

Draft recommendations on the
future electoral arrangements for
South Bedfordshire

February 2001

LOCAL GOVERNMENT COMMISSION FOR ENGLAND

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

Members of the Commission are:

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

Barbara Stephens (Chief Executive)

We are statutorily required to review periodically the electoral arrangements – such as the number of councillors representing electors in each area and the number and boundaries of wards and electoral divisions – of every principal local authority in England. In broad terms our objective 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, and the number of councillors and ward names. We can also make recommendations for change to the electoral arrangements of parish and town councils in the district.

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A large map illustrating the existing and proposed ward boundaries for Dunstable, Houghton Regis and Leighton-Linslade is inserted inside the back cover of the report.

SUMMARY

The Commission began a review of the electoral arrangements for South Bedfordshire on 25 July 2000.

- **This report summarises the representations we received during the first stage of the review, and makes draft recommendations for change.**

We found that the existing electoral arrangements provide unequal representation of electors in South Bedfordshire:

- **in 17 of the 25 wards the number of electors represented by each councillor varies by more than 10 per cent from the average for the district and 11 wards vary by more than 20 per cent from the average;**
- **by 2005 this unequal representation is not expected to improve, with the number of electors per councillor forecast to vary by more than 10 per cent from the average in 18 wards and by more than 20 per cent in 10 wards.**

Our main draft recommendations for future electoral arrangements (Figures 1 and 2 and paragraphs 155 –156) are that:

- **South Bedfordshire District Council should have 50 councillors, three fewer than at present;**
- **there should be 23 wards, instead of 25 as at present;**
- **the boundaries of 21 of the existing wards should be modified, resulting in a net reduction of two, and four wards should retain their existing boundaries;**
- **elections should continue to take place by thirds.**

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

- **In 20 of the proposed 23 wards the number of electors per councillor would vary by no more than 10 per cent from the district average.**
- **An improved level of electoral equality is forecast to continue with the number of electors per councillor in 22 wards expected to vary by no more than 10 per cent from the average for the district in 2005.**

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

- **revised warding arrangements and the re-distribution of councillors for the parish of Billington and for Dunstable, Houghton Regis and Leighton-Linslade town councils.**

This report sets out our draft recommendations on which comments are invited.

- **We will consult on our draft recommendations for eight weeks from 14 February 2001. Because we take this consultation very seriously, we may move away from our draft recommendations in the light of Stage Three responses. It is therefore important that all interested parties let us have their views and evidence, *whether or not* they agree with our draft recommendations.**
- **After considering local views, we will decide whether to modify our draft recommendations and then make our final recommendations to the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions.**
- **It will then be for the Secretary of State to accept, modify or reject our final recommendations. He will also determine when any changes come into effect.**

You should express your views by writing directly to the Commission at the address below by 23 April 2001:

**Review Manager
South Bedfordshire Review
Local Government Commission for England
Dolphyn Court
10/11 Great Turnstile
London WC1V 7JU**

**Fax: 020 7404 6142
E-mail: reviews@lgce.gov.uk
Website: www.lgce.gov.uk**

Figure 1: The Commission's Draft Recommendations: Summary

Ward name	Number of councillors	Constituent areas	Map reference
1 All Saints (in Leighton-Linslade)	2	Beaudesert ward (part – Beaudesert ward of Leighton-Linslade Town (part)); Brooklands ward (part – Beaudesert ward of Leighton-Linslade Town (part)*); Linslade ward (part – Linslade ward of Leighton-Linslade Town (part)); Plantation ward (part – Plantation ward (part) and Beaudesert ward (part) of Leighton-Linslade town *)	Large Map
2 Barton-le-Clay	2	<i>Unchanged</i> (Barton-le-Clay parish)	Map 2
3 Caddington & Slip End	3	Caddington ward (Caddington parish); Slip End ward (Slip End and Hyde parishes)	Map 2
4 Downside (in Dunstable)	2	Priory ward (part – Priory ward of Dunstable town (part))	Large Map
5 Dunstable Central (in Dunstable)	2	Dunstable Central ward (part – Central ward of Dunstable town (part)); Priory ward (part – Priory ward of Dunstable town (part))	Large Map
6 Dunstable Downs (in Dunstable)	2	Dunstable Central ward (part – Central ward of Dunstable town (part)); Watling ward (part – Watling ward of Dunstable town (part))	Large Map
7 Eaton Bray	1	<i>Unchanged</i> (Eaton Bray parish)	Map 2
8 Grovebury (in Leighton-Linslade)	3	Beaudesert ward (part – Beaudesert ward of Leighton-Linslade Town (part)); Brooklands ward (part – Beaudesert ward of Leighton-Linslade Town (part)*); Brooklands ward (part – Brooklands ward of Leighton-Linslade town (part)); Linslade ward (part – Linslade ward of Leighton-Linslade town (part)); Stanbridge ward (part – Billington Park ward of Billington parish as proposed)	Large Map
9 Heath & Reach	1	Heath & Reach ward (Heath & Reach parish); Hockliffe ward (part – Hockliffe parish)	Map 2
10 Houghton Hall (in Houghton Regis)	3	Houghton Central ward (part – Central ward of Houghton Regis town (part)); Houghton East ward (part – East ward of Houghton Regis town (part)); Houghton South ward (South ward of Houghton Regis)	Large Map
11 Icknield (in Dunstable)	3	<i>Unchanged</i> (Icknield ward of Dunstable Town)	Large Map
12 Kensworth & Totternhoe	2	Kensworth ward (Kensworth parish); Studham ward (Studham and Whipsnade parishes); Totternhoe ward (Totternhoe parish)	Map 2
13 Linslade (in Leighton-Linslade)	2	Linslade ward (part – Linslade ward of Leighton-Linslade town (part))	Large Map
14 Northfields (in Dunstable)	3	<i>Unchanged</i> (Northfields ward of Dunstable town)	Large Map
15 Parkside (in Houghton Regis)	2	Houghton East ward (part – East ward of Houghton Regis town (part))	Large Map
16 Planets (in Leighton-Linslade)	2	Brooklands ward (part – Brooklands ward of Leighton-Linslade town (part))	Large Map
17 Plantation (in Leighton-Linslade)	3	Beaudesert ward (part – Plantation ward of Leighton-Linslade town (part)*); Linslade ward (part – Linslade ward of Leighton-Linslade town (part)); Plantation ward (part – Plantation ward of Leighton-Linslade town part));	Large Map

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Constituent areas	Map reference
18	Southcott (in Leighton-Linslade)	3	Linslade ward (part – Linslade ward of Leighton-Linslade town (part)); Southcott ward (Southcott ward of Leighton-Linslade town)	Large Map
19	Stanbridge	1	Stanbridge ward (Stanbridge and Tilsworth parishes and part – Old Billington ward of Billington parish as proposed.) Hockliffe ward (part – Chalgrave and Eggington parish)	Map 2
20	Streatley	1	Streatley ward (part – Streatley and Sundon parishes)	Map 2
21	Tithe Farm (in Houghton Regis)	2	Houghton Central ward (part – Central ward of Houghton Regis town (part))	Large Map
22	Toddington	2	Streatley ward (part – Chalton parish); Toddington ward (Toddington parish)	Map 2
23	Watling (in Dunstable)	3	Dunstable Central ward (part – Central ward of Dunstable ward (part)); Watling ward (part – Watling ward of Dunstable town (part))	Large Map

Notes: 1 The whole district is parished.

2 We have made a number of minor amendments to boundaries to ensure that existing ward boundaries adhere to ground detail. These changes do not affect any electors.

3 Map 2 and the large map in the back of the report illustrate the proposed wards outlined above.

** Modifications were made to parish warding as part of South Bedfordshire Parish Order 1985.*

Figure 2: The Commission's Draft Recommendations for South Bedfordshire

Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2000)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2005)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
1 All Saints (in Leighton-Linslade)	2	3,587	1,794	4	3,688	1,844	3
2 Barton-le-Clay	2	3,518	1,759	2	3,737	1,869	4
3 Caddington & Slip End	3	4,833	1,611	-6	5,177	1,726	-4
4 Downside (in Dunstable)	2	3,719	1,860	8	3,765	1,883	5
5 Dunstable Central (in Dunstable)	2	3,371	1,686	-2	3,474	1,737	-3
6 Dunstable Downs (in Dunstable)	2	3,495	1,748	2	3,637	1,819	1
7 Eaton Bray	1	2,023	2,023	18	2,030	2,030	13
8 Grovebury (in Leighton-Linslade)	3	4,060	1,353	-21	5,670	1,890	5
9 Heath & Reach	1	1,642	1,642	-4	1,789	1,789	0
10 Houghton Hall (in Houghton Regis)	3	4,797	1,599	-7	5,315	1,772	-1
11 Icknield (in Dunstable)	3	4,863	1,621	-6	4,889	1,630	-9
12 Kensworth & Totternhoe	2	3,584	1,792	4	3,592	1,796	0
13 Linslade (in Leighton-Linslade)	2	3,611	1,806	5	3,651	1,826	2
14 Northfields (in Dunstable)	3	5,070	1,690	-2	5,349	1,783	0
15 Parkside (in Houghton Regis)	2	3,625	1,813	6	3,625	1,813	1
16 Planets (in Leighton-Linslade)	2	3,586	1,793	4	3,586	1,793	0
17 Plantation (in Leighton-Linslade)	3	4,869	1,623	-5	4,936	1,645	-8

Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2000)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2005)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
18 Southcott (in Leighton-Linslade)	3	5,360	1,787	4	5,365	1,788	0
19 Stanbridge	1	1,814	1,814	6	1,819	1,819	2
20 Streatley	1	1,717	1,717	0	1,717	1,717	-4
21 Tithe Farm (in Houghton Regis)	2	3,571	1,786	4	3,573	1,787	0
22 Toddington	2	3,905	1,953	14	3,920	1,960	9
23 Watling (in Dunstable)	3	5,252	1,751	2	5,292	1,811	-2
Totals	50	85,872	-	-	89,596	-	-
Averages	-	-	1,717	-	-	1,792	-

Source: Electorate figures are based on information obtained from South Bedfordshire District Council.

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

1 INTRODUCTION

1 This report contains our draft recommendations on the electoral arrangements for the district of South Bedfordshire on which we are now consulting. We are reviewing the three districts in Bedfordshire and the unitary authority of Luton as part of our programme of periodic electoral reviews (PERs) of all 386 principal local authority areas in England. Our programme started in 1996 and is currently expected to be completed by 2004.

2 This is our first review of the electoral arrangements of South Bedfordshire. The last such review was undertaken by our predecessor, the Local Government Boundary Commission (LGBC), which reported to the Secretary of State in August 1975 (Report No. 57). The electoral arrangements of Bedfordshire County Council were last reviewed in January 1984 (Report No. 462). We expect to review the County Council's electoral arrangements in 2002.

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

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

4 We are required to make recommendations to the Secretary of State on the number of councillors who should serve on the District Council, and the number, boundaries and names of wards. We can also make recommendations on the electoral arrangements for parish and town councils in the district.

5 We also have regard to our *Guidance and Procedural Advice for Local Authorities and Other Interested Parties* (fourth edition published in December 2000). This sets out our approach to the reviews.

6 In our *Guidance*, we state that we wish wherever possible to build on schemes which have been prepared locally on the basis of careful and effective consultation. Local interests are normally in a better position to judge what council size and ward configuration are most likely to secure effective and convenient local government in their areas, while allowing proper reflection of the identities and interests of local communities.

7 The broad objective of PERs is to achieve, as far as possible, equality of representation across the district as a whole. Having regard to the statutory criteria, our aim is to achieve as low a level of electoral imbalance as is practicable. We will require particular justification for schemes which would result in, or retain, an electoral imbalance of over 10 per cent in any ward. Any imbalances of 20 per cent or more should only arise in the most exceptional circumstances, and will require the strongest justification.

8 We are not prescriptive on council size. We start from the general assumption that the existing council size already secures effective and convenient local government in that district but we are willing to look carefully at arguments why this might not be so. However, we have found it necessary to safeguard against upward drift in the number of councillors, and we believe that any proposal for an increase in council size will need to be fully justified: in particular, we do not accept that an increase in a district’s electorate should automatically result in an increase in the number of councillors, nor that changes should be made to the size of a district council simply to make it more consistent with the size of other districts.

9 The review is in four stages (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Stages of the Review

Stage	Description
One	Submission of proposals to the Commission
Two	The Commission’s analysis and deliberation
Three	Publication of draft recommendations and consultation on them
Four	Final deliberation and report to the Secretary of State

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

11 Stage One began on 25 July 2000, when we wrote to South Bedfordshire District Council inviting proposals for future electoral arrangements. We also notified Bedfordshire County Council, Bedfordshire Police, the local authority associations, Bedfordshire Local Councils’ Association, parish and town councils in the district, the Members of Parliament with constituency interests in the district, the Members of the European Parliament for the Eastern Region, and the headquarters of the main political parties. We placed a notice in the local press, issued a press release and invited the District Council to publicise the review further. The closing date for receipt of representations, the end of Stage One, was 17 October 2000.

12 At Stage Two we considered all the representations received during Stage One and prepared our draft recommendations.

13 Stage Three began on 20 February 2001 and will end on 23 April 2001. This stage involves publishing the draft recommendations in this report and public consultation on them. **We take this consultation very seriously and it is therefore important that all those interested in the review should let us have their views and evidence, whether or not they agree with our draft recommendations.**

14 During Stage Four we will reconsider the draft recommendations in the light of the Stage Three consultation, decide whether to move away from them in any areas, and submit final recommendations to the Secretary of State. Interested parties will have a further six weeks to make representations to the Secretary of State. It will then be for him to accept, modify or reject our final recommendations. If the Secretary of State accepts the recommendations, with or without modification, he will make an Order. The Secretary of State will determine when any changes come into effect.

2 CURRENT ELECTORAL ARRANGEMENTS

15 The district of South Bedfordshire covers some 21,000 hectares in the southern part of Bedfordshire county and is bounded to the south and east by Luton and the county of Hertfordshire, to the west by the county of Buckinghamshire and to the north by Mid Bedfordshire district. The district currently has an electorate of some 86,000 and is comprised of mainly rural countryside and farmland, but contains several significant population centres, the largest of which are Leighton Buzzard, Dunstable, Houghton Regis and Linslade. The district is well served by road and rail links. The M1 and A5 make the district easily accessible from London and Birmingham.

16 The district is entirely parished and will contain 23 parishes as of 1 April 2001. The district contains the town councils of Dunstable, Houghton Regis and Leighton-Linslade. The electorate is projected to increase by 4 per cent over the next five years with Stanbridge ward forecast to be the main area of growth, with its electorate more than doubling by 2005 due to major housing development on the now disused RAF Stanbridge base in Billington parish. Houghton South ward will also have a significant rate of growth with its electorate projected to increase by 11 per cent by 2005.

