variances of within 10 per cent on 1996 electorate figures for all four Bedlington wards - Central, East, West and Sleekburn - with only Bedlington West, for the reasons described above, forecast to be more than 10 per cent from the average (13 per cent) by 2001.

Choppington, Guide Post and Stakeford

41 In its draft recommendations report, the Commission put forward proposals that would produce electoral variances of less than 10 per cent in the three wards of Choppington, Guide Post and Stakeford on the basis of 1996 figures, with only Guide Post forecast to be more than 10 per cent from the average by the year 2001.

42 The draft recommendations involved modifications to the boundaries between the wards and, although the District Council had originally proposed no change for that part of the district, it commented at Stage Three that the Commission's draft recommendations were "broadly acceptable". No other comments were received. The Commission has therefore decided to confirm its draft recommendations as final. Details of the boundary changes between the wards are shown in Appendix A at Map A3.

Newbiggin-by-the-Sea

43 The Commission concluded in its draft recommendations report that the town of Newbiggin-by-the-Sea (the wards of Newbiggin East and Newbiggin West) merited five councillors in total, rather than the present six (in two three-member wards) as preferred by the District Council. The Commission therefore proposed that the present wards of Newbiggin West and Newbiggin East be represented by two and three councillors respectively. However, it also expressed the view that electoral equality might be further improved by modifying the boundary between the two wards.

44 Wansbeck District Council opposed the Commission's proposal during Stage Three, contending that six members for the area (rather than five) should be retained, and cited a number of reasons for holding this view. In particular, the Commission was informed that Newbiggin has a higher than average number of Council properties (resulting in councillors receiving a higher than average number of queries), a higher than average number of single-parent families (who would be likely to require support from their elected representatives) and receives a number of seasonal visitors to a local caravan park, which may create an increase in workload for elected members.

45 The Commission stated in its draft recommendations report that it had carefully considered the Council's case for departing from electoral equality in the Newbiggin area. It

concluded then - and maintains the view - that its statutory requirements could be better satisfied by replacing the two present three-member wards with one two-member and one three-member ward. While the Commission fully acknowledges the issues raised by the District Council, it does not consider that such factors justify an electoral 'weighting' for the Newbiggin area.

46 On the basis of evidence available at that time, the Commission concluded that it should put forward for consultation the retention of the present boundary between the two wards. However, it expressed concern in its draft recommendations report that, under its scheme, the present boundary between the two wards would result in Newbiggin East ward being over-represented (by 9 per cent) and Newbiggin West being under-represented (by 12 per cent). The Commission therefore invited further information on how improved electoral equality might be achieved.

47 Having received more detailed electoral data from the District Council, the Commission has concluded that a modification to the present boundary, involving the transfer of 181 electors from Newbiggin West ward to Newbiggin East, would significantly improve electoral equality while not adversely affecting the statutory criteria. Again, Commission officers have visited the affected area.

48 The number of electors per councillor in both wards would vary by 3 per cent from the district average initially, improving to 1 per cent in 2001. The two modified wards of Newbiggin West and Newbiggin East are therefore put forward as final recommendations; the proposed boundary change is illustrated in Map A6 at Appendix A.

Electoral Cycle

49 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 from either the District Council or the Wansbeck Constituency Conservative Association, although the Conservatives had expressed a general preference for whole-council elections in their Stage One submission. The Commission has therefore decided to confirm its draft recommendation as final.

Conclusions

50 Having considered all the evidence and representations it has received on its draft recommendations, the Commission has concluded that there should be a decrease in council size from 46 to 45; that there should be 16 wards as at present; that elections should remain on a whole-council basis; and that the boundaries of all but two 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.

51 As Figure 4 shows, the Commission's recommendations would result in a reduction from 11 to zero in the number of wards where the number of electors per councillor varies by more than 10 per cent from the average, with just two projected to be more than 10 per cent from the average by 2001. Under these proposals, the average number of electors per councillor would rise from 1,056 to 1,079 (on 1996 figures). The Commission concludes that its recommendations would best meet the need for electoral equality, having regard to the statutory criteria.

Final Recommendation

Wansbeck District Council should comprise 45 councillors serving 16 wards, as detailed and named in Figures 1 and 5, Map 2 and Appendix A. The whole Council should continue to be elected every four years.

