

Final recommendations on the
future electoral arrangements
for Basildon in Essex

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

November 2000

LOCAL GOVERNMENT COMMISSION FOR ENGLAND

This report sets out the Commission's final recommendations on the electoral arrangements for the district of Basildon in Essex.

Members of the Commission are:

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A large map illustrating the proposed ward boundaries for Basildon District is inserted inside the back cover of the report.



Local Government Commission for England

28 November 2000

Dear Secretary of State

On 30 November 1999 the Commission began a periodic electoral review of Basildon under the Local Government Act 1992. We published our draft recommendations in June 2000 and undertook an 11 week period of consultation.

We have now prepared our final recommendations in the light of the consultation. We have substantially confirmed our draft recommendations, although one modification has been made (see paragraph 105–106) in the light of further evidence. This report sets out our final recommendations for changes to electoral arrangements in Basildon.

We recommend that Basildon District Council should be served by 42 councillors representing 16 wards, and that changes should be made to ward boundaries in order to improve electoral equality, having regard to the statutory criteria. We recommend that the Council should continue to hold elections by thirds.

The Local Government Act 2000 contains provisions relating to changes to local authority electoral arrangements. However, until such time as Orders are made implementing those arrangements we are obliged to conduct our work in accordance with current legislation, and to continue our current approach to periodic electoral reviews.

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

Yours sincerely

PROFESSOR MALCOLM GRANT
Chairman

SUMMARY

The Commission began a review of Basildon on 30 November 1999. We published our draft recommendations for electoral arrangements on 20 June 2000, after which we undertook an 11 week period of consultation.

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

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

- **in eight of the 14 wards the number of electors represented by each councillor varies by more than 10 per cent from the average for the district and two wards vary by more than 20 per cent from the average;**
- **by 2004 electoral equality 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 10 wards and by more than 20 per cent in two wards.**

Our main final recommendations for future electoral arrangements (Figures 1 and 2 and paragraphs 105-106) are that:

- **Basildon District Council should have 42 councillors, the same as at present;**
- **there should be 16 wards, instead of 14 as at present;**
- **the boundaries of 12 of the existing wards should be modified, resulting in a net increase of two, and two wards should retain their existing boundaries;**
- **elections should continue to take place by thirds.**

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

- **In 15 of the proposed 16 wards the number of electors per councillor would vary by no more than 10 per cent from the district average.**
- **This improved level of electoral equality is forecast to continue, with the number of electors per councillor in all 16 wards expected to vary by no more than 10 per cent from the average for the district by 2004.**

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

- **revised warding arrangements and the redistribution of councillors for Billericay town.**

All further correspondence on these recommendations and the matters discussed in this report should be addressed to the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, who will not make an order implementing the Commission's recommendations before 9 January 2001:

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

Figure 1: The Commission's Final Recommendations: Summary

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Constituent areas
1	Billericay East	3	<i>Unchanged</i> (Billericay North East and Billericay South East wards of Billericay town)
2	Billericay West	3	Billericay West ward (part – Billericay North ward of Billericay town and Billericay North West ward (part) of Billericay town)
3	Burstead	3	Billericay West ward (part – Billericay North West ward (part) of Billericay Town); Burstead ward (part – the parishes of Great Burstead & South Green and Little Burstead, and Billericay South West ward of Billericay town)
4	Crouch	2	Burstead ward (part – the parishes of Ramsden Bellhouse and Ramsden Crays); Laindon ward (part); Wickford South ward (part)
5	Fryerns (in Basildon New Town)	3	Fryerns Central ward (part); Fryerns East ward (part)
6	Laindon Park (in Basildon New Town)	3	Laindon ward (part); Lee Chapel North ward (part)
7	Langdon Hills (in Basildon New Town)	2	Langdon Hills ward (part); Nethermayne ward (part)
8	Lee Chapel North (in Basildon New Town)	3	Lee Chapel North ward (part); Langdon Hills ward (part)
9	Nethermayne (in Basildon New Town)	3	Nethermayne ward (part); Vange ward (part)
10	Pitsea North West (in Basildon New Town)	3	Pitsea East ward (part); Pitsea West ward (part)
11	Pitsea South East (in Basildon New Town)	3	Pitsea East ward (part); Pitsea West ward (part); Vange ward (part)
12	St Martin's (in Basildon New Town)	2	Fryerns Central ward (part); Fryerns East ward (part)
13	Vange (in Basildon New Town)	2	Fryerns East ward (part); Pitsea West ward (part); Vange ward (part)
14	Wickford Castledon	2	Wickford South ward (part)
15	Wickford North	3	<i>Unchanged</i>
16	Wickford Park	2	Wickford South ward (part)

