

Final recommendations on the  
future electoral arrangements  
for Wokingham

Report to The Electoral Commission

*June 2002*

© Crown Copyright 2002

Applications for reproduction should be made to: Her Majesty's Stationery Office Copyright Unit.

The mapping in this report is reproduced from OS mapping by The Electoral Commission with the permission of the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office, © Crown Copyright.

Unauthorised reproduction infringes Crown Copyright and may lead to prosecution or civil proceedings.  
Licence Number: GD 03114G.

This report is printed on recycled paper.

Report no: 297

# CONTENTS

	page
WHAT IS THE BOUNDARY COMMITTEE FOR ENGLAND?	5
SUMMARY	7
1 INTRODUCTION	13
2 CURRENT ELECTORAL ARRANGEMENTS	15
3 DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS	19
4 RESPONSES TO CONSULTATION	21
5 ANALYSIS AND FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS	23
6 WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?	41
APPENDIX	
A Final Recommendations for Wokingham: Detailed Mapping	43

The large map inserted at the back of this report illustrates the proposed warding arrangements for the towns of Earley, Wokingham and Woodley.



## WHAT IS THE BOUNDARY COMMITTEE FOR ENGLAND?

The Boundary Committee for England is a committee of The Electoral Commission, an independent body set up by Parliament under the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000. The functions of the Local Government Commission for England were transferred to The Electoral Commission and its Boundary Committee on 1 April 2002 by the Local Government Commission for England (Transfer of Functions) Order 2001 (SI 2001 No 3692). The Order also transferred to The Electoral Commission the functions of the Secretary of State in relation to taking decisions on recommendations for changes to local authority electoral arrangements and implementing them.

Members of the Committee are:

Pamela Gordon (Chair)  
Professor Michael Clarke CBE  
Kru Desai  
Robin Gray  
Joan Jones  
Ann M Kelly  
Professor Colin Mellors

Archie Gall (Director)

We are required by law to review the electoral arrangements of every principal local authority in England. Our aim is to ensure that the number of electors represented by each councillor in an area is as nearly as possible the same, taking into account local circumstances. We can recommend changes to ward boundaries, the number of councillors and ward names. We can also recommend changes to the electoral arrangements of parish and town councils.

This report sets out our final recommendations on the electoral arrangements for the district of Wokingham.



## SUMMARY

The Local Government Commission for England (LGCE) began a review of Wokingham's electoral arrangements on 12 June 2001. It published its draft recommendations for electoral arrangements on 22 January 2002, after which it undertook an eight-week period of consultation. As a consequence of the transfer of functions referred to earlier, it falls to us, the Boundary Committee for England, to complete the work of the LGCE and submit final recommendations to The Electoral Commission.

- **This report summarises the representations received by the LGCE during consultation on its draft recommendations, and contains our final recommendations to The Electoral Commission.**

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

- **in 15 of the 24 wards the number of electors represented by each councillor varies by more than 10 per cent from the average for the district and 11 wards vary by more than 20 per cent;**
- **by 2006 this situation is not expected to improve, with the number of electors per councillor forecast to vary by more than 10 per cent from the average in 15 wards and by more than 20 per cent in 11 wards.**

Our main final recommendations for future electoral arrangements (see Tables 1 and 2 and paragraphs 96-97) are that:

- **Wokingham District Council should have 54 councillors, the same as at present;**
- **there should be 25 wards, instead of 24 as at present;**
- **the boundaries of 21 of the existing wards should be modified, resulting in a net increase of one, and three wards should retain their existing boundaries;**
- **elections should continue to take place by thirds.**

The purpose of these proposals is to ensure that, in future, each district councillor represents approximately the same number of electors, bearing in mind local circumstances.

- **In 20 of the proposed 25 wards the number of electors per councillor would vary by no more than 10 per cent from the district average.**
- **This improved level of electoral equality is forecast to continue, with the number of electors per councillor in all wards expected to vary by no more than 10 per cent from the average for the district in 2006.**

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

- **new warding arrangements and the redistribution of councillors for the parishes of Arborfield, Earley, Finchampstead, Shinfield, Twyford, Wokingham and Woodley.**

All further correspondence on these final recommendations and the matters discussed in this report should be addressed to The Electoral Commission, which will not make an Order implementing them before 18 July 2002:

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

Table 1: Final Recommendations: Summary

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Constituent areas	Map reference
1	Arborfield	1	Part of Arborfield & Newland parish (the proposed Arborfield & Newland parish ward)	Map A2
2	Barkham	1	The parish of Barkham; part of Arborfield & Newland parish (the proposed Garrison parish ward); part of Wokingham parish (the proposed Sandy Bottom parish ward)	Map A2 and Large Map
3	Bulmershe & Whitegates	3	Part of Woodley parish (the proposed Bulmershe parish ward); Whitegates parish	Large Map
4	Charvil	1	<i>Unchanged</i> (the parish of Charvil)	Map 2
5	Coronation	2	Part of Woodley parish (the proposed Coronation Central and Coronation East parish wards)	Large Map
6	Emmbrook	3	Part of Wokingham parish (the proposed Emmbrook North and Emmbrook South parish wards)	Large Map
7	Evençons	3	Part of Wokingham parish (the proposed Evençons East and Evençons West parish wards)	Large Map
8	Finchampstead North	2	Part of Finchampstead parish (the proposed Finchampstead North parish ward)	Map A3
9	Finchampstead South	2	Part of Finchampstead parish (the proposed Finchampstead South parish ward)	Map A3
10	Hawkedon	3	Part of Earley parish (the proposed Cutbush and Hawkedon parish wards)	Large Map
11	Hillside	3	Part of Hillside parish (the proposed Hillside and Radstock parish wards)	Large Map
12	Hurst	1	The parish of St Nicholas Hurst; part of Twyford parish (the proposed Twyford South parish ward)	Map 2
13	Loddon	3	Part of Woodley parish (the proposed Loddon Airfield, Loddon South and Loddon West parish wards)	Large Map
14	Maiden Erlegh	3	Part of Earley parish (the proposed Maiden Erlegh, St Nicholas and Redhatch parish wards)	Large Map
15	Norreys	3	<i>Unchanged</i> (the Norreys parish ward of Wokingham parish)	Large Map
16	Remenham, Wargrave & Ruscombe	2	The parishes of Remenham, Ruscombe and Wargrave	Map 2
17	Shinfield North	1	Part of Shinfield Parish (the proposed Shinfield Rise parish ward)	Map A3
18	Shinfield & Spencers Wood	3	Part of Shinfield Parish (the proposed Grazeley, School and Ryeish parish wards)	Map A4
19	Sonning & Coronation West	1	The parish of Sonning; part of Woodley parish (the proposed Coronation West parish ward)	Large Map
20	South Lake	2	Part of Woodley parish (the proposed South Lake North and South Lake South parish wards)	Large Map

21	Swallowfield	1	Part of Shinfield parish (the proposed Spencers Wood parish ward); the parish of Swallowfield	Map 2
22	Twyford	2	Part of Twyford parish (the proposed Twyford North parish ward)	Map A5
23	Wescott	2	Part of Wokingham parish (the proposed Wescott East and Wescott West parish wards)	Large Map
24	Winnersh	3	<i>Unchanged</i> (the parish of Winnersh)	Large Map
25	Wokingham Without	3	Part of Finchampstead parish (the proposed Lower Wokingham parish ward); the parish of Wokingham Without	Map 2

Notes: 1 The whole district is parished.

2 Map 2 and Appendix A, including the large map in the back of the report, illustrate the proposed wards outlined above.

Table 2: Final Recommendations for Wokingham

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2001)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2006)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
1	Arborfield	1	1,166	1,166	-44	1,944	1,944	-6
2	Barkham	1	2,327	2,327	12	2,250	2,250	8
3	Bulmershe & Whitegates	3	6,527	2,176	4	6,056	2,019	-3
4	Charvil	1	2,200	2,200	6	2,037	2,037	-2
5	Coronation	2	4,252	2,126	2	4,303	2,152	4
6	Emmbrook	3	6,246	2,082	0	6,251	2,084	0
7	Evendons	3	6,515	2,172	4	6,118	2,039	-2
8	Finchampstead North	2	4,216	2,108	1	3,955	1,978	-5
9	Finchampstead South	2	4,303	2,152	3	4,128	2,064	-1
10	Hawkedon	3	6,766	2,255	8	6,299	2,100	1
11	Hillside	3	6,647	2,216	6	6,054	2,018	-3
12	Hurst	1	2,115	2,115	2	2,039	2,039	-2
13	Loddon	3	6,334	2,111	1	6,068	2,023	-3
14	Maiden Erlegh	3	7,204	2,401	15	6,739	2,246	8
15	Norreys	3	6,294	2,098	1	6,262	2,087	1
16	Remenham, Wargrave & Ruscombe	2	4,187	2,094	1	4,179	2,090	1
17	Shinfield North	1	1,763	1,763	-15	2,212	2,212	7
18	Shinfield & Spencers Wood	3	3,773	1,258	-40	6,487	2,162	4
19	Sonning & Coronation West	1	2,225	2,225	7	2,186	2,186	5
20	South Lake	2	4,709	2,355	13	4,165	2,083	0