*Figure 4:
Comparison of Current and Recommended Arrangements*

	1996 electorate		2001 projected electorate	
	Current arrangements	Final recommendations	Current arrangements	Final recommendations
Number of councillors	46	45	46	45
Number of wards	16	16	16	16
Average number of electors per councillor	1,056	1,079	1,080	1,104
Number of wards with a variance more than 10 per cent from the average	11	0	12	2
Number of wards with a variance more than 20 per cent from the average	6	0	6	0

Map 2:
The Commission's Final Recommendations for Wansbeck



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Key To Wards

- | | | |
|----------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| 1 Bedlington Central | 7 College | 12 Newbiggin West |
| 2 Bedlington East | 8 Guide Post | 13 Park |
| 3 Bedlington West | 9 Haydon | 14 Seaton |
| 4 Bothal | 10 Hirst | 15 Sleekburn |
| 5 Central | 11 Newbiggin East | 16 Stakeford |
| 6 Choppington | | |

Figure 5:
The Commission's Final Recommendations for Wansbeck

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 Bedlington Central	3	3,221	1,074	-1	3,319	1,106	0
2 Bedlington East	3	3,531	1,177	9	3,538	1,179	7
3 Bedlington West	3	3,405	1,135	5	3,751	1,250	13
4 Bothal	3	3,384	1,128	5	3,441	1,147	4
5 Central	3	3,154	1,051	-3	3,154	1,051	-5
6 Choppington	2	2,155	1,078	0	2,331	1,166	6
7 College	3	3,165	1,055	-2	3,167	1,056	-4
8 Guide Post	3	2,961	987	-9	2,961	987	-11
9 Haydon	3	3,221	1,074	-1	3,260	1,087	-2
10 Hirst	3	2,956	985	-9	2,979	993	-10
11 Newbiggin East	3	3,128	1,043	-3	3,294	1,098	-1
12 Newbiggin West	2	2,232	1,116	3	2,232	1,116	1
13 Park	3	3,203	1,068	-1	3,203	1,068	-3
14 Seaton	3	3,151	1,050	-3	3,253	1,084	-2
15 Sleekburn	3	3,377	1,126	4	3,457	1,152	4
16 Stakeford	2	2,324	1,162	8	2,326	1,163	5
Totals	45	48,568	—	—	49,666	—	—
Averages	—	—	1,079	—	—	1,104	—

Source: Electorate figures are based on Wansbeck 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, electors in Hirst ward would be relatively over-represented by 9 per cent on 1996 figures, while those of Stakeford would be relatively under-represented by 8 per cent. Figures have been rounded to the nearest whole number.

6. NEXT STEPS

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

53 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 after the date that the Commission's recommendations are submitted to the Secretary of State.

54 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 Wansbeck: Detailed Mapping

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

Map A1 acts as a locational reference for the proposed ward boundary changes as set out in detail in Maps A2 to A6.

Map A2 illustrates the proposed boundary changes between the wards of Bedlington Central, Bedlington East, and Sleekburn.

