

Final recommendations on the future electoral arrangements for South Holland in Lincolnshire

Further electoral review

July 2006

Translations and other formats

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What is the Boundary Committee for England?

The Boundary Committee for England is a committee of the Electoral Commission, an independent body set up by Parliament under the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000. It is responsible for conducting reviews as directed by the Electoral Commission or the Secretary of State.

Members of the Committee are:

Pamela Gordon (Chair)
Robin Gray
Joan Jones CBE
Ann M. Kelly
Professor Colin Mellors

Archie Gall (Director)

When conducting reviews our aim is to ensure that the number of electors represented by each councillor in an area is as nearly as possible the same, taking into account local circumstances. We can recommend changes to ward boundaries, the number of councillors and ward names. We can also recommend changes to the electoral arrangements of parish and town councils.

Executive summary

The Boundary Committee for England is the body responsible for conducting electoral reviews of local authorities. A further electoral review of South Holland is being undertaken to provide improved levels of electoral equality across the district. This review aims to ensure that the number of voters represented by each district councillor is approximately the same. As a result of the poor levels of electoral inequality that existed in 2003, the Electoral Commission directed the Boundary Committee to undertake an electoral review of South Holland on 2 June 2004.

Current electoral arrangements

Under the existing electoral arrangements seven of the 22 wards have variances of more than 10% from the district average. This is expected to worsen by 2009, with nine wards having variances of more than 10% from the district average.

Every review is conducted in four stages:

Stage	Stage starts	Description
One	17 May 2005	Submission of proposals to us
Two	9 August 2005	Our analysis and deliberation
Three	29 November 2005	Publication of draft recommendations and consultation on them
Four	7 March 2006	Analysis of submissions received and formulation of final recommendations

Draft recommendations

We adopted a mixture of 18 one-, two- and three-member wards. In Spalding town we adopted the Council's proposals subject to a number of amendments to improve electoral equality. In the east of the district we proposed a minor amendment to the Council's proposals to improve electoral equality in its Long Sutton and Sutton Bridge wards. In the rural west area, in the light of poor levels of electoral equality and limited community identity evidence, we moved away from the Council's proposals and created three-member Crowland & Deeping St Nicholas, Donington, Quadring & Gosberton, and Pinchbeck & Surfleet wards.

Responses to consultation

We received eight submissions at Stage Three, including comments from the Council, five parish councils, a local councillor and a resident. The Council put forward comments about the west of the district, Little Sutton parish and the Spalding town area.

Analysis and final recommendations

Electorate figures

The Council is predicting electorate growth of 5% over the next five years. This will be spread across the district, but with significant developments in Spalding and Holbeach towns. The Committee consider these the best estimates available.

Council size

We received no further comments on council size and are therefore confirming our draft recommendations for a council size of 37 members as final.

General analysis

We propose broadly confirming our draft recommendations as final, subject to two amendments. In the east of the district, in light of the community identity evidence received, we propose transferring Little Sutton parish back to Long Sutton ward. In the Spalding town area, we propose a very minor amendment to transfer two properties to Spalding St John's ward to address issues of access.

We propose no change in the remainder of the district. In the west of the district, we note the objections to our proposals for Crowland & Deeping St Nicholas, Pinchbeck & Surfleet and Donington, Quadring & Gosberton wards. However, the alternative proposal would significantly worsen electoral equality and we do not consider that any respondents put forward sufficient evidence of community links to persuade us to move away from our draft recommendations.

We received no comments about our Fleet, Gedney, Holbeach Hurn, Holbeach Town and Moulton, Weston & Cowbit wards Whaplode & Holbeach St Johns. In light of this and the good levels of electoral equality that they secure, we propose confirming them as final.

What happens next?

All further correspondence on these final recommendations and the matters discussed in this report should be addressed to the Electoral Commission, which will not make an Order implementing them before 22 August 2006. The information in the representations will be available for public access once the Order has been made.

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The contact details above should only be used for implementation purposes.

This report is available to download at www.boundarycommittee.org.uk.

Table 1: Final recommendations: Summary

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Constituent areas
1	Crowland & Deeping St Nicholas	3	The existing Crowland ward (the parish of Crowland) and the existing Deeping St Nicholas ward (the parish of Deeping St Nicholas)
2	Donington, Quadring & Gosberton	3	The existing Donington ward (the parishes of Donington and Quadring), the existing Gosberton Village ward (the parish ward of Gosberton Village of Gosberton parish) and part of the existing Surfleet ward (the Gosberton Clough parish ward of Gosberton)
3	Fleet	1	The existing Fleet ward (the parish of Fleet)
4	Gedney	1	The existing Gedney ward (the parish of Gedney)
5	Holbeach Hurn	1	The Existing Holbeach Hurn ward (Hurn parish ward of Holbeach Parish)
6	Holbeach Town	3	Part of the existing Holbeach Town ward (Town parish ward of Holbeach Parish)
7	Long Sutton	3	The existing Long Sutton ward (the parishes of Little Sutton, Long Sutton, Lutton and Tydd St Mary)
8	Moulton, Weston & Cowbit	3	The existing Moulton & Cowbit ward (the parishes of Cowbit, Moulton and Weston)
9	Pinchbeck & Surfleet	3	The existing Pinchbeck ward (the parish of Pinchbeck) and part of the existing Surfleet ward (the parish of Surfleet)
10	Spalding Castle	1	Part of the existing Spalding Castle (unparished) and existing Spalding St John's ward (unparished)
11	Spalding Monks House	2	The existing Spalding Monks House ward (unparished) and part of the existing Spalding Wygate ward (unparished).

Table 1: Final recommendations: Summary (continued)

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Constituent areas
12	Spalding St John's	2	Part of the existing Spalding Monks House (unparished), existing Spalding St John's (unparished) and existing Spalding Wygate wards (unparished)
13	Spalding St Mary's	2	Part of the existing Spalding St Mary's (unparished), existing Spalding St Paul's (unparished) and existing Spalding St John's wards
14	Spalding St Paul's	2	Part of the existing Spalding St Mary's (unparished) and existing Spalding St Paul's wards (unparished)
15	Spalding Wygate	2	Part of the existing Spalding Wygate ward (unparished)
16	Sutton Bridge	2	The existing Sutton Bridge ward (the parish of Sutton Bridge)
17	The Saints	1	The existing The Saints ward (the parishes of Gedney Hill, Sutton St Edmund and Sutton St James)
18	Whaplode & Holbeach St John's	2	The existing Whaplode ward (the parish of Whaplode) part of the existing Holbeach St John's ward (the proposed St John's parish ward of Holbeach parish)

Notes:

1. The whole of the borough is parished except for the town of Spalding.
2. The maps accompanying this report illustrate the proposed wards outlined above.
3. We have made a number of minor boundary amendments to ensure that existing ward boundaries adhere to ground detail. These changes do not affect any electors.