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

18 The electorate of the district is 85,872 (February 2000). The Council presently has 53 members who are elected from 25 wards, 13 of which cover the relatively urban areas of Dunstable, Houghton Regis and Leighton-Linslade, and the remainder being predominantly rural. Twelve of the wards are each represented by three councillors, four are each represented by two councillors and nine are single-member wards. The Council is elected by thirds.

19 Since the last electoral review there has been an increase in the electorate in South Bedfordshire district, with around 23 per cent more electors than two decades ago as a result of new housing developments. The most notable increases have been in Southcott and Streatley wards.

20 At present, each councillor represents an average of 1,620 electors, which the District Council forecasts will increase to 1,690 by the year 2005 if the present number of councillors is maintained. However, due to demographic and other changes over the past two decades, the number of electors per councillor in 17 of the 25 wards varies by more than 10 per cent from the district average, 11 wards by more than 20 per cent and four wards by more than 30 per cent. The worst imbalance is in Southcott ward where the two councillors represent 46 per cent more electors than the district average.

Map 1: Existing Wards in South Bedfordshire

Figure 4: Existing Electoral Arrangements

Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2000)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2005)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
1 Barton-le-Clay	2	3,518	1,759	9	3,737	1,869	11
2 Beaudesert (in Leighton-Linslade)	3	5,931	1,977	22	6,264	2,088	24
3 Brooklands (in Leighton-Linslade)	3	5,171	1,724	6	5,171	1,724	2
4 Caddington	2	2,947	1,474	-9	3,252	1,626	-4
5 Dunstable Central (in Dunstable)	3	6,014	2,005	24	6,250	2,083	23
6 Eaton Bray	1	2,023	2,023	25	2,030	2,030	20
7 Heath and Reach	1	1,070	1,070	-34	1,079	1,079	-36
8 Hockliffe	1	1,205	1,205	-26	1,348	1,348	-20
9 Houghton Central (in Houghton Regis)	3	3,750	1,250	-23	3,752	1,251	-26
10 Houghton East (in Houghton Regis)	3	4,015	1,338	-17	4,015	1,338	-21
11 Houghton South (in Houghton Regis)	3	4,228	1,409	-13	4,746	1,582	-6
12 Icknield (in Dunstable)	3	4,863	1,621	0	4,889	1,630	-4
13 Kensworth	1	1,185	1,185	-27	1,185	1,185	-30
14 Linslade (in Leighton-Linslade)	3	4,352	1,451	-10	4,419	1,473	-13
15 Northfields (in Dunstable)	3	5,070	1,690	4	5,349	1,783	5
16 Plantation (in Leighton-Linslade)	3	4,884	1,628	0	4,951	1,650	-2
17 Priory (in Dunstable)	3	4,123	1,374	-15	4,175	1,392	-18
18 Slip End	1	1,886	1,886	16	1,925	1,925	14

Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2000)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2005)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
19 Southcott (in Leighton-Linslade)	2	4,735	2,368	46	4,735	2,368	40
20 Stanbridge	1	1,181	1,181	-27	2,537	2,537	50
21 Streatley	1	2,134	2,134	32	2,134	2,134	26
22 Studham	1	1,374	1,374	-15	1,380	1,380	-18
23 Toddington	2	3,488	1,744	8	3,503	1,752	4
24 Totternhoe	1	1,025	1,025	-37	1,027	1,027	-39
25 Watling (in Dunstable)	3	5,700	1,900	17	5,743	1,914	13
Totals	53	85,872	–	–	89,596	–	–
Averages	–	–	1,620	–	–	1,690	–

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

Note: The 'variance from average' column shows by how far, in percentage terms, the number of electors per councillor varies from the average for the district. The minus symbol (-) denotes a lower than average number of electors. For example, in 2000, electors in Studham ward were relatively over-represented by 15 per cent, while electors in Watling ward were relatively under-represented by 17 per cent. Figures have been rounded to the nearest whole number.

3 REPRESENTATIONS RECEIVED

21 At the start of the review we invited members of the public and other interested parties to write to us giving their views on the future electoral arrangements for South Bedfordshire District Council and its constituent parish and town councils.

22 During this initial stage of the review, officers from the Commission visited the area and met officers and members from the District Council. We are grateful to all concerned for their co-operation and assistance. We received 22 representations during Stage One, including four district-wide schemes from the main political parties and a town council, all of which may be inspected at the offices of the District Council and the Commission.

South Bedfordshire District Council

23 The District Council conducted an extensive local consultation exercise and received a total of 19 representations from interested parties. It looked at a number of options for change, but having given full consideration to differing views and opinions, resolved not to submit an official district-wide scheme. It did, however, provide assistance to individual groups who wished to submit proposals. The Council submitted all working papers relevant to the electoral review. The council also raised the issue of the district boundary with Luton, although it fully recognised that the issue was not a matter for this review.

Bedfordshire South Conservatives

24 Bedfordshire South Conservatives (“the Conservatives”) proposed a council size of 50, three fewer than at present, serving 22 wards, compared to the existing 25. They proposed changes to 18 of the current wards, and that there should be 11 three-member, six two-member and five single-member wards. In setting out their proposals, the party stated that it had sought to recognise local communities in both rural and urban areas, utilising logical and natural boundaries within the context of achieving electoral equality. In particular, they stated a preference for three-member wards in urban areas of the district. They also proposed a reduction in the representation of rural areas of the district and Houghton Regis town, and an increase in representation for Leighton-Linslade as a result of the forecast development at RAF Stanbridge, directly to the south of Leighton-Linslade. Under the Conservatives’ proposals, four of the proposed 22 wards would have an electoral variance of more than 10 per cent from the district average, with one ward exceeding 20 per cent from the average.

South Bedfordshire District Labour Party

25 South Bedfordshire District Labour Party (“the Labour Party”) proposed a council size of 52 members, serving 22 wards. It proposed changes to 19 of the existing wards, and that there should be 12 three-member, six two-member and four single-member wards. The Labour Party collated the representations from each individual Labour Party branch in order to formulate a single scheme. It proposed a reduction in representation for the rural areas from 15 to 13 councillors, the retention of five three-member wards for Dunstable and an increase in the

representation of the Leighton-Linslade area from 14 councillors to 17. It also proposed reducing the number of members representing Houghton Regis by two. Under the Labour Party's district-wide proposal, four of the proposed 22 wards would have an electoral variance of more than 10 per cent from the district average, with three wards exceeding 20 per cent from the average.

26 Leighton-Linslade Labour Party endorsed the proposals of the District Labour Party in respect of its area. South West Bedfordshire Villages Labour Party made a submission in respect of several rural wards in the south and west of the district, supporting the retention of existing warding arrangements.

South Bedfordshire District Council Liberal Democrat Group

27 South Bedfordshire District Council Liberal Democrat Group ("the Liberal Democrats") proposed a council size of 51, serving 21 wards. They proposed changes to 23 of the existing 25 wards, and that there should be 12 three-member, six two-member and three single-member wards. In particular, they proposed uniting part of Dunstable with Houghton Regis in a new Brewers ward, and uniting Heath and Reach parish with part of Leighton-Linslade town in a new Heath ward. Under the Liberal Democrats' proposals, six of the proposed wards would have an electoral variance of more than 10 per cent from the current district average, with only one ward having an electoral variance of more than 20 per cent.

Leighton-Linslade Town Council

28 Leighton-Linslade Town Council proposed a council size of 50, serving 22 wards. It proposed changes to 21 of the existing wards, and that there should be 10 three-member, eight two-member and four single-member wards. Its scheme was similar to the Conservative and Labour Party proposals for the Dunstable and Houghton Regis areas and similar to the Liberal Democrats' in the rural areas of the district and Leighton-Linslade. Under the Town Council's proposals, four of the proposed 22 wards would have an electoral variance of more than 10 per cent from the district average, with one ward having an electoral variance of more than 20 per cent.

29 Leighton-Linslade Town Council Conservative Group opposed the Town Council's proposals for the area and, in particular, its proposal to combine part of the current Plantation ward of Leighton-Linslade town with Heath & Reach parish. They stated a preference for retaining the three-member ward pattern, which they considered would avoid confusion among the local electorate.

Bedfordshire County Council

30 Bedfordshire County Council noted that several councillors had expressed concerns about the proposals put forward for the district. In particular, Councillor Ledster (Barton-le-Clay division) had expressed concern over some of the district-wide proposals to divide the current Streatley ward. Councillor Stay (Caddington division) was concerned over proposals to combine Caddington with Kensworth and Studham wards to its south, and the implications for County Council divisions. This view was supported by Margaret Moran MP (Luton South), who argued

that there is no natural link between these areas and that the proposed ward would cut across parliamentary constituency boundaries. Councillor Goodwin (Toddington division) supported the retention of Stanbridge and Tilsworth parishes in the same district ward and expressed concern over how the review will affect the effective liaison between county and district councillors.

Parish and Town Councils

31 We received representations from a further six parish and town councils. Dunstable Town Council supported the proposals put forward by the Conservative and Labour Parties for Dunstable. It stated that the proposals had the unanimous cross-party support of the Town Council.

32 Kensworth, Hyde and Whipsnade parish councils were opposed to being combined in a district ward with Caddington. Kensworth and Caddington & Slip End parish councils supported the retention of existing warding arrangements. Heath & Reach Parish Council supported the proposals put forward by the Liberal Democrats and Leighton-Linslade Town Council to create an enlarged single-member Heath ward, combining the parish with a small part of Plantation ward in Leighton-Linslade. Chalton Parish Council supported the retention of existing warding arrangements, and was opposed to proposals that would transfer it to wards located to its west. It stated a preference to being linked with Toddington parish in a district ward if change to the current arrangements was considered necessary.

Other Representations

33 We received a further six representations from individual county, district and parish councillors and other interested parties. County Councillor Heffernan (Leighton Buzzard Beaudesert division) supported the Labour Party's proposals in Leighton-Linslade. Councillor Reeve (Heath & Reach) expressed support for the proposals put forward by Heath & Reach Parish Council, the Liberal Democrats and Leighton-Linslade Town Council and proposed a change to the electoral cycle of the district to whole-council elections every four years. Councillors Hills and Tomlin (Caddington) were opposed to combining Caddington, Kensworth and Studham wards in a three-member district ward. They supported the retention of the existing Caddington ward, but stated a preference to combine it with Slip End ward if this was not possible.

34 Councillor Amey (Caddington Parish Council) and Caddington Residents' Association supported the retention of the existing Caddington ward and were opposed to being linked in a single ward with Kensworth and Studham wards.

4 ANALYSIS AND DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS

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

36 In relation to Schedule 11, 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 next five years. We must also have regard to the desirability of fixing identifiable boundaries and to maintaining local ties.

37 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.

38 Our *Guidance* states that we accept that the achievement of absolute electoral equality for the authority as a whole is likely to be unattainable. However, we consider that, if electoral imbalances are to be kept to the minimum, such an objective should be the starting point in any review. We therefore strongly recommend that, in formulating electoral schemes, local authorities and other interested parties should start from the standpoint of absolute electoral equality and only then make adjustments to reflect relevant factors, such as community identity and interests. Regard must be had to five-year forecasts of changes in electorates and we would aim to recommend a scheme which provides improved electoral equality over this five year period.

Electorate Forecasts

39 The District Council submitted electorate forecasts, projecting an increase in the electorate of some 4 per cent from 85,872 to 89,596 over the five-year period from 2000 to 2005. It expects most of the growth to be in Stanbridge ward, although a significant amount is also expected in Hockliffe and Houghton South wards. The Council has 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 from the District Council on the likely effect on electorates of changes to ward boundaries has been obtained.

40 During Stage One, District Councillors Tomlin and Hills (Caddington) and Caddington Residents' Association queried the District Council's original five-year electorate projection for the Caddington area, which had been estimated at 2,947. They considered the District Council had underestimated all the growth that could reasonably be expected to occur over the next five years in Caddington. The District Council subsequently revised its forecast electorate for

Caddington ward to 3,252 electors by 2005. The District Council's revised electorate forecast for Caddington was included in the district-wide forecasts outlined above.

41 We accept that forecasting electorates is an inexact science and, having given consideration to the District Council's figures, are content that they represent the best estimates that can reasonably be made at this time. However, following further analysis of the projected electorate figures and additional information on specific locations of future developments, we have made a number of modifications to the forecast electorates for a number of wards proposed in all four district-wide schemes. These changes do not, however, affect the total electorate forecast for 2005. As a consequence of these changes, we would welcome further evidence and comment on electorate forecasts during Stage Three.

Council Size

42 As already explained, the Commission's starting point is to assume that the current council size facilitates effective and convenient local government, although we are willing to look carefully at arguments why this might not be the case. The Commission will not generally seek a substantial increase or decrease in council size but will be prepared to consider the case for change where there is persuasive evidence. South Bedfordshire District Council presently has 53 members. South Bedfordshire District Council Governance Overview & Scrutiny Committee considered a large number of differing warding options with council sizes ranging between 50 and 55 members. It resolved, however, not to submit a scheme or a preference on council size.

43 At Stage One, the Conservatives proposed a council of 50 members. They stated that this took into account the aim of improving levels of electoral equality while having regard to the decision of the District Council to adopt a cabinet model of government. Leighton-Linslade and Dunstable town councils endorsed a council size of 50.

44 The Liberal Democrats proposed a council size of 51. Their proposals would provide the same number of councillors for the rural area and for Leighton-Linslade as the Conservatives, but would provide an extra councillor for the Dunstable and Houghton Regis areas. The Labour Party proposed reducing the number of councillors by one to 52. It allocated the same proportion of councillors as the Conservatives and Leighton-Linslade Town Council for rural areas of the district, and the towns of Dunstable and Houghton Regis. However, it proposed that Leighton-Linslade town be represented by 17 councillors, three more than at present.

45 Having considered the size and distribution of the electorate, the geography and other characteristics of the area, together with the representations received, we have concluded the South Bedfordshire District would be best served by a council size of 50.

46 A number of considerations have informed us in making our recommendation for council size. We have noted the lack of consensus with regard to council size in the proposals put forward, and have given further consideration to all the proposed warding arrangements and council sizes. All four schemes would provide for broadly similar council sizes and reflect a broad consensus on the Council for retaining a similar council size to that which currently exists. All four schemes would result in a marginal reduction in council size, but differ in the number

of councillors they allocate for each part of the district. We have noted that all four district-wide schemes propose that the rural areas of the district be represented by 13 councillors, a reduction of two, and that by 2005, Dunstable and Houghton Regis would be entitled to 22.2 councillors under a council size of 51. However, the Liberal Democrats proposed that Dunstable and Houghton Regis towns be represented by 23 councillors. Similarly, the Labour Party's proposals would result in the Leighton-Linslade area being allocated 17 district councillors. Under a council size of 52, the town of Leighton-Linslade, including the development site at RAF Stanbridge, would only be entitled to 15.6 councillors by 2005. As a result, the Liberal Democrats' and Labour Party's proposals would provide for the over-representation of the Dunstable/Houghton Regis and Leighton-Linslade areas of the district respectively and would therefore not provide as good overall electoral equality as the Conservatives' proposals.

