

LOCAL  
GOVERNMENT  
COMMISSION  
FOR ENGLAND

FINAL  
RECOMMENDATIONS  
ON THE FUTURE  
ELECTORAL  
ARRANGEMENTS FOR  
SEDGEMOOR  
IN SOMERSET

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

*November 1997*

# LOCAL GOVERNMENT COMMISSION FOR ENGLAND

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

Members of the Commission are:

Professor Malcolm Grant (Chairman)

Helena Shovelton (Deputy Chairman)

Peter Brokenshire

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## Local Government Commission for England

4 November 1997

Dear Secretary of State

On 25 October 1996 the Commission commenced a periodic electoral review of the district of Sedgemoor under the Local Government Act 1992. We published our draft recommendations in June 1997 and undertook an eleven-week period of consultation.

We have now prepared our final recommendations in the light of the consultation. We have substantially confirmed our draft recommendations, although some modifications have been made in the light of further evidence (see paragraph 88). This report sets out our final recommendations for changes to electoral arrangements in Sedgemoor.

We recommend that Sedgemoor District Council should be served by 50 councillors representing 25 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 together every four years.

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

Yours sincerely

PROFESSOR MALCOLM GRANT  
Chairman



# SUMMARY

The Commission began a review of Sedgemoor on 25 October 1996. We published our draft recommendations for electoral arrangements on 10 June 1997, 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 Sedgemoor because:

- **in 22 of the 31 wards the number of electors represented by each councillor varies by more than 10 per cent from the average for the district;**
- **in 14 wards the number of electors represented by each councillor varies by more than 20 per cent from the average, one of which varies by more than 50 per cent;**
- **electoral equality is not expected to improve by 2001.**

Our main final recommendations for future electoral arrangements (Figure 1) are that:

- **Sedgemoor District Council should be served by 50 councillors, compared with 49 at present;**
- **there should be 25 wards, six fewer than at present;**
- **the boundaries of 24 of the existing wards should be modified, while seven wards should retain their existing boundaries;**
- **elections should continue to take place every four years.**

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

- **In 20 of the 25 wards the number of electors per councillor would vary by no more than 10 per cent from the district average.**

- **By 2001 the number of electors per councillor is projected to vary by no more than 10 per cent from the average in 22 wards; no ward would vary by more than 20 per cent.**

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

- **new warding arrangements for Burnham-on-Sea & Highbridge and North Petherton town councils and Woolavington Parish Council.**

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 16 December 1997:

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

Figure 1:  
The Commission's Final Recommendations: Summary

	<b>Ward name</b>	<b>Number of councillors</b>	<b>Constituent areas</b>	<b>Map reference</b>
1	Axbridge	1	<i>Unchanged</i> (the parish of Axbridge)	Map 2
2	Axe Vale	1	<i>Unchanged</i> (the parishes of Badgworth, Chapel Allerton, Compton Bishop and Weare)	Map 2
3	Berrow	1	Berrow ward (part – the parishes of Berrow and Breaton)	Map 2
4	Brent North	1	Berrow ward (part – the parish of Lympsham); Brent ward (part – the parish of East Brent)	Map 2
5	Bridgwater Bower	3	Central ward (part); Parchey ward (part – the parish of Bridgwater Without); Sydenham ward (part)	Map 2 and large map
6	Bridgwater Eastover	2	Central ward (part); Eastover ward	Map 2 and large map
7	Bridgwater Hamp	3	Central ward (part); Hamp ward (part); Victoria ward (part)	Map 2 and large map
8	Bridgwater Quantock	3	Central ward (part); Hamp ward (part); Quantock ward (the parish of Durleigh and an unparished area of Bridgwater)	Map 2 and large map
9	Bridgwater Sydenham	3	Central ward (part); Sydenham ward (part)	Map 2 and large map
10	Bridgwater Victoria	2	Central ward (part); Victoria ward (part)	Map 2 and large map
11	Burnham North	3	Burnham North ward (part); Burnham South ward (part)	Maps 2 and A1
12	Burnham South	3	Burnham North ward (part); Burnham South ward (part)	Maps 2 and A1
13	Cannington and Quantocks	3	Cannington and Combwich ward (the parishes of Cannington, Otterhampton and Stockland Bristol); Dowsborough ward (the parishes of Fiddington, Nether Stowey and Over Stowey); Eastern Quantocks ward (the parishes of Broomfield, Enmore, Goathurst and Spaxton)	Map 2
14	Cheddar and Shiphams	3	Cheddar ward (the parish of Cheddar); Shiphams ward (the parish of Shiphams)	Map 2
15	East Poldens	1	<i>Unchanged</i> (the parishes of Ashcott, Greinton, Moorlinch and Shapwick)	Map 2

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

Ward name	Number of councillors	Constituent areas	Map reference
16 Highbridge	3	<i>Unchanged</i> (the Highbridge parish ward of Burnham-on-Sea and Highbridge parish)	Map 2
17 Huntspill and Pawlett	2	Huntspill ward (the parishes of East Huntspill and West Huntspill); Pawlett and Puriton ward (part – the parish of Pawlett)	Map 2
18 King's Isle	2	Parchey ward (part – the parishes of Bawdrip, Chedzoy and Stawell); Soweys ward (the parishes of Middlezoy and Othery); Westonzoyland ward (the parish of Westonzoyland)	Map 2
19 Knoll	1	Brent ward (part – the parish of Brent Knoll); Mark ward (part – the parish of Burnham Without)	Map 2
20 North Petherton	3	North Petherton ward (the North Petherton parish ward of North Petherton parish); Newton Green ward (the North Newton and Northmoor parish wards of North Petherton parish, the parishes of Lyng and Thurloxton)	Map 2
21 Puriton	1	Pawlett and Puriton ward (part – the parish of Puriton)	Map 2
22 Sandford	1	<i>Unchanged</i> (the parishes of Chilton Trinity and Wembdon)	Map 2
23 Wedmore and Mark	2	Mark ward (part – the parish of Mark); Wedmore ward (the parish of Wedmore)	Map 2
24 West Poldens	1	<i>Unchanged</i> (the parishes of Burtle, Catcott, Chilton Polden, Cossington and Edington)	Map 2
25 Woolavington	1	<i>Unchanged</i> (the parish of Woolavington)	Map 2

Note: Bridgwater is the only unparished area of Sedgemoor.



# 1. INTRODUCTION

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

2 In undertaking these reviews, we have had 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 and supplemented in September 1996), which sets out our approach to the reviews.

4 This review was in four stages. Stage One began on 25 October 1996, when we wrote to Sedgemoor District Council inviting proposals for future electoral arrangements. Our letter was copied to Somerset County Council, the Avon and Somerset Police Authority, the local authority associations, Somerset Association of Local Councils, parish and town councils in the district, Members of Parliament and the Member of the European Parliament with constituency interests in the district, 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 District Council to publicise the review more widely. The closing date for receipt of representations was 20 January 1997. At Stage Two we considered all the representations received during Stage One and prepared our draft recommendations.

5 Stage Three began on 10 June 1997 with the publication of our report, *Draft Recommendations on the Future Electoral Arrangements for Sedgemoor in Somerset*, and ended on 26 August 1997. 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

<sup>6</sup> Sedgemoor, situated in the north of the county of Somerset, has two main urban settlements – the town of Bridgwater and the area of Burnham-on-Sea and Highbridge – which between them account for almost half its electorate. The district has diverse topography, ranging from the rural areas of the Mendip Hills in the north and the Quantock Hills in the south-west to the flat agricultural heartland in the south-east. A number of drainage ditches traverse the area, a pattern which is reflected in the linear development of transport links and settlements. To the west of the district lies the Bristol Channel. With the exception of the town of Bridgwater, the district is completely parished, with 53 civil parishes.

<sup>7</sup> 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 district in percentage terms, has been calculated. In the report, this calculation may also be described as ‘electoral variance’.