Table 2: Final recommendations for South Holland

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2004)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2009)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
1	Crowland & Deeping St Nicholas	3	4,609	1,536	-13	4,751	1,584	-15
2	Donington, Quadring & Gosberton	3	5,625	1,875	6	5,818	1,939	4
3	Fleet	1	1,734	1,734	-2	1,778	1,778	-5
4	Gedney	1	1,830	1,830	3	1,862	1,862	0
5	Holbeach Hurn	1	1,754	1,754	-1	1,791	1,791	-4
6	Holbeach Town	3	5,677	1,892	7	6,154	2,051	10
7	Long Sutton	3	5,821	1,940	9	6,135	2,045	9
8	Moulton, Weston & Cowbit	3	5,233	1,744	-2	5,358	1,786	-4
9	Pinchbeck & Surfleet	3	5,321	1,774	0	5,379	1,793	-4
10	Spalding Castle	1	1,546	1,546	-13	1,798	1,798	-4
11	Spalding Monks House	2	3,677	1,839	4	3,873	1,937	4

Table 2: Final recommendations for South Holland (continued)

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2004)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2009)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
12	Spalding St John's	2	3,624	1,812	2	3,790	1,3790	1
13	Spalding St Mary's	2	3,678	1,839	4	3,876	1,938	4
14	Spalding St Paul's	2	3,679	1,840	4	3,836	1,918	3
15	Spalding Wygate	2	3,173	1,587	-10	3,915	1,958	5
16	Sutton Bridge	2	3,256	1,628	-8	3,521	1,761	-6
17	The Saints	1	1,877	1,877	6	1,977	1,977	6
18	Whaplode & Holbeach St John's	2	3,457	1,729	-2	3,521	1,761	-6
	Totals	37	65,571	-	-	69,133	-	-
	Averages	-	-	1,772	-	-	1,868	-

Note: The 'variance from average' column shows by how far, in percentage terms, the number of electors per councillor in each ward 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.

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

1 Introduction

1 This report contains our final proposals for the electoral arrangements for the district of South Holland, on which we are consulting.

2 At its meeting on 12 February 2004 the Electoral Commission agreed that the Boundary Committee should make on-going assessments of electoral variances in all local authorities where the five-year forecast period following a periodic electoral review (PER) has elapsed. More specifically, it was agreed that there should be closer scrutiny where either:

- 30% of wards in an authority had electoral variances of over 10% from the average or
- any single ward had a variance of more than 30% from the average

3 The intention of such scrutiny was to establish the reasons behind the continuing imbalances, to consider likely future trends, and to assess what action, if any, was appropriate to rectify the situation.

4 This is our first review of the electoral arrangements of South Holland. South Holland's last review was carried out by the Local Government Commission for England (LGCE), which reported to the Secretary of State in March 1997. An electoral change Order implementing the new electoral arrangements was made on 21 September 1998 and the first elections on the new arrangements took place in May 1999.

5 In carrying out our work, the Boundary Committee has to work within a statutory framework.¹ This refers to the need to:

- reflect the identities and interests of local communities
- secure effective and convenient local government
- achieve equality of representation

In addition we are required to work within Schedule 11 to the Local Government Act 1972.

6 Details of the legislation under which the review of South Holland is being conducted are set out in a document entitled *Guidance and procedural advice for periodic electoral reviews* (published by the Electoral Commission in July 2002). This *Guidance* sets out the approach to the review and will be helpful both in understanding the approach taken by the Boundary Committee for England and in informing comments interested groups and individuals may wish to make about our recommendations.

7 Our task is to make recommendations to the Electoral Commission on the number of councillors who should serve on a council, and the number, boundaries and names of wards. We can also propose changes to the electoral arrangements for

¹ As set out in section 13(5) of the Local Government Act 1992 (as amended by SI 2001 No. 3962).

any parish and town councils in the district. We do not in these reviews consider changes to the external boundaries of areas.

8 The broad objective of an electoral review is to achieve, as far as possible, equal representation across the district as a whole, i.e. to ensure that all councillors in the local authority represent similar numbers of electors. Schemes which would result in, or retain, an electoral imbalance of over 10% in any ward will have to be fully justified. Any imbalances of 20% or more should only arise in the most exceptional circumstances, and will require the strongest justification.

9 Electoral equality, in the sense of each elector in a local authority having a 'vote of equal weight' when it comes to the election of councillors, is a fundamental democratic principle. Accordingly, the objective of an electoral review is to ensure that the number of electors represented by each councillor is, as near as is possible, the same across a district. In practice, each councillor cannot represent exactly the same number of electors given geographic and other constraints, including the make up and distribution of communities. However, our aim in any review is to recommend wards that are as close to the district average as possible in terms of the number of electors per councillor, while also taking account of evidence in relation to community identity and effective and convenient local government.

10 We are not prescriptive about council size and acknowledge that there are valid reasons for variations between local authorities. However, we believe that any proposals relating to council size, whether these are for an increase, a reduction, or the retention of the existing size, should be supported by strong evidence and arguments. Indeed, we believe that consideration of the appropriate council size is the starting point for our reviews and whatever size of council is proposed to us should be developed and argued in the context of the authority's internal political management structures, put in place following the Local Government Act 2000. It should also reflect the changing role of councillors in the new structure.

11 As indicated in its *Guidance*, the Electoral Commission requires the decision on council size to be based on an overall view about what is right for the particular authority and not just by addressing any imbalances in small areas of the authority by simply adding or removing councillors from these areas. While we will consider ways of achieving the correct allocation of councillors between, say, a number of towns in an authority or between rural and urban areas, our starting point must always be that the recommended council size reflects the authority's optimum political management arrangements and best provides for convenient and effective local government and that there is evidence for this.

12 In addition, we do not accept that an increase or decrease in the electorate of the authority should automatically result in a consequent increase or decrease in the number of councillors. Similarly, we do not accept that changes should be made to the size of a council simply to make it more consistent with the size of neighbouring or similarly sized authorities; the circumstances of one authority may be very different from that of another. We will seek to ensure that our recommended council size recognises all the factors and achieves a good allocation of councillors across the district.

13 Where multi-member wards are proposed, we believe that the number of councillors to be returned from each ward should not exceed three, other than in very exceptional circumstances. Numbers in excess of three could result in an unacceptable dilution of accountability to the electorate and we have not, to date, prescribed any wards with more than three councillors.

14 The review is in four stages (see Table 3).

Table 3: Stages of the review

Stage	Stage starts	Description
One	17 May 2005	Submission of proposals to us
Two	9 August 2005	Our analysis and deliberation
Three	29 November 2005	Publication of draft recommendations and consultation on them
Four	7 March 2006	Analysis of submissions received and formulation of final recommendations

15 Stage One began on 17 May 2005, when we wrote to South Holland District Council inviting proposals for future electoral arrangements. We also notified Lincolnshire Police Authority, Lincolnshire County Council, the Local Government Association, parish and town councils in the district, Members of Parliament with constituency interests in the district, Members of the European Parliament for the East Midlands Region and the headquarters of the main political parties. We placed a notice in the local press, issued a press release and invited South Holland District Council to publicise the review further. The closing date for receipt of representations, the end of Stage One, was 8 August 2005.

16 During Stage Two we considered all the submissions received during Stage One and prepared our draft recommendations.

17 Stage Three began on 29 November 2005 with the publication of the report *Draft recommendations on the future electoral arrangements for South Holland in Lincolnshire*, and ended on 6 March 2006.

18 During Stage Four we reconsidered the draft recommendations in the light of the Stage Three consultation, decided whether to modify them, and now submit final recommendations to the Electoral Commission. It is now for the Commission to accept, modify or reject our final recommendations. If the Electoral Commission accepts the recommendations, with or without modification, it will make an electoral changes Order. The Electoral Commission will determine when any changes come into effect.

