

LOCAL
GOVERNMENT
COMMISSION
FOR ENGLAND

FINAL
RECOMMENDATIONS
ON THE FUTURE
ELECTORAL
ARRANGEMENTS FOR
ELMBRIDGE
IN SURREY

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

September 1998

LOCAL GOVERNMENT COMMISSION FOR ENGLAND

This report sets out the Commission's final recommendations on the electoral arrangements for Elmbridge in Surrey.

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Peter Brokenshire

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Local Government Commission for England

1 September 1998

Dear Secretary of State

On 2 September 1997 the Commission commenced a periodic electoral review of the borough of Elmbridge under the Local Government Act 1992. We published our draft recommendations in March 1998 and undertook an eleven-week period of consultation.

We have now prepared our final recommendations in the light of the consultation. We have for the most part confirmed our draft recommendations, although one minor boundary modification has been made in the light of further evidence. This report sets out our final recommendations for changes to electoral arrangements in Elmbridge.

We recommend that Elmbridge Borough Council should continue to be served by 60 councillors, representing 22 wards, and that some changes should be made to ward boundaries in order to improve electoral equality, having regard to the statutory criteria. We recommend that the Council should continue to be elected by thirds.

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

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

Yours sincerely

PROFESSOR MALCOLM GRANT
Chairman

SUMMARY

The Commission began a review of the electoral arrangements for Elmbridge on 2 September 1997. We published our draft recommendations for electoral arrangements on 17 March 1998, after which we undertook an eleven-week period of consultation.

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

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

- **in five of the 22 wards, the number of electors represented by each councillor varies by more than 10 per cent from the average for the borough;**
- **by 2002, electoral equality is not expected to improve significantly, with the number of electors per councillor forecast to vary by more than 10 per cent from the average in five wards and by more than 20 per cent in one ward.**

Our main final recommendations for future electoral arrangements (Figure 1 and paragraphs 83 and 84) are that:

- **Elmbridge Borough Council should continue to be served by 60 councillors;**
- **there should continue to be 22 wards;**
- **the boundaries of 18 of the existing wards should be modified, while four wards should retain their existing boundaries;**
- **elections should continue to take place by thirds.**

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

- **In 21 of the 22 wards the number of electors per councillor would vary by no more than 10 per cent from the borough average.**
- **By 2002 the number of electors per councillor is projected to vary by no more than 10 per cent from the average in all wards.**

All further correspondence on these recommendations and the matters discussed in this report should be addressed to the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, who will not make an order implementing the Commission's recommendations before 13 October 1998:

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

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

Ward name	Number of councillors	Constituent areas	Map reference
1 Claygate	3	Claygate ward (part)	Map 2 and large map
2 Cobham & Downside	3	Cobham & Downside ward; Cobham Fairmile ward (part)	Map 2 and large map
3 Cobham Fairmile	2	Cobham Fairmile ward (part)	Map 2 and large map
4 Esher	3	Claygate ward (part); Esher ward (part)	Map 2 and large map
5 Hersham North	3	Hersham North ward; Hersham South ward (part)	Map 2 and large map
6 Hersham South	3	Hersham South ward (part)	Map 2 and large map
7 Hinchley Wood	2	Hinchley Wood ward (part); Long Ditton ward (part)	Map 2 and large map
8 Long Ditton	3	Hinchley Wood ward (part); Long Ditton ward (part)	Map 2 and large map
9 Molesey East	3	Molesey East ward; Molesey South ward (part)	Map 2 and large map
10 Molesey North	3	<i>Unchanged</i>	Map 2 and large map
11 Molesey South	3	Molesey South ward (part)	Map 2 and large map
12 Oatlands Park	3	<i>Unchanged</i>	Map 2 and large map
13 Oxshott & Stoke D'Abernon	3	Claygate ward (part); Cobham Fairmile ward (part); Oxshott & Stoke D'Abernon ward	Map 2 and large map
14 St George's Hill	3	<i>Unchanged</i>	Map 2 and large map
15 Thames Ditton	3	<i>Unchanged</i>	Map 2 and large map
16 Walton Ambleside	2	Walton Ambleside ward (part); Walton Central ward (part); Walton North ward (part); Walton South ward (part)	Maps 2, A1 and large map

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

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Constituent areas	Map reference
17	Walton Central	3	Walton Central ward (part); Walton North ward (part); Walton South ward (part)	Maps 2, A1 and large map
18	Walton North	3	Walton Ambleside ward (part); Walton North ward (part)	Maps 2, A1 and large map
19	Walton South	3	Walton Ambleside ward (part); Walton Central ward (part); Walton South ward (part)	Map 2 and large map
20	Weston Green	2	Esher ward (part); Weston Green ward	Map 2 and large map
21	Weybridge North	2	Weybridge North ward; Weybridge South ward (part)	Map 2 and large map
22	Weybridge South	2	Weybridge South ward (part)	Map 2 and large map

Note: The borough of Elmbridge is unparished.

1. INTRODUCTION

1 This report contains our final recommendations on the electoral arrangements for the borough of Elmbridge. We have now reviewed all the districts in Surrey as part of our programme of periodic electoral reviews of all principal local authority areas in England.

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

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

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

4 This review was in four stages. Stage One began on 2 September 1997, when we wrote to Elmbridge Borough Council inviting proposals for future electoral arrangements. Our letter was copied to Surrey County Council, the Surrey Police Authority, the Metropolitan Police Authority, the local authority associations, Members of Parliament and the Member of the European Parliament with constituency interests in the borough, and the headquarters of the main political parties. At the start of the review and following publication of our draft recommendations, we published a notice in the local press, issued a press release and invited the Council to publicise the review more widely. The closing date for receipt of representations was 25 November 1997. At Stage Two we considered all the representations received during Stage One and prepared our draft recommendations.

5 Stage Three began on 17 March 1998 with the publication of our report, *Draft Recommendations on the Future Electoral Arrangements for Elmbridge in Surrey*, and ended on 1 June 1998. Comments were sought on our preliminary conclusions. Finally, during Stage Four we reconsidered our draft recommendations in the light of the Stage Three consultation and now publish our final recommendations.