	<b>Ward name</b>	<b>Number of councillors</b>	<b>Electorate (2001)</b>	<b>Number of electors per councillor</b>	<b>Variance from average %</b>	<b>Electorate (2006)</b>	<b>Number of electors per councillor</b>	<b>Variance from average %</b>
21	Swallowfield	1	1,883	1,883	-10	1,936	1,936	-7
22	Twynford	2	4,386	2,193	5	4,400	2,200	6
23	Wescott	2	4,267	2,134	2	4,050	2,025	-2
24	Winnersh	3	5,950	1,983	-5	6,143	2,048	-1
25	Wokingham Without	3	6,208	2,069	-1	5,806	1,935	-7
	<b>Totals</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>112,463</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>112,067</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>
	<b>Averages</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>2,083</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>2,075</b>	<b>-</b>

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

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

# 1 INTRODUCTION

1 This report contains our final recommendations on the electoral arrangements for the district of Wokingham. The six districts in Berkshire have now been reviewed as part of the programme of periodic electoral reviews (PERs) of all 386 principal local authority areas in England started by the LGCE in 1996. We have inherited that programme, which we currently expect to complete in 2004.

2 This is our first review of the electoral arrangements of Wokingham. Wokingham's last review was carried out by our predecessor, the Local Government Boundary Commission (LGBC), which reported to the Secretary of State in August 1978 (Report no. 282). Since undertaking that review, Wokingham has become a unitary authority (1998). The change in unitary status has led to the loss of 13 county councillors, bringing the total number of councillors for Wokingham from 67 to 54.

3 In making final recommendations to The Electoral Commission, we have had regard to:

- the statutory criteria contained in section 13(5) of the Local Government Act 1992 (as amended by SI 2001 No 3692), i.e. the need to:
  - (a) reflect the identities and interests of local communities;
  - (b) secure effective and convenient local government;
  - (c) achieve equality of representation.

4 Details of the legislation under which the review of Wokingham was conducted are set out in a document entitled *Guidance and Procedural Advice for Local Authorities and Other Interested Parties* (LGCE, fifth edition published in October 2001). This *Guidance* sets out the approach to the review.

5 Our task is to make recommendations on the number of councillors who should serve on a council, and the number, boundaries and names of wards. We can also propose changes to the electoral arrangements for parish and town councils in the district.

6 The broad objective of PERs is to achieve, so far as possible, equal representation across the district as a whole. Schemes which would result in, or retain, an electoral imbalance of over 10 per cent in any ward will have to be fully justified. Any imbalances of 20 per cent or more should only arise in the most exceptional circumstances, and will require the strongest justification.

7 The LGCE were not prescriptive on council size. Insofar as Wokingham is concerned, it started from the assumption that the size of the existing council already secures effective and convenient local government, but were willing to look carefully at arguments why this might not be so. However, the LGCE found it necessary to safeguard against upward drift in the number of councillors, and that any proposal for an increase in council size would need to be fully justified. In particular, it do not accept that an increase in electorate should automatically result in an increase in the number of councillors, nor that changes should be made to the size of a council simply to make it more consistent with the size of other similar councils.

8 This review was in four stages. Stage One began on 12 June 2001, when the LGCE wrote to Wokingham District Council inviting proposals for future electoral arrangements. It also notified Thames Valley Police Authority, the Local Government Association, Berkshire Association of Parish & Town Councils, parish and town councils in the district, the Members of Parliament with constituencies in the district, the Members of the European Parliament for the South East region, and the headquarters of the main political parties. It placed a notice in the local press, issued a press release and invited the District Council to publicise the review

further. The closing date for receipt of representations, the end of Stage One, was 3 September 2001. At Stage Two it considered all the representations received during Stage One and prepared its draft recommendations.

9 Stage Three began on 22 January 2002 with the publication of the LGCE's report, *Draft recommendations on the future electoral arrangements for Wokingham*, and ended on 18 March 2002. During this period it sought comments from the public and other interested parties on its preliminary conclusions. Finally, during Stage Four we reconsidered the draft recommendations in the light of the Stage Three consultation and we now publish the final recommendations.

## 2 CURRENT ELECTORAL ARRANGEMENTS

10 The district of Wokingham is situated 30 miles west of London in central Berkshire. Comprising 17,892 hectares, the district has a population of 146,252 and is entirely parished (17 in total). The town of Wokingham is the largest within the district and, along with the whole of the Thames Valley region, has seen significant economic growth over the last three decades. Wokingham District Council became a unitary authority in 1998.

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

12 The electorate of the district is 112,463 (February 2001). The Council presently has 54 members who are elected from 24 wards, 11 of which are relatively urban in character and the remainder being predominantly rural. Twelve of the wards are each represented by three councillors, six are each represented by two councillors and six are single-member wards. The Council is elected by thirds.

13 At present, each councillor represents an average of 2,083 electors, which the District Council forecasts will decrease to 2,075 by the year 2006 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 15 of the 24 wards varies by more than 10 per cent from the district average, 11 wards by more than 20 per cent and six wards by more than 30 per cent. The worst imbalance is in Redhatch ward where the councillor represents 97 per cent more electors than the district average.

*Map 1: Existing Wards in Wokingham*

Table 3: Existing Electoral Arrangements

Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2001)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2006)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
1 Arborfield	1	1,438	1,438	-31	2,106	2,106	1
2 Barkham	1	1,782	1,782	-14	1,828	1,828	-12
3 Bulmershe	2	3,065	1,533	-26	3,051	1,526	-26
4 Charvil	1	2,200	2,200	6	2,037	2,037	-2
5 Coronation	3	5,859	1,953	-6	5,552	1,851	-11
6 Emmbrook	3	4,749	1,583	-24	4,757	1,586	-24
7 Evendons	3	8,473	2,824	36	8,060	2,687	29
8 Finchampstead North	2	4,569	2,285	10	4,286	2,143	3
9 Finchampstead South	2	4,742	2,371	14	4,549	2,275	10
10 Hurst	1	1,489	1,489	-29	1,411	1,411	-32
11 Little Hungerford	3	8,239	2,746	32	7,862	2,621	26
12 Loddon	3	6,466	2,155	3	6,090	2,030	-2
13 Norreys	3	6,294	2,098	1	6,262	2,087	1
14 Redhatch	3	12,329	4,110	97	11,229	3,743	80
15 Remenham & Wargrave	2	3,394	1,697	-19	3,384	1,692	-18
16 Shinfield	3	5,988	1,996	-4	9,127	3,042	47
17 Sonning	1	1,123	1,123	-46	1,142	1,142	-45
18 South Lake	3	4,709	1,570	-25	4,165	1,388	-33
19 Swallowfield	1	1,431	1,431	-31	1,509	1,509	-27
20 Twyford & Ruscombe	3	5,805	1,935	-7	5,823	1,941	-6
21 Wescott	2	3,935	1,968	-6	3,862	1,931	-7
22 Whitegates	2	3,018	1,509	-28	2,778	1,389	-33

Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2001)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2006)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
23 Winnersh	3	5,950	1,983	-5	6,143	2,048	-1
24 Wokingham Without	3	5,416	1,805	-13	5,054	1,685	-19
<b>Totals</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>112,463</b>	-	-	<b>112,067</b>	-	-
<b>Averages</b>	-	-	<b>2,083</b>	-	-	<b>2,075</b>	-

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

Note: The 'variance from average' column shows by how far, in percentage terms, the number of electors per councillor varies from the average for the district. The minus symbol (-) denotes a lower than average number of electors. For example, in 2001, electors in Redhatch ward were relatively under-represented by 97 per cent, while electors in Sonning ward were relatively over-represented by 46 per cent. Figures have been rounded to the nearest whole number.

### 3 DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS

14 During Stage One the LGCE received 19 representations, including district-wide schemes from the Conservative and Liberal Democrat groups on the Council. In the light of these representations and evidence available, the LGCE reached preliminary conclusions which were set out in our report, *Draft recommendations on the future electoral arrangements for Wokingham*.

15 The LGCE's draft recommendations were based on certain aspects of each district-wide submission. However, to improve electoral equality further and having regard to local community identities and interests, it decided to propose its own warding pattern in a number of areas within the district. It proposed that:

- Wokingham District Council should be served by 54 councillors, as at present, representing 25 wards, one more than at present;
- the boundaries of 21 of the existing wards should be modified, while three wards should retain their existing boundaries;
- there should be new warding arrangements for the parishes of Arborfield, Earley, Finchampstead, Shinfield, Twyford, Wokingham and Woodley.

**Draft Recommendation**

Wokingham District Council should comprise 54 councillors, serving 25 wards. The Council should continue to hold elections by thirds.