<sup>8</sup> The electorate of the district is 78,998 (February 1996). The Council presently has 49 members who are elected from 31 wards (Map 1 and Figure 3). Five of the 31 wards are each represented by three councillors, eight wards elect two members each, while the other 18 are single-member wards. The whole Council is elected every four years, the same as for the other district councils in Somerset, with the next elections taking place in May 1999.

<sup>9</sup> At present each councillor represents an average of 1,612 electors, which the Council forecasts would increase to 1,703 by 2001 if the present number of councillors were maintained. Since the last electoral review in 1975, the electorate of Sedgemoor has increased by some 22 per cent, but the growth has been unevenly spread, most of it being concentrated in the more urban areas. As a result, the number of electors per councillor varies significantly from the average in many wards. Electors in the wards of Sydenham and Hamp in Bridgwater, for example, have become comparatively under-represented on the District Council; conversely those of Central and Eastover

in the town are relatively over-represented. The District Council envisages further, though fairly localised, development over the next five years, notably in Bridgwater, Burnham-on-Sea, Cannington, Cheddar and North Petherton.

<sup>10</sup> There are currently 22 wards in which the number of electors per councillor varies from the average by over 10 per cent and 14 wards which vary by more than 20 per cent. Sydenham ward in Bridgwater presently has the worst degree of electoral equality in the district: the number of electors per councillor varies by over 50 per cent from the average so that the three councillors for this ward represent an average of 2,441 electors each compared to the district average of 1,612 electors.

<sup>11</sup> As part of this review, we may also make recommendations relating to the electoral arrangements of the 53 parish and town councils in the district, although we cannot alter boundaries between parishes or recommend the emparishment of presently unparished areas.

*Map 1:  
Existing Wards in Sedgemoor*



Figure 2:  
Existing Electoral Arrangements

Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (1996)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2001)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
1 Axbridge	1	1,371	1,371	-15	1,500	1,500	-12
2 Axe Vale	1	1,610	1,610	0	1,636	1,636	-4
3 Berrow	1	2,369	2,369	47	2,450	2,450	44
4 Brent	1	1,810	1,810	12	1,941	1,941	14
5 Burnham North	2	4,347	2,174	35	5,002	2,501	47
6 Burnham South	3	5,129	1,710	6	5,588	1,863	9
7 Cannington and Combwich	2	2,299	1,150	-29	2,685	1,343	-21
8 Central (Bridgwater)	3	4,350	1,450	-10	4,435	1,478	-13
9 Cheddar	2	3,887	1,944	21	4,246	2,123	25
10 Dowsborough	1	1,564	1,564	-3	1,592	1,592	-7
11 East Poldens	1	1,536	1,536	-5	1,609	1,609	-6
12 Eastern Quantocks	1	1,304	1,304	-19	1,350	1,350	-21
13 Eastover (Bridgwater)	2	2,152	1,076	-33	2,226	1,113	-35
14 Hamp (Bridgwater)	2	4,118	2,059	28	4,205	2,103	23
15 Highbridge	3	4,686	1,562	-3	4,801	1,600	-6
16 Huntspill	1	2,013	2,013	25	2,044	2,044	20
17 Mark	1	1,405	1,405	-13	1,711	1,711	0
18 Newton Green	1	1,280	1,280	-21	1,333	1,333	-22
19 North Petherton	2	2,928	1,464	-9	3,283	1,642	-4
20 Parchey	1	1,241	1,241	-23	1,337	1,337	-21
21 Pawlett and Puriton	1	2,317	2,317	44	2,420	2,420	42
22 Quantock (Bridgwater)	3	4,244	1,415	-12	4,390	1,463	-14
23 Sandford	1	1,663	1,663	3	1,700	1,700	0
24 Shipham	1	885	885	-45	904	904	-47
25 Sovey	1	952	952	-41	975	975	-43

Continued overleaf

Figure 2 (continued):  
Existing Electoral Arrangements

Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (1996)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2001)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
26 Sydenham (Bridgwater)	3	7,323	2,441	51	7,533	2,511	47
27 Victoria (Bridgwater)	2	2,882	1,441	-11	3,008	1,504	-12
28 Wedmore	2	2,439	1,220	-24	2,508	1,254	-26
29 West Poldens	1	1,922	1,922	19	1,967	1,967	16
30 Westonzoyland	1	1,391	1,391	-14	1,424	1,424	-16
31 Woolavington	1	1,581	1,581	-2	1,640	1,640	-4
<b>Totals</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>78,998</b>	—	—	<b>83,443</b>	—	—
<b>Averages</b>	—	—	<b>1,612</b>	—	—	<b>1,703</b>	—

Source: Electorate figures are based on Sedgemoor District Council's submission.

Note: The 'variance from average' column shows by how far, in percentage terms, the number of electors per councillor varies from the average for the district. The minus symbol (-) denotes a lower than average number of electors. For example, in 1996, electors in Shipham ward were relatively over-represented by 45 per cent, while electors in Sydenham ward were relatively under-represented by 51 per cent. Figures have been rounded to the nearest whole number.

### 3. DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS

12 During Stage One we received a representation from Sedgemoor District Council regarding electoral arrangements for the whole district, which included a number of representations the Council had received directly. We also received six submissions from parish and town councils and 53 further submissions from local organisations and residents. In the light of these representations and the evidence available to us, we reached preliminary conclusions which were set out in the report, *Draft Recommendations on the Future Electoral Arrangements for Sedgemoor in Somerset*. We proposed:

- (a) a reconfiguration of parishes in the existing Berrow, Brent, Mark and Wedmore wards;
- (b) combining the two wards of Cheddar and Shipham to form a three-member ward;
- (c) modifying the boundary between the wards of Burnham North and Burnham South;
- (d) modifying the boundaries of the wards in Bridgwater, and the inclusion of Bridgwater Without parish from Parchey ward in a new Bridgwater Bower ward;
- (e) the creation of a single-member ward covering only the parish of Puriton and for the parish of Pawlett to form a new two-member ward with the parishes of East Huntspill and West Huntspill;
- (f) the creation of a two-member ward covering Westonzoyland and Sovey wards and most of Parchey ward;
- (g) the creation of a three-member ward covering the parishes of North Petherton, Lyng and Thurloxtan;
- (h) that Dowsborough ward be disbanded, transferring the parish of Over Stowey to the Eastern Quantocks ward, with the parishes of Nether Stowey and Fiddington joining the existing Cannington and Combwich ward to form a new two-member ward;
- (i) no change to the existing wards of Axbridge, Axe Vale, East Poldens, Highbridge, Sandford, West Poldens and Woolavington;
- (j) modifying the parish ward boundaries in Woolavington and North Petherton.

13 Our draft recommendations reflected the proposals put forward during Stage One by the District Council (which had proposed a 51-member council) apart from in four areas – certain boundaries in Bridgwater and in Burnham-on-Sea, in the North Petherton area and in the Quantock Hills area.

#### **Draft Recommendation**

Sedgemoor District Council should comprise 50 councillors, serving 26 wards. The whole Council should continue to be elected together every four years.

14 Our proposals would have resulted in significant improvements in electoral equality, with the number of electors per councillor in 20 of the 26 wards varying by no more than 10 per cent from the district average. This level of electoral equality was expected to improve over the period to 2001.

15 Our draft recommendations are summarised at Appendix B.



## 4. RESPONSES TO CONSULTATION

16 During the consultation on our draft recommendations report, 140 representations were received. A list of all respondents is available on request from the Commission.

### **Sedgemoor District Council**

17 The Council broadly agreed with all our draft recommendations, including in relation to council size, although it proposed minor modifications to the ward boundaries in the Bridgwater and Burnham-on-Sea areas.

### **Somerset County Council**

18 The County Council did not make any specific comments on the draft recommendations for Sedgemoor, but expressed the view that changes to district ward boundaries should not restrict the options for county divisions when they are reviewed.

### **Somerset Association of Local Councils**

19 The Somerset Association of Local Councils also did not wish to comment on specific proposals, but asked that we use our discretion to “give a greater weight to the identity of communities than that given to the pure arithmetic of electoral equality”.