2. CURRENT ELECTORAL ARRANGEMENTS

⁶ The borough of Elmbridge lies on Greater London's south-western boundary, is entirely unparished and covers some 23,800 hectares (around 92 square miles). Main settlements within the borough include Esher, Hersham, Molesey, Walton and Weybridge. The borough shares boundaries with the London borough of Kingston-upon-Thames and the Surrey districts of Epsom & Ewell, Guildford, Mole Valley, Runnymede, Spelthorne and Woking. The river Thames forms the northern boundary of Elmbridge, a borough which has good road and rail links with central London.

⁷ The Council has 60 councillors elected from 22 wards (Map 1 and Figure 2). The borough contains a pattern of multi-member wards, with 16 wards represented by three councillors and the remaining six wards electing two councillors each. The Council is elected by thirds. The electorate of the borough is 89,308 (February 1997) and each councillor represents an average of 1,488 electors. The Council forecasts that the electorate will increase by around two per cent to 91,524 by the year 2002 which would increase the average number of electors per councillor to 1,525.

⁸ To compare levels of electoral inequality between wards, the extent to which the number of electors per councillor in each ward (the councillor:elector ratio) varies from the average for the borough in percentage terms has been calculated. In the report, this calculation may also be described as 'electoral variance'.

⁹ Since the last periodic electoral review of Elmbridge was completed in 1975 by our predecessor, the Local Government Boundary Commission (LGBC), changes in population and electorate have been unevenly spread across the borough. As a result, in five of the 22 wards the number of electors per councillor varies by more

than 10 per cent from the borough average. The most significant electoral imbalance is in Hinchley Wood ward where each of the three councillors, on average, represent 1,227 electors, 18 per cent less than the borough average.

Figure 2:
Existing Electoral Arrangements

Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (1997)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2002)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
1 Claygate	3	5,008	1,669	12	4,914	1,638	7
2 Cobham & Downside	3	4,454	1,485	0	4,605	1,535	1
3 Cobham Fairmile	2	3,068	1,534	3	3,373	1,687	11
4 Esher	3	4,511	1,504	1	4,635	1,545	1
5 Hersham North	3	4,130	1,377	-8	4,087	1,362	-11
6 Hersham South	3	4,939	1,646	11	4,801	1,600	5
7 Hinchley Wood	3	3,680	1,227	-18	3,790	1,263	-17
8 Long Ditton	2	3,028	1,514	2	3,689	1,845	21
9 Molesey East	3	4,514	1,505	1	4,470	1,490	-2
10 Molesey North	3	4,615	1,538	3	4,670	1,557	2
11 Molesey South	3	4,797	1,599	7	4,998	1,666	9
12 Oatlands Park	3	4,510	1,503	1	4,464	1,488	-2
13 Oxshott & Stoke D'Abernon	3	4,292	1,431	-4	4,255	1,418	-7
14 St George's Hill	3	4,238	1,413	-5	4,398	1,466	-4
15 Thames Ditton	3	4,026	1,342	-10	4,210	1,403	-8
16 Walton Ambleside	2	2,824	1,412	-5	3,057	1,529	0
17 Walton Central	3	4,245	1,415	-5	4,496	1,499	-2
18 Walton North	3	4,776	1,592	7	4,872	1,624	6
19 Walton South	3	4,934	1,645	10	5,055	1,685	10
20 Weston Green	2	2,591	1,296	-13	2,647	1,324	-13

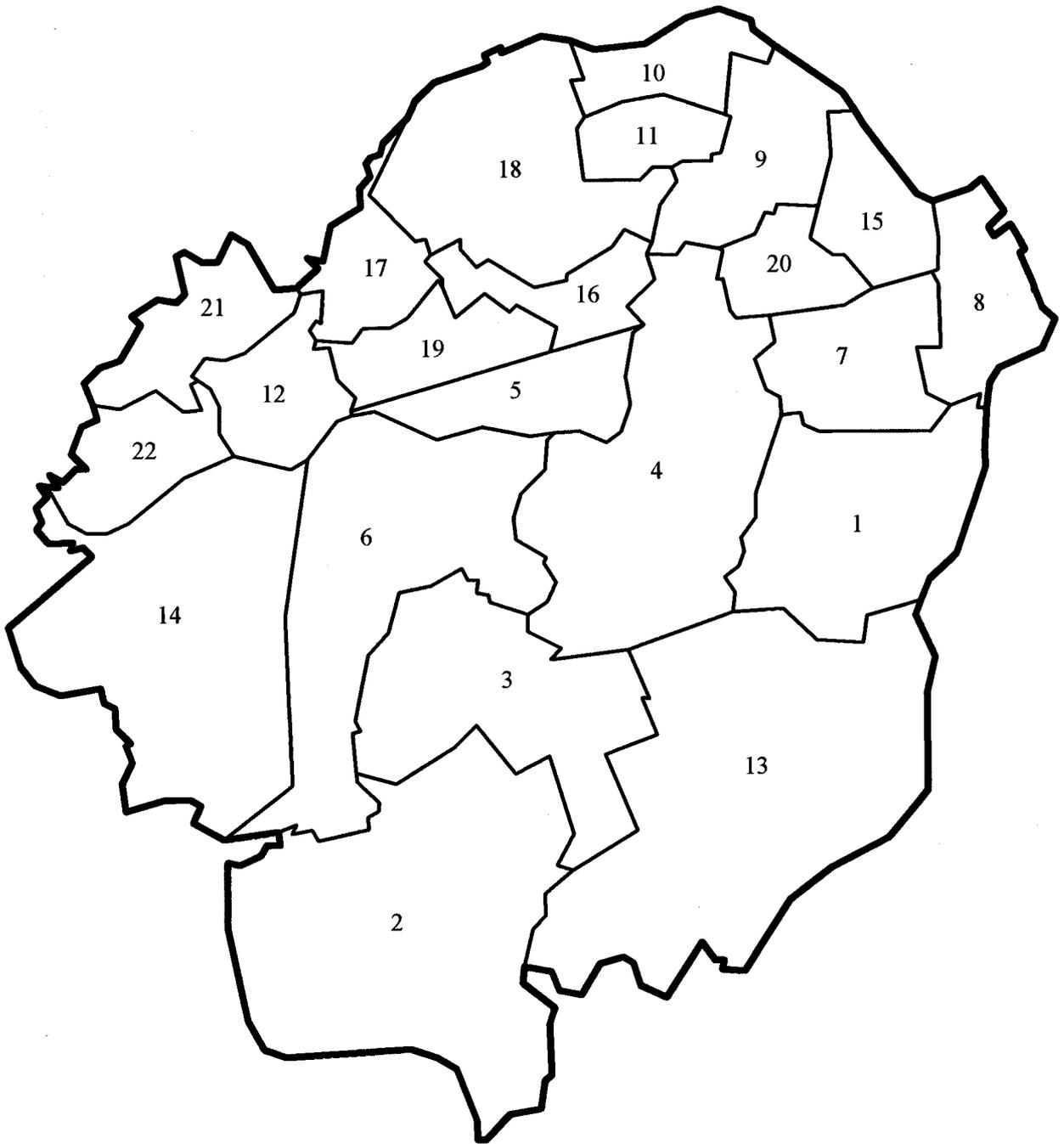
Figure 2 (continued):
Existing Electoral Arrangements

Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (1997)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2002)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
21 Weybridge North	2	2,829	1,415	-5	2,831	1,416	-7
22 Weybridge South	2	3,299	1,650	11	3,207	1,604	5
Totals	60	89,308	—	—	91,524	—	—
Averages	—	—	1,488	—	—	1,525	—

Source: Electorate figures are based on Elmbridge Borough Council's submission.

Note: The 'variance from average' column shows by how far, in percentage terms, the number of electors per councillor varies from the average for the borough. The minus symbol (-) denotes a lower than average number of electors. For example, in 1997, electors in Hinchley Wood ward were relatively over-represented by 18 per cent, while electors in Claygate ward were relatively under-represented by 12 per cent. Figures have been rounded to the nearest whole number.

Map 1:
Existing Wards in Elmbridge



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Key to Wards

- | | | |
|-----------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------|
| 1 Claygate | 9 Molesey East | 17 Walton Central |
| 2 Cobham and Downside | 10 Molesey North | 18 Walton North |
| 3 Cobham Fairmile | 11 Molesey South | 19 Walton South |
| 4 Esher | 12 Oatlands Park | 20 Weston Green |
| 5 Hersham North | 13 Oxshott and Stoke D'Abernon | 21 Weybridge North |
| 6 Hersham South | 14 St George's Hill | 22 Weybridge South |
| 7 Hinchley Wood | 15 Thames Ditton | |
| 8 Long Ditton | 16 Walton Ambleside | |

3. DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS

10 During Stage One we received representations from Elmbridge Borough Council, the Conservative Group on the Council, Hinchley Wood Residents' Association, Councillor Stewart and a local resident. In the light of these representations and the evidence available to us, we reached preliminary conclusions which were set out in our report, *Draft Recommendations on the Future Electoral Arrangements for Elmbridge in Surrey*. We proposed that:

- (a) Elmbridge Borough Council should continue to be served by 60 councillors, representing 22 wards;
- (b) the boundaries of 18 wards should be modified; and
- (c) elections should continue to be held by thirds.

Draft Recommendation

Elmbridge Borough Council should comprise 60 councillors, serving 22 wards. The Council should continue to be elected by thirds.

11 Our proposals reflected the Council's Stage One proposals, with the exception of those for Hinchley Wood and Long Ditton wards. In this area, we proposed that Hinchley Wood ward be served by one fewer councillor, Long Ditton ward be served by one additional (third) councillor and that the boundary between the two wards be modified. Our draft recommendations would have resulted in a significant improvement to electoral equality, with the number of electors per councillor in 21 of the 22 wards varying by no more than 10 per cent from the borough average. This level of electoral equality was expected to improve further during the period to 2002, by which time none of the wards were expected to vary by more than 10 per cent.

4. RESPONSES TO CONSULTATION

¹² During the consultation on our draft recommendations report, 110 representations were received. A list of all respondents is available on request from the Commission.

Elmbridge Borough Council

¹³ The Borough Council supported the majority of our draft proposals, including the retention of the existing council size and electoral cycle, but proposed an alternative ward boundary between Hinchley Wood and Long Ditton wards. Its suggested boundary would involve Severn Drive, Hill Rise, St Christopher's church and the Hinchley Wood schools being retained in Hinchley Wood ward.

Elmbridge Borough Council Conservative Group

¹⁴ The Conservative Group on the Council reiterated its Stage One proposal that the council size of Elmbridge should be reduced substantially. Its Stage Three submission proposed a reduction in council size of 16 members which would bring the total serving the borough to 44. Its modified proposals attempted to improve upon the level of electoral equality in its originally (Stage One) proposed wards in Walton and Weybridge. The revised scheme proposed that Walton be served by 11 councillors (rather than seven) returned from three three-member wards and one two-member ward, and that Weybridge be served by four councillors (rather than three), returned from two two-member wards.

Dittons & Hinchley Wood Labour Party

¹⁵ The Dittons & Hinchley Wood Labour Party opposed our proposal for Hinchley Wood ward to be served by one fewer councillor and Long Ditton ward to be served by one additional councillor. It also opposed our proposed boundary between the two wards. It alternatively proposed that each ward should retain its existing level of representation, and that a number of electors instead be transferred from Long Ditton ward into Hinchley Wood ward.

Surrey European Constituency Conservative Council

¹⁶ The European Constituency Conservative Council expressed its support for the Conservative Group's Stage One proposal for a substantial reduction in overall council size.

Member of Parliament

¹⁷ Mr Ian Taylor MP expressed his support for the Conservative Group's Stage One proposal for a substantial reduction in overall council size.

Other Representations

¹⁸ We received representations from two residents' associations, five district councillors and 98 local residents. Esher Residents' Association and Councillor Ashton supported our draft proposals, while Councillor Stewart also supported our proposals with the exception of those relating to Hinchley Wood and Long Ditton wards. Hinchley Wood Residents' Association submitted identical proposals to those put forward by the Dittons & Hinchley Wood Labour Party for an alternative boundary between Hinchley Wood and Long Ditton wards. Councillors Tanqueray and Travers supported the Conservative Group's proposal to substantially reduce the overall council size.

¹⁹ Councillor Pincham and the majority of the 98 local residents who wrote to us opposed our proposals in respect of Hinchley Wood and Long Ditton wards. The opposition to our proposals was generated in the main by the proposed boundary between the two wards. It was argued that the Hinchley Wood schools and St Christopher's church are essential parts of the Hinchley Wood community and that to include them in a revised Long Ditton ward would therefore be divisive.

