

Final recommendations on the
future electoral arrangements
for West Oxfordshire

Report to the Secretary of State for
Transport, Local Government and the Regions

August 2001

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WHAT IS THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT COMMISSION FOR ENGLAND?

The Local Government Commission for England is an independent body set up by Parliament. Our task is to review and make recommendations to the Government on whether there should be changes to local authorities' electoral arrangements.

Members of the Commission are:

Professor Malcolm Grant (Chairman)
Professor Michael Clarke CBE (Deputy Chairman)
Peter Brokenshire
Kru Desai
Pamela Gordon
Robin Gray
Robert Hughes CBE

Barbara Stephens (Chief Executive)

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, ward names and the frequency of elections. We can also recommend changes to the electoral arrangements of parish and town councils.

This report sets out the Commission's final recommendations on the electoral arrangements for the district of West Oxfordshire.

SUMMARY

We began a review of the electoral arrangements for West Oxfordshire on 25 July 2000. We published our draft recommendations for electoral arrangements on 20 February 2001, after which we undertook a nine-week period of consultation.

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

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

- **in 23 of the 33 wards the number of electors represented by each councillor varies by more than 10 per cent from the average for the district and 10 wards vary by more than 20 per cent;**
- **by 2005 this situation is expected to worsen, with the number of electors per councillor forecast to vary by more than 10 per cent from the average in 26 wards and by more than 20 per cent in 13 wards.**

Our main final recommendations for future electoral arrangements (see Tables 1 and 2 and paragraphs 94-95) are that:

- **West Oxfordshire District Council should have 49 councillors, as at present;**
- **there should be 27 wards, instead of 33 as at present;**
- **the boundaries of 26 of the existing wards should be modified, resulting in a net reduction of six, and seven 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 24 of the proposed 27 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 improve further, with the number of electors per councillor in all wards expected to vary by less than 10 per cent from the average for the district in 2005.**

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

- **new warding arrangements and the redistribution of councillors for the parishes of Carterton and Witney.**

All further correspondence on these final recommendations and the matters discussed in this report should be addressed to the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, who will not make an Order implementing them before 18 September 2001:

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

Table 1: Final Recommendations: Summary

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Constituent areas	Map reference
1	Alvescot & Filkins	1	the parishes of Alvescot, Broadwell, Filkins & Broughton Poggs, Grafton & Radcot, Holwell, Kelmscott, Kencot, Langford, Little Faringdon and Westwell	Map 2
2	Ascott & Shipton	1	the parishes of Ascott-under-Wychwood, Lyneham and Shipton-under-Wychwood	Map 2
3	Bampton & Clanfield	2	the parishes of Bampton, Black Bourton and Clanfield	Map 2
4	Brize Norton & Shilton	1	the parishes of Asthal, Brize Norton, Shilton and Swinbrook & Widford	Map 2
5	Burford	1	the parishes of Burford, Fulbrook and Taynton	Map 2
6	Carterton North East	2	Carterton North ward (part)	Large Map
7	Carterton North West	2	Carterton North ward (part)	Large Map
8	Carterton South	2	<i>Unchanged</i> (Carterton South ward)	Large Map
9	Chadlington & Churchill	1	the parishes of Chadlington, Chilson, Churchill, Cornbury & Wychwood, Sarsden and Spelsbury	Map 2
10	Charlbury & Finstock	2	the parishes of Charlbury, Fowler and Finstock	Map 2
11	Chipping Norton	3	<i>Unchanged</i> (Chipping Norton parish)	Map 2
12	Ducklington	1	the parishes of Curbridge, Ducklington and Lew	Map 2
13	Eynsham & Cassington	3	the parishes of Cassington, Eynsham and South Leigh	Map 2
14	Freeland & Hanborough	2	<i>Unchanged</i> (the parishes of Freeland and Hanborough)	Map 2
15	Hailey, Minster Lovell & Leaffield	2	the parishes of Crawley, Hailey, Leaffield, Minster Lovell and Ramsden	Map 2
16	Kingham, Rollright & Enstone	2	the parishes of Chastleton, Cornwell, Enstone, Great Tew, Heythrop, Kingham, Little Tew, Over Norton, Rollright, Salford and Swerford	Map 2
17	Milton-under-Wychwood	1	<i>Unchanged</i> (the parishes of Bruern, Fifield, Idbury and Milton-under-Wychwood)	Map 2
18	North Leigh	1	<i>Unchanged</i> (North Leigh parish)	Map 2
19	Standlake, Aston & Stanton Harcourt	2	the parishes of Aston, Cote, Northmoor, Shifford & Chimney, Standlake Hardwick-with-Yelford and Stanton Harcourt	Map 2

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Constituent areas	Map reference
20	Stonesfield & Tackley	2	the parishes of Combe, Glympton, Kiddington with Asterleigh, Rousham, Stonesfield, Tackley and Wootton	Map 2
21	The Bartons	1	the parishes of Sandford St Martin, Steeple Barton, Westcot Barton and Worton	Map 2
22	Witney Central	2	Witney West ward (part)	Large Map
23	Witney East	3	Witney East ward (part)	Large Map
24	Witney North	2	Witney East ward (part); Witney North ward	Large Map
25	Witney South	3	Witney South ward (part); Witney West ward (part)	Large Map
26	Witney West	2	Witney South ward (part); Witney West ward (part)	Large Map
27	Woodstock & Bladon	2	the parishes of Bladon, Blenheim and Woodstock	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 West Oxfordshire

Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2000)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2005)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
1 Alvescot & Filkins	1	1,383	1,383	-7	1,419	1,419	-9
2 Ascott & Shipton	1	1,614	1,614	9	1,631	1,631	5
3 Bampton & Clanfield	2	2,895	1,448	-2	2,923	1,462	-6
4 Brize Norton & Shilton	1	1,349	1,349	-9	1,507	1,507	-3
5 Burford	1	1,549	1,549	4	1,580	1,580	1
6 Carterton North East	2	1,598	799	-46	3,129	1,565	0
7 Carterton North West	2	3,155	1,578	6	3,126	1,563	0
8 Carterton South	2	3,098	1,549	4	3,057	1,529	-2
9 Chadlington & Churchill	1	1,554	1,554	5	1,598	1,598	2
10 Charlbury & Finstock	2	3,021	1,511	2	3,125	1,563	0
11 Chipping Norton	3	4,598	1,533	3	4,793	1,598	2
12 Ducklington	1	1,587	1,587	7	1,646	1,646	6
13 Eynsham & Cassington	3	4,607	1,536	3	4,612	1,537	-1
14 Freeland & Hanborough	2	3,281	1,641	11	3,326	1,663	7
15 Hailey, Minster Lovell & Leafield	2	3,153	1,577	6	3,194	1,597	2
16 Kingham, Rollright & Enstone	2	3,210	1,605	8	3,262	1,631	5
17 Milton-under-Wychwood	1	1,601	1,601	8	1,616	1,616	4
18 North Leigh	1	1,540	1,540	4	1,565	1,565	0
19 Standlake, Aston & Stanton Harcourt	2	3,110	1,555	5	3,129	1,565	0
20 Stonesfield & Tackley	2	3,195	1,598	8	3,176	1,588	2
21 The Bartons	1	1,512	1,512	2	1,518	1,518	-3
22 Witney Central	2	3,036	1,518	2	3,106	1,553	0

Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2000)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2005)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
23 Witney East	3	3,476	1,159	-22	4,528	1,509	-3
24 Witney North	2	3,073	1,537	4	3,131	1,566	0
25 Witney South	3	4,450	1,483	0	4,681	1,560	0
26 Witney West	2	3,003	1,502	1	3,003	1,502	-4
27 Woodstock & Bladon	2	3,078	1,539	4	3,041	1,521	-3
Totals	49	72,726	-	-	76,422	-	-
Averages	-	-	1,484	-	-	1,560	-

Source: Electorate figures are based on information provided by West Oxfordshire 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. 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 West Oxfordshire. We have now reviewed the five districts in Oxfordshire as part of our programme of periodic electoral reviews (PERs) of all 386 principal local authority areas in England. Our programme started in 1996 and is currently expected to finish in 2004.

2 This is our first review of the electoral arrangements of West Oxfordshire. The last such review was undertaken by our predecessor, the Local Government Boundary Commission (LGBC), which reported to the Secretary of State in October 1976 (Report No. 170). The electoral arrangements of Oxfordshire County Council were last reviewed in June 1982 (Report No. 428). We expect to review the County Council's electoral arrangements in 2002.

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

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

4 Full details of the legislation under which we work are set out in a document entitled *Guidance and Procedural Advice for Local Authorities and Other Interested Parties* (fourth edition published in December 2000). This *Guidance* sets out our approach to the reviews.

5 Our task is to make recommendations to the Secretary of State 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 In our *Guidance*, we state that we wish wherever possible to build on schemes which have been prepared locally on the basis of careful and effective consultation. Local interests are normally in a better position to judge what council size and ward configuration are most likely to secure effective and convenient local government in their areas, while also reflecting the identities and interests of local communities.

7 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.

8 We are not prescriptive on council size. We start from the assumption that the size of the existing council already secures effective and convenient local government, but we are willing to look carefully at arguments why this might not be so. However, we have found it necessary to safeguard against upward drift in the number of councillors, and we believe that any proposal for an increase in council size will need to be fully justified. In particular, we do not accept that an increase in 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.

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

10 This review was in four stages. Stage One began on 25 July 2000, when we wrote to West Oxfordshire District Council inviting proposals for future electoral arrangements. We also notified Oxfordshire County Council, Oxfordshire Police Authority, the local authority associations, Oxfordshire Association of Local Councils, parish and town councils in the district, the Members of Parliament with constituency interests in the district, the Members of the European Parliament for the South East Region, and the headquarters of the main political parties. We placed a notice in the local press, issued a press release and invited the District Council to publicise the review further. The closing date for receipt of representations, the end of Stage One, was 16 October 2000. At Stage Two we considered all the representations received during Stage One and prepared our draft recommendations.

11 Stage Three began on 20 February 2001 with the publication of our report, *Draft recommendations on the future electoral arrangements for West Oxfordshire*, and ended on 23 April 2001. Comments were sought on our preliminary conclusions. Finally, during Stage Four we considered our draft recommendations in the light of Stage Three consultation and now publish our final recommendations.

2 CURRENT ELECTORAL ARRANGEMENTS

12 The district of West Oxfordshire is bordered by the River Thames in the south-east and the Cotswold Hills to the north-west. The district is entirely parished (83 in total), covers an area of 71,494 hectares and has a population of approximately 97,000. West Oxfordshire district covers the market towns of Carterton, Chipping Norton and Witney and the RAF base at Brize Norton.

13 A parish boundary review has recently been completed in West Oxfordshire. The modifications affect the parishes of Brize Norton, Carterton, Curbridge, Hailey and Witney and were implemented on 1 April 2001.

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

15 The electorate of the district is 72,726 (February 2000). The Council presently has 49 members who are elected from 33 wards, eight of which are relatively urban in character while the remainder are predominantly rural. Five of the wards are each represented by three councillors, six are each represented by two councillors and 22 are single-member wards. The Council is elected by thirds.

16 At present, each councillor represents an average of 1,484 electors, which the District Council forecasts will increase to 1,560 by the year 2005 if the present number of councillors is maintained. However, due to demographic and other changes over the past two decades, the number of electors per councillor in 23 of the 33 wards varies by more than 10 per cent from the district average, 10 wards by more than 20 per cent and five wards by more than 30 per cent. The worst imbalance is in Witney West ward where the councillors represent 73 per cent more electors than the district average.