Equal opportunities

19 In preparing this report the Boundary Committee has had regard to the general duty set out in section 71(1) of the Race Relations Act 1976 and the statutory Code

of Practice on the Duty to Promote Race Equality (Commission for Racial Equality, May 2002), i.e. to have due regard to:

- eliminate unlawful racial discrimination
- promote equality of opportunity
- promote good relations between people of different racial groups

National parks, Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and the Broads

20 The Boundary Committee has also had regard to:

- Section 11A(2) of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949 (as inserted by section 62 of the Environment Act 1995). This states that, in exercising or performing any functions in relation to, or so as to affect, land in a National Park, any relevant authority shall have regard to the Park's purposes. If there is a conflict between those purposes, a relevant authority shall attach greater weight to the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage of the Park.
- Section 85 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000. This states that, in exercising or performing any functions in relation to, or so as to affect, land in an AONB, a relevant authority shall have regard to the purpose of the AONB.
- Section 17A of the Norfolk and Suffolk Broads Act (as inserted by section 97 Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000). This states that, in exercising or performing any functions in relation to, or so as to affect, land in the Broads, a relevant authority shall have regard to the purposes of the Broads.

2 Current electoral arrangements

21 South Holland is a predominantly rural district, located in the south eastern corner of Lincolnshire. It mostly comprises Fenland and fertile farming land. It is parished, with the exception of its main urban settlement of Spalding.

22 The Council currently has 38 members who are elected from 22 wards. Four of the wards are represented by three members, eight by two members and 10 by a single member. The district average is calculated by dividing the total electorate of the borough, 65,571, by the total number of councillors representing them on the council. At present, each councillor represents a borough average of 1,726 electors (65,571 divided by 38), which the Council forecasts will increase to 1,819 by the year 2009 if the present number of councillors is maintained (69,133 divided by 38).

23 During the last review of South Holland, the Council forecast that there would be a growth of 4,076 electors between 1996 and 2001. However, electorate growth since the last review has resulted in significant electoral inequality between wards. To compare levels of electoral inequality between wards, we calculated the extent to which the number of electors per councillor in each ward varies from the borough average in percentage terms.

24 Data from the December 2004 electoral register showed that under these arrangements, electoral equality across the district met the borough met the criteria that the Electoral Commission agreed would warrant further investigation. In all seven wards had electoral variances of greater than 10%. Having noted that this level of electoral inequality is unlikely to improve, the Electoral Commission directed the Boundary Committee to undertake a review of the electoral arrangements of South Holland District Council on 10 February 2005.

Table 4: Existing electoral arrangements in South Holland

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2004)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2009)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
1	Crowland	2	3,202	1,601	-7	3,307	1,654	-9
2	Deeping St Nicholas	1	1,407	1,407	-18	1,444	1,444	-21
3	Donington	2	3,225	1,613	-7	3,378	1,689	-7
4	Fleet	1	1,734	1,734	0	1,778	1,778	-2
5	Gedney	1	1,830	1,830	6	1,862	1,862	2
6	Gosberton Village	1	1,568	1,568	-9	1,598	1,598	-12
7	Holbeach Hurn	1	1,754	1,754	2	1,791	1,791	-2
8	Holbeach St John's	1	1,531	1,531	-11	1,565	1,565	-14
9	Holbeach Town	3	5,522	1,841	7	5,990	1,997	10
10	Long Sutton	3	5,821	1,940	12	6,135	2,045	12

Table 4: Existing electoral arrangements in South Holland (continued)

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2004)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2009)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
11	Pinchbeck	3	4,230	1,410	-18	4,273	1,424	-22
12	Spalding Castle	1	1,794	1,794	4	2,034	2,034	12
13	Spalding Monks House	2	3,485	1,743	1	3,653	1,827	0
14	Spalding St John's	2	3,994	1,997	16	4,242	2,121	17
15	Spalding St Mary's	2	3,143	1,572	-9	3,281	1,641	-10
16	Spalding St Paul's	2	3,315	1,658	-4	3,462	1,731	-5
17	Spalding Wygate	2	3,646	1,823	6	4,416	2,208	21
18	Surfleet	1	1,923	1,923	11	1,948	1,948	7
19	Sutton Bridge	2	3,256	1,628	-6	3,521	1,761	-3
20	The Saints	1	1,877	1,877	9	1,977	1,977	9

Table 4: Existing electoral arrangements in South Holland (continued)

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2004)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2009)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
21	Weston & Moulton	3	5,233	1,744	1	5,358	1,786	-2
22	Whaplode	1	2,081	2,081	21	2,120	2,120	17
	Totals	38	65,571	-	-	69,133	-	-
	Averages	-	-	1,726	-	-	1,819	-

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 2004, in Pinchbeck ward there are 18% too few electors, while Whaplode ward has 21% too many electors. Figures have been rounded to the nearest whole number.

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

3 Draft recommendations

25 During Stage One we received 10 submissions, including district-wide schemes from the Council and Councillor Walls. We also received submissions from seven parish councils and a councillor. In the light of these representations and evidence available to us, we reached preliminary conclusions which were set out in our report, *Draft recommendations on the future electoral arrangements for South Holland in Lincolnshire*.

26 Our draft recommendations were based on the Council's proposals, but subject to a number of major amendments, particularly in the west of the district. In the west of the district we considered that the council put forward very limited evidence for its proposals. It considered a number of options, but rejected them on grounds of community identity. Given the lack of community identity argument and the high variances we proposed combining Deeping St Nicholas and Crowland wards and removing one councillor from the existing Pinchbeck ward and combining it with Surfleet parish. We also proposed creating a three-member Donington, Quardring & Gosberton ward. Finally, we adopted the Council's Moulton, Weston & Cowbit and Whaplode & Holbeach St John's wards given the good levels of electoral equality that they secured.

27 In the east of the district, we proposed a minor amendment transferring Little Sutton parish from Long Sutton ward to Sutton Bridge ward to address the relatively high opposing variances between these wards. We considered an amendment to address the high variance of the Holbeach Town ward, but concurred that the Council's proposals utilised strong boundaries and avoided mixing urban and rural areas. In the light of good electoral equality we also adopted the Council's single-member Holbeach Hurn ward, three-member Holbeach Town ward, single-member Fleet ward and single-member Gedney ward without amendment.

28 Finally, in Spalding, we based our draft recommendations on the Council's proposals, but moved away in a number of areas to address a number of high opposing variances.

29 We proposed that:

- South Holland Borough Council should be served by 37 councillors, one fewer than at present, representing 18 wards, four fewer than at present
- the boundaries of 18 of the existing wards should be modified, while four wards should retain their existing boundaries
- there should be new warding arrangements for Holbeach parish

30 Our proposals would have resulted in significant improvements in electoral equality, with the number of electors per councillor in only two of the 18 wards varying by more than 10% from the district average. This level of electoral equality was forecast to improve further, with only one ward varying by more than 10% from the average by 2009.

4 Response to consultation

31 We received eight representations during Stage Three, all of which may be inspected at both our offices and those of the South Holland District Council. Representations may also be viewed on our website at www.boundarycommittee.org.uk.

South Holland District Council

32 The Council objected to our proposals for Little Sutton parish and for the west of the district. It proposed retaining the existing Crowland and Deeping St Nicholas wards and reverting to its proposals for a two-member Pinchbeck ward and two-member Donington & Quadring and Gosberton & Surfleet wards. It proposed a very minor amendment to Spalding ward.

Parish and town councils

33 We received five representations from town and parish councils. Deeping St Nicholas and Crowland parish councils objected to our proposals for a three-member Crowland & Deeping St Nicholas ward. Donington, Pinchbeck and Surfleet parish councils objected to our proposals to create three-member Donington, Gosberton & Quadring and Pinchbeck & Surfleet wards.