Notes: 1 The district contains five parishes: Billericay, Great Burstead & South Green, Little Burstead, Ramsden Bellhouse and Ramsden Crays. The rest of the district is not parished.

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

Figure 2: The Commission's Final Recommendations for Basildon

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (1999)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2004)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
1	Billericay East	3	8,966	2,989	-1	9,329	3,110	0
2	Billericay West	3	9,390	3,130	4	9,520	3,173	2
3	Burstead	3	8,523	2,841	-6	8,577	2,859	-8
4	Crouch	2	5,891	2,946	-2	6,278	3,139	1
5	Fryerns (in Basildon New Town)	3	9,591	3,197	6	9,857	3,286	6
6	Laindon Park (in Basildon New Town)	3	8,482	2,827	-6	8,801	2,934	-6
7	Langdon Hills (in Basildon New Town)	2	6,535	3,268	9	6,637	3,319	7
8	Lee Chapel North (in Basildon New Town)	3	8,749	2,916	-3	9,199	3,066	-2
9	Nethermayne (in Basildon New Town)	3	8,956	2,985	-1	8,959	2,986	-4
10	Pitsea North West (in Basildon New Town)	3	9,296	3,099	3	9,377	3,126	0
11	Pitsea South East (in Basildon New Town)	3	8,962	2,987	-1	9,167	3,056	-2
12	St Martin's (in Basildon New Town)	2	6,015	3,008	0	6,021	3,011	-3
13	Vange (in Basildon New Town)	2	6,221	3,111	3	6,567	3,284	5
14	Wickford Castledon	2	6,250	3,125	4	6,328	3,164	2
15	Wickford North	3	9,319	3,106	3	9,491	3,164	2
16	Wickford Park	2	5,218	2,609	-13	6,648	3,324	7
	Totals	42	126,364	-	-	130,756	-	-
	Averages	-	-	3,009	-	-	3,113	-

Source: Electorate figures are based on information provided by Basildon 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 final recommendations on the electoral arrangements for the district of Basildon in Essex. We have now reviewed the 12 two-tier districts in Essex 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 was our first review of the electoral arrangements of Basildon. The last such review was undertaken by our predecessor, the Local Government Boundary Commission (LGBC), which reported to the Secretary of State in August 1977 (Report No. 231). The electoral arrangements of Essex County Council were last reviewed in November 1980 (Report No. 401). We completed a directed electoral review of Thurrock in 1999 and a periodic electoral review of Southend-on-Sea in 1999. We expect to undertake a periodic electoral review of Thurrock, commencing this year and a review of the County Council's electoral arrangements in 2002.

3 In undertaking these reviews, we have had 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.

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 have also had regard to our *Guidance and Procedural Advice for Local Authorities and Other Interested Parties* (third edition published in October 1999), which 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, so far as practicable, 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 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 areas in sparsely populated rural areas, and that single-member wards (and electoral divisions) would continue in many authorities.

10 Following publication of the White Paper, we advised all authorities in our 1999/00 PER programme, including the Essex districts, that the Commission would continue to maintain its current approach to PERs as set out in the October 1999 *Guidance*. Nevertheless, we considered that local authorities and other interested parties might wish to have regard to the Secretary of State's intentions and legislative proposals in formulating electoral schemes as part of PERs of their areas. 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 Orders 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 the two-tier district areas, and our current *Guidance*.