16 The LGCE's proposals would have resulted in significant improvements in electoral equality, with the number of electors per councillor in 20 of the 25 wards varying by no more than 10 per cent from the district average. This level of electoral equality was forecast to improve further, with no ward varying by more than 10 per cent from the average in 2006.



## 4 RESPONSES TO CONSULTATION

17 During the consultation on the draft recommendations report, the LGCE received 263 representations. A list of all respondents is available from us on request. All representations may be inspected at our offices and those of Wokingham District Council.

### **Wokingham District Council**

18 The District Council's Working Group, a cross-party group established to develop proposals for the PER, agreed with the draft recommendations for six wards, but could not reach agreement on the remainder of the proposals. It also summarized the Council's options regarding the projected electorate figures and the revised local plan.

### **The Conservative Group**

19 The Conservative Group on the Council (hereafter referred to as the Conservatives) expressed support for the majority of the draft recommendations. However, it proposed alternative arrangements for Shinfield based on alternative electoral forecasts in light of what the Conservative Group considered to be a revised local plan.

### **The Liberal Democrat Group**

20 The Liberal Democrat Group on the District Council (hereafter referred to as the Liberal Democrats) generally supported the draft recommendations in 10 wards, proposed amendments to three wards and disagreed with the remainder of the draft recommendations. It also presented what it considered to be new evidence regarding the projected electorate figures for 2006 and put forward alternative warding proposals for Earley and Shinfield based on this alternative forecast.

### **Parish Councils**

21 Charvil Parish Council, St Nicholas Hurst Parish Council, Remenham Parish Council, Swallowfield Parish Council, Winnersh Parish Council and Wokingham Without Parish Council supported the draft recommendations.

22 Arborfield & Newland Parish Council generally supported the draft recommendations, but proposed amendments to the proposed parish warding. Barkham Parish Council proposed slight modifications to the proposed Barkham ward, while Wokingham Town Council offered no comment to the draft recommendations for Wokingham town.

23 Earley Town Council, Ruscombe Parish Council, Shinfield Parish Council, Sonning Parish Council, Twyford Parish Council and Woodley Town Council all opposed the draft recommendations.

### **Other Representations**

24 A further 245 representations were received in response to the LGCE's draft recommendations from local political groups, local organisations, councillors and residents.

25 The Bracknell Conservative Association supported the draft recommendations for the wards of Finchampstead North, Finchampstead South and Wokingham Without. The Maidenhead Conservative Association supported the draft recommendations, as did both its Hurst and Wargrave & Remenham branches. The Maidenhead Constituency Liberal Democrats proposed a number of amendments to the draft recommendations, while the Earley

& Shinfield Branch Labour Party supported part of the proposals for Shinfield Rise, but opposed the remainder of the proposals for Shinfield and Earley.

26 Councillors Bray, Brown, Cairns, Cockroft, Cowan, Drake, Lewis, Long, Ross and Storry supported the draft recommendations. Councillors Carpenter, Ferris and Rose opposed the draft recommendations. One local resident supported the draft recommendations for Shinfield, while one local resident opposed them. Three local residents supported the draft recommendations for Wokingham town, while two local residents opposed them. One local resident opposed the draft recommendations for Whitegates parish, while three local residents opposed the draft recommendations for Earley. One local resident supported the draft recommendations for Woodley, while one opposed them. Nine local residents opposed the draft recommendations for Sonning. Ten local residents supported the draft recommendations for Charvil, while five local residents supported the draft recommendations for Wargrave. Three local residents supported the draft recommendations for Hurst and six local residents supported the draft recommendations for Ruscombe. However, 110 local residents opposed the draft recommendations for Ruscombe and 70 local residents opposed the draft recommendations for Twyford.

## 5 ANALYSIS AND FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS

27 As described earlier, our prime objective in considering the most appropriate electoral arrangements for Wokingham is, so far as reasonably practicable and consistent with the statutory criteria, to achieve electoral equality. In doing so we have regard to section 13(5) of the Local Government Act 1992 (as amended) – the need to secure effective and convenient local government; reflect the identities and interests of local communities; and secure the matters referred to in paragraph 3(2)(a) of Schedule 11 to the Local Government Act 1972 (equality of representation). Schedule 11 to the Local Government Act 1972 refers to the number of electors per councillor being “as nearly as may be, the same in every ward of the district or borough”.

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

29 It is therefore impractical to design an electoral scheme which results in exactly the same number of electors per councillor in every ward of an authority. There must be a degree of flexibility. However, our approach, in the context of the statutory criteria, is that such flexibility must be kept to a minimum.

30 We accept that the achievement of absolute electoral equality for the authority as a whole is likely to be unattainable. However, we consider that, if electoral imbalances are to be minimised, the aim of electoral equality should be the starting point in any review. We therefore strongly recommend that, in formulating electoral schemes, local authorities and other interested parties should make electoral equality their starting point, and then make adjustments to reflect relevant factors such as community identity and interests. Five-year forecasts of changes in electorate must also be considered and we would aim to recommend a scheme which provides improved electoral equality over this five-year period.

### **Electorate Forecasts**

31 Since 1975 there has been a 40 per cent increase in the electorate of Wokingham district. At Stage One the District Council submitted electorate forecasts for the year 2006, projecting a decrease in the electorate of approximately 1 per cent from 112,463 to 112,067 over the five-year period from 2001 to 2006. However, a number of areas in the district are forecast to experience quite dramatic growth, particularly Shinfield. In order to prepare these forecasts, the Council estimated rates and locations of housing development with regard to structure and local plans, the expected rate of building over the five-year period and assumed occupancy rates. Having accepted that this is an inexact science and, having considered the forecast electorates, the LGCE stated in its draft recommendations report that it was satisfied that they represented the best estimates that could reasonably be made at the time.

32 The LGCE received comments from a number of respondents on the Council's electorate forecasts during Stage Three. The District Council's Working Group report on this matter stated that since the publication of the draft recommendations, Part II of the Inspector's Local Plan Report had been published. According to the Working Group report, the planning report “recommended a number of areas where major development would be acceptable.” The Working Group, having been unable to agree a course of action themselves on either a possible revision of the electorate forecast or where the recommended new developments might definitively take place, presented three options for the LGCE to consider regarding the new planning report:- (a) to adhere to the existing electorate forecast for 2006; (b) to re-allocate likely development to other areas and re-calculate the forecast accordingly; or (c) to

remove a level of projected population from Shinfield and totally exclude it from the electorate forecast across the district.

33 The Working Group report argued that Option B was not possible “as it would be necessary to show sustainable reasons for re-allocating likely development to other areas.” The report noted that the “Inspector’s recommendations are only recommendations for the council to accept or reject” and given that any modifications to the Local Plan would be subject to debate and challenge within the district, “it would be impossible to say...that they were likely to be developed residentially.” The report further stated that Option C might have been viable if only for the fact that no “clear decision had been taken not to provide any of the required housing in Shinfield parish.” Finally, with regard to Option A, the report stated that this option “represents the snapshot taken at the commencement of the review, is the basis on which representations have been submitted to date and...there does not appear to be a compelling reason to depart from it.”

34 The Conservatives stated their belief that the 2006 housing projections “were the best information...available.” However, they presented alternative proposals for Shinfield based on what they considered to be an accepted revised local plan. The Liberal Democrats questioned the validity of the 2006 electorate projections and commented that, based on the 2002 electoral roll, “the overall projection of an electorate in 2006 that is lower than in 2001 is likely to be incorrect.” As a consequence, the Liberal Democrats argue that the 2006 electorate figures for Shinfield in particular are over-estimated given that there is “no indication that the electorate in Shinfield is rising much faster than any other area of the District” and that “it is not valid to argue that housing will be built in Shinfield simply because no decision has yet been taken on where housing will be built.” The Liberal Democrats therefore further stated that the previously mentioned Option B was its favoured option and that the planned development should be reallocated to other areas and the forecast for the whole area should be recalculated.

35 We have noted and carefully considered the evidence presented during Stage Three regarding the electorate forecast and the related issue of the local development plan. We have further noted that the political groups on the Council have not been able to reach agreement on either issue. Given that no definitive decision has been reached by the Council and that the majority of the submissions received were based on the original forecast, we concur with the opinion expressed in paragraph 2.9 of the Working Group Report that there does not appear to be a “compelling reason” to depart from the original forecast and we remain satisfied that they represent the best estimates currently available. While, as in other areas, the situation on the ground in 2006 may not exactly match the forecast, there is no clear evidence to suggest that any other situation is more likely to occur. It is worth noting that, if at a later date, as yet unknown, the situation becomes clearer The Electoral Commission may decide to look again at this area and direct us to conduct a further review.

### **Council Size**

36 As already explained, the LGCE started its review by assuming that the current council size facilitates effective and convenient local government, although we are willing to carefully look at arguments why this might not be the case.

37 In its draft recommendations report the LGCE concurred with both the District Council consultation schemes that the current council size of 54-members be maintained. The Council stated that a council size of 54 was “viewed as the appropriate size to handle the work of the unitary authority and to meet [the] member’s constituency role.”