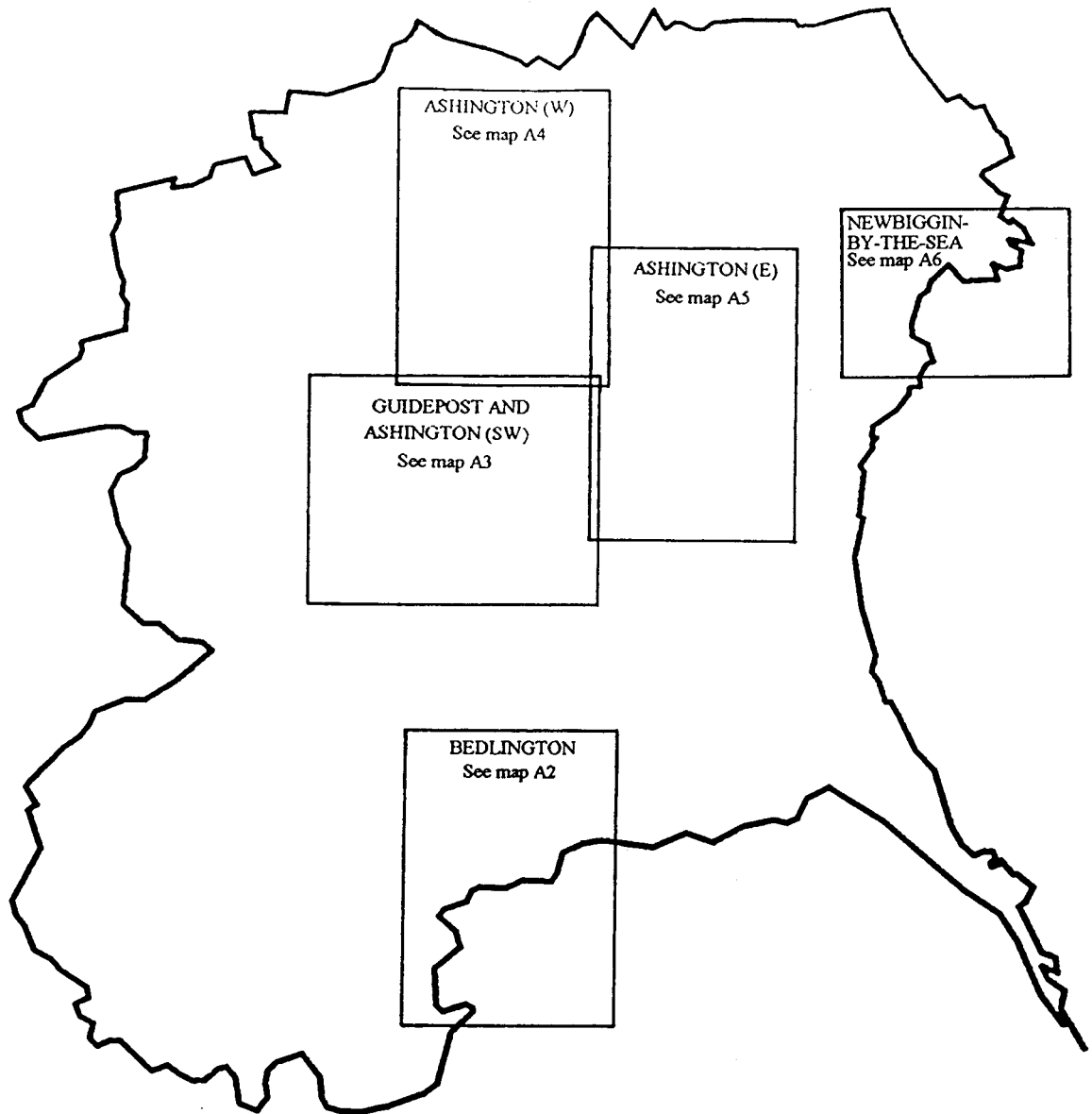
Map A3 illustrates the proposed boundary changes between the wards of Guide Post, Choppington and Stakeford, and between the wards of Bothal and Haydon.

Map A4 illustrates the proposed boundary changes between the wards of Bothal, Central and Park.

Map A5 illustrates the proposed boundary changes between the wards of College, Park and Seaton.