5. ANALYSIS AND FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS

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

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

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

23 Our *Guidance* states that, while we accept that the achievement of absolute electoral equality for the authority as a whole is likely to be unattainable, we consider that, if electoral imbalances are to be kept to the minimum, such an objective should be the starting point in any review. We therefore strongly recommend that, in formulating electoral schemes, local authorities and other interested parties should start from the standpoint of absolute electoral equality and only then make adjustments to reflect relevant factors, such as community identity. Regard must also be had to five-year forecasts of change in electorates. We will require particular justification for schemes which result in, or retain, an imbalance of over 10 per cent in any

ward. Any imbalances of 20 per cent and over should arise only in the most exceptional circumstances, and will require the strongest justification.

Electorate Forecasts

24 During Stage One, the Council submitted electorate forecasts for the period 1997 to 2002, projecting an increase in the electorate of around 2 per cent over the five-year period, from 89,308 to 91,524. 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. In our draft recommendations report we accepted that this is an inexact science and, having given consideration to projected electorates, were content that they represented the best estimates that could reasonably be made at the time.

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

Council Size

26 We indicated in our *Guidance* that we would normally expect the number of councillors serving a district or borough council to be in the range of 30 to 60.

27 Elmbridge Borough Council is at present served by 60 councillors, at the uppermost limit of this range. During Stage One of the review, the Borough Council proposed no change to the council size but the Conservative Group on the Council proposed that the council size be reduced by 21 members to form a 39-member council. In our draft recommendations report we considered the size and distribution of the electorate, the geography and other characteristics of the area, together with the representations received. We concluded that the statutory criteria and the achievement of electoral equality would best be met by retaining a council size of 60 members.

28 As we detailed in our report *Draft Recommendations on the Future Electoral Arrangements for Elmbridge in Surrey*, the Conservative Group argued that the current arrangements were “cumbersome and did not facilitate efficient and cost-effective decision-making”. We welcomed the Group’s proposals as being innovative and were grateful that such a scheme was submitted. As we have indicated in our *Guidance*, we are always prepared to consider innovative proposals in respect of council size, intended to facilitate the implementation of executive models of local authority management.

29 However we concluded that the Group’s 39-member scheme did not provide a better balance of our statutory criteria in comparison to the Borough Council’s proposals as, for example, the Council’s proposals would provide better levels of electoral equality by 2002. We therefore rejected the Conservative Group’s initial proposals but invited further evidence in relation to council size during Stage Three.

30 At Stage Three, the Borough Council reiterated its preference for the retention of the current 60-member council size, a view endorsed by the Esher Residents’ Association and Councillor Stewart. However, the Conservative Group proposed modifications to its initial 39-member scheme to instead put forward a 44-member council size, with four additional members serving Walton and one additional member serving Weybridge. The proposals would effectively retain the present levels of representation in both these towns.

31 The Group informed us that it proposed these modifications to its Stage One scheme in order to redress the imbalances which its initial proposals would provide (by 2002) in its proposed Walton North & Ambleside and Weybridge North & South wards (at 13 per cent above and 12 per cent below the borough average respectively). We received representations from Mr Ian Taylor MP, the Surrey European Constituency Conservative Council, Councillors Tanqueray and Travers and 15 local residents, all expressing support for the Conservative Group’s proposals.

32 Despite the support we have received in favour of a reduction in council size in Elmbridge, we have not been presented with sufficient new evidence or supporting information to persuade us that a reduction in council size from 60 to 39 or 44 members would better reflect community interests across the whole borough, nor improve electoral equality. We acknowledge that support for the

Group’s proposals from the entire Elmbridge Council may be difficult to achieve given that it is a relatively radical proposal and that no one political party has overall control of the Council. However, as we stated in our *Draft Recommendations* report, we are wary about recommending a radically different form of management for which the majority of councillors and political groups have not shown their support.

33 Furthermore, the Group’s revised proposals would provide for worse levels of electoral equality than its original proposition: eight wards would exceed 10 per cent from the borough average number of electors per councillor initially (with six wards at more than 20 per cent), while in five years time 13 wards would exceed 10 per cent from the borough average, with four wards at 20 per cent or more by that time. The Group’s revised proposals would provide levels of electoral imbalance which are clearly too high to be considered as a realistic alternative to our draft recommendations.

Electoral Arrangements

34 We have therefore rejected the Conservative Group’s proposals for a reduction in the size of the Council for the reasons stated above. We have concluded, having considered all the representations received, that the retention of the existing council size for Elmbridge provides for the best balance of our statutory criteria. The following areas, based on existing wards, are considered in turn:

- (a) Cobham (two wards) and Oxshott & Stoke D’Abernon ward;
- (b) Hersham (two wards);
- (c) Molesey (three wards);
- (d) Walton (four wards);
- (e) Weybridge (two wards);
- (f) Claygate, Esher and Weston Green wards;
- (g) Hinchley Wood, Long Ditton and Thames Ditton wards;
- (h) Oatlands Park and St George’s Hill wards.

Cobham (two wards) and Oxshott & Stoke D’Abernon ward

35 Cobham & Downside, Cobham Fairmile and Oxshott & Stoke D’Abernon wards are situated in the southern part of the borough, with the M25 motorway running just south of Downside itself. The number of electors per councillor in the three-

member Cobham & Downside and Oxshott & Stoke D'Abernon wards is equal to the average and 4 per cent below the borough average respectively (1 per cent above and 7 per cent below by 2002). The number of electors per councillor in the two-member Cobham Fairmile ward is 3 per cent above the borough average, projected to be 11 per cent by 2002.

36 As part of our draft recommendations, we proposed: that 183 electors should be transferred from Cobham Fairmile ward into Oxshott & Stoke D'Abernon ward; that 26 electors should be transferred from Cobham Fairmile ward into Cobham & Downside ward; and also that the northern side of Lebanon Drive should be included in Oxshott & Stoke D'Abernon ward from Cobham Fairmile ward, with the latter two proposals aimed at providing more identifiable boundaries. We did not propose any change to the number of councillors serving each of the wards. Under our proposals, the number of electors per councillor in the revised Cobham & Downside, Cobham Fairmile and Oxshott & Stoke D'Abernon wards would not exceed 4 per cent from the borough average both initially and by 2002.

