

LOCAL
GOVERNMENT
COMMISSION
FOR ENGLAND

FINAL
RECOMMENDATIONS
ON THE FUTURE
ELECTORAL
ARRANGEMENTS FOR
TAUNTON DEANE
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 Taunton Deane in Somerset

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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 borough of Taunton Deane under the Local Government Act 1992. We published our draft recommendations in June 1997 and undertook an 11-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 modifications have been made to some in the light of further evidence (see paragraph 115). This report sets out our final recommendations for changes to electoral arrangements in Taunton Deane.

We recommend that Taunton Deane Borough Council should be served by 54 councillors representing 27 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 Borough Council and other local people who have contributed to the review. Their co-operation and assistance have been very much appreciated by Commissioners and staff.

Yours sincerely

PROFESSOR MALCOLM GRANT
Chairman

SUMMARY

The Commission began a review of Taunton Deane on 25 October 1996. We published our draft recommendations for electoral arrangements on 10 June 1997, after which we undertook an 11-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 Taunton Deane because:

- **in 14 of the 30 wards, the number of electors represented by each councillor varies by more than 10 per cent from the average for the borough;**
- **in six wards, the number of electors represented by each councillor varies by more than 20 per cent from the average, two of which vary by more than 40 per cent;**
- **by 2001, the number of electors per councillor in 17 wards is likely to vary by more than 10 per cent from the average, two of which would still vary by more than 40 per cent.**

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

- **Taunton Deane Borough Council should be served by 54 councillors, compared with 53 at present;**
- **there should be 27 wards, instead of the current 30;**
- **the boundaries of 21 wards should be modified, while nine 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 borough councillor is as nearly as possible the same, having regard to local circumstances.

- **In 15 of the 27 wards the number of electors per councillor would vary by no more than 10 per cent from the borough average.**
- **By 2001 the number of electors per councillor is projected to vary by no more than 10 per cent from the average in all but three wards; only one ward would have an electoral variance over 20 per cent.**

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

- **new warding arrangements for the parishes of Cheddon Fitzpaine and Trull and the town of Wellington.**

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*

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Constituent areas	Map reference
1	Bishop's Hull	2	Bishop's Hull ward (the parish of Bishop's Hull plus part of the unparished area of Taunton); Manor ward (part)	Map 2 and large map
2	Bishop's Lydeard	2	<i>Unchanged</i> (the parishes of Bishop's Lydeard and Cothelstone)	Map 2
3	Blackdown	1	<i>Unchanged</i> (the parishes of Churchstanton, Otterford and Pitminster)	Map 2
4	Bradford-on-Tone	1	Bradford-on-Tone ward (the parishes of Bradford-on-Tone, Nynehead and Oake); West Deane ward (part – the parish of Langford Budville)	Map 2
5	Comeytrowe	3	<i>Unchanged</i> (the parish of Comeytrowe)	Map 2 and large map
6	Milverton & North Deane	2	Milverton ward (the parishes of Fitzhead and Milverton); North Deane ward (the parishes of Ash Priors, Combe Florey, Halse, Lydeard St Lawrence, Tolland and West Bagborough)	Map 2
7	Monument	1	<i>Unchanged</i> (the parishes of Sampford Arundel, Wellington Without and West Buckland)	Map 2
8	Neroche	1	<i>Unchanged</i> (the parishes of Bickenhall, Corfe, Curland, Hatch Beauchamp, Orchard Portman, Staple Fitzpaine, Stoke St Mary and West Hatch)	Map 2
9	North Curry	1	<i>Unchanged</i> (the parishes of Durston and North Curry)	Map 2
10	Norton Fitzwarren	1	<i>Unchanged</i> (the parish of Norton Fitzwarren)	Map 2 and large map
11	Ruishton & Creech	2	<i>Unchanged</i> (the parishes of Creech St Michael, Ruishton and Thornfalcon)	Map 2
12	Staplegrove	2	Staplegrove ward (part – the parishes of Kingston St Mary and Staplegrove and the proposed Cheddon parish ward of Cheddon Fitzpaine parish); Fairwater ward (part)	Map 2 and large map
13	Stoke St Gregory	1	<i>Unchanged</i> (the parishes of Burrowbridge and Stoke St Gregory)	Map 2

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

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Constituent areas	Map reference
14	Taunton Blackbrook & Holway	3	Holway ward (part); Trinity ward (part)	Large map
15	Taunton Eastgate	2	Manor ward (part); Priory & Wilton ward (part); Trinity ward (part)	Large map
16	Taunton Fairwater	3	Fairwater ward (part); Rowbarton ward (part)	Large map
17	Taunton Halcon	3	Halcon ward; Holway ward (part)	Large map
18	Taunton Killams & Mountfield	2	Trinity ward (part); Holway ward (part); Trull ward (part – the proposed Killams parish ward of Trull parish)	Large map
19	Taunton Lyngford	3	Lyngford ward (part); Rowbarton ward (part)	Large map
20	Taunton Manor & Wilton	3	Manor ward (part); Priory & Wilton ward (part)	Large map
21	Taunton Pyrland & Rowbarton	3	Lyngford ward (part); Pyrland ward; Rowbarton ward (part)	Large map
22	Trull	1	Trull ward (part – the proposed Trull parish ward of Trull parish)	Map 2 and large map
23	Wellington East	2	Wellington South ward (part)	Maps 2 and A1
24	Wellington North	2	Wellington North ward (part)	Maps 2 and A1
25	Wellington Rockwell Green & West	3	Wellington North ward (part); Wellington Rockwell Green ward; Wellington South ward (part)	Maps 2 and A1
26	West Monkton	2	West Monkton ward (the parish of West Monkton); Staplegrove ward (part – the proposed Maidenbrook parish ward of Cheddon Fitzpaine parish)	Map 2 and large map
27	Wiveliscombe & West Deane	2	Wiveliscombe ward (the parish of Wiveliscombe); West Deane ward (part – the parishes of Ashbrittle, Bathealton, Chipstable and Stawley)	Map 2

Note: Taunton is the only unparished area in the borough.

1. INTRODUCTION

1 This report contains our final recommendations on the electoral arrangements for the borough of Taunton Deane 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 Taunton Deane Borough Council inviting proposals for future electoral arrangements. Our letter was copied to Somerset County Council, the Avon & Somerset Police Authority, the local authority associations, the Somerset Association of Local Councils, parish and town councils in the borough, the Member of Parliament and the Member of the European Parliament with constituency interests in the borough, and the headquarters of the main political parties. At the start of the review and following publication of our draft recommendations, we published a notice in the local press, issued a press release and invited the Borough Council to publicise the review more widely. The closing date for receipt of representations was 20 January 1997.

5 At Stage Two we considered all the representations received during Stage One and prepared our draft recommendations. We also held a public meeting in Taunton on 26 March 1997, in order to seek further information from interested parties. An independent Assessor, Roger Grant, was appointed to chair the meeting, which was held in the Old Municipal Buildings, Taunton. Mr Grant reported his findings to the Commission, which took account of them during its deliberations. A note of the public meeting's proceedings is available from us on request.

6 Stage Three began on 10 June 1997 with the publication of our report, *Draft Recommendations on the Future Electoral Arrangements for Taunton Deane 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

7 The borough of Taunton Deane is situated in the south-west of Somerset and has a contrasting blend of urban and rural areas. Around two-fifths of the borough's electors live in its largest town, the county town of Taunton. The borough's other principal towns are Wellington and Wiveliscombe. Taunton Deane also contains a substantial rural area, including parts of the Quantock Hills in the north and the Blackdown Hills in the south, the latter bordering the neighbouring county of Devon. Taunton is well connected with the rest of southern England in terms of transport links, this being one of the reasons for the recent (and continuing) housing developments around the edges of the town. The whole of the borough outside the town of Taunton is parished, with 41 parish or town councils.

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

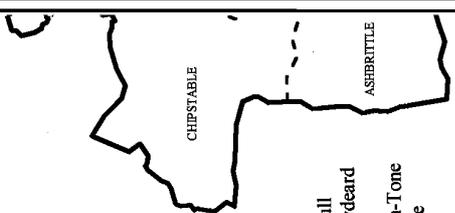
9 The Borough Council has 53 councillors elected from 30 wards (Map 1 and Figure 2). Seven wards are each represented by three councillors, nine wards elect two councillors each, while the other 14 wards elect a single councillor each. The whole Council is elected together every four years, with the next elections due in May 1999. The electorate of the borough is 76,356 (February 1996) and each councillor represents an average of 1,441 electors. The Borough Council forecasts that the electorate will increase by around 5 per cent to 80,364 by the year 2001, which would change the average number of electors per councillor to 1,516 (Figure 2).

10 Since the last electoral review was completed in 1985 by our predecessor, the Local Government Boundary Commission (LGBC), changes in population and electorate have been unevenly spread across the borough. As a result, in 14 of the 30 wards, the number of electors per councillor varies by more than 10 per cent from the average, in six wards it varies by more than 20 per cent and in two wards by over 40 per cent. The most significant electoral imbalance is in Taunton Holway ward where each councillor represents on average 2,109 electors, 46 per cent more than the borough average.