Map 1: Existing Wards in West Oxfordshire

Table 3: Existing Electoral Arrangements

Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2000)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2005)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
1 Ascott & Shipton	1	1,614	1,614	9	1,631	1,631	5
2 Aston, Bampton & Standlake	1	1,986	1,986	34	2,008	2,008	29
3 Bampton	1	2,004	2,004	35	2,003	2,003	28
4 Bartons	1	1,512	1,512	2	1,518	1,518	-3
5 Bladon & Cassington	1	1,204	1,204	-19	1,197	1,197	-23
6 Brize Norton & Curbridge	1	1,069	1,069	-28	1,112	1,112	-29
7 Burford	1	1,660	1,660	12	1,689	1,689	8
8 Carterton North	3	4,753	1,584	7	6,255	2,085	34
9 Carterton South	3	3,098	1,033	-30	3,057	1,019	-35
10 Chadlington	1	1,079	1,079	-27	1,098	1,098	-30
11 Charlbury	2	2,372	1,186	-20	2,479	1,240	-21
12 Chipping Norton	3	4,598	1,533	3	4,793	1,598	2
13 Clanfield & Shilton	1	1,604	1,604	8	1,786	1,786	15
14 Combe & Stonesfield	1	1,807	1,807	22	1,796	1,796	15
15 Ducklington	1	1,296	1,296	-13	1,350	1,350	-13
16 Enstone	1	1,289	1,289	-13	1,294	1,294	-17
17 Eynsham	3	3,722	1,241	-16	3,726	1,242	-20
18 Filkins & Langford	1	1,000	1,000	-33	1,005	1,005	-36
19 Finstock & Leafield	1	1,245	1,245	-16	1,252	1,252	-20
20 Freeland & Hanborough	2	3,281	1,641	11	3,326	1,663	7

Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2000)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2005)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
21 Hailey	1	1,379	1,379	-7	1,381	1,381	-11
22 Kingham	1	1,292	1,292	-13	1,351	1,351	-13
23 Milton-under-Wychwood	1	1,601	1,601	8	1,616	1,616	4
24 Minster Lovell	1	1,352	1,352	-9	1,380	1,380	-12
25 North Leigh	1	1,540	1,540	4	1,565	1,565	0
26 Rollright	1	1,157	1,157	-22	1,170	1,170	-25
27 Stanton Harcourt	1	1,318	1,318	-11	1,316	1,316	-16
28 Tackley & Wootton	1	1,388	1,388	-6	1,380	1,380	-12
29 Witney East	2	3,929	1,965	32	5,034	2,517	61
30 Witney North	2	2,620	1,310	-12	2,625	1,313	-16
31 Witney South	3	5,349	1,783	20	5,478	1,826	17
32 Witney West	2	5,140	2,570	73	5,312	2,656	70
33 Woodstock	2	2,468	1,234	-17	2,439	1,220	-22
Totals	49	72,726	–	–	76,422	–	–
Averages	–	–	1,484	–	–	1,560	–

Source: Electorate figures are based on information provided by West Oxfordshire 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 2000, electors in Filkins & Langford ward were relatively over-represented by 33 per cent, while electors in Witney West ward were significantly under-represented by 73 per cent. Figures have been rounded to the nearest whole number.

3 DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS

17 During Stage One we received seven representations, including district-wide schemes from West Oxfordshire District Council and a joint submission from the Witney Liberal Democrats and the West Oxfordshire District Council Liberal Democrat Group. Representations were also received from Oxfordshire County Council, a town council and three parish councils. In the light of these representations and evidence available to us, we reached preliminary conclusions which were set out in our report, *Draft recommendations on the future electoral arrangements for West Oxfordshire*.

18 Our draft recommendations were based on the District Council's proposals, which achieved some improvement in electoral equality, and provided a mix of single- and multi-member wards in the district. However, we moved away from the District Council's scheme in one area, affecting two wards. We proposed that:

- West Oxfordshire District Council should be served by 49 councillors, as at present;
- the boundaries of 26 of the existing wards should be modified, while seven wards should retain their existing boundaries;
- there should be new warding arrangements and the redistributions of councillors for the parishes of Carterton and Witney.

Draft Recommendation

West Oxfordshire District Council should comprise 49 councillors, serving 27 wards. The Council should continue to hold elections by thirds.

19 Our proposals would have resulted in significant improvements in electoral equality, with the number of electors per councillor in 24 of the 27 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 district average in 2005.

4 RESPONSES TO CONSULTATION

20 During the consultation on our draft recommendations report, we received 24 representations. A list of all respondents is available from us on request. All representations may be inspected at our offices and those of West Oxfordshire District Council.

West Oxfordshire District Council

21 The District Council generally supported the draft recommendations. However, it proposed two single-member wards for the Enstone and Kingham & Rollright area in the north of the district. The Council also proposed alternative names for a number of wards after further consultation.

Oxfordshire County Council

22 The County Council reiterated its Stage One concern that our draft recommendations would not allow coterminosity between district wards and the existing county divisions.

Parish and Town Councils

23 The town councils of Carterton and Chipping Norton, and the parish councils of Fawler, Hanborough, Kencot, North Leigh, Sandford St Martin and Stanton Harcourt all supported our draft recommendations.

24 Asthal Parish Council proposed that Minster Lovell parish remain in a ward with Asthal parish for community identity reasons. Cassington Parish Council and Clanfield Parish Council both opposed our draft proposals on the grounds of community identity. Enstone Parish Council, Kingham Parish Council and Little Tew Parish Meeting opposed our proposed Kingham, Rollright & Enstone ward. Finstock Parish Council and Minster Lovell Parish Council also objected to our draft proposals.

Other Representations

25 Councillor Hodgson, representing Charlbury division, opposed our proposed Stonesfield & Tackley ward for community identity reasons, while four local residents opposed our proposed Kingham, Rollright & Enstone ward.

5 ANALYSIS AND FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS

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

27 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 over the next five years. We also must have regard to the desirability of fixing identifiable boundaries and to maintaining local ties.

28 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.

29 Our *Guidance* states that we accept that the achievement of absolute electoral equality for the authority as a whole is likely to be unattainable. However, we consider that, if electoral imbalances are to be 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

30 At Stage One the District Council submitted electorate forecasts for the year 2005, projecting an increase in the electorate of approximately 5 per cent from 72,726 to 76,442 over the five-year period from 2000 to 2005. It expects most of the growth to be in Carterton North and Witney East wards. 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. We accept that this is an inexact science and, having considered the forecast electorates, we stated in our draft recommendations report that we were satisfied that they represented the best estimates that could reasonably be made at the time.

31 We received no comments on the Council’s electorate forecasts during Stage Three, and remain satisfied that the estimates are the best that can be made at this time.

Council Size

32 As already explained, we start 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.

33 As part of our draft recommendation we adopted the Council's proposal for a council of 49 members. Having considered the size and distribution of the electorate, the geography and other characteristics of the area, together with the representations received, we concluded that the achievement of electoral equality and the statutory criteria would best be met by a council of 49 members.

34 During Stage Three West Oxfordshire District Council confirmed its support for a 49-member council, thereby endorsing our draft recommendations. Given that no further representations were received, we are confirming this recommendation as final.