47 As stated earlier, we have concluded that the best balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria would be achieved by a council size of 50. Under a 50-member scheme, by 2005 the rural areas of the district would be entitled to 13.3 councillors, the Dunstable/Houghton Regis area would be entitled to 21.7 councillors and Leighton-Linslade would be entitled to 15.0 councillors. Our draft recommendations would provide for the rural area with 13 councillors, the Dunstable/Houghton Regis area with 22 councillors and the Leighton-Linslade area with 15 councillors. We consider that a council size of 50 would achieve a fair distribution of councillor numbers between the rural and urban areas of the district, and provide for much improved levels of electoral equality, while having regard for the statutory criteria.

Electoral Arrangements

48 We have carefully considered the representations received at Stage One, including the four district-wide schemes submitted. From these representations, a number of considerations have emerged which have assisted us in preparing our draft recommendations.

49 As outlined above, the proposals from the Conservatives and Leighton-Linslade Town Council were based on a council size of 50, three fewer than at present. The Liberal Democrats' proposals were based on a council size of 51, and the Labour Party's proposals were based on a council size of 52. Notwithstanding these different proposals for council size, we note a degree of consensus over the proposed warding pattern in some areas of the district. All four proposals supported the reduction in the number of councillors representing the rural areas of the district from 15 to 13. The Conservative and Labour Parties, and Dunstable and Leighton-Linslade town councils proposed near identical warding arrangements for Dunstable town, with the retention of five three-member wards. Their proposals for Houghton Regis were broadly similar, proposing a reduction in council representation from nine to seven. Only the Liberal Democrats' proposals for Dunstable and Houghton Regis differed substantially from the others, largely due to their proposed Brewers ward which would contain parts of Houghton Regis and Dunstable.

50 In Leighton-Linslade, all of the proposals made provision for the transfer of the RAF Stanbridge development site into the urban wards of the town. However, apart from this, they proposed significantly different warding arrangements for this area. The Liberal Democrats and Leighton-Linslade Town Council proposed identical warding arrangements which included a proposal for a new Heath ward containing the northern part of the existing Plantation ward with

Heath & Reach parish. The Conservatives proposed retaining the current pattern of five three-member wards including an enlarged Linslade ward that would straddle the river Ouzel and contain the western part of Beaudesert ward. The Labour Party proposed the continuation of a three-member Beaudesert ward, subject to the transfer of the southern area of that ward into a new two-member Marley Park ward.

51 We recognise that South Bedfordshire is a diverse district. It combines a significant rural area with larger settlements to the north-west and centre of the district, and has been subject to significant changes in size and distribution of its electorate. We recognise that all four district-wide schemes provide for much improved levels of electoral equality. For the rural area of the district, we consider that the Conservatives' proposals provide the best balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria, and have adopted them as part of our draft recommendations, subject to some minor amendments.

52 We recognise the large degree of consensus with regard to warding arrangements in Dunstable and the much improved levels of electoral equality that would result. However, we consider that these proposals do not have sufficient regard to the statutory criteria and do not utilise sufficiently clear and logical ward boundaries. We consider that the Liberal Democrats' proposals to create a district ward that would straddle the parish boundary between Dunstable and Houghton Regis would not be conducive to the effective and convenient representation of this area on the District Council. We have therefore developed our own scheme for Dunstable. Our proposals will result in a mixed pattern of two-member and three-member wards. In Houghton Regis, we have substantially endorsed the proposals of Leighton-Linslade Town Council, which we consider will provide for much improved levels of electoral equality and have regard for community identities and interests

53 In Leighton-Linslade we recognise that all of the proposed schemes will provide for improved levels of electoral equality. All four schemes proposed that the new development at the former RAF Stanbridge base should be combined with the town. However, they differed in relation to detailed warding arrangements. The Liberal Democrats and Leighton-Linslade Town Council proposed incorporating Heath & Reach parish with part of the town and a mixed pattern of warding. The Conservatives and Labour Party did not incorporate the Heath & Reach area, but while the Conservatives put forward a five three-member ward pattern, the Labour Party proposed forward five three-member wards and one two-member ward. We are putting forward our own proposals for the Leighton-Linslade area. Our proposals would provide for a mixed two and three-member ward pattern, containing elements of all four district-wide schemes.

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

South Bedfordshire Rural

- (a) Barton-le-Clay, Streatley and Toddington wards;
- (b) Eaton Bray, Heath & Reach, Hockliffe and Stanbridge wards;
- (c) Caddington, Kensworth, Slip End, Studham and Totternhoe wards;

Dunstable and Houghton Regis

- (d) Dunstable Central, Priory and Watling wards;
- (e) Icknield and Northfields wards;
- (f) Houghton Central, Houghton East and Houghton South wards;

Leighton-Linslade

- (g) Beaudesert, Brooklands and Plantation wards;
- (h) Linslade and Southcott wards.

55 Details of our draft recommendations are set out in Figures 1 and 2, and illustrated on Map 2 and on the large map inserted at the back of this report.

Barton-le-Clay, Streatley and Toddington wards

56 The existing wards of Barton-le-Clay, Streatley and Toddington are situated in the north-eastern corner of the district. Barton-le-Clay and Toddington wards are each represented by two councillors and are coterminous with the parishes of Barton-le-Clay and Toddington respectively. Streatley ward contains the parishes of Chalton, Streatley and Sundon and is a single-member ward. Under existing arrangements, Barton-le-Clay, Streatley and Toddington wards have 9 per cent, 32 per cent and 8 per cent more electors per councillor than the district average respectively (11 per cent, 26 per cent and 4 per cent more than the district average by 2005).

57 South Bedfordshire District Council made no detailed warding proposals for this area. However, it stated that it would support a boundary change between South Bedfordshire District and Luton Borough by transferring the area adjacent to the Bushmead development from Streatley parish and ward to Luton. It recognised, however, that this issue could not be addressed as part of this review.

58 The Conservatives' and Leighton-Linslade Town Council's proposals for this area were identical. They proposed retaining the current Barton-le-Clay ward but proposed transferring Chalton parish from Streatley ward to Toddington ward. They proposed that the revised Streatley ward and Toddington ward continue to be represented by one and two councillors respectively. Under their proposed council size of 50, Barton-le-Clay and Toddington wards would have 2 per cent and 14 per cent more electors per councillor than the district average respectively, and 4 per cent and 9 per cent more than the district average by 2005. Streatley ward would have equal to the average number of electors per councillor now and 4 per cent fewer than the district average by 2005.

59 The Labour Party proposed retaining the current two-member Barton-le-Clay and Toddington wards, and proposed a revised single-member Streatley ward. However, it proposed that Chalton parish should be combined with Chalgrave, Heath & Reach and Hockliffe parishes in a revised Hockliffe ward, as discussed below. Under the Labour Party's proposed council size of 52, Barton-le-Clay and Toddington wards would have 7 per cent and 6 per cent more electors

per councillor than the current district average respectively (8 per cent and 2 per cent more than average by 2005). Streatley ward would have 4 per cent more electors per councillor than the district average currently, improving to equal to the district average by 2005.

60 The Liberal Democrats proposed a revised three-member Barton-le-Clay ward containing the parishes of Barton-le-Clay, Streatley and Sundon and proposed that Chalton parish should be combined with Toddington parish in a revised two-member Toddington ward. Under the Liberal Democrats proposed council size of 51, Barton-le-Clay and Toddington wards would have 4 per cent and 16 per cent more electors per councillor than the district average respectively (3 per cent and 12 per cent more than average by 2005).

61 We received two further representations regarding this area. Chalton Parish Council argued that there was a common misconception that it did not identify with Streatley and Sundon parishes and stated that these communities share “close links and interests”. It supported the retention of the existing single-member Streatley ward and was strongly opposed to being transferred into district wards to its west where it considered that no community link existed. The Council argued that “in a very short space of time a substantial part of Streatley ward will form part of Luton Borough”, and as a result, a ward consisting of Chalton, Streatley and Sundon parishes would have the right electorate for a district councillor. The Parish Council did, however, state a preference to be linked with Toddington ward should it not prove possible to retain the current Streatley ward.

62 Councillor Ledster (Barton-le-Clay division) expressed concern with regard to some of the district-wide proposals that would provide for a revised Streatley ward. She considered that this would separate various communities that shared long-standing ties.

63 We note that the Conservative and Labour parties, and Leighton-Linslade Town Council have put forward proposals that would provide for a separate Barton-le-Clay ward and a revised Streatley ward that would contain the parishes of Streatley and Sundon. Furthermore, these proposals would provide for much improved levels of electoral equality. We have considered the Liberal Democrats’ proposals for a revised three-member Barton-le Clay ward that would combine the parishes of Barton-le-Clay, Streatley and Sundon in a new three-member ward, and recognise that this would provide for significantly improved levels of electoral equality. However, we are of the opinion that this proposal has insufficient regard for the statutory criteria and unites communities that are divided by the A6 Trunk Road. We consider that the proposals of the Labour and Conservative parties, as well as those of Leighton-Linslade Town Council have regard to the identities of the communities affected and would provide significant improvements in electoral equality under a council size of 50. We also consider that Barton-le-Clay parish contains a relatively large and cohesive community of sufficient size to sustain the current two-member ward. Having considered all the evidence received, we propose to adopt the Conservatives’, Labour Party’s, and Leighton-Linslade Town Council’s proposals for Barton-le-Clay and Streatley wards.

64 We have noted the broad agreement between the Conservatives, the Liberal Democrats and Leighton-Linslade Town Council to combine Toddington and Chalton parishes in a new two-member ward. We consider that the Labour Party’s proposal to combine Chalton parish with

Chalgrave, Hockliffe and Tilsworth parishes in a revised single-member Hockliffe ward does not recognise the independence of Chalton parish from communities to its west. We recognise that Chalton Parish Council favour the retention of the existing Streatley ward. They have argued that a review of the district boundary with Luton Borough would resolve the issue of electoral equality in the current Streatley ward. However, we have no remit to review external district boundaries; nor can we take into account the effect of any subsequent boundary alteration as part of this review. We note that Chalton Parish Council would accept being combined with Toddington parish in a district ward should it not prove possible to maintain the existing Streatley ward, and recognise that there is a large measure of support for this proposal. Therefore, having considered all the representations received, we intend to adopt the proposals of the Conservatives, Liberal Democrats, and Leighton-Linslade Town Council for Toddington ward as part of our draft recommendations.

65 Under our draft recommendations, Barton-le-Clay and Toddington wards would have 2 per cent and 14 per cent more electors per councillor than the district average respectively (4 per cent and 9 per cent more than the average by 2005). Streatley ward would have an equal ratio of electors per councillor to the district average and 4 per cent fewer electors than average by 2005.

Eaton Bray, Heath & Reach, Hockliffe and Stanbridge wards

66 The existing wards of Eaton Bray, Heath & Reach, Hockliffe and Stanbridge are located in the north and west of the district, and are all single-member wards. The wards of Eaton Bray and Heath & Reach are coterminous with the parishes of Eaton Bray and Heath & Reach. Hockliffe ward contains the parishes of Chalgrave, Eggington and Hockliffe, and Stanbridge ward contains the parishes of Billington, Stanbridge and Tilsworth. Under existing arrangements, Eaton Bray, Heath & Reach and Hockliffe wards have 25 per cent more, 34 per cent fewer and 26 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the district average respectively (20 per cent more, 36 per cent fewer and 20 per cent fewer than the average by 2005). Stanbridge ward currently has 27 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the district average. Due to substantial housing development on the site of the now disused RAF Stanbridge base, it is projected to have 50 per cent more electors per councillor than the district average by 2005.

67 The Conservatives proposed the retention of the existing single-member Eaton Bray ward and a revised single-member Heath & Reach ward containing the parishes of Heath & Reach and Hockliffe. They argued that combining Heath & Reach with an adjacent rural parish would be preferable to combining it with part of Leighton-Linslade. In addition, they proposed that Chalgrave and Eggington parishes be combined with the existing Stanbridge ward, less the site of the RAF Stanbridge base that is currently in Billington parish, to form a revised single-member Stanbridge ward.

68 Under the Conservatives' proposed council size of 50, Eaton Bray and Stanbridge wards would have 18 per cent and 6 per cent more electors per councillor than the district average respectively (13 per cent and 2 per cent more than the average by 2005). Heath & Reach ward would have 4 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the district average and equal to the district average by 2005.

69 The Labour Party also proposed retaining the existing single-member Eaton Bray ward. It proposed that the RAF Stanbridge development site be transferred from Stanbridge ward to the urban wards of Leighton-Linslade (as detailed below), and that the remainder of Billington parish be combined with Stanbridge, Eggington and Heath & Reach parishes to form a revised single-member Heath & Reach ward. It proposed a single-member Hockliffe ward containing the parishes of Chalgrave, Chalton, Hockliffe and Tilsworth. Under the Labour Party's proposed council size of 52, Eaton Bray, Heath & Reach and Hockliffe wards would have 23 per cent, 33 per cent and 1 per cent more electors per councillor than the district average respectively (18 per cent, 28 per cent and 6 per cent more than the district average by 2005).

70 South West Bedfordshire Villages Labour Party proposed the retention of the existing Eaton Bray, Hockliffe and Stanbridge wards, subject to the transfer of the RAF Stanbridge development to the urban wards of Leighton-Linslade. They argued that there were many demographic and geographical barriers between these wards and that effective governance would be best achieved by making no change to existing warding arrangements.

71 The Liberal Democrats proposed a revised two-member Eaton-Bray ward containing the parishes of Eaton Bray, Stanbridge and Totternhoe, together with the rural part of Billington parish. They proposed that the RAF Stanbridge development be combined with part of Leighton-Linslade (as detailed below). They also proposed a revised single-member Hockliffe ward containing the parishes of Chalgrave, Eggington, Hockliffe and Tilsworth. The Liberal Democrats proposed that the area of Plantation ward to the north of Sandy Lane and Chiltern Gardens and to the east of Old Linslade Road (618 electors) should be combined with Heath & Reach parish to form a new single-member Heath ward. They argued that these areas are subject to similar local issues, particularly the effects of quarrying, and that the isolated location of Heath & Reach made this option preferable to linking it with other rural communities in the area. They stated that this proposal would also maintain the independence and sense of identity that the parish has enjoyed until now.

72 Under the Liberal Democrats' proposed council size of 51, Eaton Bray and Hockliffe wards would have 17 per cent more and 12 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the district average respectively (13 per cent more and 7 per cent fewer than the average by 2005). Heath ward would have an equal ratio of electors per councillor to the district average and 3 per cent fewer than average by 2005.

73 Leighton-Linslade Town Council put forward identical proposals to the Liberal Democrats for this area. However, due to its proposals for Houghton Regis, its scheme was based on a council size of 50. Under a council size of 50, Eaton Bray ward would have 15 per cent more electors per councillor than the district average, improving to 10 per cent more than the district average by 2005. Heath and Hockliffe wards would have 2 per cent and 14 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the district average respectively (5 per cent and 9 per cent fewer by 2005).