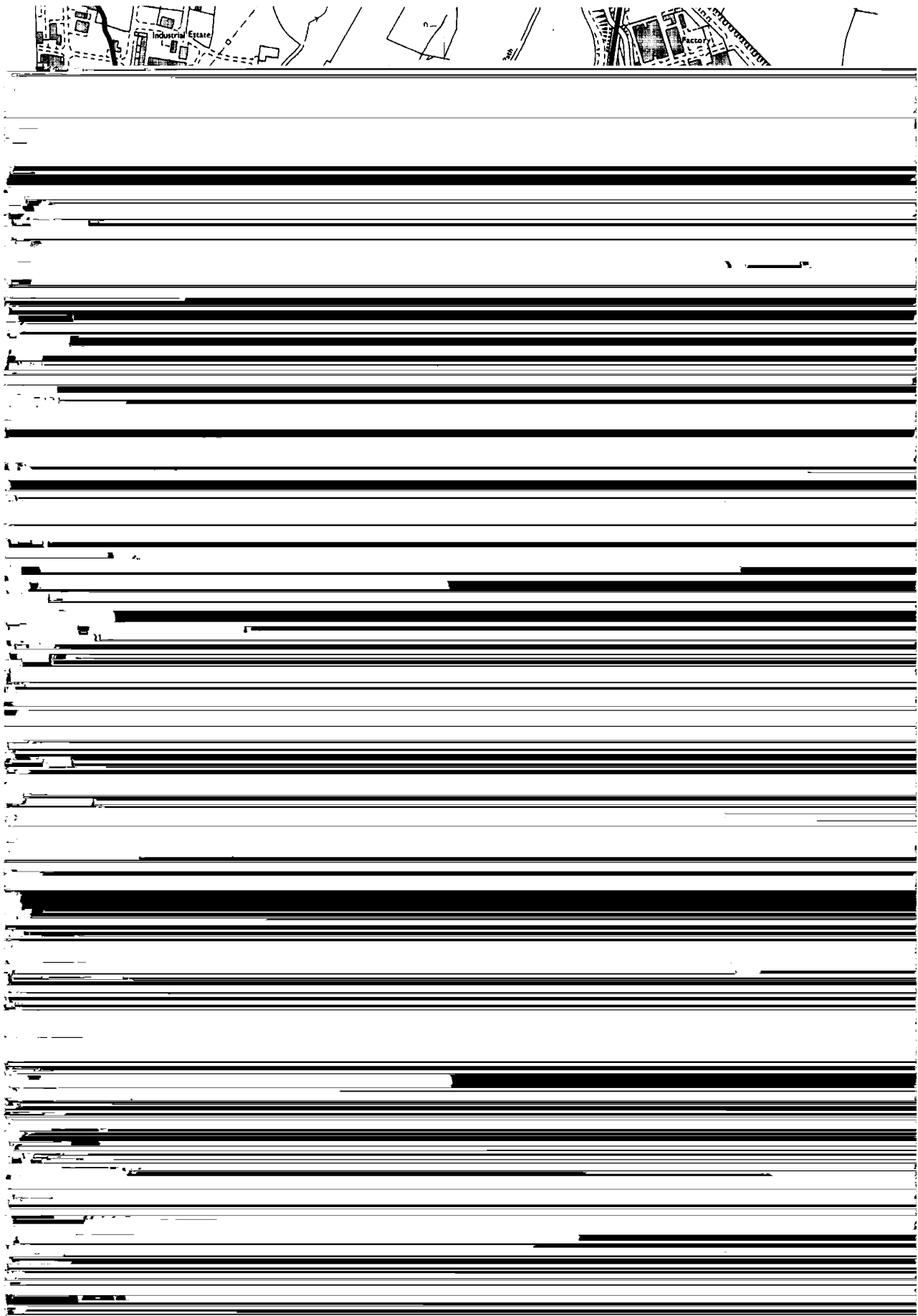
Map A6 illustrates the proposed boundary change between the wards of Newbiggin East and Newbiggin West.