Electoral Arrangements

35 As set out in our draft recommendations report, we carefully considered all the representations received at Stage One, including the district-wide schemes from the District Council and the joint submissions from Witney Liberal Democrats & West Oxfordshire District Council Liberal Democrats that provided for a 49- and 50-member council respectively. In view of the degree of consensus behind large elements of the Council's proposals, and the exemplary consultation exercise which it undertook, we concluded that we should base our draft recommendations on the District Council's scheme. However, in order to put forward electoral arrangements which would achieve even better electoral equality, having regard to the statutory criteria, we proposed moving away from the District Council's proposals with regards to the proposed wards of Enstone and Kingham & Rollright.

36 We noted Oxfordshire County Council's concern over our proposed warding arrangements for the district and their possible effect on county divisions. However, as stated in our *Guidance*, the Commission's approach in two-tier county areas is to first review the electoral arrangements of the district council and then, once the necessary electoral change orders have been made for the districts, to review those of the county council. Our future recommendations for electoral division boundaries, in all counties, including Oxfordshire, will utilise the new district wards as building blocks. We therefore cannot have any regard for existing or future county council divisions during this review.

37 We have reviewed our draft recommendations 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) Bartons, Chipping Norton, Enstone and Rollright wards;
- (b) Chadlington, Charlbury, Combe & Stonesfield, Finstock & Leafield and Tackley & Wootton wards;
- (c) Ascott & Shipton, Kingham and Milton-under-Wychwood wards;
- (d) Bampton, Burford, Clanfield & Shilton and Filkins & Langford wards;
- (e) Brize Norton & Curbridge, Ducklington, Hailey and Minster Lovell wards;
- (f) Bladon & Cassington, Freeland & Hanborough and Woodstock wards;
- (g) Aston, Bampton & Standlake, Eynsham, North Leigh and Stanton Harcourt wards;
- (h) Carterton North and Carterton South wards;
- (i) Witney East, Witney North, Witney South and Witney West wards.

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

Bartons, Chipping Norton, Enstone and Rollright wards

39 These four wards cover the north of the district. The existing single-member Bartons ward comprises the parishes of Sandford St Martin, Steeple Barton, Westcot Barton and Worton and is currently 2 per cent under-represented (3 per cent over-represented by 2005). The three-member Chipping Norton ward is coterminous with Chipping Norton parish, and is currently 3 per cent under-represented (2 per cent by 2005). The single-member Enstone ward comprises the parishes of Enstone, Great Tew, Little Tew and Swerford and is currently 13 per cent over-represented (17 per cent by 2005). The single-member Rollright ward comprises the parishes of Heythrop, Over Norton, Rollright and Salford and is currently 22 per cent over-represented (25 per cent by 2005).

40 At Stage One the District Council proposed no change to the existing Bartons and Chipping Norton wards. However, Bartons ward would be renamed The Bartons. It also proposed a modified single-member Enstone ward, to include the parishes of Enstone, Great Tew, Swerford, Heythrop and Over Norton. The remainder of the existing Enstone and Rollright wards (Little Tew, Rollright and Salford parishes) would form part of a new single-member Kingham & Rollright ward with the parishes of Chastleton, Cornwell and Kingham (part of the existing Kingham ward). Rollright ward would then cease to exist. Under these proposals, the number of electors per councillor would be 2 per cent above the district average in The Bartons ward (3 per cent below by 2005), 3 per cent above the district average in Chipping Norton ward (2 per cent by 2005), 9 per cent above the district average in Enstone ward (4 per cent by 2005) and 7 per cent above the district average in Kingham & Rollright ward (5 per cent by 2005).

41 The Council also submitted an alternative scheme for this area to facilitate the inclusion of Great Tew parish and Little Tew parish in the same ward. It proposed a single-member Enstone ward, comprising the parishes of Enstone, Great Tew, Heythrop, Little Tew, Over Norton and Swerford, and a single-member Kingham & Rollright ward, comprising the parishes of Chastleton, Cornwell, Kingham, Rollright and Salford. The number of electors per councillor would be 18 per cent above the district average (13 per cent by 2005) in Enstone ward and 2 per cent below the district average (4 per cent by 2005) in Kingham & Rollright ward.

42 The Liberal Democrats' proposed an alternative scheme for this area, but we considered that the District Council's original scheme offered a better balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria and adopted it as part of our draft recommendations. However, we moved away from the Council's scheme in one area, in the light of views expressed by both Great Tew and Little Tew parish councils during the District Council's own consultation process. We recommended that the proposed single-member Enstone and Kingham & Rollright wards be merged to form a new two-member Kingham, Rollright & Enstone ward. This would not only facilitate the inclusion of Great Tew parish and Little Tew parish in the same ward, but also provide better electoral equality. Under our draft proposals the number of electors per councillor in the wards of Chipping Norton and The Bartons would be the same as under the District Council's proposals, while it would be 8 per cent above the district average in Kingham, Rollright & Enstone ward (5 per cent by 2005.)

43 At Stage Three, the District Council generally supported our draft recommendations but opposed our proposal for a new Kingham, Rollright & Enstone ward. The Council contended that it had submitted its original proposal for single-member Enstone and Kingham & Rollright wards as it achieved good electoral equality, but that its alternative and preferred option was to keep the parishes of Great Tew and Little Tew together in the same ward. It was concerned that its alternative Enstone ward would have an electoral variance of 13 per cent by 2005 and would not match the excellent electoral equality achieved

across the district. Consequently, this proposal was not put forward by the Council as its preferred option.

44 Following further local consultation at Stage Three, the Council proposed its alternative Enstone and Kingham & Rollrights wards as its preferred option, arguing that this would best meet the need to achieve a balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria. It argued that our proposed two-member ward was an excessively large rural ward comprising “three separate and disparate wards” and was inconsistent with the recommendations for the remainder of the district in that we had proposed a two-member ward for a sparsely populated rural area. Enstone Parish Council opposed our draft proposals for reasons of community identity and supported the District Council’s Stage Three submission. Little Tew Parish Meeting also supported the Council’s submission and opposed our draft proposals, arguing that although the parish of Little Tew would be in the same ward as Great Tew parish, it would be placed in an amalgamated ward comprising three separate and distinct existing wards. Concern was raised over the effect our recommendations would have on community ties within this area and how they would be diluted in a large two-member rural ward. We further received some evidence of shared public amenities and social facilities between the parishes in the Council’s proposed alternative Enstone ward. Four local residents also supported the Council’s Stage Three submission. Kingham Parish Council opposed our draft recommendations on the grounds of community identity.