11 The review was in four stages. Stage One began on 30 November 1999, when we wrote to Basildon District Council inviting proposals for future electoral arrangements. We also notified Essex County Council, Essex Police Authority, the local authority associations, Essex Local Council's Association, parish and town councils in the district, the Members of Parliament with constituency interests in the district and 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 28 February 2000. At Stage Two we considered all the representations received during Stage One and prepared our draft recommendations.

12 Stage Three began on 20 June 2000 with the publication of our report, *Draft Recommendations on the future electoral arrangements for Basildon in Essex*, and ended on 4 September 2000. At Stage Three, comments were sought on our preliminary conclusions. Finally, during Stage Four, we considered our draft recommendations in the light of the Stage Three consultation and now publish our final recommendations

2 CURRENT ELECTORAL ARRANGEMENTS

13 The district of Basildon contains a number of diverse communities. The development of Basildon New Town started in 1949, and it now comprises around 60 per cent of the district's electorate. The A127 Southend Arterial Road and the London Fenchurch Street to Shoeburyness and London Liverpool Street to Southend Victoria railway lines traverse the district. The area to the north of the A127 Southend Arterial Road contains a number of established communities, the largest of which are Billericay and Wickford, together with open countryside. The district contains five town and parish councils, but Basildon New Town itself is unparished.

14 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'.

15 The electorate of the district is 126,364 (February 1999). The Council presently has 42 members who are elected from 14 wards, nine of which cover Basildon New Town. All 14 wards are each represented by three councillors. The Council is elected by thirds.

16 Since the last electoral review there has been an increase in the electorate in Basildon district, with around 15 per cent more electors than two decades ago as a result of new housing development. The most notable increases have been in Laindon and Pitsea East wards, with approximately 5,500 more electors in each ward than 20 years ago.

17 At present, each councillor represents an average of 3,009 electors, which the District Council forecasts will increase to 3,113 by the year 2004 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 eight of the 14 wards varies by more than 10 per cent from the district average, and in two wards by more than 20 per cent. The worst imbalance is in Wickford South ward where each of the three councillors represents 33 per cent more electors than the district average.

Map 1: Existing Wards in Basildon

Figure 3: Existing Electoral Arrangements

Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (1999)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average (%)	Electorate (2004)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average (%)
1 Billericay East	3	8,966	2,989	-1	9,329	3,110	0
2 Billericay West	3	10,665	3,555	18	10,795	3,598	16
3 Burstead	3	8,816	2,939	-2	8,888	2,963	-5
4 Fryerns Central (in Basildon New Town)	3	8,030	2,677	-11	8,238	2,746	-12
5 Fryerns East (in Basildon New Town)	3	7,613	2,538	-16	7,900	2,633	-15
6 Laindon (in Basildon New Town)	3	9,923	3,308	10	10,484	3,495	12
7 Langdon Hills (in Basildon New Town)	3	9,764	3,255	8	10,308	3,436	10
8 Lee Chapel North (in Basildon New Town)	3	7,566	2,522	-16	7,695	2,565	-18
9 Nethermayne (in Basildon New Town)	3	6,934	2,311	-23	6,939	2,313	-26
10 Pitsea East (in Basildon New Town)	3	10,585	3,528	17	10,853	3,618	16
11 Pitsea West (in Basildon New Town)	3	8,277	2,759	-8	8,313	2,771	-11
12 Vange (in Basildon New Town)	3	7,908	2,636	-12	8,013	2,671	-14
13 Wickford North	3	9,319	3,106	3	9,491	3,164	2
14 Wickford South	3	11,998	3,999	33	13,510	4,503	45
Totals	42	126,364	-	-	130,756	-	-
Averages	-	-	3,009	-	-	3,113	-

Source: Electorate figures are based on information provided by Basildon 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 1999, electors in Fryerns Central ward were relatively over-represented by 11 per cent, while electors in Billericay West ward were relatively under-represented by 18 per cent. Figures have been rounded to the nearest whole number.