### **Parish and Town Councils**

20 During Stage Three, representations were received from two town councils and 26 parish councils. Burnham-on-Sea & Highbridge Town Council supported our draft recommendations to increase the number of district councillors for the area from eight to nine, although it made no specific comment on the proposed ward boundaries.

21 We received submissions from the parish councils of Brean and Berrow, supporting the draft recommendation for the creation of a Berrow ward comprising those two parishes. Brent Knoll Parish Council expressed support for the draft recommendation to join it with the parish of Burnham Without in a new Knoll ward. Wedmore

Parish Council’s submission, forwarded to us by the District Council, opposed the proposal to join it with the parish of Mark in a new Wedmore and Mark ward. It argued that Wedmore is large in area and requested that the Commission make provision for rural weighting. It stated that since the last electoral review, the population of Wedmore has increased, resulting in an equivalent increase in the duties of district and parish councillors. Mark Parish Council also argued against the draft recommendation, stating that Mark, with a smaller electorate than Wedmore, was likely to be under-represented in the proposed two-member ward.

22 Bridgwater Without Parish Council opposed our proposal to join the parish with part of Bridgwater in a new Bridgwater Bower ward, arguing that the rural parish had no affinity with the urban area and that members would be more likely to be elected by the urban electorate and would therefore have little knowledge of rural needs. It reiterated its original proposal that the parish area might be divided among the three surrounding (rural) parishes.

23 Middlezoy Parish Council reiterated its opposition to the creation of a King’s Isle ward covering the current wards of Sovey and Westonzoyland and the parishes of Bawdrip, Chedzoy and Stawell. The parish councils of Bawdrip, Othery, Stawell and Westonzoyland also argued against the proposal, considering that the two-member ward would be too geographically large.

24 West Huntspill Parish Council stated that it had “no objection to the recommendations for the Huntspill ward”. We received a submission from North Petherton Town Council which made no specific comment on the draft recommendation for a three-member ward in that part of the district.

25 The parish councils of Cannington, Fiddington, Over Stowey and Nether Stowey all opposed our proposals to include the parishes of Fiddington and Nether Stowey in a new Cannington, Combwich and Nether Stowey ward, and to include the parish of Over Stowey in an enlarged Eastern Quantocks ward. Cannington Parish Council stated that it could not support a proposal which resulted in the ward being relatively under-represented. Fiddington Parish Council stated that its

councillors “were unanimous in their desire to remain with Nether Stowey and Over Stowey in the Dowsborough ward”. The parish councils of Over Stowey and Nether Stowey argued that the two parishes were very closely linked, geographically, historically, culturally and economically. However, the parish councils of Spaxton and Goathurst expressed support for our proposals for an enlarged Eastern Quantocks ward.

26 The parish councils of Cheddar and Shipham both opposed the draft recommendation for a new three-member Cheddar and Shipham ward covering the two parishes. Cheddar Parish Council argued that Cheddar is a planned growth area and that with the projected growth it would warrant three councillors on its own. It also stated that the two parishes were geographically separate and that there is “little common interest between the two communities”. Shipham Parish Council argued that the current over-representation of the Shipham ward should not “override community interests”, and highlighted the fact that neither it nor Cheddar Parish Council wanted change. Chapel Allerton Parish Council also opposed our draft recommendation for the ward of Cheddar and Shipham, though it made no comment regarding its own ward.

27 Our draft recommendation for retaining the current Sandford ward was supported by Chilton Trinity and Wembdon parish councils. Weare Parish Council supported the retention of the current Axe Vale ward, while Woolavington Parish Council supported both our proposal for the district ward and for modifications to its parish warding. Cossington Parish Council expressed support for our draft recommendation to retain the current West Poldens ward.

## **District Councillors**

28 Councillor Evans, who represents the present Shipham ward, opposed the proposal to join the parish in a ward with Cheddar, referring to the “depth of feeling” against our recommendation. Councillor Joslin, who represents the current Dowsborough ward, opposed the draft recommendations for that area, arguing that electoral equality in the ward was already close to the average. He also stated that the villages of Over Stowey and Nether Stowey are very closely linked, as are Nether Stowey and Fiddington.

## **County Councillors**

29 Councillor Roach, who represents the Cheddar county division, opposed our draft recommendations, highlighting the local feeling that the parishes of Cheddar and Shipham should retain their separate district councillors. Councillor Peaster, who represents the Cannington county division, opposed our draft recommendations relating to the Dowsborough district ward.

## **Other Representations**

30 We received a further 105 representations in response to our draft recommendations. The Wells Constituency Conservative Association stated its support for a 50-member council, although it also supported the retention of the current Shipham and Cheddar wards, with an extra councillor for Cheddar, which it acknowledged would increase the council size to 51 members. It supported our proposals for the wards of Axbridge, Axe Vale, Berrow, Brent, Burnham North, Burnham South, Highbridge, and Mark and Wedmore.

31 Around 90 residents of Cheddar and Shipham wrote to us objecting to the proposal for a single ward covering both those parishes. Many of these referred to the specific issue of quarry traffic restrictions through the village of Shipham and stated that the two communities had different characteristics, Cheddar being a growth area and Shipham being a stable rural community. Ten submissions from residents were received arguing against our proposals to disband the present Dowsborough ward.

## 5. ANALYSIS AND FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS

<sup>32</sup> As indicated previously, the Commission's prime objective in considering the most appropriate electoral arrangements for Sedgemoor 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".

<sup>33</sup> 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.

<sup>34</sup> 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.

<sup>35</sup> In our March 1996 *Guidance*, we expressed the view that "proposals for changes in electoral arrangements should be based on variations in each ward of no more than plus or minus 10 per cent from the average councillor:elector ratio for the authority, having regard to five-year forecasts of changes in electorates. Imbalances in excess of plus or minus 20 per cent may be acceptable, but only in highly exceptional circumstances ... and will have to be justified in full". However, as emphasised in our September 1996 supplement to the *Guidance*: "While the Commission accepts that absolute equality of representation is likely to be unattainable, it considers that, if electoral imbalances are to be kept to the minimum, such equality should be the starting point in any electoral review."

### Electorate Projections

<sup>36</sup> During Stage One, the District Council submitted electorate forecasts for the period 1996 to 2001, projecting an increase in the electorate of some 6 per cent over the five-year period from 78,998 to 83,443. 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.

<sup>37</sup> Advice from the District Council on the likely effect on electorates of ward boundary changes has been obtained. 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.

<sup>38</sup> 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

<sup>39</sup> Our March 1996 *Guidance* indicated that we would normally expect the number of councillors serving a district or borough council to be in the range of 30 to 60.

<sup>40</sup> Sedgemoor District Council is at present served by 49 councillors. The Council proposed an increase in council size to 51 members during Stage One. 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 a council size of 50 members and invited further comments. In its Stage Three submission, the District Council supported the proposed council size and we have not received sufficient evidence to persuade us to move away from this view.

## Electoral Arrangements

41 Having considered all representations received during Stage Three of the review, we have reviewed our draft recommendations. The following areas, based on existing wards, are considered in turn:

- (a) Burnham and Highbridge (three wards);
- (b) Berrow, Brent, Mark and Wedmore wards;
- (c) Bridgwater (six wards);
- (d) Parchey, Sowe and Westonzoyland wards;
- (e) Huntspill, Pawlett and Puriton, and West Poldens wards;
- (f) Newton Green and North Petherton wards;
- (g) Cannington and Comwich, Dowsborough and Eastern Quantocks wards;
- (h) Cheddar and Shipham wards;
- (i) Axbridge, Axe Vale, East Poldens, Sandford and Woolavington wards.

### **Burnham and Highbridge (three wards)**

42 In our draft recommendations report, we proposed that the area of Burnham-on-Sea and Highbridge, currently served by eight district councillors, should in future be served by three three-member wards. We proposed the retention of the current Highbridge ward but put forward modifications to the boundary between the wards of Burnham North and Burnham South.