Map A1:
The Commission's Final Recommendations for Wansbeck: Key Map

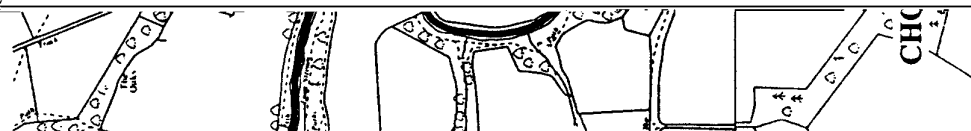
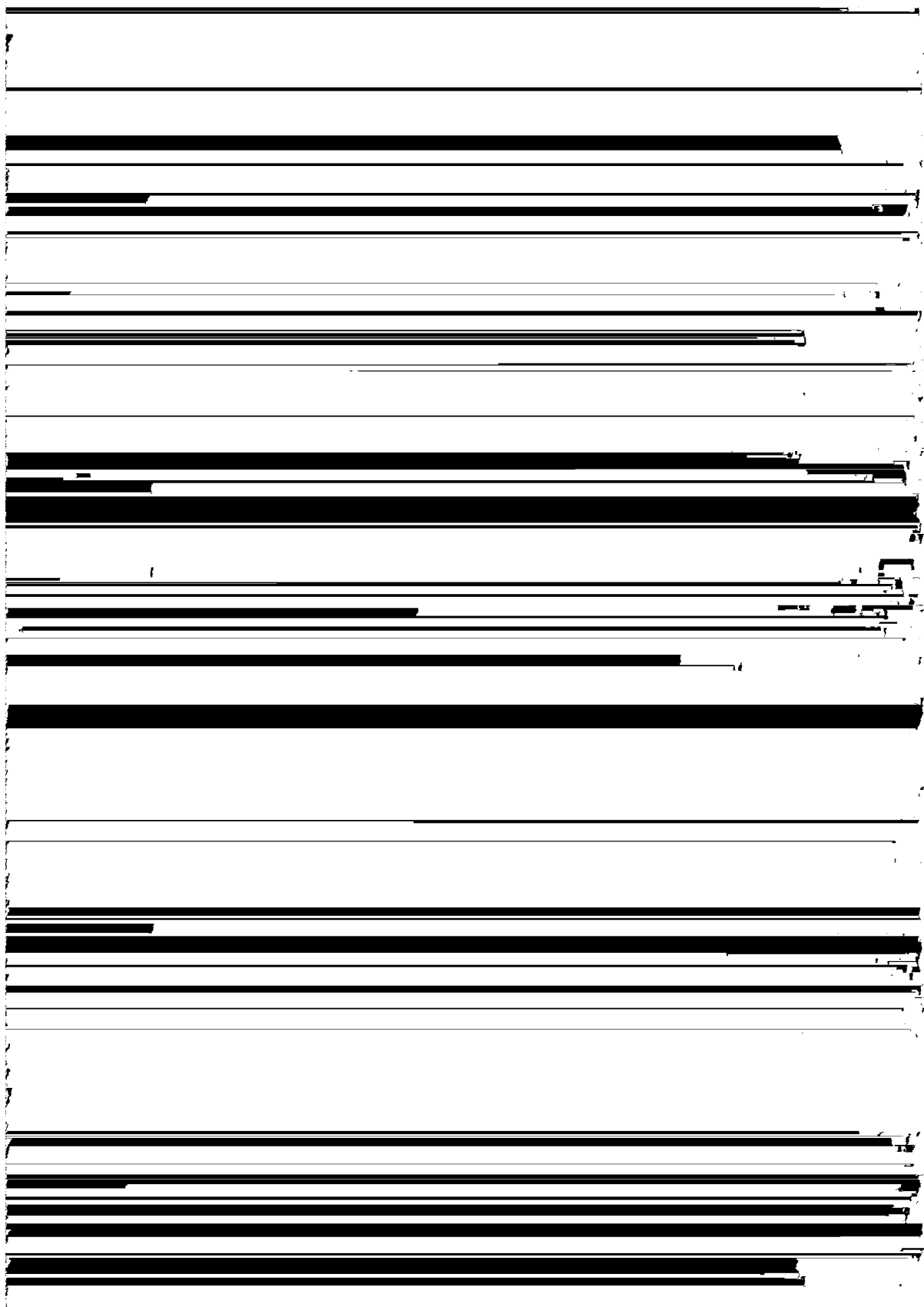


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*Map A2:
The Commission's Final Recommendations for Bedlington*