Map 1:
Existing Wards in Taunton Deane



- Key to Wards
- | | |
|------------------------------|------|
| 1 Bishop's Hull | 21 T |
| 2 Bishop's Lydeard | 22 T |
| 3 Blackdown | 23 T |
| 4 Bradford-on-Tone | 24 T |
| 5 Comeytrove | 25 W |
| 6 Milverton | 26 W |
| 7 Monument | 27 W |
| 8 Neroche | 28 W |
| 9 North Curry | 29 W |
| 10 North Deane | 30 W |
| 11 Norton Fitzwarren | |
| 12 Ruishton and Creech | |
| 13 Staplegrove | |
| 14 Stoke St Gregory | |
| 15 Taunton Fairwater | |
| 16 Taunton Halcon | |
| 17 Taunton Holtway | |
| 18 Taunton Lyngford | |
| 19 Taunton Manor | |
| 20 Taunton Priory and Wilton | |



KEY
 EXISTING WARD BOUNDARY
 EXISTING PARISH BOUNDARY

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 Bishop's Hull	2	2,733	1,367	-5	2,746	1,373	-9
2 Bishop's Lydeard	2	2,174	1,087	-25	2,774	1,387	-9
3 Blackdown	1	1,582	1,582	10	1,589	1,589	5
4 Bradford-on-Tone	1	1,251	1,251	-13	1,257	1,257	-17
5 Comeytrowe	3	4,384	1,461	1	4,405	1,468	-3
6 Milverton	1	1,277	1,277	-11	1,283	1,283	-15
7 Monument	1	1,570	1,570	9	1,577	1,577	4
8 Neroche	1	1,704	1,704	18	1,712	1,712	13
9 North Curry	1	1,339	1,339	-7	1,345	1,345	-11
10 North Deane	1	1,175	1,175	-18	1,180	1,180	-22
11 Norton Fitzwarren	1	1,558	1,558	8	1,565	1,565	3
12 Ruishton & Creech	2	3,264	1,632	13	3,280	1,640	8
13 Staplegrove	2	2,366	1,183	-18	3,066	1,533	1
14 Stoke St Gregory	1	1,125	1,125	-22	1,130	1,130	-25
15 Taunton Fairwater	3	4,402	1,467	2	4,579	1,526	1
16 Taunton Halcon	3	3,889	1,296	-10	3,908	1,303	-14
17 Taunton Holway	2	4,218	2,109	46	4,278	2,139	41
18 Taunton Lyngford	3	3,919	1,306	-9	3,938	1,313	-13
19 Taunton Manor	2	2,305	1,153	-20	2,316	1,158	-24
20 Taunton Priory & Wilton	3	4,178	1,393	-3	4,198	1,399	-8
21 Taunton Pyrland	2	2,591	1,296	-10	2,603	1,302	-14
22 Taunton Rowbarton	2	2,661	1,331	-8	2,956	1,478	-3
23 Taunton Trinity	3	4,826	1,609	12	5,320	1,773	17
24 Trull	1	1,512	1,512	5	1,592	1,592	5
25 Wellington North	2	3,136	1,568	9	3,151	1,576	4

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	Wellington Rockwell Green	1	1,424	1,424	-1	1,924	1,924	27
27	Wellington South	3	4,760	1,587	10	5,410	1,803	19
28	West Deane	1	1,079	1,079	-25	1,084	1,084	-29
29	West Monkton	1	1,918	1,918	33	2,062	2,062	36
30	Wiveliscombe	1	2,036	2,036	41	2,136	2,136	41
	Totals	53	76,356	—	—	80,364	—	—
	Averages	—	—	1,441	—	—	1,516	—

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

Note: The 'variance from average' column shows by how far, in percentage terms, the number of electors per councillor varies from the average for the borough. The minus symbol (-) denotes a lower than average number of electors. For example, in 1996, electors in West Deane ward were relatively over-represented by 25 per cent, while electors in Wiveliscombe ward were relatively under-represented by 41 per cent. Figures have been rounded to the nearest whole number.

3. DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS

¹¹ During Stage One we received a representation from Taunton Deane Borough Council on electoral arrangements for the whole borough, and representations from the Conservative and Labour Groups on the Borough Council which paid particular regard to the town of Taunton. We also heard directly from one parish council and one town council. In the light of these representations and the evidence available to us, we reached preliminary conclusions which were set out in our report, *Draft Recommendations on the Future Electoral Arrangements for Taunton Deane in Somerset*. We proposed that:

- (a) Taunton Deane Borough Council should be served by 53 councillors representing 27 wards;
- (b) the towns of Taunton and Wellington should be substantially re-warded, with a pattern of multi-member wards;
- (c) significant boundary changes should be made to many of the rural wards in the north and west of the borough;
- (d) there should be no change to most rural wards in the south and east of the borough;
- (e) the parish of Trull should be warded.

Draft Recommendation

Taunton Deane Borough Council should comprise 53 councillors, serving 27 wards. The whole Council should continue to be elected together every four years.

¹² Our proposals would have resulted in significant improvements in electoral equality, with the number of electors per councillor in 19 of the 27 wards varying by no more than 10 per cent from the borough average. This level of electoral equality was expected to improve during the period to 2001, when only four wards were expected to vary by more than 10 per cent from the average.

¹³ Our draft recommendations are summarised at Appendix B.

4. RESPONSES TO CONSULTATION

14 During the consultation on our draft recommendations report, 50 representations were received. A list of all respondents is available on request from the Commission.

Taunton Deane Borough Council

15 The Council agreed with, or did not oppose, our draft recommendations for 22 of the 27 wards. In the town of Wellington the Borough Council accepted that there was “strong community feeling in Rockwell Green”, but had “no objection in principle” to our recommendations. The Borough Council proposed an increase in council size from 53 to 54 and put forward alternative proposals for the following wards:

- (a) The proposed wards of Galmington & Wilton and Holway were accepted but new ward names were proposed, Manor & Wilton and Blackbrook & Holway respectively.
- (b) A minor modification to the boundary between the proposed Central and Trinity wards was put forward to “reflect community interests”, and new ward names of Eastgate and Killams & Mountfield were proposed.
- (c) The parish of Cheddon Fitzpaine should be warded, with the proposed Cheddon parish ward to be incorporated into a revised Staplegrove borough ward, and the proposed Nerrols parish ward to be combined with the parish of West Monkton to form a new two-member West Monkton borough ward.
- (d) Staplegrove parish should be warded, and a new single-member ward named Bindon should be created from part of the parish of Staplegrove and part of the existing AO polling district currently in Fairwater ward.
- (e) There should be no change to the two-member Bishop’s Lydeard ward, and the single-member wards of Milverton and North Deane.

Parish and Town Councils

16 During Stage Three, representations were received from 15 parish councils and one town council. The parish councils of Comeytrowe, West

Monkton and Wiveliscombe each supported the draft recommendations in relation to their own areas.

17 Bathealton, Bishop’s Lydeard & Cothelstone, Cheddon Fitzpaine, Chipstable, Combe Florey, Kingston St Mary, Langford Budville, Lydeard St Lawrence & Tolland, Nynehead, Stawley, Trull and West Bagborough parish councils and Wellington Town Council all opposed our draft recommendations in their respective areas.

18 Bishop’s Lydeard & Cothelstone Parish Council argued for the retention of the present electoral arrangements for the wards of Bishop’s Lydeard, Milverton and North Deane, contending that predominantly rural parishes should not be incorporated into “larger semi-urban areas such as Bishop’s Lydeard”. Combe Florey, Lydeard St Lawrence & Tolland and West Bagborough parish councils also supported the existing arrangements for that part of the borough, with each wishing to maintain a “rural” representative on the Borough Council.

19 Cheddon Fitzpaine Parish Council considered that its electors would be better served if it was linked with Kingston St Mary and Staplegrove as now, a view shared by Kingston St Mary Parish Council. Cheddon Fitzpaine Parish Council submitted an “informal opinion poll” which indicated that while 107 residents wanted the parish to remain in Staplegrove ward, only seven supported our draft recommendation. In order to improve electoral equality overall, the Parish Council supported being warded for borough (and parish) council purposes, submitting similar warding arrangements to those proposed by the Borough Council.

20 Bathealton, Chipstable and Stawley parish councils all wished to remain within the present West Deane ward, arguing that if they were placed in a ward including the town of Wiveliscombe they would have “no rural voice”.

21 Both Langford Budville and Nynehead parish councils objected to the parish of Langford Budville being included in a revised Bradford-on-Tone ward, the latter stating that Nynehead had closer links with the parishes of Bradford and Oake.

22 Trull Parish Council contended that our draft proposal for the parish could lead to confusion among the electorate if the Killams (parish) ward were part of Taunton Trinity ward for borough warding purposes, but with Trull for parish council purposes.