43 During Stage Three we received submissions from the District Council, the Burnham-on-Sea and Highbridge Town Council, the Town Council for Highbridge Association, the Wells Conservative Association and a local resident, concerning our recommendations in this area.

44 The District Council proposed minor modifications to our proposed boundary between the Burnham North and Burnham South wards, in order to facilitate the provision of polling stations within individual polling districts.

45 The Town Council of Burnham-on-Sea and Highbridge supported the draft recommendation for three wards covering Burnham North, Burnham South and Highbridge, each to be represented by three councillors. The Town Council for Highbridge Association, however, did not support the proposed ward boundaries and requested

that part of the current Highbridge ward and the whole of the neighbouring parish of Burnham Without form a new ward, which, it argued, would facilitate the creation of a town council for Highbridge on 'community' boundaries. A local resident also requested that the boundary between the wards of Burnham South and Highbridge be slightly modified.

46 The Wells Constituency Conservative Association supported our draft recommendations for the Burnham-on-Sea and Highbridge area and specifically opposed the views of the Town Council for Highbridge Association. While we have considered the views of the Town Council for Highbridge Association, the lack of support for its proposal from Burnham Without Parish Council and the increase in electoral inequality that would result from it have led us to conclude that the boundaries of the current Highbridge ward should remain unchanged.

47 We have considered the District Council's proposals for changes to our proposed boundary between the Burnham North and Burnham South wards, which it put forward to facilitate the provision of polling stations within individual polling districts. We concur with its view that the boundary near the Burnham-on-Sea County Infants School should be modified so that the school would be placed in Burnham South ward; no electors are affected by this change. However, in order to maintain a good level of electoral equality in the town we have concluded that we are unable to put forward its other proposal, which was to alter the boundary from the seafront to along Regent Street/Princess Street. Such a proposal would place too many electors in Burnham South ward, having regard to the five-year electorate forecast, and we therefore consider that our proposed boundary, along College Street, should be put forward as a final recommendation.

48 We are therefore confirming our draft recommendations for Burnham-on-Sea and Highbridge as final, subject to the minor boundary amendment near Burnham-on-Sea County Infants School. The three-member wards of Burnham North, Burnham South and Highbridge would all secure a good level of electoral equality: Burnham North would vary by 6 per cent from the average number of electors per councillor (4 per cent in 2001), Burnham South would vary by 6 per cent (8 per cent in 2001) while Highbridge ward would vary by 1 per cent (4 per cent in 2001). The final recommendations are illustrated in Map A1 at Appendix A and summarised in Figures 1 and 4.

## **Berrow, Brent, Mark and Wedmore wards**

49 Our draft recommendations were for the creation of a single-member Berrow ward covering the parishes of Berrow and Brean, a single-member Brent North ward covering the parishes of Lympsham and East Brent, a single-member Knoll ward covering the parishes of Brent Knoll and Burnham Without and a two-member Wedmore and Mark ward covering the parishes of those names.

50 During Stage Three, we received submissions from the District Council, the Wells Constituency Conservative Association and a number of parish councils in the area. The District Council and the Conservative Association both supported our draft recommendations for these wards. The parish councils of Berrow, Brean and Brent Knoll supported the draft recommendations for their respective areas, but the parish councils of Mark and Wedmore reaffirmed their opposition to a two-member ward covering the two parishes.

51 Given the good level of electoral equality that would be achieved, and the widespread support for our draft recommendations, we confirm our recommendations for Berrow, Brent North and Knoll wards as final.

52 As stated in our draft recommendations report, we considered a number of alternatives for the parishes of Mark and Wedmore, but were of the view that the creation of a new two-member ward covering the two parishes would not have a deleterious effect on community identity. While the two parishes are distinct entities, a two-member ward could fairly represent the views of the electorate in both parishes. We have carefully considered the views expressed by the parish councils but remain concerned about the high level of electoral inequality which would remain were the present arrangements to be retained: the number of electors per councillor in Mark is currently 13 per cent below the district average while in Wedmore it is 24 per cent below. We are therefore confirming as final our draft recommendation for a new Wedmore and Mark ward.

53 The number of electors per councillor would vary from the district average by 11 per cent in Berrow, 10 per cent in Brent North, 10 per cent in Knoll and 8 per cent in Wedmore and Mark, projected to reduce to 8 per cent, 7 per cent, 5 per cent and 5 per cent respectively by 2001.

## **Bridgwater (six wards)**

54 In our draft recommendations we proposed a re-warding of the Bridgwater area to create six new or modified wards. Electoral equality in the town would be improved considerably, with the number of electors per councillor falling below the average in Bridgwater Bower (6 per cent) and Bridgwater Eastover (5 per cent) and exceeding the average in Bridgwater Hamp (2 per cent), Bridgwater Quantock (2 per cent), Bridgwater Sydenham (5 per cent) and Bridgwater Victoria (4 per cent). These recommendations, based broadly on the District Council's submission, would involve the inclusion of the parish of Bridgwater Without (currently in Parchey ward) in the new Bridgwater Bower ward. All six wards were projected to remain within 10 per cent of the district average by 2001.

55 During Stage Three of the review, the District Council accepted the draft recommendations, although it proposed two minor adjustments to ward boundaries to provide for more convenient electoral arrangements in the area. A resident of Bridgwater Quantock ward argued that our proposal in that area would not help to retain the identity of the ward. Bridgwater Without Parish Council reiterated its Stage One submission, suggesting that the parished area should be divided between three neighbouring parishes, and opposed its inclusion in the proposed Bridgwater Bower ward.

56 We considered alternatives for the parish, but did not find any which we considered to be appropriate. The M5 motorway runs broadly north-south through the parish and appears to provide the effective eastern boundary between Bridgwater and the rural area to its east. While we could have recommended warding the parish along this boundary and including an eastern parish ward with a more rural ward, we considered that this may involve the creation of a western parish ward containing very few electors, leading to inappropriate parish council electoral arrangements. Additionally, we are unable to recommend the division of the parish of Bridgwater Without among the three surrounding parishes, as the parish council has suggested, as the legislation governing this review does not permit us to do so.

57 Placing the parish of Bridgwater Without with the other parishes in the proposed King's Isle ward would lead to that ward being under-represented by more than 10 per cent. The District Council

remains supportive of our draft recommendation and we have concluded that the proposal to include the parished area in Bridgwater Bower ward for electoral purposes would provide the best balance between our statutory criteria and the objective of seeking electoral equality.

58 The District Council's proposed changes to our draft recommendations within Bridgwater were to the Victoria/Hamp ward boundary (affecting 32 electors who would become part of Hamp ward) in the St Saviours Avenue area, and to the Quantock/Hamp ward boundary (affecting four electors who would become part of Quantock ward) in the Willow Brook area. We have concluded that the District Council's modifications to our proposed boundaries would provide for more convenient electoral arrangements for the electors concerned and would retain similar levels of electoral equality to our draft recommendations. We therefore amend our draft recommendations to include these modifications and conclude that the remainder of our proposals for Bridgwater should be confirmed as final.

59 The number of electors per councillor in the proposed wards would vary from the district average by 6 per cent (6 per cent by 2001) in Bridgwater Bower, by 5 per cent (8 per cent) in Bridgwater Eastover, by 3 per cent (1 per cent) in Bridgwater Hamp, by 2 per cent (1 per cent) in Bridgwater Quantock, by 5 per cent (1 per cent) in Bridgwater Sydenham and by 3 per cent (4 per cent) in Bridgwater Victoria. Details of our final recommendations for Bridgwater are shown on the large map inserted at the back of this report.

### **Parchey, Sovey and Westonzoyland wards**

60 The number of electors per councillor in the three single-member wards of Parchey, Sovey and Westonzoyland currently varies from the district average by 23 per cent, 41 per cent and 14 per cent respectively, becoming 21 per cent, 43 per cent and 16 per cent by 2001. All three wards are relatively over-represented. The area as a whole (less the parish of Bridgwater Without – see above) merits two councillors rather than the present three.