37 At Stage Three the Borough Council supported our draft proposals for these wards, as did Esher Residents' Association and Councillors Ashton and Stewart. The Conservative Group on the Council opposed our proposals for these wards and instead reiterated its Stage One proposals for this area. Under the Group's proposals, Cobham & Downside and Cobham Fairmile wards would be combined and the number of councillors serving the new ward would then be reduced from five members to three. Its proposals also involved the number of councillors serving Oxshott & Stoke D'Abernon ward being reduced from three members to two, and 461 electors being included in the new ward (currently in Cobham Fairmile ward).

38 Due to the variation in council size between the Conservative Group's Stage One and Stage Three proposals, providing a reduction in the overall borough average, the number of electors per councillor in its new Cobham Downside & Fairmile and Oxshott & Stoke D'Abernon wards would be 16 per cent and 17 per cent above the borough average respectively (20 per cent and 13 per cent by 2002).

39 We have explained earlier in this chapter the reasons for our rejection of the Conservative Group's scheme. Given the support of the Council and in the absence of other views, we confirm as final our draft proposals for this area. Details of our proposed boundaries between the three wards are illustrated on the large map inserted at the back of this report.

Hersham (two wards)

40 Hersham, in the centre of the borough, is currently served by two three-member wards. The number of electors per councillor in the existing Hersham North and Hersham South wards is 8 per cent below and 11 per cent above the borough average respectively (11 per cent and 5 per cent by 2002).

41 As part of our draft recommendations, we proposed that the number of councillors serving each of the two wards in Hersham remain unchanged but that 257 electors be transferred from Hersham South ward into Hersham North ward. Under our draft recommendations, the number of electors per councillor in our revised Hersham North and Hersham South wards would be 2 per cent below and 5 per cent above the borough average respectively (5 per cent below and 1 per cent below by 2002).

42 During Stage Three we received support for our draft proposals from the Borough Council, Esher Residents' Association and Councillors Ashton and Stewart. The Conservative Group on the Council opposed them and instead reiterated its Stage One proposals, which were for a reduction in the number of councillors serving each of the two wards from three to two, and 117 electors being transferred from Hersham South ward into Hersham North ward. Under its revised proposals, the number of electors per councillor in its proposed Hersham North ward would be 2 per cent above the borough average, projected to be 1 per cent by 2002. However, the number of electors per councillor in its proposed Hersham South ward would initially be 22 per cent above the borough average, projected to be 13 per cent by 2002.

43 As stated above, we do not support the Group's proposed reduction in overall council size and therefore, given the support we have received for them, we confirm our draft proposals for Hersham as final. Details of our proposed boundaries are illustrated on the large map inserted at the back of this report.

Molesey (three wards)

44 Molesey is situated in the north-east of the borough and is served by three three-member wards. The number of electors per councillor in Molesey East, Molesey North and Molesey South wards is 1 per cent above, 3 per cent above and 7 per cent above the borough average respectively (2 per cent below, 2 per cent above and 9 per cent above by 2002).

45 As part of our draft recommendations, we proposed that 46 electors be transferred from Molesey South ward into Molesey East ward and that no change be made to Molesey North ward. We did not propose any change to the number of councillors representing each of these three wards. The number of electors per councillor in our revised Molesey East and Molesey South wards would be 2 per cent above and 6 per cent above the borough average respectively (1 per cent below and 8 per cent above by 2002). An unchanged Molesey North ward would retain its existing level of electoral equality.

46 During Stage Three the Borough Council, Esher Residents' Association and Councillors Ashton and Stewart supported our proposals for these wards. However the Conservative Group opposed our proposals, instead endorsing its Stage One proposals for this area which were for the number of councillors serving each ward to be reduced from three to two, without any change proposed to the boundaries of any ward. The number of electors per councillor in the Group's proposed Molesey East, Molesey North and Molesey South wards would be 11 per cent, 14 per cent and 18 per cent above the borough average respectively (7 per cent, 12 per cent and 20 per cent by 2002).

47 Given the poor levels of electoral equality which the Conservative Group's proposals provide, we have not been able to assess them as realistic alternatives to our own draft proposals. We confirm as final our draft recommendations for Molesey and details of our proposed boundary alteration between Molesey East and Molesey South wards are illustrated on the large map inserted at the back of this report.

Walton (four wards)

48 Walton is located in the north of the borough and presently returns 11 councillors from four wards. The number of electors per councillor in the

three-member Walton Central, Walton North and Walton South wards is 5 per cent below, 7 per cent above and 10 per cent above the borough average respectively (2 per cent, 6 per cent and 10 per cent by 2002). The number of electors per councillor in the two-member Walton Ambleside ward is 5 per cent below the borough average, projected to equal the average by 2002.

49 Our draft proposals for this area were as follows: a net total of 168 electors should be transferred to Walton Ambleside ward; a net total of 229 electors should be transferred to Walton Central ward; a net total of 78 electors should be transferred from Walton North ward; and a net total of 319 electors should be transferred from Walton South ward. We proposed to retain the existing level of representation for each of these four wards. Under our proposals, the number of electors per councillor in our revised Walton Ambleside, Walton Central, Walton North and Walton South wards would be 1 per cent above, equal to the average, 5 per cent above and 3 per cent above the borough average respectively (6 per cent, 4 per cent, 5 per cent and 3 per cent by 2002).

50 As part of its Stage One proposals, the Conservative Group proposed that Walton Ambleside and Walton North wards be combined to form a new three-member ward. It also proposed that Walton Central and Walton South wards each be served by one fewer councillor to form two new two-member wards. It did not propose any boundary changes between Walton and its surrounding areas. The number of electors per councillor in the Group's (Stage One) proposed Walton Central, Walton North & Ambleside and Walton South wards would be 7 per cent below, 11 per cent above and 8 per cent above the borough average respectively (4 per cent, 13 per cent and 8 per cent by 2002).

51 During Stage Three the Borough Council supported our proposals for the four wards in Walton, and we also received support for our proposals from Esher Residents' Association and Councillors Ashton and Stewart. The Conservative Group opposed our scheme and put forward modified proposals in order to redress the levels of electoral imbalance contained in its own Stage One proposals. The Group suggested that Walton should in fact continue to be served by 11 councillors rather than be represented by seven as it had originally put forward.