74 We received four further submissions in relation to warding arrangements for this area. Chalton Parish Council were strongly opposed to the Labour Party's proposals to transfer it to an enlarged Hockliffe ward. It argued that the two areas do not have a shared identity, and

supported the retention of the existing Streatley ward. It expressed a preference for being transferred to Toddington ward to its north, should it not prove possible to retain the current boundaries of Streatley ward. Heath & Reach Parish Council expressed a preference for retaining the existing Heath & Reach ward which is coterminous with the parish. However, in response to the issue of electoral equality, which would necessitate some change to the existing boundaries of Heath & Reach ward, it put forward identical proposals to the Liberal Democrats and Leighton-Linslade Town Council. It supported the transfer of part of the current Plantation ward from Leighton-Linslade town into the proposed Heath ward and argued that the parish is “totally isolated” from other adjoining rural parishes and considered this proposal the most appropriate way of maintaining its identity and independence. Councillor Reeve (Heath & Reach) strongly endorsed the Parish Council’s proposal.

75 Leighton-Linslade Town Council Conservative Group were opposed to transferring part of the current Plantation ward to a revised single-member Heath ward. They noted that Leighton-Linslade Town Council’s submission represented the views of the majority group and not those of the whole Council. They argued that the boundary between the proposed Heath ward and the “rump” Plantation ward did not follow a distinct and logical boundary, and expressed concern that the proposal would unite rural and urban areas that did not have a shared sense of identity. In addition, they argued that the interests of urban electors would become secondary to those of rural voters who would constitute the majority of electors in the proposed ward. For the purposes of district warding, they argued that it would be more appropriate for Heath & Reach parish to be combined with other rural parishes.

76 As part of the District Council’s own consultation exercise, Stanbridge Parish Council stated that the current arrangements were satisfactory but that if change was considered necessary, any rural ward should cover as small an area as possible. In addition, it stated that it would prefer to maintain its close links with Tilsworth parish. Tilsworth Parish Council expressed similar concerns. It argued that the two parishes are “very close knit communities”, and shared local amenities and facilities. It opposed being transferred to an enlarged Hockliffe ward, stating that few community ties exist between them. This view was endorsed by Councillor Goodwin (Toddington division). He considered that the proposal to transfer Stanbridge parish to Heath & Reach ward and Tilsworth parish to Hockliffe ward would link communities that had “little or no rapport”. Eaton Bray Parish Council supported the retention of the existing Eaton Bray ward, and expressed concern that an enlarged ward, as proposed by the Liberal Democrats and Leighton-Linslade Town Council, would result in less effective representation of the area. Studham Parish Council stated its opposition to being combined with Caddington parish in a district ward. It expressed a preference to being linked with Eaton Bray to its north.

77 Billington Parish Council stated that there was mutual agreement between itself and Leighton-Linslade Town Council with respect to combining the RAF Stanbridge development with the urban wards of Leighton-Linslade, but did express a number of concerns with regard to the resulting electoral arrangements for parish council elections (as discussed in detail later).

78 We have carefully considered the representations received and the evidence presented to us at Stage One of the review. We are not persuaded to adopt the Liberal Democrats’ and Leighton-Linslade Town Council’s proposals for an enlarged Eaton Bray ward. We do not consider that

an enlarged Eaton Bray ward, including the parishes of Billington, Stanbridge and Totternhoe would adequately reflect the community identities and interests of this area. We note that the existing Eaton Bray ward is coterminous with Eaton Bray parish and contains a cohesive community with a clear identity and shared interests. We also note that such a proposal would divide the closely linked parishes of Stanbridge and Tilsworth. We acknowledge that retaining the current Eaton Bray ward would result in an initially high level of electoral variation (18 per cent more electors per councillor than the current district average), but note that electoral equality in this ward is forecast to improve over the next five years (to 13 per cent more than the average). We consider that the proposals of the Conservatives and Labour Party to maintain the existing Eaton Bray ward would reflect the statutory criteria well and note that these proposals have the support of Eaton Bray Parish Council. We therefore propose to adopt the Conservatives' and Labour Party proposals for Eaton Bray ward as part of our draft recommendations.

79 We consider that the parishes of Stanbridge and Tilsworth have a mutual sense of identity and share many local amenities and facilities. We also note that proposals by the Labour Party, the Liberal Democrats, and Leighton-Linslade Town Council are dependant upon these two parishes being located in two different district wards. We consider that the Labour Party's proposal for a revised single-member Hockliffe ward does not sufficiently recognise community identities and interests. We consider that Chalton parish has few links with Chalgrave and other parishes to its west and that it would be more appropriate for it to be located in a revised Toddington ward. Moreover, we consider that transferring Stanbridge parish to a revised Heath & Reach ward and Tilsworth parish to an enlarged Hockliffe ward would combine areas that have few apparent community ties. We are not persuaded to retain the existing Hockliffe and Stanbridge wards as proposed by South West Bedfordshire Villages Labour Party as we consider this proposal would provide poor electoral equality.

80 We note the consensus with regard to the development site at RAF Stanbridge. We consider that the rate of projected growth in this area (1,356 electors by 2005), will result in an urban community that will share a greater sense of identity with Leighton-Linslade, as well as utilising amenities and facilities in that area. We therefore endorse the proposal to combine this area with part of Leighton-Linslade as part of our draft recommendations. This issue is considered in more detail below.

81 We have given consideration to the Liberal Democrats' and Leighton-Linslade Town Council's proposal to combine 618 electors from Plantation ward with Heath & Reach parish to form a new Heath ward. We note that the proposals are supported by Heath & Reach Parish Council and Councillor Reeve. However, although we acknowledge the relatively isolated location of Heath & Reach parish in relation to other rural communities, we note that these would require the establishment of a district ward that straddles an urban and rural area would not consider that this will enhance the convenient and effective representation of these communities. Although we consider that this proposal has some merit and recognise that Heath & Reach parish shares a number of links with Leighton-Linslade, we are not persuaded that the area of the proposed ward shares significant commonality. In addition, we cannot consider this area in isolation. The proposal would combine two distinctive parts of Plantation ward with Heath & Reach parish. As these areas are not connected, they would need to form two separate Town Council wards. While the proposed boundary to the south of the Heath Court area is

distinct, we consider that the proposed boundary of Sandy Lane and the rear of Chiltern Gardens would divide communities in this part of Leighton-Linslade. By effectively removing 1000 electors from the rural area, this proposal would also have a significant effect on neighbouring rural wards. Furthermore, this proposal is dependent upon us endorsing the Liberal Democrats' and Leighton-Linslade Town Council's proposals for the whole of the rural area. We consider that, taken as a whole, the Liberal Democrats' and Leighton-Linslade Town Council's proposals for the rural area provide a poorer balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria than the Conservatives' scheme.

82 We consider that the Conservatives' proposals for these wards provide the best balance between improved levels of electoral equality and the statutory criteria. Their proposals for a revised single-member Heath & Reach ward, including the parish of Hockliffe, would provide for a significantly improved level of electoral equality and would not entail further Town Council warding. We also consider that their proposed Stanbridge ward respects the community links that exist between the parishes of Stanbridge and Tilsworth and acknowledges that Chalton parish shares few links with communities to its west. We recognise the lack of consensus with regard to the existing Heath & Reach ward but, in the absence of alternative proposals that would provide for a similar improvement in levels of electoral equality, we propose to adopt the Conservatives' scheme for Eaton Bray, Heath & Reach and Stanbridge wards as part of our draft recommendations. Our proposed Eaton Bray and Heath & Reach wards would have 18 per cent more and 4 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the district average respectively (13 per cent more and equal to the district average by 2005). Stanbridge ward would have 6 per cent more electors per councillor than average, improving to 2 per cent more than average by 2005.

Caddington, Kensworth, Slip End, Studham and Totternhoe wards

83 The existing wards of Caddington, Kensworth, Slip End, Studham and Totternhoe are situated in the south and west of the district. Kensworth ward is coterminous with Kensworth parish, Slip End ward contains Hyde parish and Slip End parish ward, Studham ward contains the parishes of Studham and Whipsnade, and Totternhoe ward is coterminous with Totternhoe parish. All four wards are currently represented by a single councillor. Caddington ward is coterminous with Caddington parish ward and is currently represented by two councillors. Under existing arrangements, Caddington, Kensworth and Slip End wards have 9 per cent fewer, 27 per cent fewer and 16 per cent more electors per councillor than the current district average respectively (4 per cent fewer, 30 per cent fewer and 14 per cent more than the district average by 2005).

84 The Conservatives proposed retaining the existing Caddington and Slip End wards. While they recognised that the two wards could be merged, they argued that Slip End had recently attained parish status and would be separated from Caddington at parish level in April 2001. Therefore, they considered that the area should have separate representation at district level. In addition, they proposed an enlarged two-member Kensworth ward incorporating the parishes of Kensworth, Studham, Totternhoe and Whipsnade. Under the Conservatives' proposed council size of 50, Caddington ward would have 14 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the district average, improving to 9 per cent fewer than average by 2005. Slip End and Kensworth wards

would have 10 per cent and 4 per cent more electors per councillor than the district average respectively, improving to 7 per cent more and equal to the average by 2005.

85 The Labour Party proposed that Caddington and Slip End wards be combined to form a new three-member Cadslip ward, subject to the transfer of Norfolk Road and part of Dunstable Road to a revised Priory ward. They argued that these two roads are much closer to Dunstable than to Caddington. In relation to Caddington and Slip End, the Labour Party argued that there is no visible boundary between the two villages. It also proposed that the existing Kensworth, Totternhoe and Studham wards be combined in a new two-member ward. It proposed naming the ward Greenfields to more accurately reflect the geographical nature of this area. Under the Labour Party's proposed council size of 52, Cadslip and Greenfields wards would have 3 per cent fewer and 9 per cent more electors per councillor than the district average respectively (1 per cent fewer and 4 per cent more than average by 2005).

86 The Liberal Democrats proposed that the existing wards of Caddington, Kensworth and Studham be combined to form a three-member Caddington ward in order to meet the objective of achieving improved levels of electoral equality. They also proposed retaining the existing single-member Slip End ward to reflect the fact that the Slip End area had recently gained parish status. In addition, they proposed that the existing Totternhoe ward be transferred to a revised two-member Eaton Bray ward to the north and west (as discussed earlier). Under the Liberal Democrats' proposed council size of 51, Caddington and Slip End wards would have 9 per cent and 12 per cent more electors per councillor than the district average respectively (both containing 10 per cent more than average by 2005).

87 Leighton-Linslade Town Council put forward identical warding arrangements to the Liberal Democrats in this area. Under Leighton-Linslade Town Council's proposals for a council size of 50, Caddington and Slip End wards would have 7 per cent and 10 per cent more electors per councillor than the district average respectively (8 per cent and 7 per cent more than average by 2005).

88 We received four further submissions from parish councils with regard to this area. Kensworth and Whipsnade parish councils were strongly opposed to being linked in a district ward with Caddington. They considered that they had little in common with Caddington, being geographically divided by the A5 Trunk Road. Kensworth Parish Council also opposed any change to the existing arrangements, arguing that there are a number of geographical, demographic and social factors to support the retention of the existing ward boundaries in this area. Whipsnade Parish Council supported a link between the existing Studham and Eaton Bray wards should a change to the existing ward boundaries prove necessary. Hyde Parish Council opposed Slip End and Caddington wards being combined in a three-member ward. It argued that this would have a detrimental effect upon its effective representation on the District Council by significantly reducing its influence. It argued that it is a distinctive settlement with only a "small but important" boundary with Slip End across the M1 motorway. Caddington & Slip End Parish Council also opposed being combined with parishes to the west, and stated that it would be a retrograde step to incorporate Caddington and Slip End in a district ward as it has been agreed that the two settlements should form separate parishes.

89 Councillors Tomlin and Hills (Caddington) were both strongly opposed to any link between Caddington ward and Kensworth and Studham wards to its west. Councillor Hills argued that the A5 Trunk Road provides a permanent physical boundary between these two areas and that such a ward would contain settlements that share few community links. Councillor Tomlin stated that “these proposals beggared belief” and argued that a more logical proposal, should it be considered necessary, would be to combine the parishes of Caddington, Slip End and Hyde in a single ward. Councillor Amey (Caddington Parish) concurred with this view and maintained that Caddington parish has “its own unique problems that would be of little interest to people living somewhere between 5 to 10 miles away”. Caddington Residents’ Association also argued that Caddington does not have any links with Kensworth and Studham and noted that these communities are also in a different parliamentary constituency. It argued that, should change be required, Caddington should be combined with Slip End. As detailed earlier, Councillors Tomlin and Hills (Caddington) and Caddington Residents’ Association also challenged the electorate forecasts for Caddington resulting in revised forecasts being prepared by the District Council.

90 As part of Bedfordshire County Council’s submission, Councillor Stay (Caddington division) argued that combining Caddington, Kensworth and Studham wards would cause difficulties for a future review of county divisions. Margaret Moran MP (Luton South) also argued that the proposed ward would cross parliamentary boundaries, although this is not a relevant consideration in this review.

91 As part of the District Council’s own consultation process, Studham Parish Council opposed being combined with Caddington in a district ward. It considered that the two communities were disparate, and favoured being linked with Eaton Bray parish for district warding purposes.

92 We have carefully considered the representations received at Stage One and note the strong opposition to the Liberal Democrats’ and Leighton-Linslade Town Council’s proposals to combine the existing wards of Caddington, Kensworth and Studham in a three-member ward. We acknowledge that this proposal would improve levels of electoral equality, but are not persuaded that it has sufficient regard to local community identities and interests. In particular, we note that the A5 Trunk Road provides a significant topographical boundary between the two areas and consider that they share few community ties. We are therefore not persuaded to adopt these proposals as part of our draft recommendations.

93 We consider that the Conservatives’ proposals to retain the current two-member Caddington and single-member Slip End ward has some merit. However, in order to further improve levels of electoral equality, we propose to adopt the Labour Party’s proposal for a three-member Cadslip ward containing the areas of Caddington, Hyde and Slip End. We note that a number of respondents considered this option a viable alternative to the existing arrangements. However, in view of the conflicting preferences expressed at Stage One, we would particularly welcome further evidence on the most appropriate warding arrangements for this area. As detailed below, we propose to retain the existing boundary between Caddington and Dunstable. We propose that this ward be named Caddington & Slip End, in order to more accurately reflect the constituent communities of this new ward.

94 We note that the existing single-member wards of Kensworth and Totternhoe are conterminous with the parishes of Kensworth and Totternhoe and contain distinct and cohesive local communities. However, we also note that the existing wards of Kensworth, Studham and Totternhoe provide some of the poorest levels of electoral equality in the district, and consider that a change to ward boundaries in this area is necessary. We consider that the proposal by the Conservatives and Labour Party to combine the parishes of Kensworth, Studham, Totternhoe and Whipsnade to form a new two-member ward will provide for much improved levels of electoral equality, while avoiding the need to combine any of these communities with Caddington parish across the A5 Trunk Road. We note that there was no agreement as to the most appropriate ward name for this new ward. We are not persuaded that the proposed ward names suggested by the Conservatives and Labour Party would adequately define this area geographically and therefore propose that this ward be named Kensworth & Totternhoe, reflecting the names of the two largest communities in the proposed ward.