61 In our draft recommendations report, we concurred with the District Council's proposals for these wards, that the whole of this area less the parish of Bridgwater Without should form a new two-member ward. The electoral variance in the proposed 'King's Isle' ward would be 3 per cent, reducing to 2 per cent by 2001.

62 In response to this proposal we received submissions from the District Council, and from the parish councils of Bawdrip, Middlezoy, Othery, Stawell and Westonzoyland. The District Council confirmed its support for the creation of a new two-member King's Isle ward, while the parish councils all opposed the proposal.

63 Middlezoy Parish Council expressed the general view of parish councils in this area of the district, stating that it "continues to object to the size and accessibility of the proposed ward ... parishes could be under-represented if, for example, the two councillors were elected from the same parish". Although it put forward an alternative proposal for a single-member ward in its own area, electoral equality in neighbouring wards would, as a result, increase to an unacceptable level, so we have discounted this as a possible final recommendation.

64 The parish councils of Othery and Westonzoyland also opposed the creation of a two-member King's Isle ward, the former arguing that it would "involve extremely large geographical areas". Bawdrip Parish Council expressed the view that it should be included in a single-member ward consisting of villages with a similar structure and environment, while Stawell Parish Council was also opposed to the proposed ward, which it contended would have a "disproportionate voice" from one of the larger centres within it.

65 In looking at the area as a whole, we have concluded that splitting the proposed King's Isle ward into two single-member wards, which many of the parish councils locally would prefer, would result in a high level of electoral inequality in at least one of the wards. We recognise that there are separate communities within the proposed ward which have distinct identities, but consider that these would not be adversely affected by their being placed together in a single ward and have concluded that two councillors could adequately represent the area involved.

66 Having carefully considered all the representations received, we have decided to confirm as final our recommendation for a new King's Isle ward, comprising the parishes of Bawdrip, Chedzoy, Middlezoy, Othery, Stawell and Westonzoyland. The number of electors per councillor in this ward would vary from the district average by 3 per cent, improving to 2 per cent by 2001.

## **Huntspill, Pawlett and Puriton, and West Poldens wards**

67 In our draft recommendation report, we adopted the District Council's proposal for this area, with the parish of Puriton forming a single-member ward on its own, the parishes of East Huntspill, West Huntspill and Pawlett forming a new two-member ward and the current single-member West Poldens ward being retained unchanged. These proposals would result in the number of electors per councillor varying from the district average by 2 per cent in Puriton, 14 per cent in Huntspill and Pawlett and 22 per cent in West Poldens, becoming 3 per cent, 15 per cent and 18 per cent respectively by 2001.

68 Although the level of electoral equality would not be ideal in this area under our draft recommendations, we considered that our proposed warding arrangements reflected the best balance between the statutory criteria, and that a degree of electoral imbalance in this part of the district was unavoidable in the circumstances. During Stage Three, our draft recommendations received support from the District Council and from the parish councils of Cossington and West Huntspill. No respondent argued against the proposals.

69 We have concluded that the draft recommendations for these wards would provide the most appropriate electoral arrangements and, given the degree of local support, are content to confirm as final our recommendations for a new Puriton ward, a new Huntspill and Pawlett ward and the retention of the current West Poldens ward.

## **Newton Green and North Petherton wards**

70 Our draft recommendation for this area was for the creation of a new three-member ward comprising the parishes of Lyng, North Petherton and Thurloxton, resulting in the number of electors per councillor varying by 11 per cent from the district average, falling to 8 per cent by 2001. In its Stage Three representation, the District Council expressed its support for this proposal, while North Petherton Town Council did not make any specific comment in its submission. No other views were received.

71 The proposal would produce, overall, improved electoral equality and the ward would not, in our view, have an adverse effect on community identities in the area. Additionally, it would join the whole of the parish of North Petherton in a single

district ward, and in the absence of further evidence we confirm this recommendation as final.

## **Cannington and Comwich, Dowsborough and Eastern Quantocks wards**

72 All three of these current wards are over-represented on the District Council, the two-member Cannington and Comwich ward by 29 per cent, the single-member Dowsborough ward by 3 per cent and the single-member Eastern Quantocks ward by 19 per cent. The area as a whole, therefore, is represented by four district councillors while it merits only three, although projected growth, mostly in the Cannington area, means that it would be entitled to just under 3.4 councillors by 2001. Our draft recommendations involved the transfer of the parishes of Fiddington and Nether Stowey to an enlarged and (renamed) Cannington, Comwich and Nether Stowey ward, and for the transfer of the parish of Over Stowey to an enlarged Eastern Quantocks ward. These proposals would result in the disbandment of the current Dowsborough ward, and the reduction in representation for the combined area from four district councillors to three. They would also improve the level of electoral equality in the area.

73 During Stage Three, we received submissions from the parish councils of Cannington, Fiddington, Nether Stowey and Over Stowey, all of which opposed the draft recommendations for this area, and from the parish councils of Spaxton and Goathurst which supported the proposal for an expanded Eastern Quantocks ward. In addition, we received 12 representations from local interest groups and residents all opposing the draft recommendations. Many argued that Over Stowey and Nether Stowey should not form part of separate wards as they were inextricably linked geographically, historically and economically, and that there was no easily definable boundary showing where one village ends and the other begins.

74 The District Council, however, accepted our draft recommendation for this area, although it acknowledged the significant local opposition to the proposal. The district councillor for Dowsborough ward, Councillor Joslin, and the county councillor for the Cannington Division, Councillor Peaster, expressed opposition.

75 We have reconsidered our draft recommendations in the light of the views expressed during Stage Three and by visiting the area ourselves. We remain of the view that this area, in total, merits three district

councillors rather than the present four, a view shared by the District Council. However, we are also persuaded on the evidence we have seen that the communities of Nether Stowey and Over Stowey are very closely linked, and that to 'split' them by placing them in separate district wards could outweigh the improvement in electoral equality that would result from our draft recommendations. Having formed this judgement, we looked at alternative options in order that we could find a solution which might best balance the criteria guiding our work.

76 We considered firstly an option involving a two-member ward comprising the current Cannington and Combwich ward plus the parish of Fiddington, resulting in the number of electors per councillor being 21 per cent below the average, with a second ward comprising the current Eastern Quantocks ward plus the parishes of Over Stowey and Nether Stowey. This latter ward would be very under-represented as a single-member ward: it would have an electoral variance of almost 70 per cent. We then looked at an alternative of the enlarged Cannington ward being represented by a single member and the enlarged Eastern Quantocks ward by two members. This would result in the number of electors per councillor varying from the average by 58 per cent (under-represented) and 16 per cent (over-represented) respectively. The option of warding parishes was also considered, but no parish in this area lends itself to an obvious divide.

77 We also considered an option which would result in a single-member ward for Cannington, and a two-member ward covering the rest of this area, a scheme which would produce a reasonable level of electoral equality: the Cannington ward would vary by just 1 per cent from the district average while the two-member ward would vary by 13 per cent. However, we considered that the separation of the parish of Otterhampton from Cannington would be likely to cut across community ties in that area. This option too was, therefore, rejected.

78 We have concluded, after much deliberation, that the proposal which strikes the best balance of the criteria guiding our work is for a three-member ward covering the whole of this area. Although we have considered the concerns that might be expressed about the size of the ward, a number of other three-member wards either exist presently in Sedgemoor or have been proposed during this review, and we are of the view that the distribution of electors between rural and small urban areas would ensure than one area did not exert excessive

influence on the ward as a whole. The number of electors per councillor in such a ward would exceed the district average by 9 per cent, projected to become 12 per cent by 2001.