45 Given the reiterated proposal from the District Council that the parishes of Great Tew and Little Tew should be included in a single-member Enstone ward, alongside a single-member Kingham & Rollright ward, we have closely re-examined this proposal.

46 We have noted the Council’s argumentation but have not been persuaded to move away from our draft recommendations. While we have received some evidence concerning the community links between parishes within the current Enstone ward, we have not received any argumentation or evidence as to why a two-member ward in this area would be detrimental to convenient and effective local government or to community identities. Given the significant worsening of electoral equality there would need to be evidence of a better reflection of the statutory criteria to convince us that the Council’s proposed alternative is a better balance between the competing criteria than our draft recommendations. Furthermore, as stated in our *Guidance*, we cannot make allowances for rural sparsity and our proposed Kingham, Enstone & Rollright ward would be one of seven two-member rural wards in the district.

47 Having carefully considered the representations received, we have decided to endorse our draft recommendations for The Bartons, Chipping Norton and Kingham, Enstone & Rollright wards, as they would achieve good electoral equality and have received a measure of local support. The levels of electoral equality would remain the same as under our draft recommendations. Details of our recommendations for these wards can be found on Map 2.

Chadlington, Charlbury, Combe & Stonesfield, Finstock & Leafield and Tackley & Wootton wards

48 These five wards cover the north-eastern part of the district. Chadlington ward comprises the parishes of Chadlington, Chilson, Fawler and Spelsbury and is served by one member who currently represents 27 per cent fewer electors than the district average (30 per cent by 2005). Charlbury district ward is coterminous with Charlbury parish and is served by two members who currently represent 20 per cent fewer electors than the district average (21 per cent by 2005). Combe & Stonesfield ward comprises the parishes of the same name and is served by a single councillor who currently represents 22 per cent more electors than the district average (15 per cent by 2005). Finstock & Leafield ward comprises the parishes

of Cornbury & Wychwood, Finstock and Leafield and is served by a single councillor who currently represents 16 per cent fewer electors than the district average (20 per cent by 2005). Tackley & Wootton ward comprises the parishes of Glympton, Kiddington with Asterleigh, Rousham, Tackley and Wootton and is also served by a single councillor who currently represents 6 per cent fewer electors than the district average (12 per cent by 2005).

49 At Stage One the District Council proposed a modified Chadlington ward, comprising the parishes of Churchill and Sarsden (part of the existing Kingham ward) and the parishes of Chadlington, Chilson, Spelsbury, and Cornbury & Wychwood. The existing Charlbury ward would be extended southwards to include Fawler parish and Finstock parish in a new Charlbury & Finstock ward. The remainder of Finstock & Leafield ward (Leafield parish) would form part of a new Hailey & Minster Lovell ward (see below). The District Council also proposed that the existing Combe & Stonesfield and Tackley & Wootton wards should be combined to form a new two-member Stonesfield & Tackley ward. Under these proposals, the number of electors per councillor would be 5 per cent above the district average in Chadlington ward (2 per cent by 2005), 2 per cent above the district average in Charlbury & Finstock ward (equal to the average by 2005) and 8 per cent above the district average in Stonesfield & Tackley ward (2 per cent by 2005).

50 Both the Liberal Democrats and Finstock Parish Council offered alternative proposals for this area. However, we considered that the District Council's scheme offered the best balance available between electoral equality and the statutory criteria, and therefore adopted it as part of our draft recommendations.

51 At Stage Three, the District Council supported our draft recommendations for this area. However, the Council suggested that the proposed Chadlington ward should be renamed Chadlington & Churchill.

52 Fawler Parish Meeting supported our draft proposals. However, Finstock Parish Council opposed our draft recommendations for community identity reasons but did not offer an alternative proposal. Councillor Hodgson, representing Charlbury division, opposed our proposed Stonesfield & Tackley ward for community identity reasons and suggested, as an alternative, two single-member wards of Combe & Stonesfield and Tackley & Wootton.

53 However, we note that no evidence has been presented as to how this proposal would provide a better balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria than our draft recommendations. In the light of the extensive consultation undertaken by the District Council and the general support this proposal received we are not proposing to adopt this alternative scheme.

54 Given the level of support our draft recommendations received during Stage Three, we generally propose endorsing them as final, but we propose renaming Chadlington ward as Chadlington & Churchill as proposed by the District Council. The levels of electoral equality would remain the same as under our draft recommendations. Details of our recommendations for these wards can be found on Map 2.

Ascott & Shipton, Kingham and Milton-under-Wychwood wards

55 These three single-member wards are situated in the north-west of the district. Ascott & Shipton ward, which comprises the parishes of Ascott-under-Wychwood, Lyneham and Shipton-under-Wychwood, is currently 9 per cent under-represented (5 per cent by 2005). Kingham ward, which comprises the parishes of Chastleton, Churchill, Cornwell, Kingham and Sarsden, is currently 13 per cent over-represented (unchanged by 2005). Milton-under-Wychwood ward, which comprises the parishes

of Bruern, Fifield, Idbury and Milton-under-Wychwood, is currently 8 per cent under-represented (4 per cent by 2005).

56 At Stage One the District Council proposed no change to the existing Ascott & Shipton and Milton-under-Wychwood wards. However, it proposed that Churchill and Sarsden parishes form part of a modified Chadlington ward and that Chastleton, Cornwell and Kingham parishes form part of a new single-member Kingham & Rollright ward (as detailed above). Kingham ward would then cease to exist. Under these proposals the number of electors per councillor would be 9 per cent above the district average in Ascott & Shipton ward (5 per cent by 2005) and 8 per cent above the district average in Milton-under-Wychwood ward (4 per cent by 2005).

57 The Liberal Democrats proposed alternative arrangements for this area, but given the wide consultation undertaken by the Council and the degree of local consensus behind its scheme, we adopted the Council's scheme as part of our draft recommendations.

58 At Stage Three the District Council supported our draft recommendations and no other representations were received.

59 Given the general level of support they received during Stage Three, we are confirming our draft recommendations as final. The levels of electoral equality would remain the same as under our draft recommendations. Details of our recommendations for these wards can be found on Map 2.