95 Under our draft recommendations, Caddington & Slip End and Kensworth & Totternhoe wards would have 6 per cent fewer and 4 per cent more electors per councillor than the current district average respectively (4 per cent fewer and equal to the district average by 2005).

Dunstable Central, Priory and Watling wards

96 The existing wards of Dunstable Central, Priory and Watling are located in the central and southern part of Dunstable, a town of some 26,000 electors adjacent to the western boundary of Luton. The three wards are each represented by three councillors. Dunstable Central and Watling wards have 24 per cent and 17 per cent more electors per councillor than the district average respectively (23 per cent and 13 per cent more than average by 2005). Priory ward has 15 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the district average and is forecast to have 18 per cent fewer than average by 2005.

97 The Conservatives proposed changes to all three wards. They proposed a revised three-member Priory ward containing the whole of the existing ward together with that part of the current Dunstable Central ward broadly to the south of Court Drive and to the east of High Street North, and from Watling ward, all properties accessed from London Road to the south of Oldhill. They also proposed a further small amendment to the boundary between Priory and Watling wards, with the transfer of Index Drive, Index Close, Graphic Close and Tibbett Close from Watling ward to Priory ward. They proposed that the remainder of Watling ward be combined with that part of Dunstable Central ward to the south of West Street, and to the east of, and including Burr Street and Bull Pond Lane. This area would form a revised three-member Watling ward. They proposed that the remainder of the current Dunstable Central ward continue to be served by three councillors and be renamed Dunstable Downs ward to more accurately identify its geographical location. The Conservatives also proposed uniting the whole of Bowland Crescent in their proposed Dunstable Downs ward. Under the Conservatives' proposed council size of 50, Watling and Priory wards would both have 3 per cent more electors per councillor than the current district average, and would both be equal to the district average by 2005. Dunstable Downs ward would have 1 per cent more electors per councillor than the district average both now and in 2005.

98 The Labour Party put forward almost identical proposals. However, it proposed the transfer of 50 electors from Norfolk Road and Dunstable Road from Caddington ward to Priory ward. It argued that this would correct a long-standing anomaly between the parish boundaries of Dunstable and Caddington. In addition, it proposed no change in the Bowland Crescent area. It also proposed retaining the ward name of Dunstable Central. Under the Labour Party's proposed council size of 52, Priory and Watling wards would each have 8 per cent more electors per councillor than the current district average (5 per cent and 4 per cent more than average by 2005). Dunstable Central ward would contain 5 per cent more electors per councillor than the district average, both now and in 2005.

99 Dunstable Town Council proposed identical warding arrangements to the Conservatives in Dunstable, except that it proposed no change in the Bowland Crescent area. It also proposed the retention of the current ward name of Dunstable Central. The Town Council noted that these proposals had unanimous support on the Town Council, and stated that it was "totally opposed" to any proposal which would incorporate part of Dunstable with Houghton Regis. Under our proposed council size of 50, Dunstable Central ward would have 1 per cent more electors per councillor than the district average, both now and in 2005. Priory and Watling wards would have 3 per cent and 4 per cent more electors per councillor than the district average respectively. Both wards would have equal to the average number of electors per councillor by 2005. Leighton-Linslade Town Council proposed an identical scheme to that of Dunstable Town Council for these wards.

100 The Liberal Democrats proposed alternative warding arrangements for this area. They proposed the transfer of the south-eastern part of Watling ward to Priory ward (as detailed above). However, they proposed no change to the northern boundary of Watling and Priory wards and proposed that the part of Dunstable Central ward to the south of Chiltern Road and up to and including Union Street and Bunker Court, and to the west of Sugden Court and north of West Street, be transferred to Northfields ward. They also proposed a consequential transfer of part of Northfields ward to Houghton South in order to limit the reduction in representation for the Houghton Regis area (as discussed further below). They proposed that their revised Dunstable Central, Priory and Watling wards should each continue to be represented by three councillors. Under the Liberal Democrats' proposed council size of 51, Dunstable Central, Priory and Watling wards would have 1 per cent, 4 per cent and 2 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the district average respectively (1 per cent, 7 per cent and 5 per cent fewer than average by 2005).

101 We have carefully considered the representations received at Stage One and note a significant degree of consensus over the proposed warding arrangements for this area. We also recognise the much improved levels of electoral equality that would result from these proposals. However, we are not persuaded that these proposals would best reflect community ties in the town. In particular, we note that the proposals would breach the A5 Trunk Road which follows the route of the old Roman Road of Watling Street. We consider that this road provides a clear and effective ward boundary between the existing Priory and Watling wards. We are not persuaded that breaching this boundary in order to create an enlarged Priory ward has sufficient regard to the community identities and interests of the areas affected. In addition, we consider that the proposed Dunstable Central (or Dunstable Downs) ward contains a number of diverse

parts of the town with few links. We are aware of the strong opinion that the pattern of three-member district wards should be maintained in Dunstable. However, we do not necessarily consider this essential to the maintenance of effective and convenient local government in urban areas. Moreover, we consider that a mixed pattern of two-member and three-member wards can have greater regard to local community interests and identities.

102 We have not been persuaded to modify the boundary between the town of Dunstable and the neighbouring parish of Caddington, as proposed by the Labour Party. We consider that the comments made by the Labour Party have some merit, and consider that Norfolk Road has greater affinity with Dunstable than Caddington. However, this issue would be better considered as part of a future parishing review by the District Council and any consequential changes to district wards should be made at that time. Whilst we acknowledge that the Liberal Democrats' proposals would provide for improved levels of electoral equality, we are not persuaded to adopt them as part of our draft recommendations. We consider that their proposals for Dunstable Central, Priory and Watling do not give sufficient weight to the identities and interests of the communities affected. Moreover their proposals are contingent upon us endorsing their scheme to combine parts of Dunstable and Houghton Regis in a district ward. We are not persuaded that this would best reflect community ties.

103 We therefore propose to put forward our own warding arrangements for Dunstable Central, Watling and Priory wards. We have taken a number of factors into account in formulating an appropriate scheme for this area. As stated above, we consider that the A5 Trunk Road (High Street South) provides a clear and logical ward boundary between the existing Watling and Priory wards, and should be retained. We consider that the current Dunstable Central ward has a comparatively large electorate and covers a somewhat large geographical area, stretching from the fringes of Totternhoe parish in the west to the former railway line in the east. Furthermore, it contains a number of disparate areas, separated from each other by a number of major roads. We consider that these parts of the town do not have a common sense of identity and propose that the part of the current Dunstable Central ward to the north of West Street and to the east of Chiltern Road be combined with the part of Priory ward to the north of Britain Street and Englands Lane (and including properties on the north side of these roads) to form a revised two-member Dunstable Central ward. We note that our proposals would result in the transfer of the site of the old Augustinian Priory and the Priory Church of St Peter into our proposed Dunstable Central ward. We therefore propose that the remainder of the current Priory ward be renamed Downside ward in order to reflect our proposed changes, and that it be served by two councillors.

104 We propose that the remainder of the existing Dunstable Central ward be combined with the Penrith Avenue area, and the whole of Friars Walk and Bowland Crescent from the existing Watling ward to form a new two-member Dunstable Downs ward. We also propose that the rest of Watling ward continue to be represented by three councillors. We recognise that we have significantly departed from all the proposals put to us for Dunstable Central, Priory and Watling wards, and would therefore particularly welcome further views on our draft recommendations for this area at Stage Three.

105 Under our draft recommendations for a council size of 50, Dunstable Central and Dunstable Downs wards would have 2 per cent fewer and 2 per cent more electors per councillor than the

district average respectively (3 per cent fewer and 1 per cent more electors than average by 2005). Downside and Watling wards would have 8 per cent and 2 per cent more electors per councillor than the district average respectively (5 per cent more and 2 per cent fewer than average by 2005). Our proposals are illustrated on the large map at the back of this report.

Ickniel and Northfields wards

106 The existing wards of Ickniel and Northfields are located in the north of Dunstable town and to the south of Houghton Regis. Both wards are currently represented by three councillors. Under existing arrangements, Ickniel ward contains equal to the average number of electors per councillor, and is projected to have 4 per cent fewer than average by 2005. Northfields ward has 4 per cent more electors per councillor than the district average, and will have 5 per cent more by 2005.

107 The Conservatives, the Labour Party, Dunstable and Leighton-Linslade town councils all proposed no change to the existing Ickniel and Northfield wards. Dunstable Town Council argued that the existing Ickniel ward is a self-contained community and “divorced from the main body of Dunstable”. It recognised that electoral equality would not be as good as in the rest of the town, but noted that the ward is separated from the rest of the town by industrial estates, retail parks and the former railway line. The Conservatives stated that Ickniel ward has no direct community interest with the adjacent wards of Dunstable Central or Priory. Under our proposed council size of 50, Ickniel and Northfields wards would have 6 per cent and 2 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the district average respectively (9 per cent fewer and equal to the district average by 2005).

108 The Liberal Democrats also proposed retaining the existing Ickniel ward, stating that there were few links between the communities of Ickniel and the rest of Dunstable. However, they put forward alternative arrangements for Northfields ward. They proposed that the part of Northfields ward to the east of High Street North be transferred to a revised three-member Houghton South ward. They also proposed that part of Dunstable Central ward, broadly to the south and east of Clifton Road (as detailed earlier), be transferred to Northfields ward to form a new three-member Brewers ward. They argued that there had been “sufficient historical movement between Dunstable and Houghton Regis to justify further change”. They considered that this proposal would also limit the reduction in councillors representing the district wards of Houghton Regis, with no consequential reduction in those councillors representing the town of Dunstable. Due to the proposed transfer of the Northfields Road area from Northfields ward to Houghton South ward, they proposed that Northfields ward be renamed Brewers ward because Brewers Hill Road constitutes a major thoroughfare in this area. Under the Liberal Democrats’ proposed council size of 51, Brewers and Ickniel wards would have 9 per cent more and 4 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the district average respectively. By 2005, these wards would have 10 per cent more and 7 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the district average respectively.

109 We have carefully considered the representations received and have noted the large degree of consensus to maintain the existing Ickniel ward. While the forecast level of electoral equality would be somewhat larger than usual, we consider this area to be a self-contained community

with its own distinct identity We note that the current ward has clear and distinct boundaries that are formed by the former railway line to the south and west, Luton Unitary Authority to the east and the town of Houghton Regis to the north. Furthermore, we note that a route has been safeguarded for the construction of a new eastern by-pass for Dunstable, and this would traverse the south-west of the ward, resulting in a further barrier between the communities of Icknield ward and the rest of Dunstable. We consider that combining all or part of the existing Icknield ward with parts of other wards in the town would not have sufficient regard to the statutory criteria. We therefore propose no change to the current Icknield ward as part of our draft recommendations.

110 We have noted a large measure of agreement with regard to the existing Northfields ward. We consider that the current ward has clear and distinct boundaries, and provides a reasonable level of electoral equality. We are not persuaded to adopt the Liberal Democrats' proposed Brewers ward. We do not believe that the creation of a district ward straddling parish boundaries in this area would provide for effective and convenient local government. We note that the Liberal Democrats' proposals would unite the communities that straddle the A5120 Houghton Road in a single ward. We recognise that these areas have a clear sense of community identity and share local amenities and facilities, including Northfields Upper School. However, in the light of the proposed construction of an eastern by-pass in this area, we consider that the Northview Road and Douglas Crescent area of Houghton South ward would be further separated from the rest of Houghton Regis and would appear to have greater links to Dunstable and the existing Northfields ward. This maybe an issue for the District Council to consider in a subsequent parish boundary review.

111 Having considered the evidence received, we propose no change to the existing boundaries of Icknield and Northfields ward. Under our proposed council size of 50, Icknield and Northfields wards would have 6 per cent and 2 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the district average respectively (9 per cent fewer and equal to the district average by 2005). Our proposals for these wards are illustrated on the large map at the back of this report.

Houghton Central, Houghton East and Houghton South wards

112 The existing wards of Houghton Central, Houghton East and Houghton South cover the area of Houghton Regis, a town of some 12,000 electors located to the north of Dunstable and to the west of Luton. All three wards are represented by three councillors. Under existing arrangements, Houghton Central ward and Houghton East ward have 23 per cent and 17 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the district average respectively. This level of electoral variation is forecast to deteriorate further over the next five years to 26 per cent and 21 per cent fewer than average. Houghton South ward currently has 13 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the district average. Due to substantial housing development over the next five years, it is projected to have 6 per cent fewer electors per councillor than average by 2005.

113 The Conservatives proposed retaining the existing Houghton Central ward, but proposed that it should be represented by two councillors rather than three as at present. They proposed that the Painters Estate be transferred from Houghton East ward to Houghton South ward and that the revised Houghton East ward should also be represented by two councillors. They also

proposed that Houghton South remain a three-member ward. They stated that the current ward names are not seen as giving a sense of identity to the constituent communities of these wards and consequently proposed that Houghton Central ward be renamed Tithe Farm, Houghton East ward be renamed Parkside, and that Houghton South ward be renamed Houghton Hall. Under the Conservatives' proposed council size of 50, Tithe Farm, Parkside and Houghton Hall wards would have 9 per cent more and 6 per cent more, and 10 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the district average respectively (5 per cent more, 1 per cent more and 4 per cent fewer than average by 2005).

114 The Labour Party proposed almost identical warding arrangements to the Conservatives for Houghton Regis. It also proposed the transfer of the Painters Estate from the existing Houghton East ward to Houghton South ward. It argued that these proposals recognised the needs of the town, while following logical boundaries and providing for an improved level of electoral equality. It proposed the same ward name changes as the Conservatives. Under the Labour Party's proposed council size of 52, Tithe Farm and Parkside wards would have 14 per cent and 8 per cent more electors per councillor than the district average respectively, and 9 per cent and 5 per cent more than average by 2005. Houghton Hall ward would have 6 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the district average, and 1 per cent fewer than average by 2005.

115 Leighton-Linslade Town Council also proposed that the Painters Estate be transferred to Houghton South ward. However, it also proposed transferring 55 electors from Bloomsbury Gardens to Houghton South ward. The Council also proposed that a further 180 electors to the south and east of Delmont Road and west of Tithe Farm Road be transferred from Houghton Central ward to a revised three-member Houghton South ward. This area includes the odd numbered properties (15-49) on Tithe Farm Road and Churchfield Road, up to and including Vicarage Road. It would also include four electors from Bedford Road. The Council proposed that Houghton Central and Houghton East wards each be represented by two councillors and that Houghton South remain represented by three councillors. Under Leighton-Linslade Town Council's proposals for a council size of 50, Houghton Central and Houghton East wards would both have 4 per cent more electors per councillor than the district average respectively, and would both have equal to the average number of electors per councillor in 2005. Houghton South ward would have 6 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the district average, and would have equal to the average number of electors per councillor by 2005.