79 Although this electoral variance is larger than the current imbalance in the Dowsborough ward, we are required to consider the area as a whole. We therefore put forward this recommendation in order to improve electoral equality over all three current wards while having regard to the views expressed during the consultation stage. We are proposing that the three-member ward be named Cannington and Quantocks. It would consist of the ten parishes of Broomfield, Cannington, Enmore, Fiddington, Goathurst, Nether Stowey, Otterhampton, Over Stowey, Spaxton and Stockland Bristol.

### **Cheddar and Shipham wards**

80 The single-member ward of Shipham is currently over-represented by 45 per cent, projected to be 47 per cent by 2001, while the two-member Cheddar ward is under-represented by 21 per cent (25 per cent in 2001). The District Council's Stage One submission recommended that the two wards should be joined and represented by three councillors. This, under a 50-member council, would result in an electoral variance of just 1 per cent, 3 per cent in 2001.

81 During Stage One, this proposal was opposed by the two parish councils involved and a number of local residents, many of whom argued that the views of Shipham residents would be subsumed by the much larger electorate of Cheddar. However, after much consideration (outlined in some detail in the *Draft Recommendations*) we concurred with the views of the District Council and proposed the creation of a three-member ward to cover the parishes of Cheddar and Shipham.

82 During the consultation period, Sedgemoor District Council supported the proposal. However, it was again opposed by the two parish councils concerned, as well as by the neighbouring Chapel Allerton Parish Council, by the Wells Constituency Conservative Association and by around 90 local residents (mostly from Shipham), who made it clear to us that the two communities have very separate identities. Many respondents cited concerns that the current traffic restrictions in place in Shipham could be in jeopardy if the village no longer had its own district councillor.

83 It was acknowledged by a number of respondents that alternative solutions, particularly that of joining the parishes of Axbridge and Shipham in a ward, would not receive support from Axbridge Parish Council, although some in Shipham considered this preferable to a link with Cheddar. In reality, Shipham appears to have more in common with certain parishes in the neighbouring authority of North Somerset, but it is not within our remit to recommend amendments to the external boundaries of local authorities as part of a Periodic Electoral Review.

84 We have again considered the local views put to us, many of which are strongly held, but are not convinced that a three-member ward covering these two communities would have the deleterious effect claimed by many respondents. With 45 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the district average, Shipham is at present extremely over-represented at the expense of other electors in the district. We do not concur with the view that all three councillors for the new ward would necessarily be residents of Cheddar, or that the views of a Cheddar councillor would automatically become District Council policy. While we acknowledge the strength of local feeling, we remain of the view that, on balance, we should recommend the creation of a new three-member ward covering the parishes of Cheddar and Shipham.

### **Axbridge, Axe Vale, East Poldens, Sandford and Woolavington wards**

85 In our draft recommendations report, we recommended that there should be no change to any of these five single-member wards. Under a 50-member council, the number of electors per councillor would vary from the district average by 13 per cent in Axbridge (10 per cent in 2001), 2 per cent in Axe Vale (2 per cent), 3 per cent in East Poldens (4 per cent), 5 per cent in Sandford (2 per cent), and equalling the average in Woolavington (2 per cent from it in 2001).

86 These proposals were supported by the District Council and by a number of parish councils in the area. Wells Constituency Conservative Association supported the recommendations for the wards of Axbridge and Axe Vale. Given the good level of electoral equality that would be achieved and the general support for the proposals, we are confirming as final our recommendations for these five wards.

## **Electoral Cycle**

87 In our draft recommendations report, we proposed that the present system of whole-council elections in Sedgemoor be retained. At Stage Three the District Council reiterated its support for this proposal. No other representations were received on this issue, and we have therefore decided to confirm our draft recommendation as final.

## **Conclusions**

88 Having considered carefully all the evidence and representations we have received in response to our consultation report, we have concluded that there should be an increase in council size from 49 to 50; that there should be 25 wards, six fewer than at present; that the boundaries of 24 of the existing wards should be modified; and that whole-council elections should continue to be held every four years. We have decided to substantially endorse our draft recommendations, subject to the amendments indicated for the following wards:

- (a) In Bridgwater, minor boundary modifications are proposed to the Victoria/Hamp ward boundary and the Quantock/Hamp ward boundary
- (b) In Burnham-on-Sea, a minor boundary modification is proposed between Burnham North and Burnham South wards;
- (c) In the south-western part of the district, we are proposing the creation of a three-member ward covering the present Cannington and Combwich, Dowsborough and Eastern Quantocks wards.

89 Figure 3 shows the impact of our final recommendations on electoral equality, comparing them with the current arrangements, based on 1996 and 2001 electorate figures.

90 As Figure 3 shows, our recommendations would result in a reduction in the number of wards with electoral variances of more than 10 per cent from the district average from 22 to five, and a further reduction to three in 2001. Under these proposals, the average number of electors per councillor would fall from 1,612 to 1,580. We conclude that our recommendations would best meet the need for electoral equality, having regard to the statutory criteria.

Figure 3:  
Comparison of Current and Recommended Electoral Arrangements

	1996 electorate		2001 projected electorate	
	Current arrangements	Final recommendations	Current arrangements	Final recommendations
Number of councillors	49	50	49	50
Number of wards	31	25	31	25
Average number of electors per councillor	1,612	1,580	1,703	1,669
Number of wards with a variance more than 10 per cent from the average	22	5	22	3
Number of wards with a variance more than 20 per cent from the average	14	1	14	0

### Final Recommendation

Sedgemoor District Council should comprise 50 councillors serving 25 wards, as detailed and named in Figures 1 and 4, and illustrated in Map 2, Appendix A, and the large map inserted at the back of this report. The Council should continue to be elected together every four years.

## Parish and Town Council Electoral Arrangements

91 In undertaking reviews of electoral arrangements, we are required to comply as far as is reasonably practicable with the provisions set out in Schedule 11 to the 1972 Act. The Schedule provides 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, we are proposing some parish ward changes, as detailed below.

92 In our draft recommendations report, we proposed that the parish wards for Burnham-on-Sea and Highbridge should be modified to reflect the proposed District Council wards in the town. In its Stage One submission, the Burnham-on-Sea and Highbridge Town Council supported the District Council's proposals for a realignment of the district and parish ward boundaries within Burnham. At Stage Three it continued to support

the District Council's proposals. We therefore propose modifications to the boundaries of the two parish wards in order to make them coterminous with the proposed district wards.

### Final Recommendation

Burnham-on-Sea and Highbridge Town Council should continue to comprise 18 councillors, representing three parish wards: Burnham North (returning five councillors); Burnham South (six) and Highbridge (seven). The parish ward boundaries should be modified to reflect the proposed District Council wards, as illustrated in Map A1 at Appendix A.

93 During the initial stage of the review, North Petherton Town Council proposed changes to its current electoral arrangements. In our draft recommendations we recommended a realignment of the boundary between the parish wards of North Petherton and Northmoor Green, but we did not recommend the creation of a new Stockmoor parish ward as proposed by the town council in its Stage One submission.

94 At Stage Three the Town Council did not make any specific comments on its original proposal for a new parish ward, and no other representations were received. We therefore confirm our draft recommendation on the electoral arrangements for North Petherton parish as final.

### **Final Recommendation**

North Petherton Town Council should continue to comprise 14 councillors, representing three parish wards, with the wards of North Newton and Northmoor Green each returning three councillors and the ward of North Petherton returning eight councillors. The parish ward boundary between North Petherton and Northmoor Green should be modified, as illustrated in Map A2 at Appendix A.

<sup>95</sup> During the initial stage of the review, we received a request from Woolavington Parish Council for a modification of its parish ward boundaries, which we included as part of our draft recommendations. In its Stage Three submission, Woolavington Parish Council supported the draft recommendation and we therefore confirm it as final.

### **Final Recommendation**

Woolavington Parish Council should continue to comprise 10 parish councillors, representing two parish wards: Woolavington North and Woolavington South, both returning five councillors. The parish ward boundaries should be modified, as illustrated in Map A3 at Appendix A.