23 Wellington Town Council argued that Rockwell Green should remain as a ward on its own and should not be linked with part of “urban” Wellington. Although the Town Council accepted our aim of improving electoral equality it considered “that Rockwell Green is an outstanding example of a separate community which should be allowed to continue as a ward on its own”.

27 Councillor Hole and Councillor Debenham reiterated their previously expressed support for single-member wards. This view was also supported by Councillor Bradley who added that we should not ignore the close links between Cheddon Fitzpaine and Kingston. One resident from Taunton also supported single-member wards, and proposed that Trinity ward be renamed Mountfield, while six residents from across the borough supported our proposals for multi-member wards in the towns of Taunton and Wellington. Finally, two residents from Rockwell Green wanted the area to keep its separate identity.

Member of Parliament

24 Mrs Jackie Ballard, MP for Taunton, supported the concept of three-member wards for the towns of Taunton and Wellington. She also asked us to take account of “the extra burden on rural councillors of attending a number of parish council meetings”.

Other Representations

25 We received a further 32 representations in response to our draft recommendations, 12 of which were from residents of Ash Priors, Bishop’s Lydeard, Lydeard St Lawrence and West Bagborough who opposed our draft recommendation for an enlarged Bishop’s Lydeard ward. The United Benefice of Bishop’s Lydeard with Bagborough & Cothelstone also opposed the proposed Bishop’s Lydeard ward, arguing that it lacked unity and a sense of identity, a view shared by two local parish councillors and one borough and one county councillor.

26 Somerset County Council expressed the view that “boundaries of wards should be capable of co-terminosity with [County Council] division boundaries in due course”. The Somerset Association of Local Councils requested that the views of local councils should be given “full weight” when any alternative proposals were put forward. The governors of Cheddon Fitzpaine Church of England VC Primary School were of the opinion that the parish of Cheddon Fitzpaine should not form part of the same ward as West Monkton.

5. ANALYSIS AND FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS

28 As indicated previously, our prime objective in considering the most appropriate electoral arrangements for Taunton Deane 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”.

29 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.

30 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.

31 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 we accept that absolute equality of representation is likely to be unattainable, we consider that, if electoral imbalances are to be kept to the minimum, such

equality should be the starting point in any electoral review.

Electorate Projections

32 During Stage One the Borough Council submitted electorate forecasts for the period 1996 to 2001, projecting an increase in the electorate of around 5 per cent over the five-year period from 76,356 to 80,364. 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. Advice has been obtained from the Borough Council on the likely effect on electorates of ward boundary changes. 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.

33 During Stage Three the Borough Council made reference to the Maidenbrook Farm development (Cheddon Fitzpaine parish) which it estimated will have “an additional 400 electors over the [original] 2001 projection”. We have found it difficult to judge which of its estimates is likely to prove the more accurate. On balance, we have decided to use the Borough Council’s original estimate for this development, as was used in the *Draft Recommendations*, which formed the basis on which views were invited.

Council Size

34 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.

35 Taunton Deane Borough Council is at present served by 53 councillors. The Council did not propose any change to council size 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 retaining a council size of 53. In its Stage Three submission the Borough Council proposed an additional councillor for the rural north-western area of the borough, which would have the effect of increasing the overall council size to 54. Having reconsidered our draft recommendations, particularly in relation to this part of the borough, we are now of the view that 54 would be an appropriate council size for the Borough Council.

Electoral Arrangements

36 Having considered all the 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) the Taunton town area, including Comeytrowe parish (10 wards);
- (b) the town of Wellington (three wards);
- (c) Bradford-on-Tone, Monument, West Deane and Wiveliscombe wards;
- (d) Bishop's Lydeard, Milverton and North Deane wards;
- (e) Bishop's Hull, Norton Fitzwarren, Staplegrove and West Monkton wards;
- (f) Blackdown and Trull wards;
- (g) Neroche, North Curry, Ruishton & Creech and Stoke St Gregory wards.

Taunton

37 Taunton (including Comeytrowe) currently comprises 10 wards represented by a total of 26 borough councillors, just under half the total for the borough. The wards of Comeytrowe, Fairwater, Halcon, Lyngford, Priory & Wilton and Trinity each return three councillors, while the wards of Holway, Manor, Pyrland and Rowbarton each return two. Although the Holway ward in particular has seen recent housing development and is, as a result, substantially under-represented on the Borough Council, the town as a whole is just about correctly represented, although with notable electoral inequality between its wards.

38 During Stage One the Borough Council proposed a number of substantial ward boundary

changes as part of a scheme which would continue the present practice of multi-member wards for the town. Its proposals (resulting in nine wards) would have substantially improved electoral equality while reducing the overall representation of the town by one to 25 members. The Labour and Conservative Groups on the Council, however, argued for 25 single-member wards.

39 Both proposals would have produced similar improvements in electoral equality and yet had markedly different principles underlying them. Because of this, we held a public meeting in March 1997 at which the differing schemes could be examined in detail. At the meeting, we sought to give the principal parties the opportunity to offer further evidence which would enable us to formulate warding arrangements for the urban area of Taunton.

40 We expanded upon the issues in some detail in our *Draft Recommendations* report. Although we have stated that we support the conclusions of the 'Widdicombe Report' in its preference for single-member wards, we have been sensitive to local preferences and have put forward a mix of single- and multi-member ward recommendations during both our structural review work and our Periodic Electoral Reviews. We will continue to reflect local preferences. In Taunton, the practice of multi-member wards is well established, and we concluded at draft stage that, on balance, the case for single-member wards was not strong enough to disturb the existing multi-member ward pattern, and that the Borough Council's scheme for the town of Taunton was marginally the more appropriate.

41 Having considered the proposals in some detail, we put forward the Borough Council's scheme for Taunton for consultation, with minor modifications to some wards in order to improve electoral equality and/or better reflect local community interests and identities. In its Stage Three submission, the Borough Council substantially endorsed our recommendations for the Taunton area, including in relation to multi-member wards. This approach was also supported by the MP for Taunton, Mrs Jackie Ballard, as well as by some other respondents. However, Councillor Jean Hole, the leader of the Labour Group on the Council, did not concur with the multi-member ward approach, urging us to "look again" at our approach. Other respondents shared her view.

42 Despite the continued debate about the relative merits (or otherwise) of single- and multi-member wards, we have not been persuaded

Central wards (described below), the projected number of electors per councillor in Trinity ward would vary considerably from the borough average.

51 In order to rectify this, we are now proposing that the new three-member Blackbrook & Holway ward should additionally include the Rowan Drive and Hawthorn Road area within it, notwithstanding that the ward would initially be under-represented. We believe this change from the draft recommendations would, in addition to improving the overall level of electoral equality in Taunton, enhance community identities in that part of the town. The number of electors per councillor in the new Blackbrook & Holway ward would, under our final recommendations, vary initially by 16 per cent from the average, but since there is no projected growth for that area (but growth elsewhere in the borough), it would vary by 10 per cent from the average by 2001.

52 The Council broadly supported our draft recommendation for Trinity ward, although it proposed a minor boundary adjustment and a different ward name. In relation to the boundary adjustment, it argued that an area of South Road in the vicinity of Kings College, containing 43 electors, should be added to Trinity ward as it would “reflect community interests more accurately.” We concur with this proposal. Additionally, it proposed that the new ward be named Killams & Mountfield ward to reflect its constituent areas. A resident also suggested the use of the word Mountfield in the new ward name and accordingly we recommend the Council’s proposed ward name.

53 The Council accepted our proposal that the identity of the Killams (urban) area, part of which is within the parish of Trull, would be improved by warding the parish and placing the Killams parish ward with the Trinity (Killams & Mountfield) borough council ward. Trull Parish Council expressed concern that it could prove difficult to recruit a parish council candidate from the proposed Killams parish ward, although it acknowledged that the area is separated from the rest of the parish electorate with no direct road links. Although we fully acknowledge the Parish Council’s concern, we remain of the view that it would be appropriate to ward the parish of Trull and place the Killams parish ward with the Trinity (Killams & Mountfield) borough ward. Arrangements for the remainder of the parish of Trull are discussed below.

54 As argued above, the projected five-year growth forecast for this part of the urban area, together with a change in overall council size to 54 and the inclusion of 43 electors from Central ward all conspire to push the projected number of electors per councillor to more than 10 per cent from the average by 2001. An improvement in the overall level of electoral equality, taking into account the five-year forecast (as well as arguably improving community ties) can be achieved by the transfer ‘back’ to the new Blackbrook & Holway ward of the 404 electors from the Rowan Drive and Hawthorn Road area, as described above.

55 Under this final recommendation, the number of electors per councillor in the new two-member ward of Killams & Mountfield would initially be 14 per cent below the borough average but, due to the projected growth in the area, would improve to be just 1 per cent from the average by 2001.

The western wards of Manor and Priory & Wilton and the parish of Comeytrowe

56 The two-member Manor ward and the three-member Priory & Wilton ward are both at present over-represented on the Borough Council: Manor by 20 per cent (24 per cent in 2001) and Priory & Wilton by 3 per cent (8 per cent in 2001). The three-member Comeytrowe ward, which covers the ‘urban’ parish of the same name, currently varies by 1 per cent from the average (3 per cent in 2001).