38 During Stage Three the Liberal Democrats, Shinfield Parish Council and a number of other respondents argued for a 55-member council size. However, no further evidence was presented that supported a 55-member council size and we have not been persuaded to change the draft recommendation for a 54-member council.

## **Electoral Arrangements**

39 The review of Wokingham has been somewhat contentious. Given the political composition of the Council, there has been less consensus than in other reviews, with no completely agreed Council scheme being submitted during Stage One. The LGCE received district-wide schemes from the two groups on the Council which differed in 18 of the 24 wards. It also received a scheme developed by the Council's Working Group.

40 The LGCE adopted parts of all the district-wide schemes submitted during Stage One, including the six wards which were agreed by the Council.

41 During Stage Three a number of issues have arisen. First, the issue of electorate forecasts. As stated above, since the publication of the draft recommendations, Part II of the Inspector's Local Plan Report has been published. A number of respondents at Stage Three considered that the forecast figures for 2006 should be substantially altered in light of the comments in that Report, although there were a number of different views on how they should be changed. We have concluded that, while there continues to be more uncertainty than in other reviews, there is no evidence at this stage to suggest that an alternative outcome is any more likely.

42 Secondly, a number of respondents have changed their views between Stages One and Three. At Stage One Ruscombe Parish Council did not oppose either of the options for the area being considered by the District Council. One of these proposals was subsequently adopted by the LGCE, but at Stage Three Ruscombe Parish Council opposed the draft recommendation for this area. The LGCE adopted the Liberal Democrats proposals for Earley, but at Stage Three the Liberal Democrats put forward alternative proposals for this area.

43 Thirdly, a number of respondents have expressed the view that some comments had been made which have regard to the possible political outcomes that may arise following the review rather than to the statutory criteria. Given that the Council is currently hung, it is possible that any alteration to the electoral arrangements will have a marked effect on the political complexion of the Council. While we acknowledge that, to a greater or lesser extent there is a political dimension to each PER. Indeed electoral schemes we receive often owe more to achieving a desired political outcome at local elections than to providing effective and convenient local governance of the area. It behoves us to be vigilant in considering the proposals put to us, and to seek as much information as is practical on the background and context within which they are developed.

44 Given the geography and the distribution of electors, and the fact that the whole area is parished, we consider that all participants in this review, including the LGCE and ourselves, have had difficulties in developing a scheme which both achieves electoral equality and reflects the, often conflicting, views on communities. The latter is not unusual in electoral reviews. However, we must be sensitive to the fact that concepts of 'community' means different things to different people, particularly political parties. A number of comments from different communities were received, outlining the existence of a community identity, some expressing opposition to the draft recommendations, others supporting the proposals. In order to achieve some degree of electoral equality it has not been possible to accommodate all these factors.

45 The draft recommendations have been reviewed in the light of further evidence and the representations received during Stage Three. For district warding purposes, the following areas, based on existing wards, are considered in turn:

- a) Northern Grouping – the wards of Charvil, Hurst, Remenham & Wargrave, Sonning, Twyford & Ruscombe.
- b) Woodley - the wards of Bulmershe, Coronation, Loddon and South Lake.
- c) Earley – the wards of Little Hungerford, Redhatch and Whitegates.
- d) Wokingham – the wards of Emmbrook, Evendons, Norreys and Wescott.
- e) Southern Grouping – the wards of Arborfield, Barkham, Finchampstead North, Finchampstead South, Shinfield, Swallowfield, Winnersh and Wokingham Without.

46 Details of our final recommendations are set out in Tables 1 and 2, and illustrated on Maps 2, 3, 4 and 5 in Appendix A and on the large map inserted at the back of this report

## **Northern Grouping**

### **Charvil, Hurst, Remenham & Wargrave, Sonning, Twyford & Ruscombe wards**

47 These wards lie to the north of the district and are mainly rural in character. The ward of Remenham & Wargrave comprises the parishes of the same name, while the ward of Twyford & Ruscombe also comprises the parishes of the same name. The remaining three wards are coterminous with the parishes of the same name. The single-member Charvil ward is currently under-represented with an electoral variance of 6 per cent (2 per cent over-represented by 2006), while the single-member Hurst ward is currently over-represented with an electoral variance of 29 per cent (32 per cent by 2006). The two-member Remenham & Wargrave ward is currently over-represented with an electoral variance of 19 per cent (18 per cent by 2006). The single-member Sonning ward is currently over-represented with an electoral variance of 46 per cent (45 per cent by 2006), while the three-member Twyford & Ruscombe ward is over-represented with an electoral variance of 7 per cent (6 per cent by 2006).

48 At Stage One the LGCE received schemes from the District Council, based on an earlier consultation it had undertaken, the Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats.

49 The LGCE carefully considered all the representations received during Stage One and acknowledged the difficulties presented in formulating a scheme for this part of the district. Both the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats recognised that a modification to the existing arrangements had to be undertaken to improve electoral equality. The LGCE also considered various options in order to improve electoral equality while also minimising any adverse impact on community identity. The existing Hurst ward lies in the rural heart of the district and is seriously over-represented. Hurst offered no obvious links with its surrounding wards and all options considered required linking Hurst with part or all of another parish in a new district ward. The LGCE adopted the Conservatives' proposal that part of Twyford parish, should form part of an enlarged Hurst ward and that the remaining part of Twyford parish should form a new Twyford district ward. Of all the options considered, the LGCE considered that this would provide the most practical pairing in terms of electoral equality and the minimising of any adverse impact on community identity.

50 Similar difficulties also arose in achieving electoral equality, while also minimising the impact on community identity in Sonning. The LGCE adopted the Conservatives' proposal to combine part of the existing Coronation ward, approximately the existing Coronation West parish ward of Woodley parish, in a new Sonning & Coronation West ward. This achieved

excellent electoral equality for both the northern area and Woodley town, and of all the options the LGCE considered it would have least impact on community identity given the historical links and good access between Sonning and Woodley. The LGCE also adopted the Conservatives' proposal for Charvil as it would provide for excellent electoral equality. It also adopted the Remenham, Wargrave & Ruscombe ward outlined in the District Council's consultation document given the excellent electoral equality it achieved and the community identity it reflected.

51 Under the draft recommendations the number of electors per councillor in the single-member Charvil ward would be 6 per cent above the district average (2 per cent below the average by 2006), in the single-member Hurst ward this figure would be 2 per cent above the average (2 per cent below the average by 2006), in the two-member Remenham, Wargrave & Ruscombe ward 1 per cent above the district average (no change by 2006), in the single-member Sonning & Coronation West ward 7 per cent above the district average (5 per cent by 2006) and in the two-member Twyford ward 5 per cent above the district average (6 per cent by 2006).

52 At Stage Three the District Council's Working Group did not agree with the draft recommendations for this area, its members did not reach agreement among themselves and did not offer alternative proposals. The Conservatives supported the draft recommendations. The Liberal Democrats opposed the draft recommendations and argued that its Stage One proposals respected "community identity to a far greater extent than the Commission's draft proposals."

53 Charvil Parish Council and St. Nicholas Hurst Parish Council supported the draft recommendations. Remenham Parish Council accepted the draft recommendations. Sonning Parish Council opposed the draft recommendations and reiterated its Stage One proposal for a three-member Riverside ward comprising the parishes of Sonning, Remenham and Wargrave. Ruscombe Parish Council opposed the draft recommendations for reasons of community identity and proposed that Ruscombe parish remain in a ward with Twyford parish. Twyford Parish Council also opposed the draft recommendations for reasons of community identity, but stated that if Twyford parish were to be divided into separate district wards then the wards should be named 'Twyford North' and 'Twyford South'.

54 Councillor Cairns and Councillor Drake supported the draft recommendations for this area. However, Councillor Ferris opposed the draft recommendations while Councillor Rose supported the draft recommendations for Sonning but opposed those for Twyford. The Maidenhead Conservative Association, the Hurst branch of the Maidenhead Conservative Association and the Wargrave & Remenham branch of the Maidenhead Conservative Association supported the draft recommendations. 21 local residents expressed support for the draft recommendations, while 180 local residents opposed the draft recommendations to place the parishes of Twyford and Ruscombe in different district wards.

55 We have noted both the support for, and opposition to, the draft recommendations for Twyford and Ruscombe. In formulating its draft recommendations the LGCE sought to improve electoral equality as a whole across the area, as well as aiming to reflect the identities and interests of local communities. A number of respondents stated that the level of electoral equality in the current Twyford & Ruscombe ward was already high, but when reviewing an area we have to look at the area as a whole rather than just one area in isolation. Given the severe electoral inequality in Hurst, Remenham and Wargrave, changes are necessary which have a knock-on effect on surrounding wards. As stated previously, part of an existing ward has to be added to Hurst ward to reduce the over-representation and, after careful consideration of the evidence available, the LGCE recommended that part of Twyford should join Hurst in a new single-member ward given the good access between them in comparison to the poorer access between Hurst and other adjoining areas.