<sup>96</sup> In our draft recommendations report we also proposed that there should be no change to the electoral cycle of parish and town councils in the district. We have not received any evidence to consider moving away from this proposal, and therefore confirm it as final.

### **Final Recommendation**

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

Map 2:  
The Commission's Final Recommendations for Sedgemoor



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

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Key to Wards

- |                       |                             |                     |
|-----------------------|-----------------------------|---------------------|
| 1 Axbridge            | 10 Bridgwater Victoria      | 19 Knoll            |
| 2 Axe Vale            | 11 Burnham North            | 20 North Petherton  |
| 3 Berrow              | 12 Burnham South            | 21 Puriton          |
| 4 Brent North         | 13 Cannington and Quantocks | 22 Sandford         |
| 5 Bridgwater Bower    | 14 Cheddar and Shipham      | 23 Wedmore and Mark |
| 6 Bridgwater Eastover | 15 East Poldens             | 24 West Poldens     |
| 7 Bridgwater Hamp     | 16 Highbridge               | 25 Woolavington     |
| 8 Bridgwater Quantock | 17 Huntspill and Pawlett    |                     |
| 9 Bridgwater Sydenham | 18 King's Isle              |                     |

Figure 4:  
The Commission's Final Recommendations for Sedgemoor

Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (1996)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2001)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
1 Axbridge	1	1,371	1,371	-13	1,500	1,500	-10
2 Axe Vale	1	1,610	1,610	2	1,636	1,636	-2
3 Berrow	1	1,756	1,756	11	1,800	1,800	8
4 Brent North	1	1,428	1,428	-10	1,550	1,550	-7
5 Bridgwater Bower	3	4,473	1,491	-6	4,700	1,567	-6
6 Bridgwater Eastover	2	3,017	1,509	-5	3,073	1,537	-8
7 Bridgwater Hamp	3	4,873	1,624	3	4,968	1,656	-1
8 Bridgwater Quantock	3	4,820	1,607	2	4,954	1,651	-1
9 Bridgwater Sydenham	3	4,957	1,652	5	4,972	1,657	-1
10 Bridgwater Victoria	2	3,253	1,627	3	3,468	1,734	4
11 Burnham North	3	5,041	1,680	6	5,199	1,733	4
12 Burnham South	3	4,435	1,478	-6	5,391	1,797	8
13 Cannington and Quantocks	3	5,167	1,722	9	5,627	1,876	12
14 Cheddar and Shipham	3	4,772	1,591	1	5,150	1,717	3
15 East Poldens	1	1,536	1,536	-3	1,609	1,609	-4
16 Highbridge	3	4,686	1,562	-1	4,801	1,600	-4
17 Huntspill and Pawlett	2	2,724	1,362	-14	2,844	1,422	-15
18 King's Isle	2	3,260	1,630	3	3,400	1,700	2
19 Knoll	1	1,429	1,429	-10	1,750	1,750	5
20 North Petherton	3	4,208	1,403	-11	4,616	1,539	-8
21 Puriton	1	1,606	1,606	2	1,620	1,620	-3
22 Sandford	1	1,663	1,663	5	1,700	1,700	2
23 Wedmore and Mark	2	3,410	1,705	8	3,508	1,754	5
24 West Poldens	1	1,922	1,922	22	1,967	1,967	18
25 Woolavington	1	1,581	1,581	0	1,640	1,640	-2

*Continued overleaf*

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

Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (1996)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2001)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
<b>Totals</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>78,998</b>	—	—	<b>83,443</b>	—	—
<b>Averages</b>	—	—	<b>1,580</b>	—	—	<b>1,669</b>	—

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

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

## 6. NEXT STEPS

<sup>97</sup> Having completed our review of electoral arrangements in Sedgemoor and submitted our final recommendations to the Secretary of State, we have fulfilled our statutory obligation under the Local Government Act 1992.

<sup>98</sup> 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.

<sup>99</sup> All further correspondence concerning our recommendations and the matters discussed in this report should be addressed to:

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



# APPENDIX A

## Final Recommendations for Sedgemoor: Detailed Mapping

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

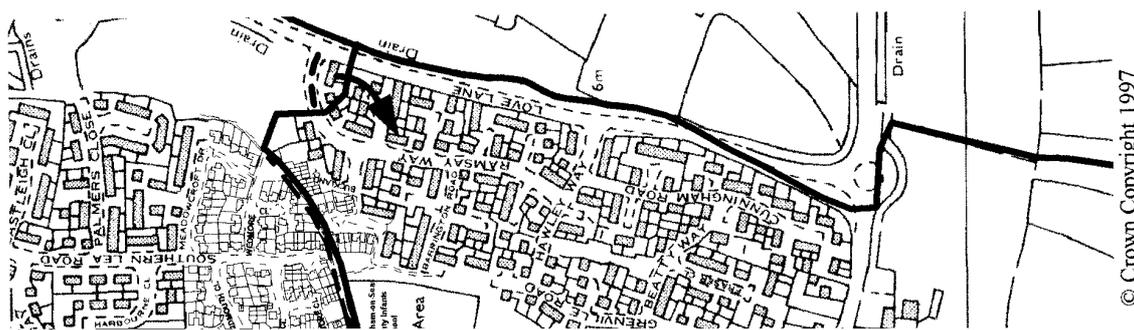
**Map A1** illustrates the proposed district and parish ward boundary between Burnham North and Burnham South.

**Map A2** illustrates the proposed parish ward boundaries in North Petherton.

**Map A3** illustrates the proposed parish ward boundaries in Woolavington.

The **large map** inserted in the back of this report illustrates the Commission's proposed warding for Bridgwater.

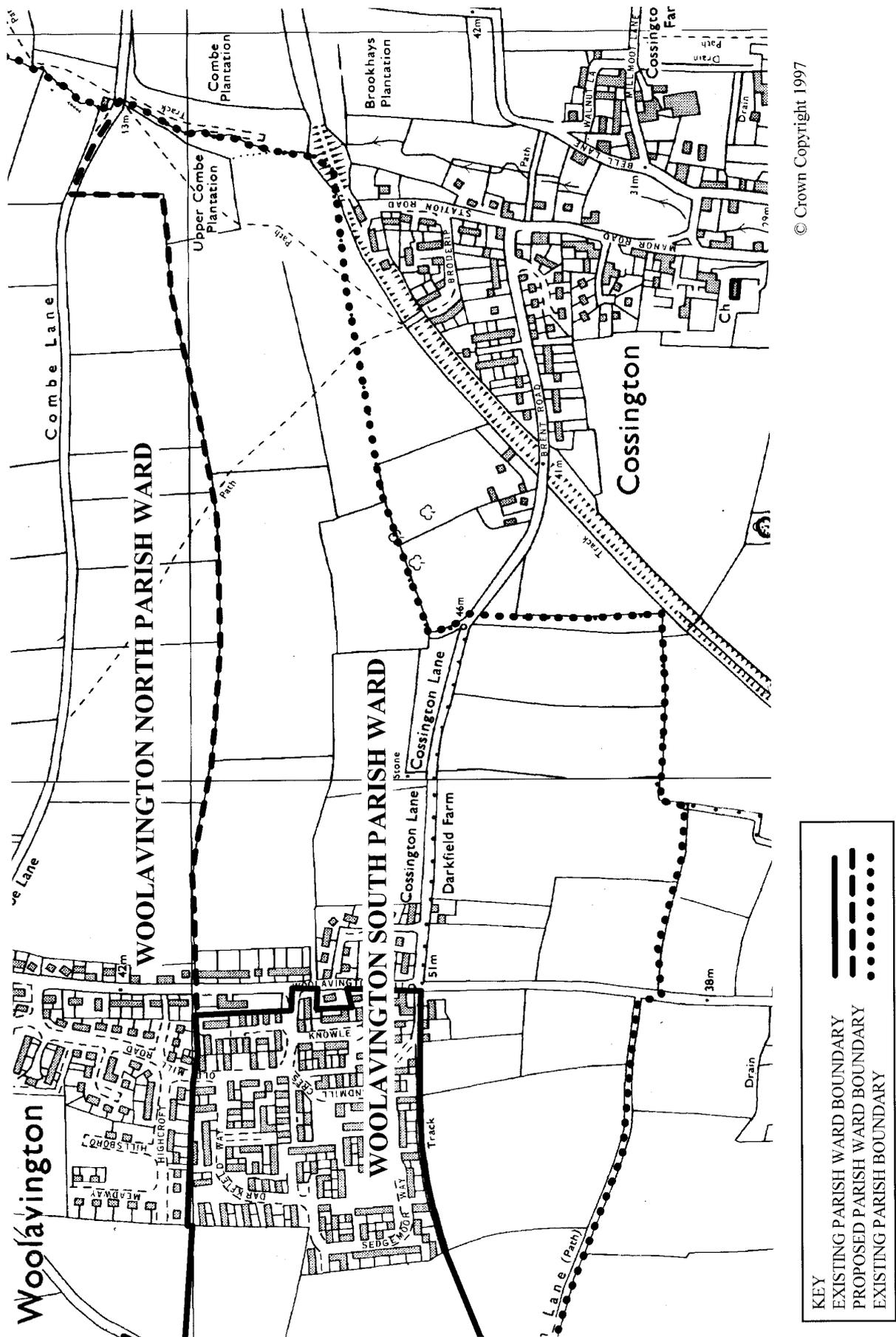
Map A1:  
*Proposed District and Parish Ward Boundaries in Burnham-on-Sea*