3 DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS

18 During Stage One we received eight representations, including district-wide schemes from Basildon District Council, Billericay Branch Liberal Democrats and a local resident, Mr James. Three parish and town councils and two other local residents also made submissions. In the light of these representations and evidence available to us, we reached preliminary conclusions which were set out in our report, *Draft recommendations on the future electoral arrangements for Basildon in Essex*.

19 Our draft recommendations were based on the District Council's proposals. These achieved a substantial improvement in electoral equality, and provided a pattern of six two-member wards and 10 three-member wards. However, we moved away from the District Council's scheme in seven areas, affecting nine wards, using options generated by a local resident, Mr James, together with some of our own proposals. We proposed that:

- Basildon District Council should continue to be served by 42 councillors, as at present, representing 16 wards, two more than at present;
- the boundaries of 12 of the existing wards should be modified, while two wards should retain their existing boundaries;
- there should be new warding arrangements and a redistribution of councillors for Billericay Town Council.

Draft Recommendation

Basildon District Council should comprise 42 councillors, serving 16 wards. The Council should continue to hold elections by thirds.

20 Our proposals would have resulted in significant improvements in electoral equality, with the number of electors per councillor in 15 of the 16 wards varying by no more than 10 per cent from the district average. This level of electoral equality was forecast to improve further, with no ward varying by more than 10 per cent from the average in 2004.

4 RESPONSES TO CONSULTATION

21 During the consultation on our draft recommendations report, nine representations were received. A list of all respondents is available on request from the Commission. All representations may be inspected at the offices of Basildon District Council and the Commission.

Basildon District Council

22 The District Council supported our draft recommendations in relation to council size and supported our proposed warding arrangements. It suggested that the proposed Lee Chapel ward be renamed Lee Chapel North, in order to more accurately identify the area geographically.

Basildon District Council Conservative Group

23 Basildon District Council Conservative Group ('the Conservative Group') indicated that they considered that the Commission's proposals for the part of Basildon District to the north of the A127 Southend Arterial Road were broadly acceptable. However, they requested that the Commission reconsider the Council's Stage One proposals for the area to the south of the A127 (Basildon New Town).

Basildon Conservative Association

24 Basildon Conservative Association expressed concern that our draft recommendations failed to give sufficient weight to the issue of community identities. They proposed no change to the Commission's proposals for the area to the north of the A127, but proposed alternative warding arrangements for eight of the ten proposed wards in the Basildon New Town area of the district. They proposed three new two-member wards – Laindon West, Laindon East and Lee Chapel North – to replace our proposed three-member Laindon Park and Lee Chapel wards. They also proposed the retention of the existing Vange ward, and changes to our proposed Pitsea South East, Nethermayne, Fryerns and St Martin's wards.

25 With regard to ward names, the Association proposed that St Martin's ward be renamed Central ward, that the proposed Pitsea South East ward be renamed 'Pitsea', and that the proposed Pitsea North West ward be renamed 'Nevendon' to reflect the fact that the old village of Pitsea would no longer encroach upon its borders.

Parish and Town Councils

26 We received three submissions from parish and town councils. Billericay Town Council, and Ramsden Bellhouse and Ramsden Crays parish councils all expressed support for our proposals.

Other Representations

27 A further three representations were received in response to our draft recommendations from local residents. Mr James supported our draft recommendations in their entirety. In particular, he

noted that the Commission had based its draft recommendations for new Lee Chapel, Langdon Hills and Nethermayne wards on his Stage One proposals. One local resident argued that the proposals had paid insufficient regard to historically defined areas and parliamentary constituency boundaries. He argued that the A127 Southend Arterial Road does not act as a “natural barrier” between the north and south of the district because there were several evenly distributed crossing points along its length, and community boundaries straddle it. He further argued that the district council has too many councillors at present, and suggested reducing the council size to 39 or 36, largely retaining existing wards. In particular, he argued that Laindon ward should remain intact as a three-member ward. Another resident opposed our draft recommendations for Vange ward, and supported the retention of the existing ward.