56 Changes are also necessary to Remenham and Wargrave ward to address its over-representation and, as stated previously, the adjacent parish of Ruscombe parish was considered to be the best option, given that its semi-rural character is similar to that of Remenham and Wargrave. We acknowledge the strength of community identity and the depth of opposition to the draft recommendations to place the parishes of Twyford and Ruscombe in separate wards, but do not consider that this will necessarily lead to a disruption of the inter-community links or ventures. As stated by a number of respondents, both communities will continue to be represented in district wards that effectively reflect their interests and character in terms of size, setting and access. Despite the generally adverse response to the draft recommendations in this area, especially to the proposals for Ruscombe and Twyford, we have not been persuaded that the alternatives would provide for a better balance between the statutory criteria.

57 We have also noted both the support for, and opposition to, the draft recommendations to place part of Woodley parish in a ward with Sonning parish. We received nine representations opposing the draft recommendations. A number of respondents argued that there was poor access between Woodley and Sonning, no community links, no communal interests and that Sonning would be better placed in a ward with Remenham and Wargrave. We have noted these concerns but again have not been persuaded to modify the draft recommendations. There is reasonable vehicular access between Woodley and Sonning, and a reasonable degree of communal interest. We do not consider that Sonning parish should be placed in a ward with Remenham and Wargrave as this would result in a detached ward, something we do not generally endorse. As we are not proposing to substantially modify the draft recommendations for Woodley (see below) we are consequently not proposing to alter the draft recommendation for a Sonning & Coronation West ward. The draft recommendation for this ward achieves electoral equality and sustains community identity for the immediate area and for the northern area as a whole.

58 Given that no new alternative proposals or proposals that improved the draft recommendations were submitted during Stage Three we have decided to confirm the draft recommendations as final for this area.

59 Under our final recommendations, the levels of electoral equality would be the same as under the draft recommendations. Our proposals are illustrated on Map 2, Map A5 in Appendix A and the large map inserted in the back of this report.

## **Woodley**

### **Bulmershe, Coronation, Loddon and South Lake wards**

60 The town of Woodley lies to the north of the main west country railway line. Woodley comprises the two-member Bulmershe ward which is currently over-represented with an electoral variance of 26 per cent (no change by 2006), the three-member Coronation ward, which is currently over-represented with an electoral variance of 6 per cent (11 per cent by 2006), the three-member Loddon ward which is currently under-represented with an electoral variance of 3 per cent (2 per cent over-represented by 2006) and the three-member South Lake ward, which is currently over-represented with an electoral variance of 25 per cent (33 per cent by 2006).

61 At Stage One, the LGCE received submissions from the District Council, based on an earlier consultation document, the Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats.

62 The LGCE carefully considered all the representations received during Stage One regarding warding arrangements for this area. It generally adopted the Liberal Democrats' proposals with modifications to improve electoral equality. The LGCE concurred with the Liberal Democrats that all of Whitegates parish should form part of a new Bulmershe &

Whitegates ward as it would facilitate the correct level of representation for the area as a whole. However, it proposed modifying the proposed boundary between Coronation ward and Loddon ward. The LGCE also adopted the Conservatives' proposal that part of the existing Coronation ward should be combined with the existing Sonning ward in a new single-member Sonning & Coronation West ward (see above).

63 Under the draft recommendations the number of electors per councillor in the three-member Bulmershe & Whitegates ward would be 1 per cent above the district average (6 per cent by 2006), 7 per cent above the district average in the two-member Coronation ward (3 per cent by 2006), 2 per cent above the district average in the three-member Loddon ward (1 per cent by 2006) and 13 per cent above the district average in the two-member South Lake ward (equal to the average by 2006).

64 The District Council Working Group did not agree on a response to the draft recommendations for Bulmershe & Whitegates ward but proposed that those electors in and around the Mays Lane area between the A329 (M) and the railway line should be included in the St Nicholas ward to enhance community identity. The Working Group also provided more accurate electorate data for the proposed wards of Bulmershe & Whitegates and Loddon. The Working Group did not agree on the proposed Coronation ward or the proposed Loddon ward. The Conservatives accepted the draft recommendations for Woodley, while the Liberal Democrats reiterated their Stage One proposal that Woodley should be allocated 11 members, an increase of one, as part of their overall proposal for a 55-member council. The Liberal Democrats also questioned the projected 2006 electorate figures for the wards of Coronation, Loddon and South Lake, and opposed the proposed Coronation ward and the proposed Sonning & Coronation West ward for community identity reasons.

65 Woodley Town Council opposed the draft recommendations. It opposed the reduction in the level of representation for Woodley at district level and opposed the increase in representation at parish level. Woodley Town Council argued that community identity had not been respected in proposing the Sonning & Coronation West ward. Councillor Storry generally supported the Bulmershe & Whitegates ward but expressed reservations over its impact on community identity. One local resident supported the draft recommendations while three local residents opposed them.

66 We have given careful consideration to the evidence and representations received during Stage Three. While acknowledging the view that community identity would be better reflected by including electors in the Mays Lane area in St Nicholas ward, it would necessitate the creation of a new parish ward. Given that only 45 electors reside in this area, we do not consider a parish ward of such a size would be viable.

67 As stated earlier we are not revising the 2006 electorate figures and are confirming the draft recommendation for a 54-member council. We therefore do not consider that an additional councillor should be allocated to Woodley as under a council size of 54 members. Woodley has been allocated the correct number of councillors for its electorate. As mentioned previously, we are confirming the draft recommendations for the Sonning & Coronation West ward.

68 Under our final recommendations, given the more accurate figures, the number of electors per councillor in Bulmershe & Whitegates ward would be 4 per cent above the district average (3 per cent below the district average by 2006), 2 per cent above the district average in Coronation ward (4 per cent by 2006), 1 per cent above the district average in Loddon ward (3 per cent below the district average by 2006) and 13 per cent above the district average in South Lake ward (equal to the district average by 2006). Our proposals are illustrated on Map 2 and the large map inserted in the back of this report.

## **Earley**

### **Little Hungerford, Redhatch and Whitegates wards**

69 The town of Earley lies to the south of the west country railway line. Earley comprises the three-member wards of Little Hungerford which is currently under-represented with an electoral variance of 32 per cent (26 per cent by 2006) and Redhatch which is currently under-represented with an electoral variance of 97 per cent (80 per cent by 2006). It also comprises the two-member Whitegates ward which is currently over-represented with an electoral variance of 28 per cent (33 per cent by 2006).

70 At Stage One, the LGCE received submissions from the District Council, based on an earlier consultation document, the Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats.

71 The LGCE carefully considered all the representations received during Stage One regarding warding arrangements for this area. Given its adoption of the proposal to transfer Whitegates parish ward from Earley to Woodley with one minor modification, the LGCE adopted the remainder of the Liberal Democrats' proposals for Earley for three three-member wards as they achieved good electoral equality and respected community identity.

72 Under the draft recommendations the number of electors per councillor in the three-member Hawkedon ward would be 8 per cent above the district average (1 per cent by 2006), 6 per cent above the district average in the three-member Hillside ward (3 per cent below the average by 2006) and 15 per cent above the district average in the three-member St Nicholas ward (8 per cent by 2006).

73 In response to the draft recommendations, the District Council Working Group agreed that if the draft recommendation for St Nicholas ward were to be confirmed as final, then it should be renamed Maiden Erlegh ward. The Working Group did not agree on the remainder of the draft recommendations for Earley. The Conservatives supported the boundaries proposed by Earley Town Council (see below), while the Liberal Democrats argued that their Stage One proposals for Earley, which the LGCE substantially endorsed as part of the draft recommendations, required readjustment in the light of what they considered to be different electorate figures for 2006. They proposed a reconfiguration of the Earley and Shinfield areas which would result in Earley gaining an additional councillor and Shinfield losing a councillor. The proposals would join the LGCE's proposed Shinfield Rise ward with a modified Hillside ward, would create modified Hawkedon ward and St Nicholas wards, and a new Maiden Erlegh ward comprising those parts of Hillside ward not included in the new Hillside ward.

74 Earley Town Council questioned the LGCE's assertion that this proposal had the support of the Town Council. It also argued that Earley is entitled to be represented by 10 district councillors, but nevertheless made alternative proposals for three three-member wards. These reconfigured the boundaries proposed in the draft recommendations report but did not provide a detailed breakdown of their composition. The Earley & Shinfield Branch Labour Party argued that Earley should be divided into four wards represented by 10 councillors and that there was a "significant electoral imbalance between the urban and rural areas" in the draft recommendations. It also questioned the electorate projections and planning forecast for the district. As mentioned earlier, Councillor Storry generally supported the Bulmershe & Whitegates ward but expressed reservations over its impact on community identity, while Councillor Carpenter opposed the draft recommendations and questioned the electorate projections for Earley. Three local residents opposed the draft recommendations for Earley.