Bampton, Burford, Clanfield & Shilton and Filkins & Langford wards

60 These four single-member wards cover the south-west of the district. Bampton ward is coterminous with Bampton parish, and the number of electors per councillor is currently 35 per cent above the district average (28 per cent by 2005). Burford ward comprises the parishes of Burford, Fulbrook, Swinbrook & Widford and Taynton. The number of electors per councillor in this ward is 12 per cent above the district average (8 per cent by 2005). Clanfield & Shilton ward comprises the parishes of Alvescot, Black Bourton, Clanfield, Grafton & Radcot and Shilton. The number of electors per councillor in this ward is currently 8 per cent above the district average (15 per cent by 2005). Filkins & Langford ward comprises the parishes of Broadwell, Filkins & Broughton Poggs, Holwell, Kelmscott, Kencot, Langford, Little Faringdon and Westwell. The number of electors per councillor in this ward is currently 33 per cent below the district average (36 per cent by 2005).

61 At Stage One the District Council proposed a modified two-member Bampton ward, comprising the existing Bampton ward together with Black Bourton and Clanfield parishes. A new single-member Alvescot & Filkins ward would include the whole of the existing Filkins & Langford ward together with the parishes of Alvescot and Grafton & Radcot. A modified single-member Burford ward would comprise the parishes of Burford, Fulbrook and Taynton. The remainder of the existing Clanfield & Shilton ward (Shilton parish) and the remainder of the existing Burford ward (Swinbrook & Widford parish) would form part of a new Brize Norton & Shilton ward (see below). Clanfield & Shilton and Filkins & Langford wards would then cease to exist. Under these proposals, the number of electors per councillor would be 7 per cent below the district average in Alvescot & Filkins ward (9 per cent by 2005), 2 per cent below the district average in Bampton ward (6 per cent by 2005) and 4 per cent above the district average in Burford ward (1 per cent by 2005).

62 The Liberal Democrats' proposed 49-member scheme mirrored that of the Council in this area and given the electoral equality it achieved, we endorsed the Council's scheme as part of our draft recommendations.

63 At Stage Three the District Council supported our draft recommendations but proposed Bampton & Clanfield as an alternative name for our proposed Clanfield ward. Clanfield Parish Council also proposed an alternative name for this ward, Bampton, Clanfield & Black Bourton, to further reflect community identity.

64 Given the general level of support our draft recommendations received during Stage Three, we are endorsing them as part of our final recommendations, with one minor modification. We are content to adopt the District Council's alternative ward name as we consider it reflects the constituent settlements in the ward. The levels of electoral equality would remain the same as under our draft proposals. The recommendations are illustrated on Map 2.

Brize Norton & Curbridge, Ducklington, Hailey and Minster Lovell wards

65 These four single-member wards cover the central part of the district, and each of them is currently over-represented. Brize Norton & Curbridge ward, which comprises the three parishes of Brize Norton, Curbridge and Lew, has an electoral variance of 28 per cent (29 per cent by 2005). Ducklington ward, which comprises the parishes of Ducklington and Hardwick-with-Yelford, has an electoral variance of 13 per cent (unchanged by 2005). Hailey ward, which comprises the parishes of Crawley, Hailey and Ramsden, has an electoral variance of 7 per cent (11 per cent by 2005). Minster Lovell ward, which comprises the parishes of Asthal and Minster Lovell, has an electoral variance of 9 per cent (12 per cent by 2005).

66 At Stage One, the District Council proposed a new single-member Brize Norton & Shilton ward comprising Asthal parish, Brize Norton parish, Shilton parish (part of the existing Clanfield & Shilton ward) and Swinbrook & Widford parish (part of the existing Burford ward). The remainder of Brize Norton & Curbridge ward (the parishes of Curbridge and Lew) would form part of a modified single-member Ducklington ward, with Ducklington parish. The remainder of the existing Ducklington ward (Hardwick-with-Yelford parish) would be included in a new Standlake & Stanton Harcourt ward (see below). The whole of the existing Hailey ward would be included in a new two-member Hailey & Minster Lovell ward with Minster Lovell parish (the remainder of the existing Minster Lovell ward) and Leaffield parish (part of the existing Finstock & Leaffield ward). Under these proposals the number of electors per councillor would be 9 per cent below the district average in Brize Norton & Shilton ward (3 per cent by 2005), 7 per cent above the district average in Ducklington ward (6 per cent by 2005) and 6 per cent above the district average in Hailey & Minster Lovell ward (2 per cent by 2005).

67 The Liberal Democrats' proposals closely followed those of the Council, but provided for an alternative Minster Lovell ward. After carefully considering the evidence received, we adopted the District Council's scheme in this area without modification as part of our draft recommendations.

68 At Stage Three the District Council supported our draft recommendations. However, the Council suggested that the proposed Hailey & Minster Lovell ward should be renamed Hailey, Minster Lovell & Leaffield to account for the large settlement in Leaffield parish.

69 Both Asthal Parish Council and Minster Lovell Parish Council opposed our draft recommendations on the grounds of community identity. Both councils proposed remaining together in the same ward,

stating that they share local facilities and transport links. However, while recognising their argument, we cannot look at any particular area in isolation and given that no consideration was given to the effect that this proposal would have on neighbouring parishes we are not endorsing it as part of our final recommendations.

70 Given the general level of support received during Stage Three, we confirm our draft recommendations as final, with one minor modification. We are content to adopt the District Council's alternative ward name as we consider it reflects the constituent settlements in the ward. The electoral variances would be the same as under our draft recommendations and details of our proposals can be found on Map 2.

Bladon & Cassington, Freeland & Hanborough and Woodstock wards

71 These three wards cover a small area in the east of the district. The councillor for Bladon & Cassington ward, which comprises the parishes of the same name, currently represents 19 per cent fewer electors than the district average (23 per cent by 2005). The two members for Freeland & Hanborough ward, which comprises the parishes of the same name, currently represent 11 per cent more electors than the district average (7 per cent by 2005). The two members for Woodstock ward, which comprises the parishes of Blenheim and Woodstock, currently represent 17 per cent fewer electors than the district average (22 per cent by 2005).