57 For our draft recommendations, we built on the Borough Council’s proposals for this area of the town. We proposed a new three-member Galmington & Wilton ward, and a new two-member Central ward. We concurred with both the Borough Council and Comeytrowe Parish Council and recommended no change to the present three-member Comeytrowe ward, which would remain close to the average number of electors per councillor.

58 The Borough Council accepted the thrust of our draft recommendations for this area, although it proposed a minor boundary change affecting Central ward and suggested alternative names for two of the wards. The Council, along with Comeytrowe Parish Council, accepted the draft recommendation for the continuation of a three-member ward for Comeytrowe (coterminous with the parish area) and, in the absence of any specific opposition to this proposal, we confirm it as final. The ward would vary by 3 per cent from the borough average initially, 1 per cent by 2001.

59 The Council accepted our proposal for a new three-member ward of Galmington & Wilton, but preferred that it be known instead as Manor & Wilton, a proposal we accept. No other specific comments were received. The three-member ward of Manor & Wilton would vary by 2 per cent from the average number of electors per councillor initially, 3 per cent in 2001.

60 Our proposal for a new two-member ward to be known as Central was supported in principle by the Council, although it proposed two minor modifications. As described above, it proposed that an area of South Road in the vicinity of Kings College, containing 43 electors, should be added to the new Killams & Mountfield ward as it would "reflect community interests more accurately." We concur with this suggestion. It also put forward an alternative ward name for the area, arguing that Eastgate would be more appropriate than Central. Again, we concur with this suggestion. The number of electors per councillor in the two-member Eastgate ward would be 9 per cent above the borough average initially, 6 per cent in 2001.

The town of Wellington: the wards of North, South and Rockwell Green

61 In our draft recommendations report, we agreed with both the Borough Council and Wellington Town Council that the town should be served by an additional (seventh) borough councillor. The combined electorate of the town's three present wards is 9,320, but it is projected to grow to 10,485 by 2001.

62 We based our draft recommendations on Wellington Town Council's proposal that the present single-member Rockwell Green ward be retained and that the rest of the town be re-warded to create three new two-member wards of East, North and West. While we agreed with the Town Council's proposals for the East and North wards, we were concerned about the degree of under-representation that would result in the Rockwell Green ward if we recommended no change for that area. Substantial development already underway in Rockwell Green is projected to increase the electorate by 500 over the five-year period.

63 Having weighed up the options available, we put forward a proposal for a three-member ward which would combine the Town Council's proposed wards of Rockwell Green and Wellington West. Such a proposal would retain the distinct area

of Rockwell Green in one ward and would secure a good level of electoral equality. All three of our proposed wards of Wellington East, North and Rockwell Green & West were projected to have electoral variances of 10 per cent or less by 2001.

64 During Stage Three, we received a number of comments in relation to Wellington. The Borough Council stated that, while it accepted there was "strong community feeling" in Rockwell Green, it would have "no objection in principle" to our proposals for the town. Wellington Town Council supported our proposals for East and North wards, but did not support the proposed Rockwell Green & West ward, stating that "Rockwell Green is regarded locally as a separate community with its own identity, with its own village sign, its own services, clubs, schools, post office, shops and other local organisations." Mrs Jackie Ballard, MP for Taunton, supported the principle of three-member wards for the town.

65 We agree with the Town Council and local residents that the Rockwell Green area of Wellington has its own distinct identity, separated as it is from the rest of the town by the green wedge area of Hilly Head. However, the major house-building programme already underway in Rockwell Green is projected to increase the electorate of the ward from 1,424, as it was on the 1996 electoral register, to 1,924 by the year 2001. With a 54-member council, which we are now proposing, a single-member Rockwell Green ward would have 30 per cent more electors per councillor than the borough average in 2001, a serious degree of under-representation.

66 While we accept the arguments regarding the distinctiveness of Rockwell Green, we remain concerned as to the level of under-representation that would result were we to recommend no change to the ward. We have considered other alternatives: for example, to place Rockwell Green in a two-member ward with the neighbouring parishes of Sampford Arundel and Wellington Without would create a 'rural' ward with improved electoral equality by 2001. However, no respondent has argued for this, and our electoral scheme for neighbouring wards in the area would be adversely affected if we were to put forward such a recommendation.

67 Under a 54-member council, the proposed three-member ward of Wellington Rockwell Green & West would initially have 12 per cent fewer than the average number of electors per councillor, but with

a projected growth for the ward of more than 1,000 electors, it would have 10 per cent more than the average by the year 2001. Some electoral imbalance appears to be unavoidable in the circumstances and, on balance, we consider that it is the proposal which best meets our criteria. We are therefore putting it forward as a final recommendation, along with the proposals for Wellington East ward and Wellington North ward, in which the number of electors per councillor would be 1 per cent and 4 per cent from the borough average respectively (3 per cent and 9 per cent by 2001). Details of our proposals for Wellington are shown at Map A1 in Appendix A.

The wards of Bradford-on-Tone, Monument, West Deane and Wiveliscombe

68 The present single-member Bradford-on-Tone ward consists of the parishes of Bradford-on-Tone, Nynehead and Oake and is marginally over-represented, with 13 per cent fewer than the average number of electors per councillor (17 per cent in 2001). The single-member Monument ward comprises the parishes of Sampford Arundel, Wellington Without and West Buckland and is under-represented with 9 per cent above the borough average (4 per cent in 2001).

69 The present single-member West Deane ward consists of the parishes of Ashbrittle, Bathealton, Chipstable, Langford Budville and Stawley and is substantially over-represented, with 25 per cent fewer than the average number of electors per councillor (29 per cent in 2001). Wiveliscombe is a single-member ward comprising the parish of that name and is substantially under-represented, varying by 41 per cent both initially and in 2001.

70 During Stage One the Borough Council proposed no change to these four wards, and was supported in that view by some of the parish councils in the area. However, in our draft recommendations, we put forward proposals which would reduce considerably the present levels of electoral inequality while in our view reflecting community ties so far as practicable.

71 We proposed no change to the single-member Monument ward which, with a 54-member council, would initially have 11 per cent more electors per councillor than the average improving to 6 per cent in 2001. During Stage Three the Council supported

this proposal while no other specific views were received. In the absence of any opposition to this recommendation, we confirm it as final.

72 In order to improve electoral equality in the Bradford-on-Tone ward we proposed adding to it the parish of Langford Budville, presently in the West Deane ward. The modified single-member Bradford-on-Tone ward would, with a 54-member council size, initially have 15 per cent more than the average number of electors per councillor (10 per cent by 2001).

73 During Stage Three the Borough Council commented that the modified Bradford-on-Tone ward would be fairly large, but that nevertheless it accepted the proposal. Nynehead Parish Council also voiced concern over the size of the ward, stating that "parishioners of Nynehead have a closeness with Oake and Bradford, but not so much with Langford Budville". The parish council of Langford Budville did not wish to be part of the proposed Bradford-on-Tone ward, preferring no change to the current West Deane ward.

74 We acknowledge the views expressed in relation to the size of the proposed ward, but do not consider that it would be too large for a borough councillor to represent effectively. Given the support of the Borough Council for our proposal and the improvement in electoral equality that would result in this part of the borough, we confirm our draft recommendation as final.

75 In the remainder of this area we put forward a proposal which would improve the present electoral imbalances. We recommended that the present Wiveliscombe and West Deane wards (less the parish of Langford Budville) should be merged together to form a new two-member ward, which we proposed to name Wiveliscombe & West Deane. The new ward, which would comprise the parishes of Ashbrittle, Bathealton, Chipstable, Stawley and Wiveliscombe, would, with a 54-member council, have 3 per cent fewer than the average number of electors per councillor for the borough (4 per cent in 2001).

76 Wiveliscombe Parish Council supported the draft recommendation, including the proposed ward name. In its Stage Three submission the Borough Council commented that "whilst [it] is not happy with the proposal [because of the size of the ward] it has been unable to find a solution which does not produce even less acceptable

arrangements.” It noted that the proposal had the support of Wiveliscombe Parish Council and therefore endorsed it “with some reluctance.” The proposal also had the support of a local resident.

77 The parish councils of Bathealton, Chipstable and Stawley all opposed the recommendation which would see them form part of a two-member Wiveliscombe & West Deane ward. All three voiced concerns that the parish of Wiveliscombe, which would have around three-quarters of the electors in the ward, could dominate and that the “rural voice” may be lost. We appreciate these concerns, although the two borough councillors for such a ward would not necessarily come from Wiveliscombe.

78 A recommendation for no change in this area would perpetuate the present serious degree of electoral inequality in this part of the borough. Under a 54-member council size, the retention of a single-member ward consisting solely of the parish of Wiveliscombe would be under-represented by some 44 per cent. On balance, having carefully considered the concerns expressed by the more rural parish councils, we remain of the view that our draft proposal for the two-member ward of Wiveliscombe & West Deane is appropriate. Accordingly, we are confirming it as a final recommendation.