5 ANALYSIS AND FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS

28 As described earlier, our prime objective in considering the most appropriate electoral arrangements for Basildon 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 to 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”.

29 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 ensuing five years. We also must have regard to the desirability of fixing identifiable boundaries and to maintaining local ties which might otherwise be broken.

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

31 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 also be had to five-year forecasts of change in electorates.

Electorate Forecasts

32 At Stage One, the District Council submitted electorate forecasts for the year 2004, projecting an increase in the electorate of some 3 per cent from 126,364 to 130,756 over the five-year period from 1999 to 2004. It expected most of the growth to be in Wickford South ward, which it projected would have an additional 1,500 electors by 2004. 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 was obtained. In our draft recommendations report, we accepted that forecasting electorates is an inexact science and, having given consideration to the District Council’s figures, were content that they represented the best estimates that could reasonably be made at the time.

33 We received no comments on the Council’s electorate forecasts during Stage Three, and remain satisfied that they represent the best estimates presently available.

Council Size

34 As already explained, the Commission’s starting point is to assume that the current council size facilitates convenient and effective local government, although we are willing to carefully look at arguments why this might not be the case.

35 Basildon District Council presently has 42 councillors. At Stage One, the District Council, the Liberal Democrats and Mr James proposed that the current council size should be retained. However, one local resident proposed a council of 28 members, with each ward being represented by one fewer councillor than at present. In addition, the District Council noted that the Billericay and Wickford Area Committees had expressed disappointment that the District Council had not proposed that the number of councillors representing the district should be “significantly reduced”.

36 In our draft recommendations report, we considered the size and distribution of the electorate, the geography and other characteristics of the area, together with the representations received, and concluded that the achievement of electoral equality and the statutory criteria would best be met by the retention of a council of 42 members.

37 At Stage Three, one local resident advocated a reduction in council size from 42 to either 39 or 36 and provided an outline scheme for consideration. His proposals were based on largely retaining the existing wards with a reduction in councillors for Basildon New Town. He did not, however, make specific detailed proposals for this area.

38 The District Council, Mr James and three parish and town councils supported our draft recommendations in their entirety, although they made no specific comments on the issue of council size. At Stage Three, Basildon Conservative Association, and the Conservative Group, also proposed alternative proposals based on a council size of 42. Accordingly, we remain persuaded that the balance of evidence supports the retention of a council comprising 42 members, which we consider would achieve the best balance between the number of members required to facilitate effective and convenient local government, while reflecting the identities and interests of local communities. We have therefore decided to confirm our draft recommendation for a council size of 42 members as final.

Electoral Arrangements

39 As set out in our draft recommendations report, we carefully considered all the representations received at Stage One, including the district-wide schemes from the District Council, Billericay Branch Liberal Democrats, and Mr James. From these representations, some considerations emerged which helped to inform us when preparing our draft recommendations.

40 In view of the degree of consensus behind large elements of the Council’s proposals, and the consultation exercise which it undertook with interested parties, our draft recommendations were substantially based on the District Council’s scheme. We considered that this scheme would provide a better balance between electoral, equality and the statutory criteria than the current arrangements. However, to improve electoral equality further and having regard to local community interests and identities, we decided to move away from the District Council’s

proposals in the south of the district, where we based our draft recommendations on Mr James' proposal.

41 We examined the proposals put forward by two local residents to retain the existing ward boundaries but modify the number of councillors representing each ward. We were not persuaded that this approach would address current levels of electoral inequality, and we therefore discounted these proposals from our considerations.

42 We have reviewed our draft recommendations in the light of further evidence and the representations received during Stage Three. We note that our draft recommendations received a degree of local support and we propose that our draft recommendations should be substantially endorsed. For district warding purposes, the following areas, based on existing wards, are considered in turn:

- (a) Billericay East, Billericay West and Burstead wards;
- (b) Wickford North and Wickford South wards;
- (c) Fryerns Central and Fryerns East wards;
- (d) Laindon, Langdon Hills, Lee Chapel North, Nethermayne and Vange wards;
- (e) Pitsea East and Pitsea West wards.