Other representations

34 Councillor Espin (Deeping St Nicholas ward) expressed support for the Council's objections to a three-member Crowland & Deeping St Nicholas ward. A local resident also objected to our proposals for a three-member Crowland & Deeping St Nicholas ward.

5 Analysis and final recommendations

35 We have now finalised our conclusions on the electoral arrangements for South Holland.

36 As described earlier, the prime aim in considering the most appropriate electoral arrangements for South Holland is to achieve electoral equality. In doing so we have regard to section 13(5) of the Local Government Act 1992 (as amended):

- the need to secure effective and convenient local government
- reflect the identities and interests of local communities
- secure the matters in respect of equality of representation referred to in paragraph 3(2)(a) of Schedule 11 to the Local Government Act 1972

37 Schedule 11 to the Local Government Act 1972 refers to the number of electors per councillor being 'as nearly as may be, the same in every ward of the district or borough'. In relation to Schedule 11, our recommendations are not intended to be based solely on existing electorate figures, but also on estimated changes in the number and distribution of local government electors likely to take place over the next five years. We must also have regard to the desirability of fixing clearly identifiable boundaries and to maintaining local ties.

38 In reality, the achievement of absolute electoral equality is unlikely to be attainable. There must be a degree of flexibility. However, our approach, in the context of the statutory criteria, is to keep variances to a minimum.

39 If electoral imbalances are to be minimised, the aim of electoral equality should be the starting point in any review. We therefore strongly recommend that, in formulating electoral schemes, local authorities and other interested parties should make electoral equality their starting point, and then make adjustments to reflect relevant factors such as community identity and interests. Five-year forecasts of changes in electorate should also be taken into account and we aim to recommend a scheme which provides improved electoral equality over this period.

40 The recommendations do not affect county, district or parish external boundaries, local taxes, or result in changes to postcodes. Nor is there any evidence that these recommendations will have an adverse effect on house prices, or car and house insurance premiums. Our proposals do not take account of parliamentary boundaries, and we are not, therefore, able to take into account any representations which are based on these issues.

Electorate figures

41 As part of the previous review of South Holland, the Council forecast an increase in the electorate of 7% between 1996 and 2001. However, between 1996 and the start of this review the electorate increased by 13%. The Council predicts that significant growth will continue, with the electorate increasing by 5% from 65,571 in 2004 to 69,133 by 2009.

42 At Stage One, we noted the comments of Lutton Parish Council querying the electorate forecasts for Long Sutton parish and forwarded them to South Holland

District Council. The Council confirmed that it had in fact underestimated its projections for this ward and stated that there would be an additional 12 electors by 2009.

43 We accepted the Council's minor adjustment to its electorate projections. We considered that the Council put forward reasonable evidence for these projections and we were satisfied that it had provided the best estimates available.

44 We received no comments on the Council's electorate forecasts during Stage Three, and we remain satisfied that they represent the best estimates currently available.

Council size

45 South Holland District Council presently has 38 members. At Stage One we received two proposals for council size. The Council proposed a reduction of one to 37 members, while Councillor Walls proposed a reduction of 14 to 24 members.

46 We gave careful consideration to the evidence received. We noted that while the Council argued that the recent increase in cabinet size reflected demands and time-consuming nature of the role, this was directly contradicted by Councillor Walls' argument that the level of attendance at council meetings and on scrutiny panels suggested that the Council could function with fewer members.

47 We also noted that Councillor Walls contradicted the Council's assertion that the representative function of the members is time consuming. While we would concur with his comments that the increased use of technology may lead to a reduction in the time that members spend on certain tasks, we also noted that he argued that the representational role would continue to be an important part of the job. On balance we were not convinced that a reduction in council size would facilitate this important representational role. In addition to this we noted Councillor Walls comments on improved 'customer services' but considered there to be insufficient evidence of what this would actually comprise, and even less evidence of how and if this would actually free up members' time.

48 While there was an argument to suggest that the Council's executive and scrutiny function could possibly be carried out by fewer members, we considered that this should be balanced against the Council's argument that the impact of the new Licensing Act has yet to be assessed. In addition to this, we were unconvinced that a reduced council would be able to carry out its representational role.

49 We considered that Councillor Walls provided some novel and thought-provoking arguments and highlighted a number of issues that could be valid if the issue of council size is revisited in the future. However, there was no evidence of public consultation or public support for such a radical departure from the existing council size. When balanced against the Council's proposal and evidence for a 37-member council we did not feel there was sufficient evidence to support Councillor Walls' proposal.

50 We considered that a council of 37 members would enable the Council to continue its executive and scrutiny role and would allow members to perform their representational role.

51 Having rejected Councillor Walls' proposals, during our consideration of the Council's proposal we noted that while a council of 37 members gave the town and surrounding areas the correct allocation of councillors, this could be improved further with a council size of 36 members.

52 We examined a number of options based on a council of size of 36, but we were unable to find any alternative warding pattern that would avoid the need to divide a number of parishes between wards. Although the Council failed to supply strong evidence of communities, we noted that where possible it sought to avoid dividing parishes. Therefore, on balance, we were not persuaded that a further reduction in council size, while dividing parishes between wards, would provide sensible electoral arrangements. We therefore adopted the Council's proposals for a council of 37-members.

53 At Stage Three we received no further argument on council size and are therefore confirming proposals for a 37-member council as final.

Electoral equality

54 Electoral equality, in the sense of each elector in a local authority having a vote of equal weight when it comes to the election of councillors, is a fundamental democratic principle. The Electoral Commission expects the Boundary Committee's recommendations to provide for high levels of electoral equality, with variances normally well below 10%. Therefore when making recommendations we will not simply aim for electoral variances of under 10%. Where inadequate justification is provided for specific ward proposals we will look to improve electoral equality, seeking to ensure that each councillor represents as close to the same number of electors as possible, providing this can be achieved without compromising the reflection of the identities and interests of local communities and the provision of effective and convenient local government. We take the view that any proposals that would result in, or retain, electoral imbalances of over 10% from the average in any ward will have to be fully justified, and evidence must be provided which would justify such imbalances in terms of community identity or effective and convenient local government. We will rarely recommend wards with electoral variances of 20% or more, and any such variances proposed by local interested parties will require the strongest justification in terms of the other two statutory criteria.

55 At Stage One, the Council proposed a number of high variances in its proposals. Its Deeping St Nicholas, Pinchbeck and Crowland wards had 23% fewer, 14% more and 12% fewer electors than the district average by 2009. It explored a number of options to improve these variances, but concluded that these did not reflect community identities. However, in light of the limited community identity evidence provided, and the high electoral variances, we re-examined the Council's alternative options and also considered a number of our own. The Council also put forward a number of high variances in the Spalding town area. Its Spalding Monks House, Spalding St John's, Spalding St Paul's and Spalding Wygate wards had 7% more, 8% fewer, 10% more and 8% fewer electors than the district average by 2009. In light of the very limited community identity evidence provided we also sought to improve these variances.

56 Under our proposals we created a Crowland & Deeping St Nicholas ward with 15% fewer electors than the district average by 2009. While we acknowledged that this is a high variance, it enabled us to secure an improvement in electoral equality compared with the Council's proposals in the west of the district. In addition, it enabled us to adopt the Council's proposed council size of 37 members and avoid the unnecessary division of parishes between wards.

57 The district average is calculated by dividing the total electorate of the borough, 65,571, by the total number of councillors representing them on the council, 37 under our draft proposals. Therefore the average number of electors per councillor under our draft recommendations is 1,772.