The wards of Bishop’s Lydeard, Milverton and North Deane

79 The two-member Bishop’s Lydeard ward and the two single-member Milverton and North Deane wards are all over-represented, with 25 per cent, 11 per cent and 18 per cent fewer than the average number of electors per councillor respectively (9 per cent, 15 per cent and 22 per cent in 2001). Bishop’s Lydeard ward comprises the parishes of Bishop’s Lydeard and Cothelstone, Milverton comprises Fitzhead and Milverton, and North Deane comprises Ash Priors, Combe Florey, Halse, Lydeard St Lawrence, Tolland and West Bagborough.

80 During Stage One the Borough Council proposed no change to any of these wards. In order to reduce electoral inequality in this part of the borough, we proposed that there should be two new wards across the combined area. We also proposed that this area should, in total, have three borough councillors rather than the present four.

81 We proposed that the parishes of Ash Priors and Halse should be added to the existing Milverton

ward to form a new single-member ward, which would initially have 12 per cent more than the average number of electors per councillor, improving to 7 per cent by 2001. We also proposed adding the remainder of the present North Deane ward (the parishes of Combe Florey, Lydeard St Lawrence, Tolland and West Bagborough) to the present Bishop’s Lydeard ward to form a new two-member ward. The number of electors per councillor in the expanded Bishop’s Lydeard ward would initially have 5 per cent more than the average number of electors per councillor, although with a projected increase of over 600 electors this was expected to increase to 20 per cent by 2001.

82 At Stage Three the Borough Council opposed our draft recommendations. It considered that no change to the present two-member ward of Bishop’s Lydeard and the single-member ward of North Deane was the “only satisfactory solution”. It had considered an alternative that would involve the warding of Bishop’s Lydeard parish but decided that there were “unacceptable disadvantages” in this option. The Council’s proposal for no change to the wards in this area (which would retain four councillors overall rather than our proposed three) led it to propose an overall increase in the size of the Council from 53 to 54 members.

83 The parish councils of Bishop’s Lydeard & Cothelstone, Combe Florey, Lydeard St Lawrence & Tolland and West Bagborough all opposed our recommendations for this area. Opposition was also voiced by Councillor Mrs Lewin-Harris, the borough councillor for Bishop’s Lydeard ward, local parish councillors, the United Benefice of Bishop’s Lydeard with Bagborough & Cothelstone and several local residents.

84 The opposition centred around two main issues. Firstly, that by reducing representation from four to three members, the area as a whole would become under-represented on the Borough Council. In particular, respondents asked us to take into account the fact that there would be a substantial increase in electorate in the parish of Bishop’s Lydeard, projected by the Council to be 600 electors over the five-year period and likely to grow even further beyond that time. Secondly, and connected to the first issue, that because the nature of Bishop’s Lydeard (described by many respondents as “semi-urban” or “suburban”) is different to the rest of the area, a ward comprising that (expanding) community with more established

rural areas may not best reflect local community identities and interests.

85 In light of this fairly widespread opposition, we have re-assessed our draft recommendations for this part of the borough. The most important question we had to ask ourselves was whether the area merited three councillors overall or four. Judging by the 1996 electoral roll, the area clearly merits three councillors. However, the projected growth for Bishop's Lydeard means that, on the 2001 projected electorate forecast, the present wards of Bishop's Lydeard, Milverton and North Deane merit between them nearer three than four councillors under a 53-member council, but nearer four than three under a 54-member council.

86 Although we are only obliged to take into account the five-year projected electorate forecast, most respondents argue that the development within the parish of Bishop's Lydeard (on the site of a former hospital) will continue after 2001. On balance, therefore, we are now persuaded that this combined area of the borough should have four borough councillors.

87 Given the views expressed regarding the distinctive nature of Bishop's Lydeard, we now propose no change to the present two-member ward consisting of the parishes of Bishop's Lydeard and Cothelstone. Under a 54-member council size, such a ward would initially have 23 per cent fewer than the average number of electors per councillor, but the projected growth of more than 600 electors would reduce this level of over-representation to just 7 per cent by 2001.

88 As for the rest of this area, we considered recommending no change to the present single-member wards of Milverton and North Deane. Having regard to our duty to seek electoral equality, however, we propose an alternative as our final recommendation. A two-member ward of Milverton & North Deane, consisting of the two present single-member wards of those names, would vary from the average number of electors per councillor by 13 per cent initially, 17 per cent by 2001. Other two-member wards are being proposed in the north and west of the borough (Bishop's Lydeard and Wiveliscombe & West Deane) and an improvement in the overall level of electoral equality would result.

89 We acknowledge that the two-member Milverton & North Deane ward, consisting of the parishes of Ash Priors, Combe Florey, Fitzhead, Halse, Lydeard

St Lawrence, Milverton, Tolland and West Bagborough, would be relatively large in terms of area. We are of the view, however, that such a ward would strike the best balance of the criteria guiding our work and accordingly put it forward as a final recommendation.

The wards of Bishop's Hull, Norton Fitzwarren, Staplegrove and West Monkton

90 Presently, the two-member ward of Bishop's Hull, comprising the parish of that name together with a relatively small part of the unparished area of Taunton, has 5 per cent fewer than the average number of electors per councillor (9 per cent in 2001). The single-member ward of Norton Fitzwarren comprises solely the parish of that name, and is 8 per cent above the average (3 per cent in 2001).

91 The two-member ward of Staplegrove, which comprises the parishes of Cheddon Fitzpaine, Kingston St Mary and Staplegrove, is at present over-represented on the Borough Council by 18 per cent but, due to a planned housing development in the parish of Cheddon Fitzpaine, the ward is projected to vary by just 1 per cent from the average number of electors per councillor by 2001. The neighbouring ward of West Monkton is single-member, comprising solely the parish of that name, and is substantially under-represented, with the number of electors per councillor varying from the average by 33 per cent (36 per cent in 2001).

92 In our draft recommendations we proposed that there should be no change to the present Norton Fitzwarren ward and that the Bishop's Hull ward should be modified slightly along its eastern boundary to include 259 electors from the Belmont Road area, presently a part of the Taunton Manor ward. Under a 54-member council the number of electors per councillor in Norton Fitzwarren ward would be 10 per cent above the average (5 per cent in 2001), while the modified two-member Bishop's Hull ward would be 5 per cent above the average (1 per cent in 2001).

93 During Stage Three the Borough Council accepted our proposals for these wards and no other specific comments were received. We therefore confirm as final our draft recommendations for the wards of Bishop's Hull and Norton Fitzwarren. The new eastern boundary of the Bishop's Hull ward can be seen on the large map inserted at the back of this report.

94 The present wards of Staplegrove and West Monkton are represented in total by three members but with the addition of part of the present Taunton Fairwater ward and the projected electorate increase in the parish of Cheddon Fitzpaine, the area merits four overall. Our draft recommendations reflected this: we proposed that the parishes of Cheddon Fitzpaine and West Monkton be combined in a two-member ward and that the parishes of Kingston St Mary and Staplegrove be combined with part of the Taunton Fairwater ward to form a separate two-member ward.

95 Our proposals would improve considerably the level of electoral equality, having regard to the five-year projected increase in electorate. Under a 54-member council, the number of electors per councillor in our proposed two-member West Monkton with Cheddon ward would initially be 24 per cent below the average, but the projected increase in electorate would mean that the ward would vary by just 1 per cent from the average by 2001. Our proposed Staplegrove with Kingston ward would vary by 1 per cent from the average on 1996 figures, 6 per cent in 2001.

96 In its Stage Three submission the Council accepted that this combined area of the borough merited four councillors rather than the current three, but disagreed with our specific proposals. It proposed instead that part of the parish of Staplegrove be placed with part of the Taunton Fairwater ward to form a new single-member ward to be known as Bindon. It proposed that the remaining part of Staplegrove parish be placed with the parish of Kingston St Mary and the village of Cheddon Fitzpaine to form a new single-member ward to be known as Staplegrove. Finally, it proposed that the parish of West Monkton be placed with part of the parish of Cheddon Fitzpaine, the part which contains the projected increase of 700 electors, to form a new two-member West Monkton ward.

97 We received a number of other comments in relation to this area. Cheddon Fitzpaine Parish Council proposed that the parish be warded, and that the northern parish ward, containing the village of Cheddon Fitzpaine, be placed in a ward with the parishes of Kingston St Mary and Staplegrove. It shared the Borough Council's view that the southern parish ward, an area containing the projected increase of 700 electors, be placed with the parish of West Monkton in a new two-

member ward. The Governors of Cheddon Fitzpaine Primary School supported a continued link between the parishes of Cheddon Fitzpaine and Kingston St Mary, a view shared by Councillor Mrs Bradley.