43 Details of our final 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.

Billericay East, Billericay West and Burstead wards

44 The three-member wards of Billericay East, Billericay West and Burstead are all situated to the north of the A127 Southend Arterial Road. Billericay East ward comprises the two town council wards of Billericay North East and Billericay South East, while Billericay West ward comprises the town council wards of Billericay North and Billericay North West. Burstead ward contains Billericay South West town council ward and the parishes of Great Burstead & South Green, Little Burstead, Ramsden Bellhouse and Ramsden Crays. The town of Billericay and the adjoining Burstead community form the second largest settlement in the district. Under current arrangements, Billericay East and Billericay West wards have 1 per cent fewer and 18 per cent more electors per councillor than the district average respectively (and equal to the average and 16 per cent more respectively by 2004). Burstead ward currently has 2 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the average, and is projected to have 5 per cent fewer in 2004.

45 At Stage One the District Council proposed that Billericay East ward should remain unchanged. It proposed that Billericay West ward should be substantially retained, with the area to the south of the London Liverpool Street to Southend Victoria railway line and to the east of Western Road being transferred to a revised three-member Burstead ward. The revised Burstead ward would also include the parishes of Great Burstead & South Green and Little Burstead, but the parishes of Ramsden Bellhouse and Ramsden Crays would be combined with the part of Laindon ward to the north of the A127 Southend Arterial Road to form a new two-member Crouch ward. The District Council suggested that the part of Wickford South ward bounded by the A129 London Road, Sugden Avenue and Winton Avenue, together with the Borwick Lane

area in Wickford South ward should also be included in the new Crouch ward. It proposed that the rest of Laindon ward should be combined with part of Lee Chapel North ward to form a new Laindon Park ward, as discussed below.

46 Under the District Council's proposal, Billericay East, Burstead and Crouch wards would initially have 1 per cent, 6 per cent and 4 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the district average respectively, while Billericay West ward would have 4 per cent more electors per councillor than the average. This level of electoral equality is not projected to change significantly over the next five years.

47 The Liberal Democrats and Mr James supported the District Council's proposals for this area, while Billericay Town Council supported its proposals for Billericay. Great Burstead & South Green Parish Council supported the District Council's proposed Burstead ward, and Ramsden Bellhouse Parish Council supported its proposed Crouch ward.

48 In our draft recommendations report, we considered that the District Council's proposed warding arrangements for this area would achieve a reasonable level of electoral equality, have a degree of local support and reflect the statutory criteria well. In particular, we noted that they would utilise strong and easily identifiable boundaries, such as the A127 Southend Arterial Road, the London Liverpool Street to Southend Victoria railway line and the River Crouch.

49 While we noted that the proposed Crouch ward would cover a relatively large geographical area, we were unable to find alternative electoral arrangements that would provide a better balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria. We considered that the District Council's proposal to include Vine Cottages and Doeshill Farm in the proposed Crouch ward would better reflect the interests and identities of communities than the current arrangements, as these properties have no direct communication links with Wickford. In addition, we noted that the District Council's proposals in this area have achieved a degree of local support.

50 However, we considered that the District Council's proposed boundary between its proposed Crouch and Wickford Castledon wards could be made stronger and more easily identifiable. We noted that under its proposal, Ramsden View Road and the south side of the A129 London Road between Woolshot's Farm and Oak Chase would be separated by fields from the rest of the District Council's proposed Wickford Castledon ward. We therefore proposed that the area to the west of Oak Chase, together with the area west of the track adjoining 196 London Road, should be included in the new Crouch ward. We were otherwise content to endorse the District Council's proposals for this area, subject to this minor modification.

51 At Stage Three, the District Council and Mr James supported our proposals for this area. Three parish and town councils – Billericay Town Council and Ramsden Bellhouse and Ramsden Crays parish councils – also expressed support for our draft recommendations in their own areas.