58 At Stage Three we did not receive sufficient evidence to persuade us to move away from our draft recommendations, with the exception of the Sutton Bridge and Long Sutton wards. This amendment marginally worsens electoral equality, with Long Sutton worsening from 8% more electors than the average by 2009 to 9% more and Sutton Bridge from 3% fewer to 6% fewer.

General analysis

59 At Stage One, the Council put forward a single scheme for the whole district. It explored a number of options to improve the high variances it proposed in the west of the district, but argued that the alternatives did not reflect local communities and rejected them. However, in light of very limited community identity argument for rejecting these alternatives, we revisited a number of the options and examined a number of our own.

60 In seeking to address the electoral variances in the Council's proposed Crowland and Deeping St Nicholas wards, and in an alternative two-member Crowland & Deeping St Nicholas ward that we considered, we examined the option of creating a rural three-member ward combining Deeping St Nicholas, Crowland and Cowbit parishes (which had a variance of 2% by 2009). We considered that this ward covered a number of relatively well-linked and similar rural villages. However, we noted that this proposal had a knock-on effect on the Weston, Moulton, Whaplode and Holbeach parish areas, which as a result would be significantly over-represented. Removing Cowbit still left the area with five councillors, rather than its correct allocation of four. This effectively meant that, while the Council had not got the allocation of councillors in the urban and rural areas wrong, a better allocation could be achieved by reducing the council size further to 36 members.

61 As a result we considered that it might be possible to utilise a council of 36 members, reducing the number of councillors for this area by one. We explored a number of options for this area based on an allocation of four councillors (and a reduction in overall council size to 36). However, we noted that while a 36-member option secured good electoral equality, it forced us to move radically away from the Council's proposals and also required a further reduction in council size. In addition, to this, we were concerned about the need to divide parishes between district wards. Therefore, on balance, although we considered that this alternative provided good electoral arrangements, we are not persuaded to adopt it.

62 In the remainder of the district, we adopted the Council's arrangements, subject to a number of minor amendments to improve electoral equality.

63 At Stage Three, we noted the objections to our proposals in the west of the district, with particular reference to our three-member Crowland & Deeping St Nicholas, Donington, Quadring & Gosberton and Pinchbeck & Surfleet wards. We also note the Council's objections to our proposal to transfer Little Sutton parish.

64 The Council put forward specific objections to the geographic size of our proposed wards and the impact on a councillor's ability to represent an area. It expressed a particular objection to 'large multi-member wards', arguing that they 'act as a barrier to the democratic process'. It also objected to merging 'two or more communities with distinct identities', adding that 'smaller communities are more likely to be disadvantaged [...] candidates selected from larger communities are more likely to poll a great number of these votes. Consequently the smaller communities are more likely to find that they are not represented by a local person'.

65 We note these objections, but in terms of the geographic size of wards, the Committee does not consider issues of rural sparsity. The Electoral Commission's guidance acknowledges that arguments relating to the difficulty of representing rural areas are often put forward, however, this must be offset against arguments that state that urban areas, with particular social characteristics and problems are also difficult to represent. The guidance also states that 'there is no provision in legislation for the BCFE to apply such a weighting in reaching recommendations'.

66 We also note that the Council quotes our guidance, with particular reference to the imbalances that we will accept and the level of evidence required to justify them. Unfortunately, it is the Committee's opinion that it is on this criteria, community identity evidence that the Council have generally failed to provide sufficient argument. In the Little Sutton case they have highlighted specific community links, schools, shopping facilities, churches and sporting facilities. This degree of evidence has persuaded us to move away from our draft recommendations. Unfortunately, for the remainder of the district the evidence is not as strong, particularly given the high imbalances that they seek to justify.

67 As the Council itself states, imbalances over 10% will require strong justification, while imbalances over 20% will only be acceptable in exceptional circumstances, where a very high level of evidence is produced. As stated above, with the exception of Little Sutton, we do not consider that the Council has produced this level of argument, particularly in the case of Deeping St Nicholas where it has sought to justify a variance of 21%.

68 On balance, in the west of the district, we do not consider that any of the respondents put forward strong or compelling community identity argument and have therefore not been persuaded to move away from our draft recommendations in this area. In the remainder of the district, we have not received any comments, apart from the Little Sutton parish. We consider there to be some reasonable community identity argument for transferring Little Sutton parish to Long Sutton ward and propose adopting this as part of our final recommendations.

Warding arrangements

69 For district warding purposes, the following areas, based on existing wards, are considered in turn:

- Crowland, Deeping St Nicholas, Donington, Gosberton Village, Pinchbeck, Surfleet, Weston & Moulton and Whaplode wards (page 30)
- Fleet, Gedney, Holbeach Hurn, Holbeach St John's, Long Sutton, Sutton Bridge, The Saints wards (page 33)
- Spalding Castle, Spalding Monks House, Spalding St John's, Spalding St Mary's, Spalding St Paul's and Spalding Wygate wards (page 35)

70 Details of our final recommendations are set out in Tables 1 and 2, and illustrated on the large maps accompanying this report.

Crowland, Deeping St Nicholas, Donington, Gosberton Village, Pinchbeck, Surfleet, Weston & Moulton and Whaplode wards

71 Under the existing arrangements Crowland, Deeping St Nicholas, Donington, Gosberton Village, Pinchbeck, Surfleet, Weston & Moulton and Whaplode wards are all parished. Table 5 below shows the constituent parts of these wards. Table 4 (pages 18–20) outlines the existing electoral variances for 2004 and the variances which the wards are forecast to have by 2009 if the existing arrangements were to remain in place.

Table 5: Existing arrangements

Ward	Constituent areas	Councillors
Crowland	Crowland parish	2
Deeping St Nicholas	Deeping St Nicholas parish	1
Donington	Parishes of Donington and Quadring	2
Gosberton Village	Village parish ward of Gosberton parish	1
Pinchbeck	Pinchbeck parish	3
Surfleet	Surfleet parish and Riseigate parish ward of Gosberton parish	1
Weston & Moulton	Cowbit, Moulton and Weston parishes	3
Whaplode	Saracens Head, St Catherine's and Village parish wards of Whaplode parish	1

72 At Stage One, in the west of the district the Council proposed the retention of the existing two-member Crowland ward (which would have 12% fewer electors than the district average by 2009) and single-member Deeping St Nicholas ward (23% fewer electors than the district average by 2009), but acknowledging that both wards contain too few electors. It proposed retaining the existing Pinchbeck ward, but with two councillors rather than three (14% more electors than the district average). It also proposed the retaining the existing two-member Donington ward, but renaming it Donington & Quadring ward. It proposed a two-member Gosberton & Surfleet ward comprising Gosberton and Surfleet parishes (5% fewer electors than the district average). It proposed the retention of the existing Weston & Moulton ward (4% fewer electors than the average). It proposed the creation of a Whaplode & Holbeach St John's ward, comprising Whaplode parish and Holbeach St John's parish ward of

Holbeach parish. It also proposed a minor modification to the boundary between Holbeach St John's and Holbeach Town parish wards of Holbeach parish to transfer 155 electors to Holbeach Town parish ward. The Council acknowledged that its proposals did not secure good electoral equality and considered options to improve this, but rejected them arguing that they would not reflect local communities.

73 Deeping St Nicholas Parish Council expressed support for the existing electoral arrangements. Gosberton Parish Council argued that it would prefer not to be divided between wards.