98 Kingston St Mary Parish Council considered that it should be part of a predominantly rural ward, supporting a link with Cheddon Fitzpaine rather than Staplegrove which, it considered, is becoming increasingly urban in character. West Monkton Parish Council supported our draft recommendation for a new two-member ward in its area.

99 We have reconsidered our draft recommendations in the light of the consultation. The proposal of the Borough Council and Cheddon Fitzpaine Parish Council to ward the parish and place the village of Cheddon Fitzpaine with its neighbour Kingston St Mary, and the proposed housing development on the outskirts of Taunton with the parish of West Monkton appears to have merit. The new housing is expected to be built fairly close to the Taunton to Monkton Heathfield road and is likely to have relatively little contact with the village of Cheddon Fitzpaine.

100 At present, the area proposed for development contains just seven electors, residents of Nerrols and Maidenbrook farms. However, if the projected 700 electors for this area are added to the present West Monkton ward, the ward merits a second councillor. Under a 54-member council, a two-member West Monkton ward consisting of that parish and the southern parish ward of Cheddon Fitzpaine would initially vary from the average number of electors per councillor by 32 per cent but would improve to be just 7 per cent from the average by 2001. Having given due consideration to the possible options for this part of the borough, we confirm this proposal as final. Details are shown on Map 2 and on the large map inserted at the back of this report.

101 By warding the parish of Cheddon Fitzpaine in the manner described, it becomes possible to place the village of Cheddon Fitzpaine (i.e. the northern parish ward) in a Borough Council ward with Kingston St Mary, meeting the concerns of many respondents who wrote during the consultation period. We have considered the Borough Council's proposal to place that combined area in a new single-member Borough ward with part of the parish of Staplegrove. Although, according to the Council, such a ward would provide a good level of electoral

equality, we are concerned on community and other grounds about the proposed division of Staplegrove parish.

102 The Council proposed using Staplegrove Road as a ward boundary, with electors to the south of the road (and a few to the north of it) being placed in a single-member Bindon ward with part of the present Taunton Fairwater ward. Such a ward would provide a good level of electoral equality and, according to the Council, “would deal better with the identifiable community in the Bindon Road area [which] although being essentially an extension of Taunton, is currently split”. The remainder of Staplegrove parish would be placed in a single-member Staplegrove ward with the parish of Kingston St Mary and the village of Cheddon Fitzpaine.

103 We were concerned that the Council’s proposed division of the parish of Staplegrove appeared to be fairly arbitrary, splitting closely linked areas of housing, and were not convinced that the Bindon Road area was an ‘identifiable community’ worthy of its own single-member ward when the Council was arguing for multi-member wards in the rest of the Taunton area. Our draft recommendation would meet the Council’s concern that the Bindon Road area be contained entirely within one ward. Additionally, the Council’s proposal would necessitate the creation of parish wards for Staplegrove parish, something on which the parish council had not had a chance to comment.

104 We have come to the conclusion that, on balance, the best solution for this area is to add the village of Cheddon Fitzpaine (the northern parish ward of that parish) to our two-member ward proposed for this area in our *Draft Recommendations* report. Such a ward would, under a 54-member council, vary from the average number of electors per councillor by 7 per cent on 1996 figures, improving to 2 per cent by 2001. We confirm this proposal for a new two-member ward, to be named Staplegrove ward, as final; details are shown on Map 2 and on the large map inserted at the back of this report.

The wards of Blackdown and Trull

105 The present single-member ward of Blackdown comprises the parishes of Churchstanton, Otterford and Pitminster and varies from the average number of electors per councillor by 10 per cent (projected to be 5 per cent in 2001). During Stage One the Borough Council proposed no

change to the ward, and because of the reasonable level of electoral equality that would be retained, we adopted this proposal in our consultation report.

106 During Stage Three the Borough Council reaffirmed its support for no change to the ward of Blackdown and no other specific comments were received. Under a 54-member scheme, the ward would vary from the average number of electors per councillor by 12 per cent on 1996 figures (7 per cent in 2001). Given the support of the Council and the reasonable level of electoral equality that would be retained, we are content to confirm our draft recommendation for no change to this ward as final.

107 Trull is presently a single-member ward comprising the parish of that name and varies from the average number of electors per councillor by 5 per cent; it is projected to remain at that level by 2001. As explained in our *Draft Recommendations*, we proposed warding the parish to better reflect local community interests and identities. The Killams area of southern Taunton has extended into the parish of Trull yet appears to have little in common with the village of that name. By warding the parish, it would be possible to place the 100 electors currently in the Killams area but within the parish of Trull into a Taunton town borough council ward. The Trull borough council ward would retain a good level of electoral equality.

108 During Stage Three the Borough Council accepted that “the anomaly of the Killams area would, in part at least, be improved by the warding of Trull”, and therefore endorsed our draft recommendation. Trull Parish Council was of the opinion that “to include the Killams area in the Trinity ward for Borough Council purposes and as a separate ward within Trull for Parish Council purposes will surely cause confusion among the electorate”. No other specific comments were received.

109 We understand the concern expressed by the Parish Council, but remain of the view that the ‘Taunton’ electors of the Killams area should be in a ‘Taunton’ borough council ward rather than in a ward with the village of Trull, with which they share little in common. The Borough Council has acknowledged that “a complete solution to the anomaly will require changes to the parish boundary as a separate exercise” and has promised to address that issue in due course.

110 A single-member ward for the parish of Trull (less the Killams area) would equal the average number of electors per councillor both in 1996 and 2001, under our final recommendations. Given the support of the Council and the good level of electoral equality that would result, we are content to confirm our draft recommendation for a single-member Trull ward as final. Details of the proposed parish ward boundary can be seen on the large map inserted at the back of this report.

The wards of Neroche, North Curry, Ruishton & Creech and Stoke St Gregory

111 During Stage One the Borough Council proposed no change to any of these four wards, arguing that the local pattern of community settlements coupled with the particular geography of the area made improved electoral equality difficult to attain without cutting across community identities and interests. After careful consideration, outlined in our *Draft Recommendations* report, we concurred with the Council's view and recommended no change to any of the four wards, despite the fact that the present arrangements do not result in an optimum degree of electoral equality.

112 The Borough Council reaffirmed its support for no change to any of the four wards in its Stage Three submission. An appendix to its submission included a letter from Hatch Beauchamp Parish Council which supported the proposal for no change to the Neroche ward. No other specific comments were received.

113 Under a 54-member council the two-member Ruishton & Creech ward would vary from the average number of electors per councillor by 15 per cent (becoming 10 per cent by 2001), while the single-member wards of Neroche, North Curry and Stoke St Gregory would respectively vary by 21 per cent, 5 per cent and 20 per cent, becoming 15 per cent, 9 per cent and 24 per cent by 2001. While the degree of under-representation in Neroche ward and over-representation in Stoke St Gregory ward is not ideal, we remain of the view that, on balance, the best electoral arrangements for this part of the borough are those currently in place. We are therefore confirming as final our proposals for no change to these four wards.

Electoral Cycle

114 In our draft recommendations report we proposed that the present system of whole-council elections in Taunton Deane be retained. At Stage Three the Borough Council expressed 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

115 Having considered carefully all the evidence and representations we have received in response to our consultation report, we have decided substantially to endorse our draft recommendations, subject to an increase in council size from 53 to 54 and amendments to the following wards:

- (a) In the town of Taunton the wards of Holway, Central, Trinity and Galmington & Wilton should instead be renamed Blackbrook & Holway, Eastgate, Killams & Mountfield and Manor & Wilton respectively;
- (b) In the town of Taunton the boundaries between the proposed wards of Eastgate, Halcon and Killams & Mountfield should be modified;
- (c) The present two-member ward of Bishop's Lydeard should remain unchanged;
- (d) The present single-member wards of Milverton and North Deane should be merged together to form a new two-member ward;
- (e) The parish of Cheddon Fitzpaine should be warded, with the proposed Cheddon parish ward forming a ward with the parishes of Staplegrove and Kingston St Mary and part of the Taunton Fairwater ward, and the proposed Maidenbrook parish ward forming a separate ward with the parish of West Monkton.

116 We have concluded that there should be an increase in council size from 53 to 54; that there should be 27 wards, three fewer than at present; that the boundaries of 21 of the existing wards should be modified; and that whole-council elections should continue to be held every four years.

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	53	54	53	54
Number of wards	30	27	30	27
Average number of electors per councillor	1,441	1,414	1,516	1,486
Number of wards with a variance more than 10 per cent from the average	14	12	17	3
Number of wards with a variance more than 20 per cent from the average	6	3	8	1

117 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.

118 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 14 to 12, and a further reduction to three in 2001. Under these proposals, the average number of electors per councillor would be reduced from 1,441 to 1,414. We conclude that our recommendations would best meet the need for electoral equality, having regard to the statutory criteria.

Final Recommendation

Taunton Deane Borough Council should comprise 54 councillors serving 27 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

119 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 borough. Accordingly, we propose a number of consequential parish ward changes, as detailed below.