52 Due to these modifications (and an additional alteration to its Stage One proposals in relation to the level of representation in Weybridge) the average number of electors per councillor for the borough as a whole would change from 2,290 under a 39-member council to 2,030 under a 44-member council (on 1997 electorate figures). This would have the effect of changing the level of

60 At Stage Three the Borough Council supported our draft proposals, as did Esher Residents' Association and Councillor Stewart. We also received a representation from Councillor Ashton, who represents the existing Claygate ward, in support of our draft proposals across the borough but specifically our proposals for his ward, stating that "the minor changes affecting my own ward are sensible".

61 The Conservative Group on the Council, however, opposed our proposals and instead endorsed its Stage One proposal for these wards involving the number of councillors serving Claygate and Esher wards being reduced from three to two, with the boundaries of both wards remaining unchanged. It also proposed that Weston Green ward be combined with Thames Ditton ward to form a new three-member Thames Ditton & Weston Green ward.

62 Under its revised proposals, the number of electors per councillor in its two-member Claygate and Esher wards would initially be 23 per cent above and 11 per cent above the borough average respectively (18 per cent and 11 per cent by 2002). The number of electors per councillor in its three-member Thames Ditton & Weston Green ward would be 9 per cent above the borough average, projected to 10 per cent by 2002.

63 As detailed at the beginning of this chapter, we do not find favour with the proposals submitted by the Conservative Group and have therefore rejected its proposals. We confirm our draft recommendations as final in these three wards, and details of our proposed ward boundaries are shown on the large map inserted at the back of this report.

Hinchley Wood, Long Ditton and Thames Ditton wards

64 These three wards are located in the north-east of the borough. Hinchley Wood and Thames Ditton wards return three councillors each, while Long Ditton ward returns two councillors. The number of electors per councillor in the three wards is 18 per cent below, 10 per cent below and 2 per cent above the borough average respectively (17 per cent, 8 per cent and 21 per cent by 2002).

65 In its Stage One submission the Borough Council did not express a preference for any of the

three options which it put forward for these wards, the three proposed options being as follows:

- that there should be no change to any of the three wards;
- that the number of councillors serving each ward should remain the same, but 161 electors should be transferred from Long Ditton ward into Hinchley Wood ward and 208 electors should be transferred from Long Ditton into Thames Ditton ward; and
- that the number of councillors serving Hinchley Wood ward should be reduced from three to two and the number of councillors serving Long Ditton ward should be increased from two to three. In addition, it suggested a transfer of electors (without providing specific proposals) between the following wards: from Esher to Weston Green; from Hinchley Wood to Esher; from Hinchley Wood and Thames Ditton into Long Ditton; and from Weston Green into Thames Ditton.

66 Following the close of Stage One the Borough Council informed us that it would prefer for no change to be made to Hinchley Wood, Long Ditton and Thames Ditton wards. As we stated in our *Draft Recommendations* report, we were unable to recommend no change in this area in view of the high levels of electoral inequality which would continue.

67 As part of our draft recommendations for this area, we proposed that the number of councillors serving Hinchley Wood ward be reduced from three members to two, that the number of councillors serving Long Ditton ward be increased from two to three and that 701 electors be transferred from Hinchley Wood ward into Long Ditton ward.

68 Under our scheme, the number of electors per councillor in the proposed Hinchley Wood and Thames Ditton wards would be equal to the average and 10 per cent below the borough average respectively (1 per cent above and 8 per cent below by 2002). The number of electors per councillor in our proposed Long Ditton ward would initially be 17 per cent below the borough average, but due to the development forecast to place take on the former water-works site in the north-east of the ward, it was projected to be only 4 per cent below the borough average by 2002.

69 At Stage Three the Borough Council supported our proposals in relation to the number of councillors serving each of our proposed wards, but it opposed the proposed boundary between Hinchley Wood and Long Ditton wards. It put forward a slight modification to our boundary in order that the 166 electors on Severn Drive and Hill Rise could continue to be within Hinchley Wood ward, rather than be included in Long Ditton ward. Under its proposals, the Hinchley Wood schools and St Christopher's church would also be retained in Hinchley Wood ward and the number of electors per councillor in its proposed Hinchley Wood and Long Ditton wards would be 6 per cent above and 20 per cent below the borough average respectively (7 per cent and 8 per cent by 2002).

70 At Stage Three the Conservative Group on the Council endorsed its Stage One proposals. At Stage One it put forward that Hinchley Wood and Long Ditton wards be combined to form a new three-member ward. It also proposed that Thames Ditton ward be combined with Weston Green ward to form a new three-member ward. Under its revised proposals, the number of electors per councillor in the new Hinchley Wood & Long Ditton and Thames Ditton & Weston Green wards would be 10 per cent and 9 per cent above the borough average respectively (20 per cent and 10 per cent by 2002). Given the levels of electoral inequality which the Group's revised proposals provide in these wards and a number of other wards across the borough, we have concluded to reject them (as argued earlier).

71 We also received a further 101 representations in opposition to our proposed boundary between these two wards. The Dittons & Hinchley Wood Labour Party and Hinchley Wood Residents' Association proposed (separately) that the number of councillors representing both Hinchley Wood and Long Ditton wards should remain as at present. Each also proposed that a number of electors currently in Long Ditton ward should be placed within a modified Hinchley Wood ward, with the new ward boundary running behind the houses on Scott Farm Close, Rectory Lane and Woodstock Lane South to include all the electors on these roads within Hinchley Wood ward. Under these proposals the number of electors per councillor in the revised Hinchley Wood and Long Ditton wards would be 9 per cent and 11 per cent below the borough average respectively (9 per cent below and 9 per cent above by 2002).

72 Councillor Pincham, who represents the existing Claygate and Hinchley Wood electoral division, stated that he was "particularly concerned" with maintaining community identities in wards in Elmbridge and that "reducing the size of the [Hinchley Wood] ward would weaken that institution". We also received the views of 98 local residents. Those opposing our proposed boundary between Hinchley Wood ward and Long Ditton ward stated that such a boundary would cut across local identities, principally due to the 'removal' of the Hinchley Wood schools and St Christopher's church from their existing ward. They argued that the schools and church provide a strong bond for the residents in the area and that to include them within Long Ditton ward would be detrimental to community identities and interests.