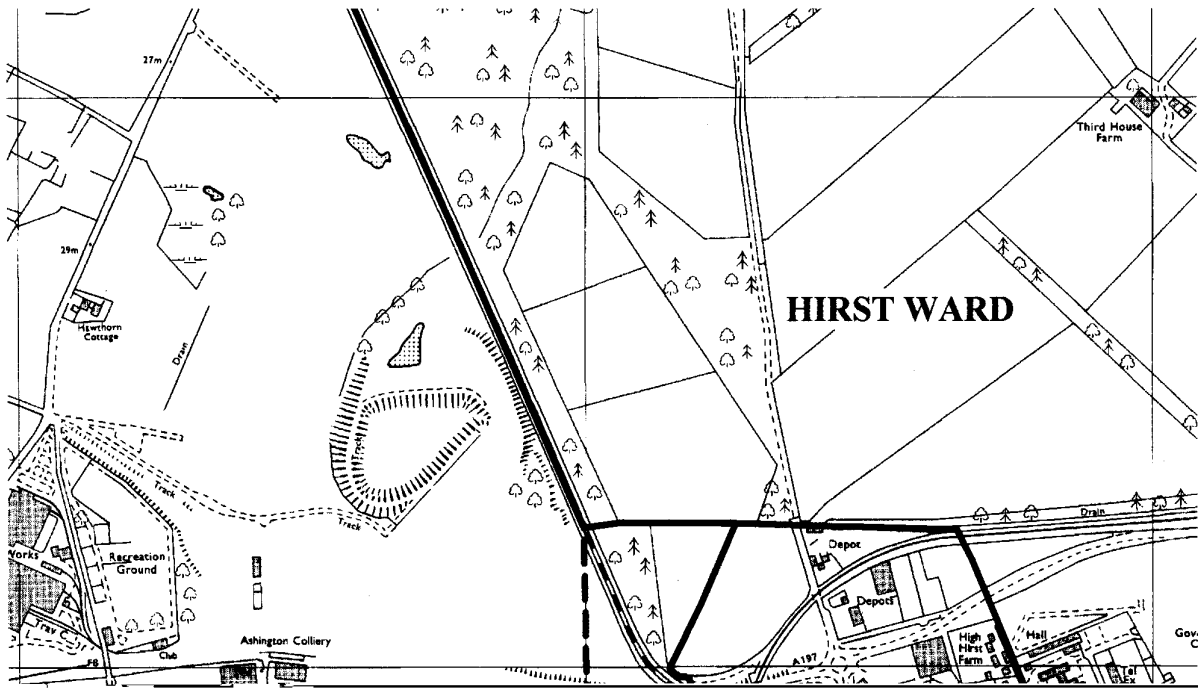


Map A3:
The Commission's Final Recommendations for Guide Post and Ashington (South West)



KEY
EXIS
PRO

Map A4:
The Commission's Final Recommendations for Ashington (West)