120 In our draft recommendations report, we proposed that the town wards for Wellington should be modified to reflect the proposed borough council wards in the town, although with the retention of a separate town council ward for the distinctive area of Rockwell Green. During Stage Three, the Town Council argued that for Rockwell Green to have its own town councillors but be part of a larger ward for borough council purposes could cause confusion. However, having confirmed our draft recommendation for borough council wards in the town as final, we remain of the view that the town council wards should be modified to reflect this. We continue to believe that the Rockwell Green area of the town should be separately represented on the Town Council. We are therefore confirming our draft recommendation for town council warding as final.

Final Recommendation

Wellington Town Council should comprise 15 town councillors, representing four wards. The town wards of Wellington East and Wellington North should be coterminous with the proposed borough council wards of those names, and should each return four town councillors. The proposed borough council ward of Wellington Rockwell Green & West should be divided into two for town warding purposes. The existing Rockwell Green town ward should return three town councillors, while the remaining area of the proposed Rockwell Green & West ward, to be known as Wellington West ward for town council electoral purposes, should return four town councillors. Map A1 in Appendix A details the proposed new boundaries.

¹²¹ During Stage One we proposed that the parish of Trull should be warded. During Stage Three Trull Parish Council was concerned that the warding of the parish and the subsequent inclusion of the parish wards in different borough council wards may cause some confusion. However, in the light of our final recommendation for the borough council warding arrangements, we are confirming our draft recommendation as final.

Final Recommendation

The parish of Trull should be warded. The proposed parish ward of Trull should return nine parish councillors, while the proposed parish ward of Killams should return one. The parish ward boundaries should be coterminous with the proposed borough council wards, as shown on the large map at the back of this report.

¹²² During Stage Three both the Borough Council and Cheddon Fitzpaine Parish Council proposed the warding of Cheddon Fitzpaine parish in order to facilitate improved electoral equality for the borough council warding arrangements. The Borough Council proposed that the northern parish ward be named Cheddon and that the southern parish ward be named Nerrols. The Parish Council proposed that the southern parish ward instead be named Maidenbrook. In the light of our final recommendation for the borough council warding arrangements, we recommend

that the parish of Cheddon Fitzpaine be warded and that the parish ward names be 'Cheddon' and 'Maidenbrook'.

Final Recommendation

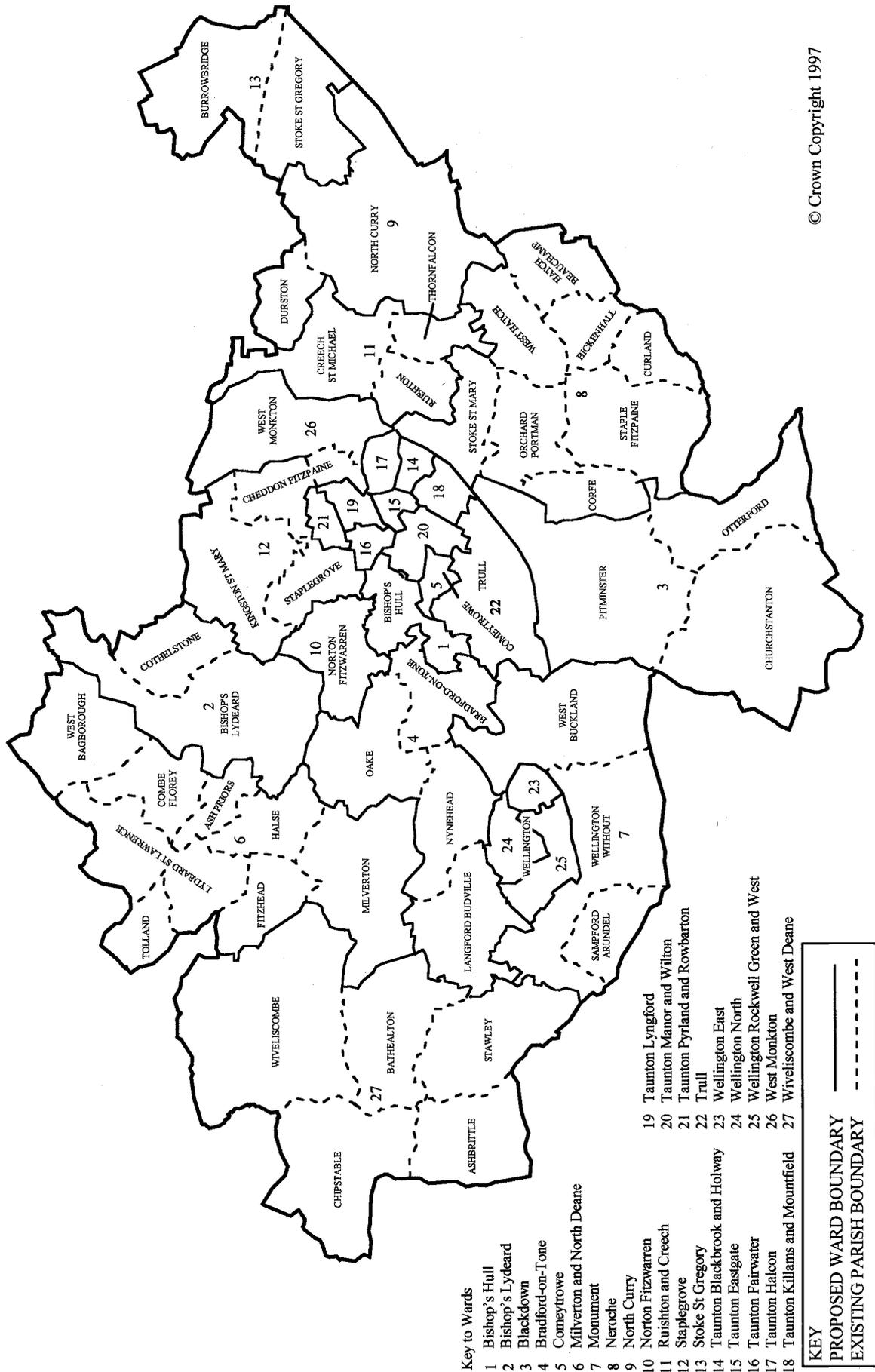
The parish of Cheddon Fitzpaine should be warded. The proposed parish ward of Cheddon should return five parish councillors, while the proposed parish ward of Maidenbrook should return one. The parish ward boundaries should be coterminous with the proposed borough council wards, as shown on the large map at the back of this report.

¹²³ 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 borough. 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 Borough Council.

Map 2:
The Commission's Final Recommendations for Taunton Deane



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Figure 4:
The Commission's Final Recommendations for Taunton Deane

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 Bishop's Hull	2	2,982	1,491	5	2,995	1,498	1
2 Bishop's Lydeard	2	2,174	1,087	-23	2,774	1,387	-7
3 Blackdown	1	1,582	1,582	12	1,589	1,589	7
4 Bradford-on-Tone	1	1,629	1,629	15	1,637	1,637	10
5 Comeytrove	3	4,384	1,461	3	4,405	1,468	-1
6 Milverton & North Deane	2	2,452	1,226	-13	2,463	1,232	-17
7 Monument	1	1,570	1,570	11	1,577	1,577	6
8 Neroche	1	1,704	1,704	21	1,712	1,712	15
9 North Curry	1	1,339	1,339	-5	1,345	1,345	-9
10 Norton Fitzwarren	1	1,558	1,558	10	1,565	1,565	5
11 Ruishton & Creech	2	3,264	1,632	15	3,280	1,640	10
12 Staplegrove	2	3,020	1,510	7	3,020	1,510	2
13 Stoke St Gregory	1	1,125	1,125	-20	1,130	1,130	-24
14 Taunton Blackbrook & Holway	3	4,902	1,634	16	4,902	1,634	10
15 Taunton Eastgate	2	3,084	1,542	9	3,154	1,577	6
16 Taunton Fairwater	3	4,175	1,392	-2	4,467	1,489	0
17 Taunton Halcon	3	4,526	1,509	7	4,545	1,515	2
18 Taunton Killams & Mountfield	2	2,439	1,220	-14	2,933	1,467	-1
19 Taunton Lyngford	3	4,198	1,399	-1	4,262	1,421	-4
20 Taunton Manor & Wilton	3	4,316	1,439	2	4,325	1,442	-3
21 Taunton Pyrland & Rowbarton	3	4,539	1,513	7	4,551	1,517	2

Continued overleaf

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

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 %
22 Trull	1	1,412	1,412	0	1,492	1,492	0
23 Wellington East	2	2,870	1,435	1	2,870	1,435	-3
24 Wellington North	2	2,703	1,352	-4	2,718	1,359	-9
25 Wellington Rockwell Green & West	3	3,747	1,249	-12	4,897	1,632	10
26 West Monkton	2	1,925	963	-32	2,769	1,385	-7
27 Wiveliscombe & West Deane	2	2,737	1,369	-3	2,840	1,420	-4
Totals	54	76,356	—	—	80,217	—	—
Averages	—	—	1,414	—	—	1,486	—

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

Notes: 1 The 'variance from average' column shows by how far, in percentage terms, the number of electors per councillor varies from the average for the borough. The minus symbol (-) denotes a lower than average number of electors. Figures have been rounded to the nearest whole number.