72 At Stage One, the District Council proposed no change to the existing Freeland & Hanborough ward. It also proposed that the existing Woodstock ward should be extended southwards to include Bladon parish and that Cassington parish be included in a modified Eynsham ward (see below). Under these proposals, the number of electors per councillor would be 11 per cent above the district average in Freeland & Hanborough ward (7 per cent by 2005) and 4 per cent above the district average in Woodstock ward (3 per cent below by 2005).

73 The Liberal Democrats' proposals reflected the Council's scheme in this area and having noted this degree of consensus, we adopted it as part of our draft recommendations.

74 At Stage Three, the District Council generally supported our draft recommendations, as did Hanborough Parish Council. The District Council, however, suggested that the proposed Woodstock ward should be renamed Woodstock & Bladen to better reflect community identity. Cassington Parish Council opposed our draft recommendations for reasons of community identity but did not put forward an alternative proposal.

75 Given the general level of support they received during Stage Three, we are confirming our draft recommendations as final, with one modification. We are content to adopt the District Council's alternative ward name as we consider it reflects the constituent settlements in the ward. The levels of electoral equality would remain the same as under our draft proposals. The recommendations are illustrated on Map 2.

Aston, Bampton & Standlake, Eynsham, North Leigh and Stanton Harcourt wards

76 These four wards cover the far south-eastern part of the district. Aston, Bampton & Standlake, North Leigh and Stanton Harcourt wards are each represented by a single councillor, while Eynsham ward is represented by three members. The number of electors per councillor in Aston, Bampton & Standlake

ward, which comprises the parishes of Aston, Cote, Shifford & Chimney and Standlake, is currently 34 per cent above the district average (29 per cent by 2005). The number of electors per councillor in Eynsham ward, which is coterminous with Eynsham parish, is currently 16 per cent below the district average (20 per cent by 2005). The number of electors per councillor in North Leigh ward, which is coterminous with North Leigh parish, is currently 4 per cent above the district average (equal to the average by 2005). The number of electors per councillor in Stanton Harcourt ward, which comprises the parishes of Northmoor, South Leigh and Stanton Harcourt, is currently 11 per cent below the district average (16 per cent by 2005).

77 At Stage One the District Council proposed no change to the existing North Leigh ward. It proposed a new three-member Eynsham ward, comprising the existing Eynsham ward, together with the parishes of South Leigh and Cassington. A new two-member Standlake & Stanton Harcourt ward would include the whole of the existing Aston, Bampton & Standlake ward, together with Northmoor and Stanton Harcourt parishes and Hardwick-with-Yelford parish (part of the existing Ducklington ward). Under these proposals the number of electors per councillor would be 3 per cent above the district average in Eynsham ward (1 per cent below by 2005), 4 per cent above the district average in North Leigh ward (equal to the average by 2005) and 7 per cent above the district average in Standlake & Stanton Harcourt ward (2 per cent by 2005).

78 The Liberal Democrats' 49-member scheme for this area mirrored that of the Council's except that it proposed an alternative North Leigh, Hailey & Combe ward. Although the Liberal Democrats' scheme achieved good electoral equality we were concerned that it had not been made available for public inspection and we were therefore unaware of the degree of local support it would command. We therefore adopted the Council's scheme as part of our draft recommendations.

79 At Stage Three the District Council supported our draft recommendations. However, the Council suggested that the proposed Eynsham ward should be renamed Eynsham & Cassington and that the proposed Stanlake & Stanton Harcourt ward should be renamed Standlake, Aston & Stanton Harcourt to better reflect community identity.

80 North Leigh Parish Council and Stanton Harcourt Parish Council both supported our draft recommendations, while no other representations were received.

81 Given the general level of support they received during Stage Three, we propose confirming our draft recommendations as final, with two minor modifications. We are content to adopt the District Council's alternative ward names as we consider they reflect the constituent settlements in each ward. The levels of electoral equality would remain the same as under our draft recommendations. Details of our recommendations for these wards can be found on Map 2.

Carterton North and Carterton South wards

82 These two wards cover Carterton parish, and are both represented by three members. The number of electors in Carterton North ward is currently 7 per cent above the district average (34 per cent above by 2005). The number of electors per councillor in Carterton South ward is currently 30 per cent below the district average (35 per cent by 2005).

83 At Stage One the District Council proposed that the town of Carterton be divided into three wards, rather than two as at present. It proposed no change to the boundaries of the existing Carterton South ward, but recommended that it be represented by two members, rather than three. However, it proposed

that the existing Carterton North ward be divided into two two-member wards, Carterton North East and Carterton North West. Under these proposals the number of electors per councillor would be 46 per cent below the district average in Carterton North East ward (equal to the average by 2005), 6 per cent above the district average in Carterton North West ward (equal to the average by 2005) and 4 per cent above the district average in Carterton South ward (2 per cent below by 2005).

84 The Liberal Democrats' proposals for Carterton mirrored those of the Council and, given the consensus behind the Council's scheme and the high levels of electoral equality it would achieve, we adopted its proposals as part of our draft recommendations.

85 At Stage Three our draft recommendations received support from both the District Council and Carterton Town Council. The District Council, however, noted that our recommended boundary for Carterton North East ward (Upavon parish ward of Carterton Town Council) did not correspond with that proposed by the Council. No other representations were received.

86 Given the general level of support they received during Stage Three, we propose generally confirming our draft recommendations as final. We are grateful for the District Council's comments on our proposed boundary for the Carterton North East ward and agree that its eastern boundary should be extended eastwards along and north of Carterton Road. The levels of electoral equality remain the same as under our draft proposals. These proposals have consequential implications for the parish warding of Carterton, the details of which are outlined later in the chapter. The recommendations are illustrated on the large map at the end of the report.

Witney East, Witney North, Witney South and Witney West wards

87 Witney is the main town in West Oxfordshire, accounting for 23 per cent of the district's total electorate. The four wards cover the whole of Witney parish. The two-member Witney East ward is currently 32 per cent under-represented (61 per cent by 2005), the two-member Witney North ward is currently 12 per cent over-represented (16 per cent by 2005), the three-member Witney South ward is currently 20 per cent under-represented (17 per cent by 2005) and the two-member Witney West ward is currently 73 per cent under-represented (70 per cent by 2005).