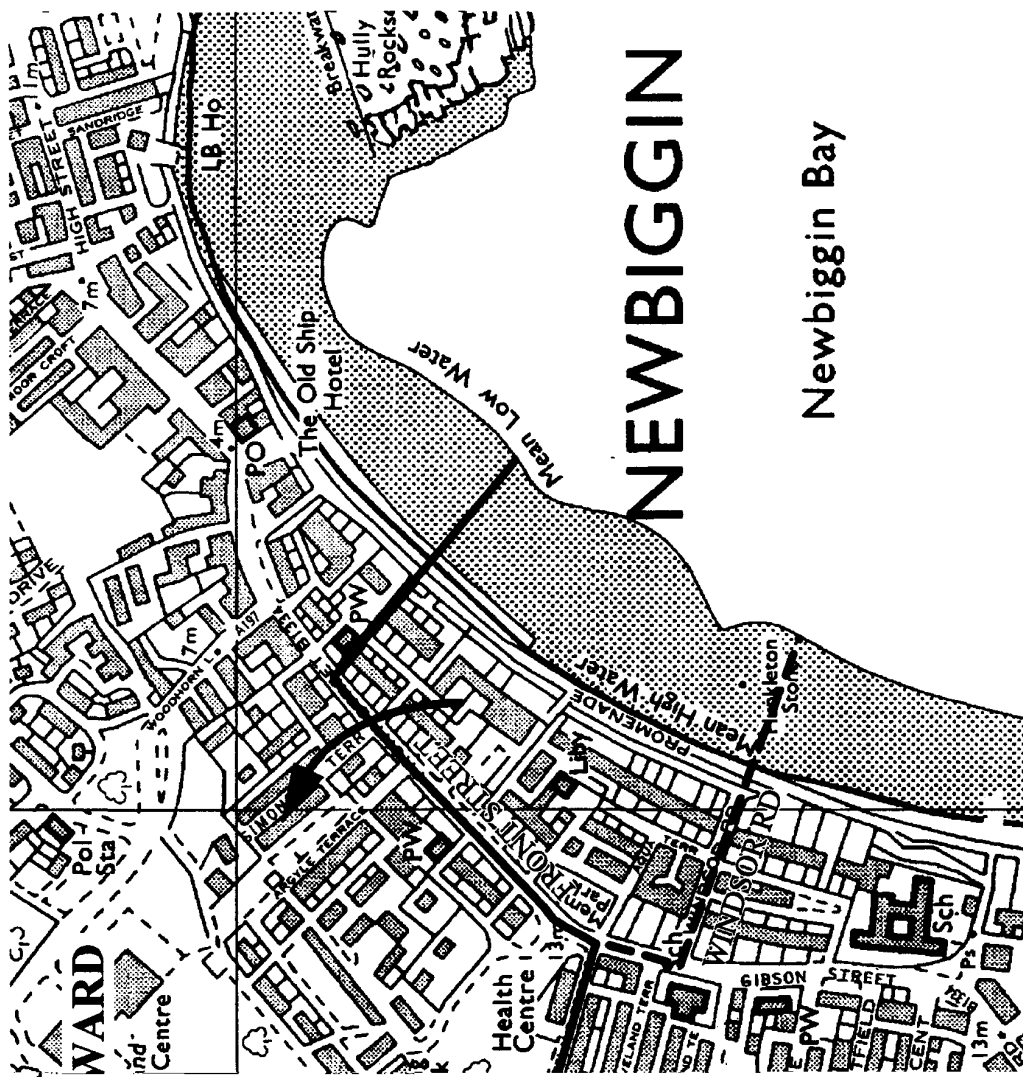


Map A5:
The Commission's Final Recommendations for Ashington (East)



Map A6:

The Commission's Final Recommendations for Newbiggin-by-the-Sea



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APPENDIX B

Draft Recommendations for Wansbeck

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

Ward name	Constituent areas
1 Bedlington Central	Bedlington Central (part)
2 Bedlington East	Bedlington East (part); Bedlington Central (part)
3 Bedlington West	<i>Unchanged</i>
4 Bothal	Bothal (part)
5 Central	Central; Bothal (part)
6 Choppington	Choppington; Guide Post (part)
7 College	College (part); Seaton (part)
8 Guide Post	Guide Post (part); Stakeford (part)
9 Haydon	Haydon; Bothal (part)
10 Hirst	<i>Unchanged</i>
11 Newbiggin East	<i>Unchanged</i>
12 Newbiggin West	<i>Unchanged</i>
13 Park	Park; College (part)
14 Seaton	Seaton (part)
15 Sleekburn	Sleekburn; Bedlington East (part)
16 Stakeford	Stakeford (part)

Figure B2:
The Commission's Draft Recommendations for Wansbeck

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 Bedlington Central	3	3,579	1,193	11	3,677	1,226	11
2 Bedlington East	3	3,486	1,162	8	3,493	1,164	5
3 Bedlington West	3	3,405	1,135	5	3,751	1,250	13
4 Bothal	3	3,384	1,128	5	3,441	1,147	4
5 Central	3	3,486	1,162	8	3,486	1,162	5
6 Choppington	2	2,155	1,078	0	2,331	1,166	6
7 College	3	3,165	1,055	-2	3,167	1,056	-4
8 Guide Post	3	2,961	987	-9	2,961	987	-11
9 Haydon	3	3,221	1,074	-1	3,260	1,087	-2
10 Hirst	3	2,956	985	-9	2,979	993	-10
11 Newbiggin East	3	2,947	982	-9	3,113	1,038	-6
12 Newbiggin West	2	2,413	1,207	12	2,413	1,207	9
13 Park	3	2,871	957	-11	2,871	957	-13
14 Seaton	3	3,151	1,050	-3	3,253	1,084	-2
15 Sleekburn	3	3,064	1,021	-5	3,144	1,048	-5
16 Stakeford	2	2,324	1,162	8	2,326	1,163	5
Totals	45	48,568	—	—	49,666	—	—
Averages	—	—	1,079	—	—	1,104	—

Source: Electorate figures are based on Wansbeck District Council's Stage One 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, electors in Hirst ward would be relatively over-represented by 9 per cent on 1996 figures, while those of Bedlington East would be relatively under-represented by 8 per cent. Figures have been rounded to the nearest whole number.