74 We gave careful consideration to the evidence received. We noted the poor levels of electoral equality for the Council's Crowland, Deeping St Nicholas and Pinchbeck wards, but did not consider that it put forward any compelling evidence to justify these variances. We therefore decided to explore a number of options, including those that the Council rejected in its own submission.

75 We rejected the idea of a three-member ward combining Deeping St Nicholas and Pinchbeck wards (2% more electors than the average) as this would leave Crowland ward with 12% fewer electors than the district average. In addition to this, we noted that Deeping St Nicholas has marginally better road links to Crowland ward than to Pinchbeck ward. We therefore decided to revisit one of the proposals rejected by the Council, to combine Crowland and Deeping St Nicholas parishes in a three-member ward (15% fewer electors than the district average). While this would leave Pinchbeck ward with 14% more electors than the average, we noted that this problem could be addressed by combining Pinchbeck ward with Surfleet parish to create a three-member Pinchbeck & Surfleet ward (7% fewer electors than the district average). It would then be possible to improve the electoral equality of the Council's proposed Donington & Quadring ward by combining it with Gosberton parish to create a three-member Donington, Quadring & Gosberton ward (with 4% more electors than the district average).

76 We acknowledged that these proposals would leave the Crowland & Deeping St Nicholas ward with reasonably poor electoral equality. We considered a number of other options to address this, including a further reduction in council size to 36. However, as stated in the Council Size and General Analysis sections above, we concluded that the knock-on effects in the Weston, Moulton, Whaplode and Holbeach parish areas would be too great.

77 We therefore adopted three-member Crowland & Deeping St Nicholas, Donington, Quadring & Gosberton and Pinchbeck & Surfleet wards. We also adopted the Council's Moulton, Weston & Cowbit and Whaplode & Holbeach St John's wards without amendment. While we acknowledged that our proposed Crowland & Deeping St Nicholas ward would have poor electoral equality, we did not consider that the Council had provided sufficient evidence of local communities to justify the even lower levels of electoral equality for its proposals in the west of the district. We also acknowledged that there may be opposition to the creation of rural three-member wards, particularly in terms of geographic size, but we did not consider that the Donington, Quadring & Gosberton and Pinchbeck & Surfleet wards cover particularly large rural areas, certainly not significantly larger than other wards in the district that will be covered by one councillor. We also noted that there were reasonable road links between the constituent parishes.

78 At Stage Three, the Council objected to our proposals for three-member Crowland & Deeping St Nicholas, Donington, Quadring & Gosberton and Pinchbeck & Surfleet wards. It objected to the geographic area covered by Crowland & Deeping St Nicholas ward, arguing that Crowland contains more electors than Deeping St Nicholas and would dominate the ward. It argued that the area is separated by two rivers and that road links between them are poor. It also argued that Deeping St Nicholas looks towards Spalding for doctors, dentists and shopping.

79 It also objected to Donington, Quadring & Gosberton and Pinchbeck & Surfleet wards. It argued that Pinchbeck and Surfleet are different sizes and that they are 'distinct' communities. However, it did not specify how they are distinct. It also stated that Gosberton was only combined with Donington and Quadring to compensate for the fact it had been separated from Surfleet.

80 Deeping St Nicholas Parish Council objected to our draft recommendations, arguing that the geographic size of our proposed Crowland & Deeping St Nicholas ward is too large. It also argued that it has its own issues to deal with, including housing development and a new wind turbine.

81 A local resident also objected to the size of our proposed Crowland & Deeping St Nicholas ward, citing that the two areas are separated by a river and have different aspirations and 'no day-to-day affinity'. Councillor Espin expressed support for the comments put forward by South Holland Borough Council. Crowland Parish Council also objected to our proposals, stating that 'they are two completely different settlements with different identities'.

82 Donington Parish Council objected to our Donington, Quadring & Gosberton ward, in particular, the creation of a three-member rural ward. Surfleet and Pinchbeck parish councils objected to our proposals. Surfleet Parish Council argued that Pinchbeck would dominate the ward and that it has links with a doctor's surgery in Gosberton. Pinchbeck Parish Council requested the retention of the existing three-member Pinchbeck ward. It argued that the villages 'are very different from one another', but did not explain how they are different.

83 We have given careful consideration to the evidence received and note the objections to our proposals. As stated in the General Analysis section (paragraph 64), we also note the general objections to rural three-member wards. However, if they do not improve significantly electoral equality, we cannot dismiss these without strong evidence for why the specific three-member wards do not meet the statutory criteria. We do not consider that any respondents put forward argument beyond general objections to the principle of three-member rural wards.

84 We note that the Council, Crowland and Deeping St Nicholas parish councils, Councillor Espin and the local resident all objected to our proposed three-member Crowland & Deeping St Nicholas ward. We also note the comments about the rivers, but note that there are road links across these. We consider that they put forward very limited evidence of local community links, giving no specific examples and only argued that there are limited road and community links between the two parishes, and that they tend to look towards Spalding and not each other. They also argued that it would be difficult for three members to represent a large rural ward, but as stated in paragraph 65, we do not consider there to be sufficient evidence that these specific three-member wards would not reflect local communities or that councillors

would be unable to represent them. In addition to this, given the poor levels of electoral equality under the Council's proposals, we do not consider there to be sufficient evidence of community identity to persuade us to move away and significantly worsen electoral equality. We are therefore confirming our draft recommendation for this ward as final.

85 We also note the objections to our Donington, Quadring & Gosberton and Pinchbeck & Surfleet wards. As with the arguments against our Crowland & Deeping St Nicholas ward, we consider that respondents have only argued against the idea of three-member wards and provided insufficient evidence, considering the worsening to electoral equality, to argue why these wards do not work in terms of local communities. We are therefore confirming our draft recommendations for these wards as final.

86 We received no comments regarding our Moulton, Weston & Cowbit ward Whaplode & Holbeach St Johns ward and in light of the good electoral equality, we propose confirming them as final. Tables 1 and 2 (on pages 9 and 11, respectively) provide details of the constituent parts and electoral variances of our final recommendations for Crowland & Deeping St Nicholas, Donington, Quadring & Gosberton and Moulton, Weston & Cowbit, Pinchbeck & Surfleet and Whaplode & Holbeach St John wards. Our final recommendations are shown on Map 1 accompanying this report.

Fleet, Gedney, Holbeach Hurn, Holbeach St John's, Holbeach Town, Long Sutton, Sutton Bridge and The Saints wards

87 Under the existing arrangements Fleet, Gedney, Holbeach Hurn, Holbeach St John's, Long Sutton, Sutton Bridge and The Saints wards are all parished. Table 6 shows the constituent areas. Table 4 (on pages 18–20) outlines the existing electoral variances for 2004 and also the variances which the wards are forecast to have by 2009 if the existing arrangements remain in place.

Table 6: Existing arrangements

Ward	Constituent areas	Councillors
Fleet	Fleet parish	1
Gedney	Gedney parish	1
Holbeach Hurn	Hurn parish ward of Holbeach parish	1
Holbeach St John's	St John's parish ward of Holbeach parish and Drove parish ward of Whaplode parish	1
Holbeach Town	Town ward of Holbeach parish	1
Long Sutton	Little Sutton, Long Sutton, Lutton and Tydd St Mary parishes	3
Sutton Bridge	Sutton Bridge parish	2
The Saints	Gedney Hill, Sutton St James and Sutton St Edmund parishes	1

88 At Stage One, in the east of the district the Council proposed retaining the existing Fleet, Gedney, Holbeach Hurn, Long Sutton, Sutton Bridge and The Saints ward. It did not put forward any community identity argument, but argued that they already secure good electoral equality. The Council did consider transferring Little Sutton parish to Sutton Bridge ward to improve the electoral equality in Long Sutton and Sutton Bridge wards, but rejected this option, stating 'statistically, this option would be more attractive but Little Sutton has no affinity with Sutton Bridge'. It proposed a modification to the boundary between Holbeach St John's and Holbeach Town parish wards to create a modified three-member Holbeach Town ward, with 10% more electors than the district average. It stated that this would 'take [in]to account community identities and the wishes of Holbeach Parish Council', adding that it 'would provide a more logical and convenient ward boundary'.