88 At Stage One the District Council proposed that the town of Witney be represented by 12 councillors (three more than at present), serving five wards (one more than at present). The revised Witney East and Witney North wards would cover that part of Witney town east of the River Windrush, while the remainder of the town would be divided into three wards. The revised Witney West ward would broadly cover that part of Witney town west of Apley Way and Thorney Leys, while the central part of the town would be covered by two wards; a new Witney Central ward and a modified Witney South ward. The boundary between the two wards would broadly follow Curbridge Road and Welch Way. Under these proposals the number of electors per councillor would be 2 per cent above the district average in Witney Central ward (equal to the average by 2005), 22 per cent below the district average in Witney East ward (3 per cent by 2005), 4 per cent above the district average in Witney North ward (equal to the average by 2005), equal to the district average in Witney South ward (unchanged by 2005) and 1 per cent above the district average in Witney West ward (4 per cent below by 2005).

89 The Liberal Democrats' proposals for Witney mirrored those of the District Council and, given the consensus behind the Council's scheme and the high levels of electoral equality it would achieve, we adopted its proposals as part of our draft recommendations.

90 At Stage Three the District Council supported our draft recommendations, while Witney Town Council supported the proposed Witney Central ward name. The District Council, however, noted that our recommended boundary between the wards of Witney Central and Witney West did not correspond with that proposed by the Council. No other representations were received.

91 Given the general level of support they received during Stage Three, we are generally confirming our draft recommendations as final. We are grateful for the District Council's comments on our proposed boundary between the wards of Witney Central and Witney West and agree that the proposed boundary should be extended southwards, broadly following Apley Way. The levels of electoral equality would remain the same as under our draft proposals. These proposals have consequential implications for the parish warding of Witney, the details of which are outlined later in the chapter. The recommendations are illustrated on the large map at the end of the report.

Electoral Cycle

92 At Stage One we received no proposals in relation to the electoral cycle of the district. Accordingly, we made no recommendation for change to the present system of elections by thirds.

93 At Stage Three no further comments were received to the contrary, and we confirm our draft recommendation as final.

Conclusions

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

- we propose minor boundary realignments in Carterton and Witney;
- we propose that the proposed ward of Bampton should be renamed Bampton & Clanfield;
- we propose that the proposed ward of Chadlington should be renamed Chadlington & Churchill;
- we propose that the proposed ward of Eynsham should be renamed Eynsham & Cassington
- we propose that the proposed ward of Hailey & Minster Lovell should be renamed Hailey, Minster Lovell & Leafield;
- we propose that the proposed ward of Standlake & Stanton Harcourt should be renamed Standlake, Aston & Stanton Harcourt;
- we propose that the proposed ward of Woodstock should be renamed Woodstock & Bladon.

95 We conclude that, in West Oxfordshire:

- a council of 49 members should be maintained;
- there should be 27 wards, six fewer than at present;
- the boundaries of seven of the existing wards should be retained;
- the Council should continue to hold elections by thirds.

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

Table 4: Comparison of Current and Recommended Electoral Arrangements

	2000 electorate		2005 forecast electorate	
	Current arrangements	Final recommendations	Current arrangements	Final recommendations
Number of councillors	49	49	49	49
Number of wards	33	27	33	27
Average number of electors per councillor	1,484	1,560	1,484	1,560
Number of wards with a variance more than 10 per cent from the average	23	3	26	0
Number of wards with a variance more than 20 per cent from the average	10	2	13	0

97 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 23 to three. This level of electoral equality would improve further in 2005, with no wards forecast to vary by more than 10 per cent from the district average. We conclude that our recommendations would best meet the need for electoral equality, having regard to the statutory criteria.

Final Recommendation

West Oxfordshire District Council should comprise 49 councillors serving 27 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. The Council should continue to hold elections by thirds.

Parish and Town Council Electoral Arrangements

98 When reviewing electoral arrangements, we are required to comply as far as is reasonably practicable with the rules 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. Accordingly, in our draft recommendations report we proposed consequential changes to the warding arrangements for the parishes of Carterton and Witney to reflect the proposed district wards.

99 In response to our consultation report, both the District Council and Carterton Town Council supported our draft recommendations for parishing arrangements for Carterton. Following further consultation with the District Council, as described earlier, the proposed Upavon parish ward should have its boundary extended eastwards to remain contiguous with the proposed Carterton North East district ward. No further submissions were received.

100 Having considered all the evidence received, and in light of the confirmation of our proposed district wards in the area, we confirm, with one minor modification, our draft recommendation for warding Carterton parish as final.

Final Recommendation

Carterton Town Council should comprise 16 councillors, as at present, representing five wards: Gateway ward (returning two councillors), Milestone ward (returning three councillors), Rock Farm ward (returning three councillors), Shillbrook ward (returning three councillors) and Upavon ward (returning five councillors). The town ward boundaries should reflect the proposed district ward boundaries in the area, as illustrated and named on the large map at the back of the report.

101 In response to our consultation report, the District Council supported our draft recommendations, while Witney Town Council offered no comment on them. Following further consultation with the District Council, as described earlier, the proposed boundary between the parish wards of Witney Central and Witney West should be extended southwards broadly along Apley Way to remain contiguous with the proposed district ward. No further submissions were received.

102 Having considered all the evidence received, and in light of the confirmation of our proposed district wards in the area, we confirm our draft recommendation, with one minor modification, for warding Witney parish as final.

Final Recommendations

Witney Town Council should comprise 17 councillors, one more than at present, representing five wards: Central ward (returning three councillors), East ward (returning four councillors), North ward (returning three councillors), South ward (returning four councillors) and West ward (returning three councillors). The boundaries between the five town wards should reflect the proposed district ward boundaries, as illustrated and named on the large map at the back of the report.

103 At Stage One the District Council noted that Stonesfield Parish Council had proposed an increase of one in its council size and that Woodstock Town Council had proposed its warding arrangements should be abolished. During Stage One we received no further submissions in support of these requests and they did not form part of our draft recommendations. At Stage Three no further proposals regarding these areas were received.

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

Final Recommendation

For parish and town councils, elections should continue to be held at the same time as elections for the principal authority.

Map 2: Final Recommendations for West Oxfordshire

6 NEXT STEPS

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

106 It is now up to the Secretary of State 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 September 2001.

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

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

APPENDIX A

Final Recommendations for West Oxfordshire: Detailed Mapping

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

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

The **large map** inserted at the back of this report illustrates the proposed warding arrangements for the towns of Carterton and Witney.

Map A1: Final Recommendations for West Oxfordshire: Key Map