75 We have carefully considered the representations received during the consultation period. As stated above, we are not proposing to move away from the electorate figures produced at Stage One, and therefore we do not consider that the draft recommendations allocated the incorrect level of representation for Earley. We have not been persuaded to alter the proposed

ward boundaries as the alternatives presented did not contain either enough evidence to substantiate them or did not improve on the draft recommendations. We do, however, concur with the proposal to rename the proposed St Nicholas ward as Maiden Erlegh ward. We are therefore confirming the draft recommendations as final, except for the ward renaming.

76 Under our final recommendations, the levels of electoral equality would be the same as under the draft recommendations. Our proposals are illustrated on Map 2 and the large map inserted in the back of this report.

## **Wokingham**

### **Emmbrook, Evendons, Norreys and Wescott wards**

77 Wokingham Town comprises the three-member wards of Emmbrook, Evendons and Norreys, plus the two-member Wescott ward. Emmbrook ward is currently over-represented and has an electoral variance of 24 per cent (no change by 2006). Evendons ward and Norreys ward are both under-represented and have an electoral variance of 36 per cent and 1 per cent respectively (29 per cent and 1 per cent respectively by 2006). Wescott ward is currently over-represented with an electoral variance of 6 per cent (7 per cent by 2006).

78 At Stage One, the LGCE received submissions from the District Council, based on an earlier consultation document, the Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats.

79 The LGCE carefully considered all the representations received during Stage One regarding warding arrangements for this area. It adopted the Conservatives' proposal as part of the draft recommendations as it achieved excellent electoral equality and had the support of the Town Council and minimized change to the existing warding arrangements. The proposal allowed for Wokingham town to be represented by 11 members in three three-member wards and one two-member ward. The LGCE also endorsed the agreed transfer of part of the existing Evendons ward, the proposed Sandy Bottom parish ward, to an enlarged Barkham ward.

80 Under the draft recommendations the number of electors per councillor in the three-member Emmbrook ward would be equal to the district average (1 per cent above the average by 2006), 4 per cent above the district average in the three-member Evendons ward (2 per cent below the average by 2006), 1 per cent above the average in the three-member Norreys ward (no change by 2006) and 2 per cent above the district average in the two-member Wescott ward (2 per cent below the average by 2006).

81 In response to the draft recommendations the District Council's Working Group proposed that those properties in the Edney's Hill area be included in the proposed Barkham ward. It also proposed that the eastern end of Jupiter Way be transferred from the proposed Emmbrook ward to the proposed Evendons ward, a transfer that would involve approximately 30 electors. It also proposed a minor boundary adjustment to the proposed Norreys ward regarding its parish wards but otherwise the Working Group did not agree on its response to the draft recommendations for Wokingham. The Conservatives supported the draft recommendations, while the Liberal Democrats generally supported the draft recommendations for Barkham ward and Norreys ward. However, they did not fully agree with the proposed Emmbrook ward and opposed the proposed Evendons ward, arguing that the Woosehill ward which they had proposed as part of their Stage One proposals would better reflect community identity.

82 Barkham Parish Council supported the draft recommendations for the Barkham area of Wokingham Town, but proposed some minor boundary adjustments. This would involve the inclusion of those electors in and around the Bearwood Road, Barkham Road and Edney's Hill area transferring from the proposed Evendons ward to the proposed Barkham ward. Wokingham Town Council made no comment on the draft recommendations, while Councillors Brown, Lewis and Rose supported the draft recommendations. One local resident supported

the draft recommendations, while one local resident proposed minor boundary modifications to the proposed Evendons ward and Emmbrook ward, whereby the whole of the Scots Farm estate would form part of the proposed Emmbrook ward.

83 We have carefully considered the representations received during the consultation period and note the consensus behind large parts of the draft recommendations for the Wokingham town area. We concur with both the Working Group and Barkham Parish Council that the boundary between Evendons ward and Emmbrook ward be adjusted to enhance community identity and to provide a more identifiable boundary. However, to further enhance community identity we propose that those electors north of the junction of Doles Hill and Doles Lane, on the eastern side of Doles Hill, be included in Barkham ward. We also partially concur with the proposal to include the whole of the Scots Farm Estate in Emmbrook ward. However, we propose that only the properties in Scots Drive and Walter Road should transfer from Evendons ward to Emmbrook ward for reasons of electoral equality and community identity.

84 Under our final recommendations the number of electors per councillor in Emmbrook ward would be equal to the average (no change by 2006), 4 per cent above the district average in Evendons ward (2 per cent below the district average by 2006), 1 per cent above the district average in Norreys ward (no change by 2006) and 2 per cent above the district average in Westcott ward (2 per cent below the district average by 2006). Our proposals are illustrated on Map 2 and the large map inserted in the back of this report.

## **Southern Grouping**

### **Arborfield, Barkham, Finchampstead North, Finchampstead South, Shinfield, Swallowfield, Winnersh and Wokingham Without wards**

85 These wards lie to the south of the district. Arborfield ward is coterminous with Arborfield & Newland parish. The wards of Barkham, Shinfield, Swallowfield, Winnersh and Wokingham Without are each coterminous with the parish of the same name. The single-member Arborfield ward is currently over-represented with an electoral variance of 31 per cent (1 per cent by 2006), while the single-member Barkham ward is currently over-represented with an electoral variance of 14 per cent (12 per cent by 2006). Both the two-member Finchampstead North and Finchampstead South wards are currently under-represented with an electoral variance of 10 and 14 per cent respectively (3 per cent and 10 per cent respectively by 2006). The three-member Shinfield ward is currently over-represented with an electoral variance of 4 per cent (47 per cent under-represented by 2006), while the single-member Swallowfield ward is currently over-represented with an electoral variance of 31 per cent (27 per cent by 2006). The three-member Wokingham Without ward is currently over-represented with an electoral variance of 13 per cent (19 per cent by 2006).

86 At Stage One, the LGCE received submissions from the District Council, based on an earlier consultation document, the Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats.

87 The LGCE carefully considered all the representations received during Stage One regarding warding arrangements for this area. It was pleased to note the consensus between the political groups for the proposed wards of Arborfield, Barkham, Finchampstead North, Finchampstead South, Winnersh and Wokingham Without. The LGCE adopted these proposals as part of its draft recommendations, although it proposed a slight modification to the southern part of the proposed boundary between Arborfield ward and Barkham ward. The LGCE also adopted the Liberal Democrats' proposals for Shinfield parish and Swallowfield parish.

88 Under the draft recommendations the number of electors per councillor in the single-member Arborfield ward would be 36 per cent below the district average (4 per cent by 2006), 4 per cent above the district average in the single-member Barkham ward (6 per cent by

2006), 1 per cent above the district average in the two-member Finchampstead North ward (5 per cent below the average by 2006), 3 per cent above the district average in the two-member Finchampstead South ward (1 per cent below the average by 2006), 15 per cent below the district average in the single-member Shinfield Rise ward (7 per cent by 2006), 40 per cent below the district average in the three-member Shinfield & Spencers Wood ward (4 per cent above the average by 2006), 10 per cent below the district average in the single-member Swallowfield ward (7 per cent by 2006), 5 per cent below under the district average in the three-member Winnersh ward (1 per cent by 2006) and 1 per cent below the district average in the three-member Wokingham Without ward (7 per cent by 2006).

89 In response to the draft recommendations report the District Council Working Group agreed with the proposed Finchampstead North, Finchampstead South, Swallowfield, Winnersh and Wokingham Without wards. The Working Group did not agree with the proposed Arborfield ward but provided more accurate electorate data. It also did not agree with the proposed Shinfield Rise ward. However, it stated that, if this proposal were to be confirmed as final, then Shinfield Rise ward should be renamed Shinfield North ward. The Working Group also proposed that the White House caravan site should be included in the proposed Swallowfield ward rather than the proposed Shinfield & Spencers Wood ward to provide a more identifiable boundary.

90 The Conservatives generally supported the draft recommendations in this area. However, they opposed the proposed Shinfield Rise ward arguing that it would not reflect community identity and reiterated their Stage One proposal for two two-member wards for the Shinfield area, which they had revised to account for what they considered to be new planning developments in the area. The Liberal Democrats generally agreed with the draft recommendations but opposed the proposal for Shinfield. In view of what they considered to be revised electorate figures, they submitted new proposals for this area. As mentioned previously, part of the proposed Shinfield Rise ward would form part of a modified Hillside ward, while the remaining part would form part of an enlarged Shinfield & Spencers Wood ward.