116 The Liberal Democrats submitted alternative arrangements for Houghton Regis. They proposed that the part of Houghton East ward broadly to the north and west of Parkside Drive be transferred to a revised three-member Houghton Central ward. They also proposed the area of Houghton South ward to the north of Windsor Drive be transferred to a revised two-member Houghton East ward. In addition, they proposed that the Northfields Road area of Northfields ward in Dunstable be transferred to a revised three-member Houghton South ward. They stated that the Northfields Road community identifies with those adjacent communities within the existing Houghton South ward and utilised shared amenities and facilities. They proposed to retain the existing ward names and argued that, although their proposals would result in some wards having an electoral imbalance of greater than 10 per cent from the average, the proposed wards are tied to logical boundaries and would unite communities that identify with each other. Under the Liberal Democrats' proposed council size of 51, Houghton Central and Houghton East

wards would contain 5 per cent fewer and equal to the average number of electors per councillor respectively (9 per cent fewer and 2 per cent more than average by 2005). Houghton South ward would have 12 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the district average, improving to 10 per cent fewer than average by 2005.

117 Dunstable Town Council opposed the Liberal Democrats' proposals for Northfields and Houghton South wards. They stated that Dunstable faces issues which "are quite different from those affecting other towns and villages in South Bedfordshire", and were of the opinion that the present external boundaries of Dunstable town should be preserved.

118 As part of the District Council's own consultation process, Councillor Hogan (Houghton East) supported the transfer of the Poets estate from Houghton East ward to Houghton South, but was opposed to the transfer of all or part of Bloomsbury Gardens, as proposed in some of the district-wide schemes. He considered that the electors in this area would wish to remain in Houghton East ward.

119 We have considered all the representations received at Stage One, and recognise that there is a degree of consensus between the proposals from the Conservatives, Labour Party and Leighton-Linslade Town Council. We consider that all the proposals would provide for significantly improved levels of electoral equality and have regard for the statutory criteria. We note that the Liberal Democrats' proposed warding arrangements would result in relatively high levels of electoral inequality and, as outlined above, we have not been persuaded of the case for creating a district ward that straddles the two urban areas.

120 We note that Leighton-Linslade Town Council's proposals to transfer the south-western part of the current Houghton East ward to a revised Houghton South ward would further improve the levels of electoral equality in these wards. Having sought to reflect community interests and identities as well as well as provide the best levels of electoral equality obtainable, we propose to adopt Leighton-Linslade Town Council's proposals a part of our draft recommendations. However, we consider that Bloomsbury Gardens shares a greater sense of identity with the communities of Houghton East and therefore propose the retention of the Bloomsbury Gardens area in Houghton East ward. In order that our proposed wards are more clearly identifiable, we propose to adopt the ward name changes as suggested by the Conservatives and the Labour Party. Therefore, under our draft recommendations, we propose that Houghton Centra ward be renamed Tithe Farm and be represented by two councillors. We also propose that Houghton East ward be renamed Parkside and be represented by two councillors and Houghton South ward be renamed Houghton Hall and continue to be represented by three councillors.

121 Under our draft recommendations, Houghton Hall ward has 7 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the district average, and improving to 1 per cent fewer than average by 2005. Parkside and Tithe Farm wards have 6 per cent and 4 per cent more electors per councillor than the district average (1 per cent more and equal to the district average by 2005). Our proposals are illustrated on the large map at the back of this report.

Beaudesert, Brooklands and Plantation wards

122 The existing wards of Beaudesert, Brooklands and Plantation cover the Leighton Buzzard area, which is situated in the north-west of the district to the east of the River Ouzel. All three wards are currently represented by three councillors. Under existing arrangements, Beaudesert and Brooklands wards have 22 per cent and 6 per cent more electors per councillor than the district average respectively (24 per cent and 2 per cent more than average by 2005). Plantation ward has an equal number of electors per councillor to the district average and is forecast to have 2 per cent fewer than average by 2005.

123 Arising from a misinterpretation of a 1985 Parish Ward Order, the District Council had incorrectly assumed that modifications to Beaudesert, Brooklands and Plantation town council wards also made consequential changes to Beaudesert, Brooklands and Plantation district wards. As a result, Beaudesert district ward has been assumed to contain one area which should actually form part of Plantation district ward, and another area that should form part of Brooklands district ward. Plantation district ward has also been deemed to include an area which should actually lie in Beaudesert district ward. In the following analysis of Beaudesert, Brooklands and Plantation wards, when outlining the proposed schemes and our draft recommendations, an existing ward, when mentioned, should be taken to refer to the existing town council ward. We intend that our recommendations will result in proposed district wards being coterminous with town council wards. Consequently proposed wards, when mentioned, should be taken to refer to our recommendations for both town council and district wards. As detailed earlier, for district warding purposes, we propose to transfer the housing development at the RAF Stanbridge site from Billington parish to Leighton-Linslade. Therefore our proposed Grovebury ward, when mentioned in the following text, should be taken to refer to the proposed district ward only.

124 The Conservatives stated that they had based their proposals for this area on clearly identifiable boundaries, while having regard to levels of electoral equality. They proposed retaining the current pattern of three-member district wards in the town arguing that this arrangement is straightforward and avoids confusion among the electorate. They proposed that the part of the existing Beaudesert ward broadly to the north and west of Hockliffe Street and Vandyke Road, and to the east of Church Street be transferred to a revised three-member Plantation ward. They also proposed that the area of the existing Beaudesert ward to the west of Church Street and to the north of the High Street be transferred to a revised Linslade ward (as discussed further below). They further proposed that the part of Beaudesert ward bounded by Hockliffe Road, Regents Street and Vandyke Road be combined within the current Brooklands ward to form a new three-member Leedon ward.

125 The Conservatives proposed that the remainder of the current Beaudesert ward be combined with the RAF Stanbridge development site from Billington parish to form a new three-member All Saints ward based around the town centre and All Saints Church. Under the Conservatives' proposed council size of 50, Leedon and Plantation wards would have 8 per cent and 6 per cent more electors per councillor than the district average respectively (4 per cent and 2 per cent more than average by 2005). All Saints ward would have 32 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the district average. Due to the substantial housing development at the RAF Stanbridge site, this ward would have 3 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the district average in five years' time.

126 The Labour Party proposed that the part of Plantation ward bounded by Vandyke Road, Churchill Road and Roosevelt Avenue, be transferred to Brooklands ward. It also proposed a revised boundary between the existing Brooklands and Beaudesert wards, transferring the area broadly to the south and west of Brooklands Drive and Atterbury Avenue to Beaudesert ward. It proposed that the revised Brooklands ward remain represented by three councillors and be renamed Leedon ward. In addition, it proposed that the area broadly to the east of Billington Road and south of Stanbridge Road, together with the Marley Fields development be combined with the development site at RAF Stanbridge from Billington parish to form a new two-member Marley Park ward. It argued that although the electorate of this proposed ward would initially be considerably smaller than the average for the district, housing development at RAF Stanbridge would result in substantial growth in its electorate over the course of the next five years. It further proposed that part of the current Beaudesert ward to the west of Bassett Road, up to and including Windsor Avenue and York Court, be combined with the remainder of the current Plantation ward to form a revised three-member Plantation ward. It proposed that the remainder of Beaudesert ward continue to be represented by three members and argued that this revised ward would contain the predominantly old Victorian centre of the town.

127 The Labour Party stated that its proposals utilise clear boundaries and reflect the identities and interests of local communities. Under the Labour Party's proposed council size of 52, Beaudesert and Leedon wards would have 1 per cent fewer and 5 per cent more electors per councillor than the district average respectively (4 per cent fewer and 1 per cent more than average by 2005). Plantation and Marley Park wards would have 6 per cent and 62 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the district average respectively (9 per cent and 17 per cent fewer than average by 2005). The Labour Party's proposals were fully supported by Leighton-Linslade Branch Labour Party.

128 The Liberal Democrats and Leighton-Linslade Town Council proposed alternative arrangements for these wards. They proposed a revised two-member Plantation ward combining the area to the north of Sandy Lane and Chiltern Gardens and to the east of Old Linslade Road with the existing Heath & Reach parish and ward to form a new single-member Heath ward. Leighton-Linslade Town Council argued that these two areas experience similar local problems, such as the issue of quarrying in the area. They also proposed a new two-member All Saints ward which would be based around the old Victorian centre of the town. A majority of the new ward would be formed from the part of the current Beaudesert ward to the north of Clipstone Brook and to the west of South Street. However, the ward would also include the part of the current Plantation ward to the south of Wentworth Drive and west of Plantation Road, and the area broadly to the south of Roosevelt Avenue and east of Heath Road.

129 They further proposed that Vimy Road, which is situated between the River Ouzel and The Grand Union Canal, be transferred from Linslade ward to the proposed All Saints ward, and that the remainder of the current Beaudesert ward be combined with the development site at RAF Stanbridge to form a new three-member Grove ward. Leighton-Linslade Town Council also considered that the RAF Stanbridge site should be transferred into the Leighton-Linslade Town Council area, and was disappointed that this could not be done simultaneously with the Periodic Electoral Review.

130 Under our proposed council size of 50, All Saints and Grove wards would have 2 per cent and 39 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the district average respectively (3 per cent and 12 per cent fewer than average by 2005). Brooklands and Plantation wards would have 4 per cent and 5 per cent more electors per councillor than the district average respectively, and equal to and 2 per cent more than the district average by 2005.

131 We received a further five representations with regard to this area. Heath & Reach Parish Council stated that while it would prefer the retention of current boundaries for Heath & Reach ward, it would support the proposals of the Liberal Democrats and Leighton-Linslade Town Council for a new single-member Heath ward encompassing the Sandy Lane area of Plantation ward. It stated that there were many “social and environmental factors to support such a change” and stated that the two areas shared many social and religious activities. It expressed concern at proposals by the Conservatives and the Labour Party to combine the parish in a district ward with adjoining rural parishes with which it considered it shared few community interests. Councillor Reeve (Heath & Reach) strongly endorsed the submission of Heath & Reach Parish Council.

132 Leighton-Linslade Town Council Conservative Group noted that the Town Council’s submission represented the views of the majority group and not those of the whole Council. They supported the retention of the current pattern of three-member wards in the town, allowing electors to exercise their votes in each year of the four year electoral cycle. They considered that the introduction of two-member wards would destroy the existing relationship between County, District and Town Council representation and that this would be confusing to local electors. They were particularly opposed to the Town Council’s proposals for the existing Plantation ward. They considered this would result in a mixed urban and rural district ward in which the minority of electors who lived in urban areas would struggle to secure effective representation. They argued that the proposed boundary between the Town Council’s proposed Heath and Plantation wards was not clearly defined and united settlements that were separated by Green Belt land. Furthermore, they did not consider that the community of Heath & Reach was isolated from other rural communities in the district, citing the example of Hockliffe which they stated is “only three or four miles distant”.

133 County Councillor Heffernan (Leighton Buzzard Beaudesert division) expressed support for the Labour Party’s proposals for the existing Beaudesert ward, and recommended the relocation of some polling stations in the area. South West Bedfordshire Villages Labour Party supported the transfer of the RAF Stanbridge site from Stanbridge ward into the district wards of Leighton-Linslade.

134 We have carefully considered the representations received at Stage One. We have noted that the four proposed schemes would result in much improved levels of electoral equality in the wards affected. We acknowledge that the transfer of the development site at RAF Stanbridge, which currently contains no electors (2000 electoral register), may initially result in substantial levels of electoral variation in whichever district ward of Leighton-Linslade it is incorporated with. However, we note that development is under way on the site and is forecast to contain 1,356 electors in five years’ time. Furthermore, we consider that this area will share many of the characteristics with urban district wards to its north, as well as relying on shared local amenities and facilities. Therefore, we propose to transfer the RAF Stanbridge development site into the district wards of Leighton-Linslade as part of our draft recommendations. We are not able, as

part of this periodic electoral review, to modify external parish boundaries and, as a result, this area would remain part of Billington parish. Modifications to parish boundaries can, however, be made as part of a future parish boundary review by the District Council.

135 We acknowledge that the Conservatives' scheme would result in substantially improved levels of electoral equality in the wards of Beaudesert, Brooklands and Plantation. However, we are not persuaded to adopt their proposals to combine Leighton Buzzard town centre with Linslade to its west. The resulting district ward would significantly breach the River Ouzel, which forms the boundary between the towns of Leighton Buzzard and Linslade. We consider that this proposal has insufficient regard to the statutory criteria, and consider that the River Ouzel and the Grand Union Canal to its west provide significant and clearly defined barriers on which to base ward boundaries.

136 We consider the Labour Party's proposal for a new two-member Marley Park ward which would contain the new housing development at the RAF Stanbridge site has some merit. This proposal would cause minimal disruption to the current boundaries of Beaudesert ward and would consist almost entirely of areas of new development. However, the proposed ward would fail to provide reasonable electoral equality, with 62 per cent fewer electors per councillor now and 17 per cent fewer than average in 2005. We consider this too great a level of electoral variation in an urban district ward. Furthermore, we consider that its proposed Plantation ward would not utilise clear and logical boundaries, and would have insufficient regard to the statutory criteria. We consider that while there may be some merit in transferring the Churchill Road area from Plantation ward, we note that it would result in the Brooklands Drive area being divided between Leedon and Beaudesert wards and have therefore not been persuaded to put forward this change.

137 We consider that the Liberal Democrats' and Leighton-Linslade Town Council's proposal to create a new two-member All Saints ward and three-member Grove ward would utilise clear boundaries and reflect community ties. In particular, it would utilise Clipstone Brook as a boundary and provide separate representation for the communities around the commercial centre of Leighton Buzzard. As outlined above, we are not persuaded to combine parts of Plantation ward with Heath & Reach parish in a new ward which would require the formation of two additional Town Council wards and would, in our view, divide communities in the north of Leighton Buzzard.

138 We have therefore based our proposals on broadly retaining the current Plantation ward and also propose to largely endorse the Liberal Democrats and Leighton-Linslade Town Council's proposals for All Saints ward, subject to a number of amendments to ward boundaries. We consider that Clipstone Brook provides a clear and natural barrier on which to base the southern boundary of the proposed ward. We therefore propose that the area of the existing Beaudesert ward to the north of Clipstone Brook and up to and including the whole of Regent Street also be transferred to the new All Saints ward. We consider that this area shares similar characteristics with the rest of the town centre. We also endorse the transfer of the Vimy Road area from Linslade ward to All Saints ward. Although this will result in a breach of the River Ouzel, our proposed ward boundary would follow the Grand Union Canal, which provides a clear and natural boundary in this area. We propose that the northern boundary of our proposed All Saints ward should follow the existing boundary between Beaudesert and Plantation wards, subject to

the inclusion of King Street in All Saints ward. We consider that our proposed All Saints ward would combine similar areas and would have the clear geographical focus of the older Victorian centre of the town. We propose amending the western boundary of the existing Plantation ward to follow the Grand Union Canal rather than the River Ouzel which would provide a clear and consistent boundary throughout the area. This change would affect no electors.