89 Long Sutton Parish Council requested the retention of the existing electoral arrangements. Lutton Parish Council expressed support for the Council's proposals. Holbeach Parish Council submitted proposals for its parish arrangements that were identical to the Council's proposed district warding arrangements. Councillor Worth requested that Holbeach Hurn ward be renamed Holbeach Marsh ward.

90 We gave careful consideration to the evidence received and noted that the majority of the Council's proposed wards in this area secured good levels of electoral equality. However, we noted that its Holbeach Town ward had 10% more electors than the average. We did consider options to improve this, but rejected them, concurring with the Council's argument that this was not possible without breaching strong barriers or mixing urban and rural electors.

91 We also expressed concerns about the relatively high opposing electoral variances in the Council's Long Sutton and Sutton Bridge wards. We noted that the Council considered transferring Little Sutton parish to Sutton Bridge to improve the electoral equality of its proposed ward, but rejected this asserting that these areas do not have 'affinity'. However, we did not consider that it had provided any evidence, beyond assertion and given the improvement in electoral equality this amendment secured, we adopted it as part of our draft recommendations.

92 In the remainder of the area, although the Council only provided very limited community identity evidence, we adopted its Fleet, Gedney, Holbeach Hurn and The Saints wards, noting that these wards avoided the warding of parishes and secured good levels of electoral equality.

93 At Stage Three we received no comments regarding our Fleet, Gedney, Holbeach Hurn, Holbeach Town and The Saints wards. Therefore, in light of the good electoral equality that they achieve we are confirming them as final.

94 We note the Council's objections to our proposal to transfer Little Sutton to Sutton Bridge ward, although it did acknowledge that our proposals secured an improvement in electoral equality. In its Stage Three submissions, the Council gave further details of community identity in the area. It stated in Little Sutton 'pupils of secondary school age usually attend the Peele School at Long Sutton and not Sutton Bridge which does not have a secondary school', adding that 'sporting facilities are provided at the Peele School'. It also stated that 'people in Little Sutton naturally gravitate to Long Sutton for shopping because it has better shopping facilities'.

95 We have given consideration to the evidence received and note that the Council has provided some good evidence of Little Sutton's links to Long Sutton. This evidence is stronger than that provided for the rest of the district. Although reverting to the Council's favoured proposal would worsen electoral equality (Long Sutton worsening from 8% more electors than the average by 2009 to 9% more and Sutton Bridge from 3% fewer to 6% fewer) we concur that this would better reflect local communities.

96 Therefore, given the evidence received, we propose reverting to the Council's proposals and transferring Little Sutton parish back to Long Sutton ward. Tables 1 and 2 (on pages 9 and 11, respectively) provide details of the constituent parts and electoral variances of our final recommendations for Fleet, Gedney, Holbeach Hurn, Holbeach Town, Long Sutton, Sutton Bridge and The Saints wards. Our final recommendations are shown on Maps 1, 3, 4, 5 and 6 accompanying this report.

Spalding Castle, Spalding Monks House, Spalding St John's, Spalding St Mary's, Spalding St Paul's and Spalding Wygate wards

97 All of these wards are unparished. Table 4 (on pages 18–20) outlines the existing electoral variances for 2004 and also the variances which the wards are forecast to have by 2009 if the existing arrangements were to remain in place.

98 At Stage One, in the Spalding town area the Council put forward a revised configuration of the existing wards. Its Spalding St Paul's, Spalding St Mary's, Spalding St John's, Spalding Monks House and Spalding Wygate wards would have 7% more, 8% fewer, 3% fewer, 10% more and 8% more electors than the district average by 2009, respectively. Its Spalding Castle ward would have an electoral variance equal to the district average by 2009. The Council offered limited community identity evidence, arguing that the boundaries of its proposed wards 'largely follow physical features, e.g. the River Welland, railway lines and main roads', adding 'such features create natural community boundaries [and] it is considered important to retain them wherever possible'.

99 We gave careful consideration to the Council's proposals and noted that it opted to retain a number of high variances. Although it produced wards with variances of less than 10%, we stated that any variance either side of the district average still requires justification. Of particular concern were the opposing electoral variances of its proposed Spalding St Paul's and Spalding St Mary's wards. In addition, all except its Spalding Castle ward retained electoral variances of 7% or more from the average by 2009.

100 We consider that the Council provided sufficient evidence to justify these levels of electoral inequality. In addition to this, we noted that it argued in favour of utilising 'significant boundaries' for its wards, but noted that in a number of places it moves away from these boundaries. Therefore, while we concurred that strong boundaries can be useful, we were not persuaded that they could not be breached in certain places. We therefore explored a number of options to improve electoral equality between wards, while also utilising good boundaries.

101 We addressed the opposing variances between the Council's proposed Spalding St Paul's and Spalding St Mary's wards by transferring the 65 electors in

Birch Grove and 192 electors in Grange Drive, Beechfield Gardens and Beechfield from Spalding St Paul's to Spalding St Mary's ward. We also transferred 514 electors to the south of Pennygate and east of the rear of Carrington Road from the Council's Spalding Monk's House ward to its Spalding St John's ward. We also moved the boundary between Spalding Castle and Spalding Wygate wards to the railway line and transferred 233 electors from Spalding Castle to Spalding Wygate and 44 electors to Spalding St John's. To compensate for the removal of electors from Spalding Castle ward we transferred 199 electors to the east of the Crescent and Vine Street from the Council's Spalding St John's ward to its Spalding Castle ward. Finally, we propose transferred 379 electors to rear of the north of Wygate and Betjeman Close from Spalding Wygate ward to Spalding Monks House ward.

102 Where possible, we have sought to utilise strong boundaries. However, given the lack of community identity evidence we have decided to move away from the Council's proposals. Our proposed wards would secure significantly improved electoral equality. Spalding Castle, Spalding St Paul's, Spalding St Mary's, Spalding St John's, Spalding Monks House and Spalding Wygate wards would have 4% fewer, 4% more, 1% more, 4% more, 3% more and 5% more electors than the district average by 2009, respectively.

103 At Stage Three the Council proposed a very minor adjustment to our proposed wards in Spalding Town. It proposed transferring Millgate Lodge and Wildwood Lodge, Winsover Road to Spalding St John's ward, arguing that these properties access on to Winsover Road. We received no other comments regarding these wards.

104 We note the Council's amendment and note that it does not affect electoral equality, while providing improved access. We therefore propose adopting it as part of our final recommendations. We received no other comments for the remainder of Spalding and therefore, given the good electoral equality that our proposals secure, we are confirming them as final, subject to the minor amendment outlined.

105 Tables 1 and 2 (on pages 9 and 11, respectively) provide details of the constituent parts and electoral variances of our final recommendations for Spalding Castle, Spalding St Paul's, Spalding St Mary's, Spalding St John's, Spalding Monks House and Spalding Wygate wards. Our final recommendations are shown on Map 1 and Map 2 accompanying this report.