91 Shinfield Parish Council opposed the draft recommendations and reiterated its Stage One argument that Shinfield be represented by five members as part of a 55-member council. It therefore proposed a three-member Shinfield East ward comprising Shinfield Village parish ward and Shinfield North parish ward, and a two-member Shinfield West ward comprising Spencers Wood parish ward and Grazeley & Three Mile Cross parish ward. Swallowfield Parish Council argued that it did not believe that increasing or subtracting the council size by one to avoid a hung council required public consultation and that 2010 should have been the designated year for the projected electorate rather than 2006. Earley & Shinfield Branch Labour Party proposed a modified Shinfield Rise ward and opposed the draft modifications for the remainder of Shinfield, Arborfield, Barkham, Swallowfield, Winnersh and Wokingham Without. One local resident generally supported the draft recommendations for Shinfield while five local residents generally opposed them. Arborfield & Newland Parish Council proposed that the roads of Faraday, Fleming and Kelvin be included in the proposed Garrison parish ward.

92 We have carefully considered the representations received during the consultation period and have been pleased to note that agreement was reached on part of the draft recommendations in the wards of Finchampstead North, Finchampstead South, Swallowfield, Winnersh and Wokingham Without. We concur with the more accurate electorate data provided for Arborfield ward and the proposals to transfer the White House caravan site to Swallowfield ward, and confirm them as part of our final recommendations. However, we have not been persuaded to change the draft recommendations in Shinfield, except to rename Shinfield Rise ward as Shinfield North ward.

93 We are confirming the draft recommendations for a 54-member council size and the proposed warding arrangements for Earley. We are subsequently unable to endorse proposals to substantially reconfigure the draft recommendations for Shinfield in terms of increasing its representation or proposed warding arrangements. Furthermore, as previously stated, we have not been persuaded to revise the electorate projections or take account of an unagreed revised local plan. This has prevented us from adopting either the Conservatives' or the Liberal Democrats' Stage Three proposals for Shinfield as they were based on either a revised electorate figure, the revised local plan or would have resulted in high electoral inequality. The Conservative proposal for two two-member wards, under the established electorate figures, would result in an electoral variance of 26 per cent for their Spencers Wood & Grazley ward and of 36 per cent in their Shinfield & Shinfield Rise ward. To achieve a better balance would necessitate a reconfiguration of the proposed boundaries. Nor have we been able to adopt Shinfield Parish Council's Stage Three proposals for Shinfield as they were based on a five-member allocation. Under the proposed council size of 54, this area merits four councillors. Under an allocation of four members the Parish Council's proposed wards would result in unacceptably high levels of electoral inequality. Nor did its proposals provide an alternative warding arrangement for Swallowfield, which needs to be joined with part of Shinfield to reduce its over-representation.

94 Under our final recommendations the number of electors per councillor in Arborfield ward would be 44 per cent below the district average (6 per cent by 2006), 12 per cent above the district average in Barkham ward (8 per cent by 2006), 1 per cent above the district average in Finchampstead North ward (5 per cent below the district average by 2006), 3 per cent above the district average in Finchampstead South (1 per cent below the district average by 2006), 15 per cent below the district average in Shinfield North (7 per cent above the district average by 2006), 40 per cent below the district average in Shinfield & Spencers Wood ward (4 per cent above the district average by 2006), 10 per cent below the district average in Swallowfield ward (7 per cent by 2006), 5 per cent below the district average in Winnersh ward (1 per cent by 2006) and 1 per cent below the district average in Wokingham Without ward (7 per cent by 2006).

## **Electoral Cycle**

95 In conducting its review the LGCE sought views in relation to the electoral cycle of the district. However, by virtue of the amendments made to the Local Government Act 1992 by the Local Government Commission for England (Transfer of Functions) Order 2001, we have no powers to make recommendations concerning electoral cycle.

## **Conclusions**

96 Having considered carefully all the representations and evidence received in response to the LGCE's consultation report, we have decided substantially to endorse those draft recommendations, subject to the following amendments:

- We propose that Shinfield Rise ward be renamed Shinfield North ward.
- We propose minor boundary realignments between the proposed Arborfield and Barkham wards, between the proposed Emmbrook and Evendons wards, and between the proposed Sonning & Coronation West and Coronation wards

97 We conclude that, in Wokingham:

- there should be no change in the council size of 54 members;
- there should be 25 wards, one more than at present;

- the boundaries of 21 of the existing wards should be modified;
- elections should continue to be held by thirds.

98 Table 4 shows the impact of our final recommendations on electoral equality, comparing them with the current arrangements, based on 2001 and 2006 electorate figures.

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

	2001 electorate		2006 forecast electorate	
	Current arrangements	Final recommendations	Current arrangements	Final recommendations
Number of councillors	54	54	54	54
Number of wards	24	25	24	25
Average number of electors per councillor	2,083	2,083	2,075	2,075
Number of wards with a variance more than 10 per cent from the average	15	5	15	0
Number of wards with a variance more than 20 per cent from the average	11	2	11	0

99 As Table 4 shows, our recommendations would result in a reduction in the number of wards with an electoral variance of more than 10 per cent from 15 to five, with two wards varying by more than 20 per cent from the district average. By 2006 no wards are forecast to have an electoral variance of more than 10 per cent. We conclude that our recommendations would best meet the need for electoral equality, having regard to the statutory criteria.

#### **Final Recommendation**

Wokingham District Council should comprise 54 councillors serving 25 wards, as detailed and named in Tables 1 and 2, and illustrated on Map 2 and in Appendix A, including the large map inside the back cover.

## **Parish and Town Council Electoral Arrangements**

100 When reviewing parish electoral arrangements, we are required to comply as far as is reasonably practicable with the provisions set out in Schedule 11 to the 1972 Act. The Schedule states that if a parish is to be divided between different district wards, it must also be divided into parish wards, so that each parish ward lies wholly within a single ward of the district. In the LGCE's draft recommendations report it proposed consequential changes to the warding arrangements for the parishes of Arborfield & Newland, Earley, Finchampstead, Shinfield, Twyford, Wokingham and Woodley to reflect the proposed district wards.

101 As part of the proposed draft recommendations the LGCE proposed that the parish of Arborfield & Newland should continue to be served by 10 councillors, but that it should be divided into two wards to reflect the proposed district ward boundaries. The proposed Arborfield ward would return nine councillors and would form part of the proposed Arborfield district ward. The proposed Garrison ward would return one councillor and would form part of the proposed Barkham district ward.

102 In response to the consultation report Arborfield & Newland Parish Council expressed concern that “creating a separate parish ward could impose restrictions on parish council membership”. It added that Faraday Road, Flemming Road and Kelvin Road should be included in the Garrison parish ward. No further comments were received.

103 Having considered all the evidence received, we concur that Faraday Road, Flemming Road and Kelvin Road should be included in the Garrison parish ward. In light of the confirmation of the proposed district wards in the area, we confirm the draft recommendation, subject to the minor boundary modification, for warding Arborfield parish as final.

**Final Recommendation**

Arborfield & Newland Parish Council should comprise 10 councillors, as at present, representing two wards: Arborfield parish ward (returning nine councillors) and Garrison parish ward (returning one councillor). The parish ward boundaries should reflect the proposed district ward boundaries in the area, as illustrated and named on Map A2 in Appendix A.

104 As part of the draft recommendations the LGCE proposed that the town of Earley should continue to be served by 25 councillors, representing eight wards, reflecting the proposed district ward boundaries. The proposed Cutbush parish ward, represented by three councillors and the proposed Hawkedon parish ward, represented by three councillors, would form part of the proposed Hawkedon district ward; the proposed Hillside parish ward, represented by three councillors, and the proposed parish Radstock ward, represented by three councillors, would form part of the proposed Hillside district ward; the proposed Maiden Erlegh parish ward, represented by three councillors, the proposed St Nicholas parish ward, represented by three councillors and the proposed Redhatch parish ward, represented by four councillors, would form part of the proposed St Nicholas district ward. Whitegates parish ward would form part of Bulmershe & Whitegates ward and would return three councillors.

105 In response to the consultation report, we received no further comments regarding parish council arrangements.

106 Having received no further evidence, and in light of the confirmation of our proposed district wards in the area, we confirm the draft recommendation for warding Earley parish as final.

**Final Recommendations**

Earley Town Council should comprise 25 councillors, as at present, representing eight wards: Cutbush parish ward (returning three councillors); Hawkedon parish ward (returning three councillors); Hillside parish ward (returning three councillors); Maiden Erlegh parish ward (returning three councillors); St Nicholas parish ward (returning three councillors); Radstock parish ward (returning three councillors); Redhatch parish ward (returning four councillors) Whitegates parish ward (returning three councillors). The parish ward boundaries should reflect the proposed district ward boundaries in the area, as illustrated and named the large map inserted in the back of this report.

107 As part of the draft recommendations the LGCE proposed that the parish of Finchampstead should continue to be served by 17 councillors, representing three wards, an increase of one to reflect our proposed district ward boundaries. The proposed Finchampstead North ward, returning seven councillors, would form part of the proposed Northampstead North district ward, the proposed Finchampstead South ward, returning eight councillors, would form

part of the proposed Finchampstead South district ward and the proposed Lower Wokingham ward, returning two councillors, would form part of the proposed Wokingham Without district ward.