73 We have re-examined our draft proposals for Hinchley Wood and Long Ditton wards in the light of the representations we have received. We acknowledge the arguments that have been put to us with regard to the Hinchley Wood schools and St Christopher's church being integral parts of the Hinchley Wood community. However, we do not look favourably on the proposal put forward by the Dittons & Hinchley Wood Labour Party and Hinchley Wood Residents' Association, given that they would provide worse levels of electoral equality in comparison to our draft proposals. We are also of the view that the proposals from these respondents may have an adverse effect on the community ties which currently exist in Long Ditton ward.

74 We acknowledge that the Borough Council's proposals provide only a marginally better level of electoral equality in these wards, compared to those submitted by the Dittons & Hinchley Wood Labour Party and Hinchley Wood Residents' Association. However, we regard the Council's proposals as being a better reflection of local ties in both Hinchley Wood and Long Ditton wards and acknowledge that Severn Drive and Hill Rise may share closer ties with Hinchley Wood ward rather than Long Ditton ward, given their geographical location and the fact that they would need to pass through our proposed Hinchley Wood ward to gain access to Long Ditton ward.

75 However, we regard the area to the north and east of the school playing field (including Greenwood Road, Orchard Avenue and the northern end of Manor Road North) as being reasonably well linked to Long Ditton along Sugden Road. We are not of the view that the

proposal to transfer these electors into Long Ditton ward would have a significantly detrimental effect on local ties, given that the electors in this area appear to be split somewhat arbitrarily (for example along Sugden Road) at present between two continuous suburban wards.

76 We consider the Borough Council's proposed modifications to our draft recommendations as being a suitable compromise between securing a reasonable level of electoral equality in these wards while reflecting community identities and interests in the area. We have therefore concluded to adopt the Borough Council's revised boundary between Hinchley Wood ward and Long Ditton ward and confirm as final our draft proposal that no change be made to the boundaries of Thames Ditton ward.

77 Under our final recommendations, the number of electors per councillor in our proposed Hinchley Wood, Long Ditton and Thames Ditton wards would be 6 per cent above, 20 per cent below and 10 per cent below the borough average respectively (7 per cent, 8 per cent and 8 per cent by 2002). Details of our proposed boundaries are illustrated on the large map inserted at the back of this report.

Oatlands Park and St George's Hill wards

78 Oatlands Park and St George's Hill wards are located in the west of the borough, and each ward returns three councillors. The number of electors per councillor in the two wards is 1 per cent above and 5 per cent below the borough average respectively (2 per cent below and 4 per cent below by 2002).

79 As part of our draft proposals, we put forward for consultation that no change should be made to either ward, given the good levels of electoral equality which the existing arrangements provide. At Stage Three the Borough Council supported our draft proposals and we also received support for our proposals from Esher Residents' Association and Councillors Ashton and Stewart.

80 However, the Conservative Group on the Council opposed our draft recommendations and instead endorsed its Stage One proposal that the number of councillors serving each of the wards should be reduced from three to two, that 179 electors should be transferred from Oatlands Park ward into its proposed Weybridge North & South

ward, and that no change should be made to the boundaries of the revised St George's Hill ward. The number of electors per councillor in its proposed Oatlands Park and St George's Hill wards would be 11 per cent and 4 per cent above the borough average respectively (3 per cent and 6 per cent by 2002).

81 The Conservative Group's proposals would provide marginally worse levels of electoral equality in both these wards by 2002, compared to those provided by our own draft proposals. On this basis, and because we do not regard the proposed reduction in council size as being in the interest of the electorate across the borough, we reject the Group's proposals and confirm as final our draft proposals for these two wards.

Electoral Cycle

82 In our draft recommendations report, we proposed that the present system of elections by thirds should continue. At Stage Three, Elmbridge Borough Council supported this proposal as did Esher Residents' Association and Councillor Ashton. However, the Conservative Group on the Council proposed that the whole council be elected together every four years. We have not been persuaded that there is sufficient local support for altering the electoral cycle of Elmbridge Borough Council and we have therefore decided to confirm our draft recommendation as final.

Conclusions

83 Having considered carefully all the evidence and representations we have received in response to our consultation report, we have decided to substantially endorse our draft recommendations, subject to the minor boundary modification between our proposed Hinchley Wood and Long Ditton wards.

84 We have concluded that the present council size of 60 members should be retained; that there should be 22 wards; that the boundaries of 18 of the existing wards should be modified; and that elections by thirds should continue to be held.

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

Figure 3:
Comparison of Current and Recommended Electoral Arrangements

	1997 electorate		2002 projected electorate	
	Current arrangements	Final recommendations	Current arrangements	Final recommendations
Number of councillors	60	60	60	60
Number of wards	22	22	22	22
Average number of electors per councillor	1,488	1,488	1,525	1,525
Number of wards with a variance more than 10 per cent from the average	5	1	5	0
Number of wards with a variance more than 20 per cent from the average	0	0	1	0

⁸⁶ As Figure 3 shows, our recommendations would result in a significant reduction in the number of wards where the number of electors per councillor varies by more than 10 per cent from the borough average from five to one, and a further reduction to none by 2002. Under these proposals, the average number of electors per councillor would remain the same as under the current arrangements, at 1,488 initially and 1,525 by 2002. We conclude that our recommendations would best meet the need for electoral equality, having regard to the statutory criteria.

Final Recommendation

Elmbridge Borough Council should comprise 60 councillors serving 22 wards, as detailed and named in Figures 1 and 4 and illustrated in Map 2, Map A1 and the large map inserted at the back of this report. The Council should continue to be elected by thirds.