Conclusions

106 Table 7 shows the impact of our final recommendations on electoral equality, comparing them with the current arrangements based on 2004 and 2009 electorate figures.

Table 7: Comparison of current and recommended electoral arrangements

	Current arrangements		Final recommendations	
	2004	2009	2004	2009
Number of councillors	38	38	37	37
Number of wards	22	22	18	18
Average number of electors per councillor	1,726	1,819	1,772	1,868
Number of wards with a variance more than 10% from the average	7	9	2	1
Number of wards with a variance more than 20% from the average	1	3	0	0

107 As shown in Table 7, our final recommendations for South Holland District Council would result in a reduction in the number of wards with an electoral variance of more than 10% from seven to two. By 2009 only one ward is forecast to have an electoral variance of more than 10%.

Final recommendation:

South Holland District Council should comprise 37 councillors serving 18 wards, as detailed and named in Tables 1 and 2, and illustrated on the large maps accompanying this report.

Parish electoral arrangements

108 As part of an FER the Committee can make recommendations for new electoral arrangements for parishes. Where there is no impact on the district council's electoral arrangements, the Committee will generally be content to put forward for consideration proposals from parish and councils for changes to parish electoral arrangements in FERs. However, the Boundary Committee will usually wish to see a degree of consensus between the district council and the parish council concerned. Proposals should be supported by evidence, illustrating why changes to parish electoral arrangements are required. The Boundary Committee cannot recommend changes to the external boundaries of parishes as part of a FER.

109 Responsibility for reviewing and implementing changes to the electoral arrangements of existing parishes, outside of an electoral review conducted by the

Boundary Committee, lies with district councils.² If a district council wishes to make an Order amending the electoral arrangements of a parish that has been subject to an electoral arrangements Order made by either the Secretary of State or the Electoral Commission within the past five years, the consent of the Commission is required.

110 During Stage One we received proposals for revised parish council electoral arrangements from Holbeach Parish Council.

111 The parish of Holbeach is currently divided into three parish wards, Hurn, St John's and Town. In agreement with the District Council, Holbeach Parish Council proposed a minor amendment to the boundary between St John's and Town parish wards. This is designed to better reflect communities and secure improved warding arrangements. These minor amendments do not affect the number of councillors allocated to each parish ward, and Hurn parish ward would continue to be served by five members, St John's by three and Town ward by 10.

112 We proposed endorsing the Council's proposals for ward and parish ward boundaries in this area as part of our draft recommendations.

113 At Stage Three we received no further comments relating to Holbeach parish and therefore confirm our draft recommendations as final.

Final recommendation:

Holbeach Parish Council should comprise 18 parish councillors, as at present, representing three wards: Hurn (returning five councillors), St John's (returning three councillors), Town (returning 10 councillors). The parish ward boundaries should reflect those on maps 3, 4, 5 and 6 in the back of this report.

² Such reviews must be conducted in accordance with section 17 of the Local Government and Rating Act 1997.

6 What happens next?

114 Having completed our review of electoral arrangements in South Holland and submitted our final recommendations to the Electoral Commission, we have fulfilled our statutory obligation.³

115 It is now up to the Electoral Commission to decide whether or not to endorse our recommendations, with or without modification, and to implement them by means of an Order. Such an Order will not be made before 22 August 2006, and the Electoral Commission will normally consider all written representation made to them by that date.

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

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Great Peter Street
London SW1P 2HW**

Fax: 020 7271 0667

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The contact details above should only be used for implementation purposes.

This report is available to download at www.boundarycommittee.org.uk.

³ Under the Local Government Act 1992 (as amended by SI No. 2001/3962).

7 Mapping

Final recommendations for South Holland district:

The following maps illustrate our proposed ward boundaries for South Holland district.

Sheet 1, Map 1 illustrates in outline form the proposed wards for South Holland district, including constituent parishes.

Sheet 2, Map 2 illustrates the proposed boundaries in Spalding town.

Sheet 3, Map 3 illustrates the proposed Holbeach parish.

Sheet 4, Map 4 illustrates the proposed Holbeach parish.

Sheet 5, Map 5 illustrates the proposed Holbeach parish.

Sheet 6, Map 6 illustrates the proposed Holbeach parish.

Appendix A

Glossary and abbreviations

AONB (Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty)	A landscape whose distinctive character and natural beauty are so outstanding that it is in the nation's interest to safeguard it
The Boundary Committee	The Boundary Committee for England is a committee of the Electoral Commission, responsible for undertaking electoral reviews
Constituent areas	The geographical areas that make up any one ward, expressed in parishes or existing wards, or parts of either
Consultation	An opportunity for interested parties to comment and make proposals at key stages during the review
Council size	The number of councillors elected to serve a council
Order (or electoral change Order)	A legal document which implements changes to the electoral arrangements of a local authority
The Electoral Commission	An independent body that was set up by the UK Parliament. Its mission is to foster public confidence and participation by promoting integrity, involvement and effectiveness in the democratic process
Electoral equality	A measure of ensuring that every persons vote is of equal worth
Electoral imbalance	Where there is a large difference between the number of electors represented by a councillor and the average for the district
Electorate	People in the authority who are registered to vote in local government elections
FER (or further electoral review)	A further review of the electoral arrangements of a local authority following significant shifts in the electorate since the last periodic electoral review conducted between 1996 and 2004
Multi-member ward	A ward represented by more than one councillor and usually not more than three councillors

National Park	<p>The 12 National Parks in England and Wales were designated under the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act of 1949 and will soon be joined by the new designation of the South Downs. The definition of a National Park is:</p> <p>'an extensive area of beautiful and relatively wild country in which, for the nation's benefit and by appropriate national decision and action:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the characteristic landscape beauty is strictly preserved; - access and facilities for open-air enjoyment are amply provided; - wildlife and buildings and places of architectural and historic interest are suitably protected; - established farming use is effectively maintained'
Number of electors per councillor	The total number of electors in a local authority divided by the number of councillors
Over-represented	Where there are fewer electors per councillor in a ward than the average the electors can be described as being over-represented
Parish	A specific and defined the area of land within a single district enclosed within a parish boundary. There are over 10,000 parishes in England, which provide the first tier of representation to their local residents
Parish council	A body elected by residents of the parish who are on the electoral register, which serves and represents the area defined by the parish boundaries
Parish electoral arrangements	The total number of parish councillors; the number, names and boundaries of parish wards; and the number of councillors for each ward
Parish ward	A particular area of a parish, defined for electoral, administrative and representational purposes. Eligible electors vote in whichever parish ward they live for candidate or candidates they wish to represent them on the parish council

PER (or periodic electoral review)	A review of the electoral arrangements of all local authorities in England, undertaken periodically. The last programme of PERs was undertaken between 1996 and 2004 by the Boundary Committee for England and its predecessor, the now-defunct Local Government Commission for England
Political management arrangements	The Local Government Act 2000 enabled local authorities to modernise their decision making process. Councils could choose from three broad categories; a directly elected mayor and cabinet; a cabinet with a leader; or a directly elected mayor and council manager. Whichever of the categories it adopted became the new political management structure for the council
Under-represented	Where there are more electors per councillor in a ward than the average the electors can be described as being under-represented
Variance (or electoral variance)	How far the number of electors per councillor in a ward varies in percentage terms from the district average
Ward	A specific area of a district or borough, defined for electoral, administrative and representational purposes. Eligible electors vote in whichever ward they are registered for the candidate or candidates they wish to represent them on the district council