139 With regard to the southern part of the town, we propose to base our draft recommendations on the Liberal Democrats' and Leighton-Linslade Town Council's proposals. However, in order to improve electoral equality and provide clearer boundaries, we propose that the ward be expanded eastwards to include the Brooklands Drive area from the current Brooklands ward. We propose that this new ward be named Grovebury after the name of a major road in this area, and that it include the housing development currently under construction at the RAF Stanbridge site. We propose that the remainder of the current Brooklands ward form a revised two-member ward and propose that this ward be renamed Planets ward after a major housing estate in the centre of our proposed ward

140 Our proposals would result in a mixed pattern of two and three member wards which we consider would provide a good balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria. Under our draft recommendations, All Saints and Planets wards would both have 4 per cent more electors per councillor than the district average (3 per cent more and equal to the district average by 2005). Grovebury and Plantation wards would have 21 per cent and 5 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the district average respectively (5 per cent more and 8 per cent fewer by 2005).

141 We recognise that this area has been the subject of some contention in the initial stage of the review. Moreover, as we propose to significantly depart from all of the proposed warding arrangements received at Stage One of the review, we would particularly welcome further comment on our draft recommendations for this area at Stage Three. Our proposals are illustrated on the large map at the back of this report.

Linslade and Southcott wards

142 The existing wards of Linslade and Southcott are located to the west of the River Ouzel and cover the area of Linslade, a town of some 9,000 electors that was located in the county of Buckinghamshire until relatively recently. Linslade ward is currently represented by three councillors, while Southcott ward is represented by two councillors. Under existing arrangements, Linslade ward has 10 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the current district average, and is projected to have 13 per cent fewer than average by 2005. Due to a substantial level of housing development since the last review, Southcott ward has 46 per cent more electors per councillor than the current district average and is projected to have 40 per cent more than average by 2005.

143 The Conservatives proposed that the current Linslade ward expand eastwards to include the part of Leighton Buzzard town, broadly to the west of North Street and north of West Street that currently lies in Beaudesert ward. They also proposed that the part of Linslade ward broadly to the west of numbers 10 and 37 Knaves Hill and including Rowley Furrows be transferred to

a revised three-member Southcott ward. They proposed that their revised Linslade ward be represented by three councillors. Under the Conservatives proposed council size of 50, Linslade and Southcott wards would have equal to and four per cent more electors per councillor than the district average (2 per cent fewer and equal to the district average by 2005).

144 The Liberal Democrats and Leighton-Linslade Town Council proposed that the eastern boundary of Linslade ward be retained, subject to the transfer of Vimy Road to their proposed All Saints ward (as detailed above). They proposed almost identical changes to the ward boundary between Linslade and Southcott as the Conservatives, although, under their proposals, a further 12 electors on the north side of Knaves Hill would be transferred to their revised Southcott ward. Under their proposals, a revised Linslade ward would be represented by two councillors and a revised Southcott ward would be represented by three councillors. Under our proposed council size of 50, Linslade and Southcott wards would have 5 per cent and 4 per cent more electors per councillor than the district average respectively (2 per cent more and equal to the district average by 2005).

145 The Labour Party had sought to avoid amalgamating parts of Leighton Buzzard district wards in Linslade ward, stating that there would be “immense public resistance” to such proposals. It proposed only a minor revision to the ward boundary between Linslade and Southcott wards. It proposed that Mowbury Drive and 58 electors from Soulbury Road be transferred from Southcott ward to a revised Linslade ward and that both wards be represented by three councillors. Under the Labour Party’s proposed council size of 52, Linslade and Southcott wards would both have 8 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the district average respectively. By 2005, Linslade and Southcott wards would have 11 per cent and 12 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the district average respectively.

146 We have carefully considered the representations received at Stage One and note the large measure of agreement with regard to Southcott ward. We are not persuaded to put forward the Conservatives’ proposals to transfer a substantial portion of the existing Beaudesert ward to a revised three-member Linslade ward. We note that the proposal would significantly breach the boundary between the towns of Linslade and Leighton Buzzard, formed by the River Ouzel, and therefore consider that it has insufficient regard to the statutory criteria.

147 We have not been persuaded to put forward the Labour Party’s scheme. We note that its proposals would provide six councillors for the two wards of Linslade and Southcott when this area is entitled to only five councillors under its proposed council size, leading to both of its proposed wards having an electoral variance of more than 10 per cent from the average.

148 We have given consideration to the proposals by the Liberal Democrats and Leighton-Linslade Town Council for a revised two-member Linslade ward. We consider that the Grand Union Canal would provide a strong, well defined ward boundary between their proposed Linslade and All Saints wards. We consider that Vimy Road, which is separated from the majority of Linslade by the Grand Union Canal is not an integral part of the town, being located on its eastern perimeter, and consider that their proposal to transfer this area to a revised two-member All Saints ward has some merit. However, we propose that the entire eastern boundary of our proposed Linslade ward be amended to follow the route of the Grand Union Canal, and

therefore be more closely tied to ground detail. This proposal will affect no electors other than those in Vimy Road.

149 We have considered the proposals by the Conservatives, Liberal Democrats and Leighton-Linslade Town Council to transfer some 600 electors from the Knaves Hill area of Linslade to a revised three-member Southcott ward. We consider that while the proposed ward boundary is somewhat arbitrary, the proposal would provide significantly improved electoral equality for both wards. We also note that our ability to consider alternative warding arrangements in this area are severely limited due to the location of the London to Birmingham railway line.

150 We consider that due to these limitations, and in the absence of alternative proposals that would provide more well defined ward boundaries and a similarly improved level of electoral equality, we propose to adopt these arrangements as part of our draft recommendations. We consider that the Conservatives' proposals would provide for a more well-defined ward boundary, and therefore propose to adopt their proposals as part of our draft recommendations. We propose a further amendment to the ward boundary to the north of Knaves Hill to follow field boundaries and Stoke Road in order that the boundary is tied to ground detail. These change would affect no electors.

151 Under our draft recommendations Linslade and Southcott wards would have 5 per cent and 4 per cent more electors per councillor than the district average respectively (2 per cent more and equal to the district average by 2005).

Electoral Cycle

152 We received five representations regarding the District Council's electoral cycle. The Conservatives, the Liberal Democrats and Leighton-Linslade Town Council proposed no change to the existing cycle of elections by thirds. As part of the Labour Party's submission, Houghton Regis Branch Labour Party also favoured the retention of elections by thirds. We note that South Bedfordshire District Council's Local Governance Overview & Scrutiny Committee also resolved to retain elections by thirds.

153 Councillor Reeve (Heath & Reach) supported a change to whole-council elections every four years. He argued that in areas of the district where three-member wards predominate, a growing sense of apathy had resulted in the steady decline in turnout for district council elections. He stated that frequent elections diminished the electorate's interest in the affairs of local government.

154 We have considered carefully all representations. At present, there appears to be a majority view that the present electoral cycle should be retained and we therefore propose no change to the current electoral cycle of elections by thirds for the District Council.

Conclusions

155 Having considered all the evidence and representations received during the initial stage of the review, we propose that:

- there should be a reduction in council size from 53 to 50;
- there should be 23 wards;
- the boundaries of 21 of the existing wards should be modified, resulting in a net reduction of two wards;
- elections should continue to be held by thirds.

156 Our draft recommendations would involve modifications to all but four of the existing wards in South Bedfordshire district, as summarised below:

- in the rural areas of the district, we propose to adopt the Conservatives' proposals, subject to the creation of a new three-member Caddington & Slip End ward in the south of the district.
- we propose putting forward our own proposals for Dunstable town. We propose that the area be represented by 15 councillors. Our proposals include a revised Watling ward and two-member Dunstable Central, Dunstable Downs and Downside wards. We propose no change to the existing Icknield and Northfields wards.
- we propose adopting Leighton-Linslade Town Council's proposals for the Houghton Regis area, subject to a minor boundary amendment. We propose that representation of the town be reduced from nine to seven councillors.
- we propose putting forward our own proposals for the Leighton-Linslade area. We propose that the area be represented by 15 councillors. We have recommended a revised Plantation ward, new two-member All Saints and Planets wards and a new three-member Grovebury ward containing the disused RAF Stanbridge base.

157 Figure 5 shows the impact of our draft recommendations on electoral equality, comparing them with the current arrangements, based on 2000 electorate figures and with forecast electorates for the year 2005.

Figure 5: Comparison of Current and Recommended Electoral Arrangements

	2000 electorate		2005 forecast electorate	
	Current arrangements	Draft recommendations	Current arrangements	Draft recommendations
Number of councillors	53	50	53	50
Number of wards	25	23	25	23
Average number of electors per councillor	1,620	1,717	1,690	1,792
Number of wards with a variance more than 10 per cent from the average	17	3	18	1
Number of wards with a variance more than 20 per cent from the average	11	1	10	0

158 As shown in Figure 5, our draft recommendations for South Bedfordshire District Council would result in a reduction in the number of wards varying by more than 10 per cent from the district average from 17 to three. By 2005 only one ward is forecast to vary by more than 10 per cent from the average for the district.

Draft Recommendation

South Bedfordshire District Council should comprise 50 councillors serving 23 wards, as detailed and named in Figures 1 and 2, and illustrated on Map 2 and on the large map inside the back cover. The Council should continue to hold elections by thirds.

Parish and Town Council Electoral Arrangements

159 In undertaking reviews of electoral arrangements, we are required to comply as far as possible with the provisions set out in Schedule 11 to the 1972 Act. The Schedule provides that if a parish is to be divided between different district wards it must also be divided into parish wards, so that each parish ward lies wholly within a single ward of the district. Accordingly, we propose consequential warding arrangements for the parishes of Billington, Dunstable, Houghton Regis and Leighton-Linslade to reflect the proposed district wards.

160 South Bedfordshire District Council made preliminary proposals on the parish warding arrangements for Billington parish. However, as outlined above, it made no formal submission relating to warding issues at Stage One. The Conservatives proposed that two wards be created. They proposed a new Billington Park ward consisting of the development of the same name which would be represented by five councillors. They proposed that the remaining rural part of the parish should form a new Old Billington parish ward represented by two parish councillors. South West Bedfordshire Villages Labour Party supported these proposals. As part of the District

Council’s own consultation exercise, Billington Parish Council was opposed to the initial District Council proposals to name the new urban ward of the parish Billington Park. It considered that retaining the name Billington in the ward title would cause confusion to local electors. It was also concerned about the distribution of parish councillors between the two proposed wards. It considered that the warding of the parish should be “preliminary to or concomitant with” the altering of the parish boundary between Billington and Leighton-Linslade.

161 We recognise the concerns of Billington Parish Council with regard to the distribution of councillors between the two proposed parish wards. We consider that reducing the number of parish councillors for the rural part of the parish to two would significantly affect representation. We also note that there is a consensus in favour of modifying the parish boundary, but we are unable to make such amendments as part of this review. Any revision to external ward boundaries would be a matter for the District Council to consider in a subsequent parish review. Any parish warding arrangements are therefore likely to be of a transitional nature and may be subject to change in the near future. We propose that Billington Parish be represented by 10 parish councillors, three more than at present and that five councillors be elected from the proposed Old Billington parish ward and five councillors from the proposed Billington Park parish ward. We consider Billington Park to be an acceptable name for the proposed parish ward that contains the RAF Stanbridge development site. We consider the ward names proposed by the District Council to accurately reflect the communities affected, and therefore propose to adopt them as part of our draft recommendations.

Draft Recommendation
Billington Parish Council should comprise 10 councillors, three more than at present, representing two wards: Billington Park parish ward (returning five councillors) and Old Billington parish ward (returning five councillors). The parish ward boundary of Billington Park ward should reflect the proposed district ward boundary in the area, as illustrated and named on the large map at the back of this report.

162 Dunstable Town Council is currently represented by 20 town councillors and is divided into five parish wards whose boundaries are coterminous with the district wards of the town. All five wards are currently represented by four town councillors each.

163 As part of our draft recommendations, we proposed substantial amendments to Dunstable Central, Priory and Watling district wards. We proposed the creation of three new two-member wards: Dunstable Downs, Dunstable Central and Downside wards, and three-member Watling, Icknield and Northfields district wards. We propose that town council ward boundaries be revised to reflect our draft recommendations for the town and that Dunstable Central, Dunstable Downs and Downside ward be represented by three town councillors each and that Watling, Icknield and Northfields town council wards be represented by four councillors each.

Draft Recommendation

Dunstable Town Council should comprise 21 councillors, one more than at present, representing six wards: Dunstable Central, Dunstable Downs and Downside town council wards, each returning three councillors, and Watling, Icknield and Northfields town council wards each returning four councillors. The boundary between the six town council wards should reflect the proposed district ward boundaries, as illustrated and named on the large map at the back of this report.

164 Houghton Regis Town Council is currently represented by 15 town councillors and is divided into three parish wards whose boundaries are coterminous with the district wards of the town. All three wards are currently represented by five town councillors each.

165 As part of our draft recommendations, we proposed amendments to all three district wards. We proposed the creation of a new three-member Houghton Hall ward, a new two-member Tithe Farm ward and a new two-member Parkside ward. We propose that the town council ward boundaries should be coterminous with district ward boundaries so as to reflect our draft recommendations for Houghton Regis. In the absence of any other proposal, we propose that Parkside and Tithe Farm town council wards be represented by four councillors each and Houghton Hall town council ward be represented by six town councillors.

Draft Recommendation

Houghton Regis Town Council should comprise 14 councillors, one fewer than at present, representing three wards: Parkside and Tithe Farm town council wards, each returning four councillors, and Houghton Hall town council ward returning six councillors. The boundary between the three town council wards should reflect the proposed district ward boundaries, as illustrated and named on the large map at the back of this report.

166 Leighton-Linslade Town Council is currently represented by 20 town councillors and is divided into five town council wards whose boundaries are coterminous with the district wards that have been utilised subsequent to the 1985 Parish Order. All five wards are currently represented by four councillors each.

167 As part of our draft recommendations, we proposed substantial amendments to all five district wards. We propose the creation of new two-member All Saints and Planets wards and a new three-member Grovebury ward which would also include part of Billington parish. We also propose revised three-member Plantation ward and Southcott ward, and a revised two-member Linslade ward. All Town Council wards would be coterminous with the proposed district wards except Grovebury town council ward which would reflect only that part of Leighton-Linslade town contained in Grovebury district ward. In the absence of any locally generated proposals, we propose that All Saints, Linslade, Grovebury and Planets town council wards be served by three councillors each, and that Plantation and Southcott town council wards be represented by four councillors each.

Draft Recommendation

Leighton-Linslade Town Council should comprise 20 councillors, as at present, representing six wards: All Saints, Grovebury, Linslade and Planets town council wards, each returning three councillors, and Plantation and Southcott town council wards each returning four councillors. The boundary between the six town council wards should reflect the proposed district ward boundaries, as illustrated and named on the large map at the back of this report.