Figure 4:
The Commission's Final Recommendations for Elmbridge

Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (1997)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2002)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
1 Claygate	3	4,906	1,635	10	4,812	1,604	5
2 Cobham & Downside	3	4,480	1,493	0	4,631	1,544	1
3 Cobham Fairmile	2	2,859	1,430	-4	3,164	1,582	4
4 Esher	3	4,476	1,492	0	4,600	1,533	1
5 Hersham North	3	4,387	1,462	-2	4,344	1,448	-5
6 Hersham South	3	4,682	1,561	5	4,544	1,515	-1
7 Hinchley Wood	2	3,150	1,575	6	3,260	1,630	7
8 Long Ditton	3	3,558	1,186	-20	4,219	1,406	-8
9 Molesey East	3	4,560	1,520	2	4,516	1,505	-1
10 Molesey North	3	4,615	1,538	3	4,670	1,557	2
11 Molesey South	3	4,751	1,584	6	4,952	1,651	8
12 Oatlands Park	3	4,510	1,503	1	4,464	1,488	-2
13 Oxshott & Stoke D'Abernon	3	4,475	1,492	0	4,438	1,479	-3
14 St George's Hill	3	4,238	1,413	-5	4,398	1,466	-4
15 Thames Ditton	3	4,026	1,342	-10	4,210	1,403	-8
16 Walton Ambleside	2	2,992	1,496	1	3,221	1,611	6
17 Walton Central	3	4,474	1,491	0	4,761	1,587	4
18 Walton North	3	4,698	1,566	5	4,794	1,598	5
19 Walton South	3	4,615	1,538	3	4,704	1,568	3
20 Weston Green	2	2,728	1,364	-8	2,784	1,392	-9

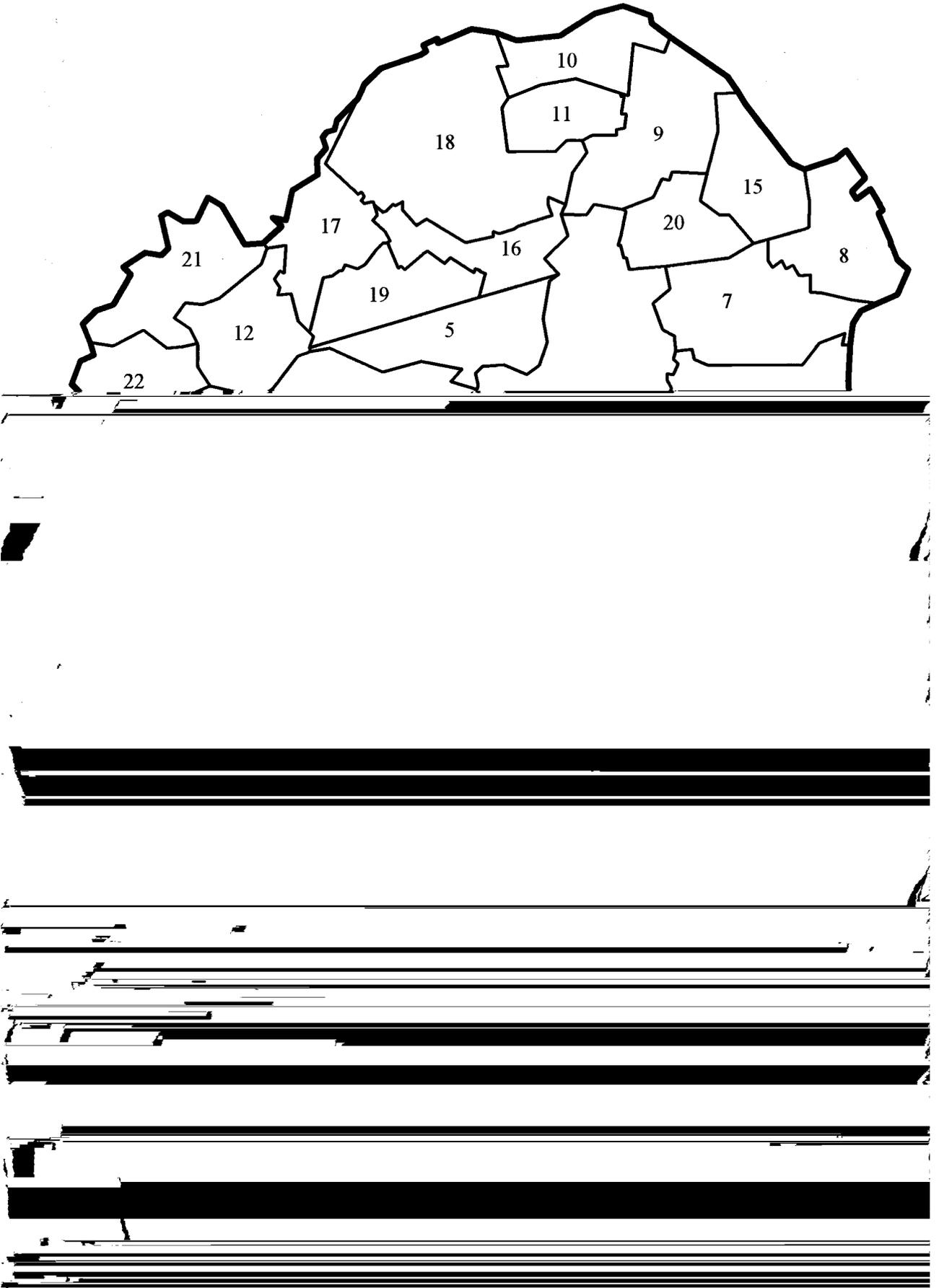
Figure 4 (continued):
The Commission's Final Recommendations for Elmbridge

Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (1997)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2002)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
21 Weybridge North	2	3,054	1,527	3	3,056	1,528	0
22 Weybridge South	2	3,074	1,537	3	2,982	1,491	-2
Totals	60	89,308	—	—	91,524	—	—
Averages	—	—	1,488	—	—	1,525	—

Source: Electorate figures are based on Elmbridge Borough Council's submission.

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

Map 2:
The Commission's Final Recommendations for Elmbridge



6. NEXT STEPS

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

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

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

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

APPENDIX A

Final Recommendations for Elmbridge: Detailed Mapping

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

Map A1 illustrates our proposed boundary changes between Walton Ambleside, Walton Central and Walton North wards.

The **large map** inserted in the back of this report illustrates the Commission's proposed ward boundaries for Elmbridge.

APPENDIX B

Draft Recommendations for Elmbridge (March 1998):

Our final recommendations, detailed in Figures 1 and 4, differ from those we put forward as draft recommendations only in respect of the wards as detailed below.

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

Ward name	Number of councillors	Constituent areas
Hinchley Wood	2	Hinchley Wood ward (part); Long Ditton ward (part)
Long Ditton	3	Hinchley Wood ward (part); Long Ditton ward (part)

*Figure B2:
The Commission's Draft Recommendations: The Number of Electors per Councillor*

Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (1997)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2002)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
Hinchley Wood	2	2,984	1,492	0	3,094	1,547	1
Long Ditton	3	3,724	1,241	-17	4,385	1,462	-4