Map A2:  
Proposed Parish Ward Boundaries in North Petherton



Map A3:  
Proposed Parish Ward Boundaries in Woolavington



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# APPENDIX B

## Draft Recommendations for Sedgemoor

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

	<b>Ward name</b>	<b>Number of councillors</b>	<b>Constituent areas</b>
1	Axbridge	1	<i>Unchanged</i> (the parish of Axbridge)
2	Axe Vale	1	<i>Unchanged</i> (the parishes of Badgworth, Chapel Allerton, Compton Bishop and Weare)
3	Berrow	1	Berrow ward (part – the parishes of Berrow and Brea)
4	Brent North	1	Berrow ward (part – the parish of Lympsham); Brent ward (part – the parish of East Brent)
5	Bridgwater Bower	3	Parchey ward (part – the parish of Bridgwater Without); Sydenham ward (part); Central ward (part)
6	Bridgwater Eastover	2	Eastover ward; Central ward (part)
7	Bridgwater Hamp	3	Hamp ward; Central ward (part)
8	Bridgwater Quantock	3	Quantock ward (the parish of Durleigh and an unparished area of Bridgwater); Central ward (part)
9	Bridgwater Sydenham	3	Sydenham ward (part); Central ward (part)
10	Bridgwater Victoria	2	Victoria ward; Central ward (part)
11	Burnham North	3	Burnham North ward (part); Burnham South ward (part)
12	Burnham South	3	Burnham North ward (part); Burnham South ward (part)
13	Cannington, Comwich and Nether Stowey	2	Cannington and Comwich ward (the parishes of Cannington, Otterhampton and Stockland Bristol); Dowsborough ward (part – the parishes of Nether Stowey and Fiddington)
14	Cheddar and Shipham	3	Cheddar ward (the parish of Cheddar); Shipham ward (the parish of Shipham)
15	East Poldens	1	<i>Unchanged</i> (the parishes of Ashcott, Greinton, Moorlinch and Shapwick)

*Continued overleaf*

Figure B1 (continued):

*The Commission's Draft Recommendations: Constituent Areas*

	<b>Ward name</b>	<b>Number of councillors</b>	<b>Constituent areas</b>
16	Eastern Quantocks	1	Eastern Quantocks ward (the parishes of Broomfield, Enmore, Goathurst and Spaxton); Dowsborough ward (part – the parish of Over Stowey)
17	Highbridge	3	<i>Unchanged</i> (the Highbridge parish ward of Burnham-on-Sea and Highbridge parish)
18	Huntspill and Pawlett	2	Huntspill ward (the parishes of East Huntspill and West Huntspill); Pawlett and Puriton ward (part – the parish of Pawlett)
19	King's Isle	2	Parchey ward (part – the parishes of Bawdrip, Chedzoy and Stawell); Sovey ward (the parishes of Middlezoy and Othery); Westonzoyland ward (the parish of Westonzoyland)
20	Knoll	1	Brent ward (part – the parish of Brent Knoll); Mark ward (part – the parish of Burnham Without)
21	North Petherton	3	North Petherton ward (the North Petherton parish ward of North Petherton parish); Newton Green ward (the North Newton and Northmoor parish wards of North Petherton parish, the parishes of Lyng and Thurloxton)
22	Puriton	1	Pawlett and Puriton ward (part – the parish of Puriton)
23	Sandford	1	<i>Unchanged</i> (the parishes of Chilton Trinity and Wembdon)
24	Wedmore and Mark	2	Mark ward (part – the parish of Mark); Wedmore ward (the parish of Wedmore)
25	West Poldens	1	<i>Unchanged</i> (the parishes of Burtle, Catcott, Chilton Polden, Cossington and Edington)
26	Woolavington	1	<i>Unchanged</i> (the parish of Woolavington)

*Note: The whole of Sedgemoor district is parished with the exception of Bridgwater.*

Figure B2:  
The Commission's Draft Recommendations for Sedgemoor

Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (1996)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2001)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
1 Axbridge	1	1,371	1,371	-13	1,500	1,500	-10
2 Axe Vale	1	1,610	1,610	2	1,636	1,636	-2
3 Berrow	1	1,756	1,756	11	1,800	1,800	8
4 Brent North	1	1,428	1,428	-10	1,550	1,550	-7
5 Bridgwater Bower	3	4,473	1,491	-6	4,700	1,567	-6
6 Bridgwater Eastover	2	3,017	1,509	-5	3,073	1,537	-8
7 Bridgwater Hamp	3	4,845	1,615	2	4,940	1,647	-1
8 Bridgwater Quantock	3	4,816	1,605	2	4,950	1,650	-1
9 Bridgwater Sydenham	3	4,957	1,652	5	4,972	1,657	-1
10 Bridgwater Victoria	2	3,285	1,643	4	3,500	1,750	5
11 Burnham North	3	5,041	1,680	6	5,199	1,733	4
12 Burnham South	3	4,435	1,478	-6	5,391	1,797	8
13 Cannington, Combwich and Nether Stowey	2	3,582	1,791	13	3,992	1,996	20
14 Cheddar and Shipham	3	4,772	1,591	1	5,150	1,717	3
15 East Poldens	1	1,536	1,536	-3	1,609	1,609	-4
16 Eastern Quantocks	1	1,585	1,585	0	1,635	1,635	-2
17 Highbridge	3	4,686	1,562	-1	4,801	1,600	-4
18 Huntspill and Pawlett	2	2,724	1,362	-14	2,844	1,422	-15
19 King's Isle	2	3,260	1,630	3	3,400	1,700	2
20 Knoll	1	1,429	1,429	-10	1,750	1,750	5
21 North Petherton	3	4,208	1,403	-11	4,616	1,539	-8
22 Puriton	1	1,606	1,606	2	1,620	1,620	-3
23 Sandford	1	1,663	1,663	5	1,700	1,700	2
24 Wedmore and Mark	2	3,410	1,705	8	3,508	1,754	5

Continued overleaf

Figure B2 (continued)  
The Commission's Draft Recommendations for Sedgemoor

Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (1996)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2001)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
25 West Poldens	1	1,922	1,922	22	1,967	1,967	18
26 Woolavington	1	1,581	1,581	0	1,640	1,640	-2
<b>Totals</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>78,998</b>	—	—	<b>83,443</b>	—	—
<b>Averages</b>	—	—	<b>1,580</b>	—	—	<b>1,669</b>	—

Source: Electorate figures are based on Sedgemoor District Council's submission.

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