108 In response to the consultation report, we received no further comments regarding parish council arrangements.

109 Having received no further evidence, and in light of the confirmation of our proposed district wards in the area, we confirm the draft recommendation for warding Finchampstead parish as final.

#### **Final Recommendations**

Finchampstead Parish Council should comprise 17 councillors, representing three wards: Finchampstead North ward (returning seven councillors); Finchampstead South ward (returning eight councillors) and Lower Wokingham ward (returning two councillors). The parish ward boundaries should reflect the proposed district ward boundaries in the area, as illustrated and named on Map A3 in Appendix A. The parish ward boundaries should reflect the proposed district ward boundaries in the area, as illustrated and named on Map A3 in Appendix A.

110 As part of the draft recommendations the LGCE proposed that the parish of Shinfield should continue to be served by 15 councillors, representing five wards, an increase of one to reflect the proposed district ward boundaries. The proposed Grazeley parish ward, to be represented by two councillors, would form part of the proposed Shinfield & Spencers Wood district ward; the proposed School parish ward, returning five councillors, would form part of the proposed Shinfield & Spencers Wood district ward; the proposed Shinfield Rise parish ward returning three councillors, would be coterminous with the proposed Shinfield Rise district ward; the proposed Spencers Wood parish ward, returning two councillors, would form part of the proposed Swallowfield district ward and the proposed Ryeish parish ward, returning three councillors, would form part of the proposed Shinfield & Spencers Wood ward.

111 In response to the consultation report, the District Council Working Party called for greater clarity regarding the parish council arrangements for Shinfield. Shinfield Parish Council based its Stage Three proposals for parish warding on its proposed district ward boundaries which we have not endorsed. No further representations were received relating to the parish council arrangements.

112 Having considered all the evidence received, and in light of the confirmation of our proposed district wards in the area, we confirm the draft recommendation for warding Shinfield parish as final.

#### **Final Recommendations**

Shinfield Parish Council should comprise 15 councillors, as at present, representing five wards: Grazeley ward (returning two councillors); School ward (returning five councillors); Shinfield Rise ward (returning three councillors); Spencers Wood ward (returning two councillors) and Ryeish ward (returning three councillors). The parish ward boundaries should reflect the proposed district ward boundaries in the area, as illustrated and named on Map A4 in Appendix A.

113 As part of the draft recommendations the LGCE proposed that the parish of Twyford should continue to be served by 15 councillors, representing two wards, an increase of one to reflect the proposed district ward boundaries. The proposed Twyford parish ward, returning 10

councillors, would be coterminous with the proposed Twyford district ward and the proposed Town ward, returning five councillors, would form part of the proposed Hurst district ward.

114 In response to the consultation report, the District Council Working Group proposed that the Town parish ward should return two councillors and that the Twyford parish ward should return 13 parish councillors to achieve a better balance of representation. Twyford Parish Council opposed the draft recommendations, but stated that if Twyford were to be parish warded then its wards should be named Twyford North parish ward and Twyford South parish ward. No further representations were received relating to the parish council arrangements.

115 Having considered all the evidence received, we concur with Twyford Parish Council that its parish wards should be renamed Twyford North parish ward and Twyford South parish ward. We also concur with the Working Group's proposal that Twyford North parish ward should return 13 councillors and that Twyford South parish ward should return two councillors as it would achieve a better balance of representation within the parish.

### **Final Recommendations**

Twyford Parish Council should comprise 15 councillors, as at present, representing two wards: Twyford North ward (returning 13 councillors) and Twyford South ward (returning two councillors). The parish ward boundaries should reflect the proposed district ward boundaries in the area, as illustrated on Map A5 in Appendix A.

116 As part of the draft recommendations the LGCE proposed that the town of Woodley should be served by 25 councillors, an increase of one, representing nine wards, an increase of one to reflect our proposed district ward boundaries. The proposed Bulmershe parish ward, to be represented by four councillors, would form part of the proposed Bulmershe & Whitegates district ward; the proposed Coronation Central parish ward, to be represented by two councillors and the proposed Coronation East parish ward, represented by three councillors, would form the proposed Coronation district ward; the proposed Coronation West parish ward, represented by two councillors, would form part of the proposed Sonning & Coronation West district ward; the proposed Loddon Airfield parish ward, represented by three councillors, the proposed Loddon South parish ward, represented by three councillors, and the proposed Loddon West parish ward, represented by two councillors, would form the proposed Loddon district ward; the proposed South Lake North parish ward and the proposed South Lake South parish ward, each represented by three councillors, would form part of the proposed South Lake district ward.

117 In response to the consultation report, Woodley Town Council opposed the draft recommendations at both district and parish level. It opposed the proposal that Woodley should be served by 25 councillors as it was a consequence of the proposals at district level to create the Sonning & Coronation West ward. Woodley Town Council further stated that it "would prefer to continue to operate with 24 town councillors" and that the splitting of Western Avenue between the proposed Coronation West parish ward and the Coronation Central parish ward would not enhance community identity. No further representations relating to parish council arrangements were received.

118 Having considered all the evidence received, we concur with the proposal that the whole of Western Avenue should form part of Coronation West parish ward. However, as the recommendation that 25 councillors should represent Woodley parish was consequential to the draft recommendations at district level, we confirm this and the parish ward allocation as final.

**Draft Recommendations**

Woodley Town Council should comprise 25 councillors, an increase of one, representing nine wards: Bulmershe ward (returning four councillors); Coronation Central ward (returning two councillors); Coronation West ward (returning two councillors); Coronation East ward (returning three councillors); Loddon Airfield ward (returning three councillors); Loddon South ward (returning three councillors); Loddon West ward (returning two councillors); South Lake North ward (returning three councillors) and South Lake South ward (returning three councillors). The parish ward boundaries should reflect the proposed district ward boundaries in the area, as illustrated on Map 2 and the large map inserted at the back of the report.

119 As part of the draft recommendations the LGCE proposed that the town of Wokingham should continue be served by 25 councillors, representing nine wards, an increase of one to reflect our proposed district ward boundaries. The proposed parish wards of Emmbrook North and Emmbrook South, each represented by three councillors, should form the proposed Emmbrook district ward; the proposed parish ward of Evendons East, represented by three councillors, the proposed parish ward of Evendons West, represented by five councillors and the proposed parish ward of Sandy Bottom, represented by one councillor, should form the proposed Evendons district ward; the proposed parish wards of Norreys East and Norreys West, each represented by three councillors, should form the proposed Norreys district ward and the proposed parish wards of Wescott East and Westcott West, each represented by two councillors, should form the proposed Wescott district ward.

120 In response to the consultation report, we received no further comments regarding parish council arrangements.

121 Having received no further evidence, and in light of the confirmation of our proposed district wards in the area, we confirm the draft recommendation for warding Wokingham parish as final.

**Final Recommendations**

Wokingham Town Council should comprise 25 councillors, as at present, representing nine wards: Emmbrook North ward (returning three councillors); Emmbrook South ward (returning three councillors); Evendons East ward (returning three councillors); Evendons West ward (returning five councillors); Norreys East ward (returning three councillors); Norreys West ward (returning three councillors); Sandy Bottom ward (returning one councillor); Wescott East ward (returning two councillors) and Wescott West ward (returning two councillors). The parish ward boundaries should reflect the proposed district ward boundaries in the area, as illustrated and named on Map 2 and on the large map inserted in the back of this report

122 We are not proposing any change to the electoral cycle of parish councils in the district.

**Final Recommendation**

Parish and town council elections should continue to take place every four years.

Map 2: *Final Recommendations for Wokingham*

## 6 WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

123 Having completed our review of electoral arrangements in Wokingham and submitted our final recommendations to The Electoral Commission, we have fulfilled our statutory obligation under the Local Government Act 1992 (as amended by SI 2001 No 3692).

124 It is now up to The Electoral Commission to decide whether to endorse our recommendations, with or without modification, and to implement them by means of an Order. Such an Order will not be made before 18 July 2002.

125 All further correspondence concerning our recommendations and the matters discussed in this report should be sent to The Electoral Commission at the address below, to arrive no later than the 18 July 2002:

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



# APPENDIX A

## Final Recommendations for Wokingham: Detailed Mapping

The following maps illustrate our proposed ward boundaries for the Wokingham area.

**Map A1** illustrates, in outline form, the proposed ward boundaries within the district and indicates the areas which are shown in more detail in Maps A2, A3, A4 and A5, and the large map at the back of the report.

**Map A2** illustrates the proposed warding of Arborfield parish.

**Map A3** illustrates the proposed warding of Finchampstead parish.

**Map A4** illustrates the proposed warding of Shinfield parish.

**Map A5** illustrates the proposed warding of Twyford parish.

The **large map** inserted at the back of this report illustrates the proposed warding arrangements for the towns of Earley, Wokingham and Woodley.

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

*Map A2: Proposed Arborfield & Newland Parish wards*

*Map A3: Proposed Finchampstead Parish wards*

*Map A4: Proposed Shinfield Parish wards*

*Map A5: Proposed Twyford Parish ward*