168 We are not proposing any change to the electoral cycle of parish and town councils in the district.

Draft Recommendation

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

169 We have not finalised our conclusions on the electoral arrangements for South Bedfordshire and welcome comments from the District Council and others relating to the proposed ward boundaries, number of councillors, electoral cycle, ward names and parish and town council electoral arrangements. We will consider all the evidence submitted to us during the consultation period before preparing our final recommendations.

Map 2: The Commission's Draft Recommendations for South Bedfordshire

5 NEXT STEPS

170 We are putting forward draft recommendations on future electoral arrangements for consultation. We will take fully into account all representations received by 23 April 2001. Representations received after this date may not be taken into account. All representations will be available for public inspection by appointment at the offices of the Commission and the District Council, and a list of respondents will be available on request from the Commission after the end of the consultation period.

171 Views may be expressed by writing directly to us:

Review Manager
South Bedfordshire Review
Local Government Commission for England
Dolphyn Court
10/11 Great Turnstile
London WC1V 7JU

Fax: 020 7404 6142
E-mail: reviews@lgce.gov.uk
www.lgce.gov.uk

172 In the light of representations received, we will review our draft recommendations to consider whether they should be altered. As indicated earlier, it is therefore important that all interested parties let us have their views and evidence, whether or not they agree with our draft recommendations. We will then submit our final recommendations to the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions. After the publication of our final recommendations, all further correspondence should be sent to the Secretary of State, who cannot make an Order giving effect to our recommendations until six weeks after he receives them.

APPENDIX A

Draft Recommendations for South Bedfordshire: Detailed Mapping

The following map illustrates the proposed ward boundaries for South Bedfordshire district

The **large map** inserted in the back of the report illustrates the existing and proposed warding arrangements for the towns of Dunstable, Houghton Regis and Leighton Linlade.

Map A1: Draft Recommendations for South Bedfordshire: Key Map

APPENDIX B

Bedfordshire South Conservatives' Proposed Electoral Arrangements

Our draft recommendations detailed in Figures 1 and 2 differ from those put forward by the Conservatives in 11 wards, where their proposals were as follows:

Figure B1: The Conservatives' Proposals: Number of Councillors and Electors by Ward

Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2000)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2005)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
All Saints (in Leighton-Linslade)	3	3,526	1,175	-32	5,215	1,738	-3
Caddington	2	2,947	1,474	-14	3,252	1,626	-9
Dunstable Downs (in Dunstable)	3	5,207	1,736	1	5,430	1,810	-1
Houghton Hall (in Houghton Regis)	3	4,618	1,539	-10	5,136	1,712	-4
Leedon (in Leighton-Linslade)	3	5,570	1,857	8	5,576	1,859	4
Linslade (in Leighton-Linslade)	3	5,158	1,719	0	5,242	1,747	-2
Plantation (in Leighton-Linslade)	3	5,459	1,820	6	5,498	1,833	2
Priory (in Dunstable)	3	5,300	1,767	3	5,365	1,788	0
Slip End	1	1,886	1,886	10	1,925	1,925	7
Tithe Farm (in Houghton Regis)	2	3,750	1,875	9	3,752	1,876	5
Watling (in Dunstable)	3	5,330	1,777	3	5,373	1,791	0

Source: Electorate figures are based on those provided by South Bedfordshire District Council.

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

South Bedfordshire District Labour Party's Proposed Electoral Arrangements

Our draft recommendations detailed in Figures 1 and 2 differ from those put forward by the Labour Party in 15 wards, where its proposals were as follows:

Figure B2: The Labour Party's Proposals: Number of Councillors and Electors by Ward

Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2000)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2005)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
Beaundesert (in Leighton-Linslade)	3	4,884	1,628	-1	4,947	1,649	-4
Dunstable Central (in Dunstable)	3	5,189	1,730	5	5,412	1,804	5
Heath & Reach	1	2,200	2,200	33	2,207	2,207	28
Hockliffe	1	1,673	1,673	1	1,818	1,818	6
Houghton Hall (in Houghton Regis)	3	4,673	1,558	-6	5,136	1,712	-1
Leedon (in Leighton-Linslade)	3	5,191	1,730	5	5,202	1,734	1
Linslade (in Leighton-Linslade)	3	4,550	1,517	-8	4,617	1,539	-11
Marley Park (in Leighton-Linslade)	2	1,259	630	-62	2,876	1,438	-17
Parkside (in Houghton Regis)	2	3,570	1,785	8	3,625	1,813	5
Plantation (in Leighton-Linslade)	3	4,652	1,551	-6	4,717	1,572	-9
Priory (in Dunstable)	3	5,350	1,783	8	5,415	1,805	5
Southcott (in Leighton-Linslade)	3	4,537	1,512	-8	4,537	1,512	-12
Tithe Farm (in Houghton Regis)	2	3,750	1,875	14	3,752	1,876	9

Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2000)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2005)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
Toddington	2	3,488	1,744	6	3,503	1,752	2
Watling (in Dunstable)	3	5,348	1,783	8	5,391	1,797	4

Source: Electorate figures are based on those provided by South Bedfordshire District Council.

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

South Bedfordshire District Council Liberal Democrat Group's Proposed Electoral Arrangements

Our draft recommendations detailed in Figures 1 and 2 differ from those put forward by the Liberal Democrats in 19 wards, where their proposals were as follows:

Figure B3: The Liberal Democrats' Proposals: Number of Councillors and Electors by Ward

Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2000)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2005)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
All Saints (in Leighton-Linslade)	2	3,364	1,682	0	3,468	1,734	-1
Barton-le-Clay	3	5,235	1,745	4	5,454	1,818	3
Brewers (in Dunstable)	3	5,487	1,829	9	5,781	1,927	10
Brooklands (in Leighton-Linslade)	3	5,358	1,786	6	5,361	1,787	2
Caddington	3	5,506	1,835	9	5,817	1,939	10
Dunstable Central (in Dunstable)	3	4,985	1,662	-1	5,196	1,732	-1
Eaton Bray	2	3,949	1,975	17	3,958	1,979	13
Grove (in Leighton-Linslade)	3	3,141	1,047	-38	4,754	1,585	-10
Heath	1	1,688	1,688	0	1,705	1,705	-3
Hockliffe	1	1,485	1,485	-12	1,628	1,628	-7
Houghton Central (in Houghton Regis)	3	4,788	1,596	-5	4,790	1,597	-9
Houghton East (in Houghton Regis)	2	3,353	1,677	0	3,577	1,789	2
Houghton South (in Houghton Regis)	3	4,464	1,488	-12	4,768	1,589	-10
Linslade (in Leighton-Linslade)	2	3,599	1,800	7	3,639	1,820	4
Plantation (in Leighton-Linslade)	2	3,621	1,811	8	3,671	1,836	4
Priory (in Dunstable)	3	4,851	1,617	-4	4,905	1,635	-7
Slip End	1	1,886	1,886	12	1,925	1,925	10

Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2000)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2005)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
Southcott (in Leighton-Linslade)	3	5,372	1,791	6	5,377	1,792	2
Watling (in Dunstable)	3	4,972	1,657	-2	5,013	1,671	-5

Source: Electorate figures are based on those provided by South Bedfordshire District Council.

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

Leighton-Linslade Town Council's Proposed Electoral Arrangements

Our draft recommendations detailed in Figures 1 and 2 differ from those put forward by the Leighton-Linslade Town Council in 16 wards, where its proposals were as follows:

Figure B4: Leighton-Linslade Town Council's Proposals: Number of Councillors and Electors by Ward

Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2000)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2005)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
All Saints (in Leighton-Linslade)	2	3,364	1,682	-2	3,468	1,734	-3
Brooklands (in Leighton-Linslade)	3	5,358	1,786	4	5,361	1,787	0
Caddington	3	5,506	1,835	7	5,817	1,939	8
Dunstable Central (in Dunstable)	3	5,189	1,730	1	5,412	1,804	1
Eaton Bray	2	3,949	1,975	15	3,958	1,979	10
Grove (in Leighton-Linslade)	3	3,141	1,047	-39	4,754	1,585	-12
Heath	1	1,688	1,688	-2	1,705	1,705	-5
Hockliffe	1	1,485	1,485	-14	1,628	1,628	-9
Houghton East (in Houghton Regis)	2	3,570	1,785	4	3,570	1,785	0
Houghton South (in Houghton Regis)	3	4,852	1,617	-6	5,370	1,790	0
Linslade (in Leighton-Linslade)	2	3,599	1,800	5	3,639	1,820	2
Plantation (in Leighton-Linslade)	2	3,621	1,811	5	3,671	1,836	2
Priory (in Dunstable)	3	5,300	1,767	3	5,365	1,788	0
Slip End	1	1,886	1,886	10	1,925	1,925	7

Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2000)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2005)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
Southcott (in Leighton-Linslade)	3	5,372	1,791	4	5,377	1,792	0
Watling (in Dunstable)	3	5,348	1,783	4	5,391	1,797	0

Source: Electorate figures are based on those provided by South Bedfordshire District Council.

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

APPENDIX C

The Statutory Provisions

Local Government Act 1992: the Commission's Role

1 Section 13(2) of the Local Government Act 1992 places a duty on the Commission to undertake periodic electoral reviews of each principal local authority area in England, and to make recommendations to the Secretary of State. Section 13(3) provides that, so far as reasonably practicable, the first such review of any area should be undertaken not less than 10 years, and not more than 15 years, after this Commission's predecessor, the Local Government Boundary Commission (LGBC), submitted an initial electoral review report on the county within which that area, or the larger part of the area, was located. This timetable applies to districts within shire and metropolitan counties, although not to South Yorkshire and Tyne and Wear¹. Nor does the timetable apply to London boroughs; the 1992 Act is silent on the timing of periodic electoral reviews in Greater London. Nevertheless, these areas will be included in the Commission's review programme. The Commission has no power to review the electoral arrangements of the City of London.

2 Under section 13(5) of the 1992 Act, the Commission is required to make recommendations to the Secretary of State for any changes to the electoral arrangements within the areas of English principal authorities as appear desirable to it, having regard to the need to:

- (a) reflect the identities and interests of local communities; and
- (b) secure effective and convenient local government.

3 In reporting to the Secretary of State, the Commission may make recommendations for such changes to electoral arrangements as are specified in section 14(4) of the 1992 Act. In relation to principal authorities, these are:

- the total number of councillors to be elected to the council;
- the number and boundaries of electoral areas (wards or divisions);
- the number of councillors to be elected for each electoral area, and the years in which they are to be elected; and
- the name of any electoral area.

4 Unlike the LGBC, the Commission may also make recommendations for changes in respect of electoral arrangements within parish and town council areas. Accordingly, in relation to parish

¹ The Local Government Boundary Commission did not submit reports on the counties of South Yorkshire and Tyne and Wear.

or town councils within a principal authority's area, the Commission may make recommendations relating to:

- the number of councillors;
- the need for parish wards;
- the number and boundaries of any such wards;
- the number of councillors to be elected for any such ward or, in the case of a common parish, for each parish; and
- the name of any such ward.

5 In conducting the review, section 27 of the 1992 Act requires the Commission to comply, so far as is practicable, with the rules given in Schedule 11 to the Local Government Act 1972 for the conduct of electoral reviews.

Local Government Act 1972: Rules to be Observed in Considering Electoral Arrangements

6 By virtue of section 27 of the Local Government Act 1992, in undertaking a review of electoral arrangements the Commission is required to comply so far as is reasonably practicable with the rules set out in Schedule 11 to the 1972 Act. For ease of reference, those provisions of Schedule 11 which are relevant to this review are set out below.

7 In relation to shire districts:

Having regard to any changes in the number or distribution of the local government electors of the district likely to take place within the period of five years immediately following the consideration (by the Secretary of State or the Commission):

- (a) the ratio of the number of local government electors to the number of councillors to be elected shall be, as nearly as may be, the same in every ward in the district;
- (b) in a district every ward of a parish council shall lie wholly within a single ward of the district;
- (c) in a district every parish which is not divided into parish wards shall lie wholly within a single ward of the district.

8 The Schedule also provides that, subject to (a)–(c) above, regard should be had to:

- (d) the desirability of fixing ward boundaries which are and will remain easily identifiable; and
- (e) any local ties which would be broken by the fixing of any particular ward boundary.

9 The Schedule provides that, in considering whether a parish should be divided into wards, regard shall be had to whether:

- (f) the number or distribution of electors in the parish is such as to make a single election of parish councillors impracticable or inconvenient; and
- (g) it is desirable that any area or areas of the parish should be separately represented on the parish council.

4 Where it is decided to divide any such parish into parish wards, in considering the size and boundaries of the wards and fixing the number of parish councillors to be elected for each ward, regard shall be had to:

- (h) any change in the number or distribution of electors of the parish which is likely to take place within the period of five years immediately following the consideration;
- (i) the desirability of fixing boundaries which are and will remain easily identifiable; and
- (j) any local ties which will be broken by the fixing of any particular boundaries.

11 Where it is decided not to divide the parish into parish wards, in fixing the number of councillors to be elected for each parish regard shall be had to the number and distribution of electors of the parish and any change which is likely to take place within the period of five years immediately following the fixing of the number of parish councillors.

APPENDIX D

Code of Practice on Written Consultation

1 The Cabinet Office's November 2000 *Code of Practice on Written Consultation*, (www.cabinet-office.gov.uk/servicefirst/index/consultation.htm), requires all Government Departments and Agencies to adhere to certain criteria, set out below, on the conduct of public consultations. Non-Departmental Public Bodies, such as the Local Government Commission, are encouraged to follow the Code.

2 The Code of Practice applies to consultation documents published after 1 January 2001, which should reproduce the criteria, give explanations of any departures, and confirm that the criteria have otherwise been followed.

Commission compliance with Code criteria

Criteria	Compliance/departure
Timing of consultation should be built into the planning process for a policy (including legislation) or service from the start, so that it has the best prospect of improving the proposals concerned, and so that sufficient time is left for it at each stage.	The Commission complies with this requirement.
It should be clear who is being consulted, about what questions, in what timescale and for what purpose.	The Commission complies with this requirement.
A consultation document should be as simple and concise as possible. It should include a summary, in two pages at most, of the main questions it seeks views on. It should make it as easy as possible for readers to respond, make contact or complain.	The Commission complies with this requirement.
Documents should be made widely available, with the fullest use of electronic means (though not to the exclusion of others), and effectively drawn to the attention of all interested groups and individuals.	The Commission complies with this requirement.
Sufficient time should be allowed for considered responses from all groups with an interest. Twelve weeks should be the standard minimum period for a consultation	The Commission consults on draft recommendations for a minimum of eight weeks, but may extend the period if consultations take place over holiday periods.
Responses should be carefully and open-mindedly analysed, and the results made widely available, with an account of the views expressed, and reasons for decisions finally taken.	The Commission complies with this requirement.
Departments should monitor and evaluate consultations, designating a consultation coordinator who will ensure the lessons are disseminated.	The Commission complies with this requirement.