2 The slight difference between the total number of electors projected for 2001 in this table, compared to that projected in Figure 2 (page 6) is due to the 'rounding' of some of the electorate figures supplied by the Borough Council in respect of the Taunton town wards.

6. NEXT STEPS

¹²⁴ Having completed our review of electoral arrangements in Taunton Deane and submitted our final recommendations to the Secretary of State, we have fulfilled our statutory obligation under the Local Government Act 1992.

¹²⁵ 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.

¹²⁶ 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

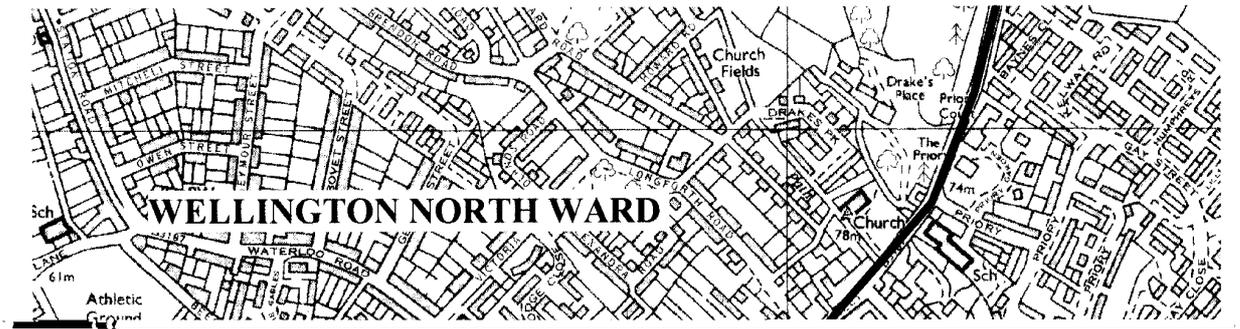
APPENDIX A

Final Recommendations for Taunton Deane: Detailed Mapping

Map A1 illustrates the Commission's proposed ward boundaries within Wellington town.

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

Map A1:
Proposed Ward Boundaries in Wellington



APPENDIX B

Draft Recommendations for Taunton Deane

Figure B1:

The Commission's Draft Recommendations: Constituent Areas

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Constituent areas
1	Bishop's Hull	2	Bishop's Hull ward (the parish of Bishop's Hull plus part of the unparished area of Taunton); Manor ward (part)
2	Bishop's Lydeard	2	Bishop's Lydeard ward (the parishes of Bishop's Lydeard and Cothelstone); North Deane ward (part – the parishes of Combe Florey, Lydeard St Lawrence, Tolland and West Bagborough)
3	Blackdown	1	<i>Unchanged</i> – (the parishes of Churchstanton, Otterford and Pitminster)
4	Bradford-on-Tone	1	Bradford-on-Tone ward (the parishes of Bradford-on-Tone, Nynehead and Oake); West Deane ward (part – the parish of Langford Budville)
5	Comeytrowe	3	<i>Unchanged</i> – (the parish of Comeytrowe)
6	Milverton	1	Milverton ward (the parishes of Fitzhead and Milverton); North Deane ward (part – the parishes of Ash Priors and Halse)
7	Monument	1	<i>Unchanged</i> – (the parishes of Sampford Arundel, Wellington Without and West Buckland)
8	Neroche	1	<i>Unchanged</i> – (the parishes of Bickenhall, Corfe, Curland, Hatch Beauchamp, Orchard Portman, Staple Fitzpaine, Stoke St Mary and West Hatch)
9	North Curry	1	<i>Unchanged</i> – (the parishes of Durston and North Curry)
10	Norton Fitzwarren	1	<i>Unchanged</i> – (the parish of Norton Fitzwarren)
11	Ruishton & Creech	2	<i>Unchanged</i> – (the parishes of Creech St Michael, Ruishton and Thornfalcon)
12	Staplegrove with Kingston	2	Staplegrove ward (part – the parishes of Kingston St Mary and Staplegrove); Fairwater ward (part)
13	Stoke St Gregory	1	<i>Unchanged</i> – (the parishes of Burrowbridge and Stoke St Gregory)

Continued overleaf

Figure B1 (continued):

The Commission's Draft Recommendations: Constituent Areas

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Constituent areas
14	Taunton Central	2	Manor ward (part); Priory & Wilton ward (part); Trinity ward (part)
15	Taunton Fairwater	3	Fairwater ward (part); Rowbarton ward (part)
16	Taunton Galmington & Wilton	3	Manor ward (part); Priory & Wilton ward (part)
17	Taunton Halcon	3	Halcon ward; Holway ward (part)
18	Taunton Holway	3	Holway ward (part); Trinity ward (part)
19	Taunton Lyngford	3	Lyngford ward (part); Rowbarton ward (part)
20	Taunton Pyrland & Rowbarton	3	Lyngford ward (part); Pyrland ward; Rowbarton ward (part)
21	Taunton Trinity	2	Trinity ward (part); Holway ward (part); Trull ward (part – the proposed Killams parish ward of Trull parish)
22	Trull	1	Trull ward (part – the proposed Trull parish ward of Trull parish)
23	Wellington East	2	Wellington South ward (part)
24	Wellington North	2	Wellington North ward (part)
25	Wellington Rockwell Green & West	3	Wellington North ward (part); Wellington Rockwell Green ward; Wellington South ward (part)
26	West Monkton with Cheddon	2	West Monkton ward (the parish of West Monkton); Staplegrove ward (part – the parish of Cheddon Fitzpaine)
27	Wiveliscombe & West Deane	2	Wiveliscombe ward (the parish of Wiveliscombe); West Deane ward (part – the parishes of Ashbrittle, Bathealton, Chipstable and Stawley)

Figure B2:
The Commission's Draft Recommendations for Taunton Deane

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 Bishop's Hull	2	2,982	1,491	3	2,995	1,498	-1
2 Bishop's Lydeard	2	3,018	1,509	5	3,621	1,811	20
3 Blackdown	1	1,582	1,582	10	1,589	1,589	5
4 Bradford-on-Tone	1	1,629	1,629	13	1,637	1,637	8
5 Comeytrowe	3	4,384	1,461	1	4,405	1,468	-3
6 Milverton	1	1,608	1,608	12	1,616	1,616	7
7 Monument	1	1,570	1,570	9	1,577	1,577	4
8 Neroche	1	1,704	1,704	18	1,712	1,712	13
9 North Curry	1	1,339	1,339	-7	1,345	1,345	-11
10 Norton Fitzwarren	1	1,558	1,558	8	1,565	1,565	3
11 Ruishton & Creech	2	3,264	1,632	13	3,280	1,640	8
12 Staplegrove with Kingston	2	2,799	1,400	-3	2,799	1,400	-8
13 Stoke St Gregory	1	1,125	1,125	-22	1,130	1,130	-25
14 Taunton Central	2	3,127	1,564	9	3,197	1,599	6
15 Taunton Fairwater	3	4,175	1,392	-3	4,467	1,489	-2
16 Taunton Galmington & Wilton	3	4,316	1,439	0	4,325	1,442	-5
17 Taunton Halcon	3	4,526	1,509	5	4,545	1,515	0
18 Taunton Holway	3	4,498	1,499	4	4,498	1,499	-1
19 Taunton Lyngford	3	4,198	1,399	-3	4,262	1,421	-6
20 Taunton Pyrland & Rowbarton	3	4,539	1,513	5	4,551	1,517	0
21 Taunton Trinity	2	2,800	1,400	-3	3,294	1,647	9
22 Trull	1	1,412	1,412	-2	1,492	1,492	-1
23 Wellington East	2	2,870	1,435	0	2,870	1,435	-5

Continued overleaf

Figure B2 (continued):
The Commission's Draft Recommendations for Taunton Deane

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 %
24 Wellington North	2	2,703	1,352	-6	2,718	1,359	-10
25 Wellington Rockwell Green & West	3	3,747	1,249	-13	4,897	1,632	8
26 West Monkton with Cheddon	2	2,146	1,073	-26	2,990	1,495	-1
27 Wiveliscombe & West Deane	2	2,737	1,369	-5	2,840	1,420	-6
Totals	53	76,356	—	—	80,217	—	—
Averages	—	—	1,441	—	—	1,514	—

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

Notes: 1 The 'variance from average' column shows by how far, in percentage terms, the number of electors per councillor varies from the average for the borough. The minus symbol (-) denotes a lower than average number of electors. Figures have been rounded to the nearest whole number.

2 It came to our attention during Stage Three that a relatively minor error occurred in the calculation of the total number of electors in our proposed Taunton Trinity ward (1996 figures). This figure has now been corrected, and therefore some of the electoral variance percentage figures for 1996 vary marginally from those which appeared in the draft recommendations report. The electorate projections for 2001 remain unaltered.