52 Basildon Conservative Association supported our proposals for the area to the north of the A127 Southend Arterial Road. The Conservative Group also supported our draft recommendations for the area north of the A127 Southend Arterial Road. A local resident strongly opposed the transfer of the Laindon High Road North and Noaks Bridge areas to the new

Crouch ward. He argued that the A127 Southend Arterial Road does not provide a clearly defined natural barrier on which to base ward boundaries and that communities straddle it.

53 Having carefully considered the representations received, we have not been persuaded to depart from our draft recommendations for the Billericay and Burstead areas. We consider that our proposals would provide the best possible balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria. We note that there has been general support expressed for these arrangements with only one submission opposing our proposals for this area.

54 We remain persuaded that the A127 Southend Arterial Road provides an acceptable natural barrier on which to base our warding arrangements, and we are not persuaded that its use would divide communities. Consequently, we are content to endorse our draft recommendations for Billericay East, Billericay West, Burstead and Crouch wards as final. (Our final recommendations for the part of Laindon ward to the south of the A127 are detailed below).

55 Under our final recommendations, Billericay East, Burstead and Crouch wards would have 1 per cent, 6 per cent and 2 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the district average respectively, while Billericay West ward would have 4 per cent more electors per councillor than the average. This level of electoral equality is not projected to change significantly over the next five years.

Wickford North and Wickford South wards

56 The existing three-member Wickford North and Wickford South wards cover Wickford town, which is the third largest settlement in the district. Under current arrangements, Wickford North and Wickford South wards have 3 per cent and 33 per cent more electors per councillor than the district average respectively. By 2004, it is projected that they will have 2 per cent and 45 per cent more than the average respectively.

57 At Stage One the District Council proposed retaining the existing three-member Wickford North ward. In order to provide an improved level of electoral equality, it also proposed that Wickford South ward should be divided into two two-member wards. It proposed that a new two-member Wickford Castledon ward should comprise the part of Wickford South ward to the west of the A132, less the area bounded by Park Drive and Nevendon Road, which would form part of a new two-member Wickford Park ward, together with the rest of Wickford South ward. It also proposed that the area bounded by the A129 London Road, Sugden Avenue and Winton Avenue should be combined with the parishes of Ramsden Bellhouse and Ramsden Crays in a new Crouch ward.

58 The Liberal Democrats supported the District Council's proposed ward boundaries in this area, but suggested that the District Council's proposed Wickford Castledon and Wickford Park wards be renamed Wickford South West and Wickford South East respectively. Mr James supported the District Council's proposed Wickford North ward, and supported its proposal that the existing Wickford South ward should be replaced by two two-member wards. However, he argued that the District Council's proposed boundary between Wickford Castledon and Wickford Park wards did not equitably allocate the new development between wards, although he did not

specify an alternative boundary. He expressed concern that, under the District Council's proposal, the level of under-representation in Wickford Park ward would continue to increase.

59 In our draft recommendations report, we were content that the District Council's proposed warding arrangements would provide a reasonable balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria, and enjoy a measure of local support. While we noted Mr James' concerns regarding future under-representation in the proposed Wickford Park ward, we considered that the District Council's proposal achieved a reasonable balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria over the five-year period, and would have clear boundaries.

60 However, we proposed modifying the District Council's suggested boundary between the new Crouch and Wickford Castledon wards. We proposed that the area to the west of Oak Chase and the track adjoining 196 London Road should be included in the new Crouch ward, to utilise a stronger boundary. In particular, we noted that properties on the south of London Road and to the west of Oak Chase would otherwise be divided from the proposed Wickford Castledon ward by agricultural land.

61 At Stage Three, the District Council and Mr James supported our draft recommendations for this area in their entirety, while Basildon Conservative Association and the Conservative Group accepted our proposals. One resident proposed merging the current Wickford South ward with Burstead ward to create a six-member ward, or dividing the two wards to form two three-member wards as the two areas have an affinity with each other.

62 Having carefully considered the representations received, we are convinced that our proposals provide the best prospect of improving electoral equality in the area, and note that the District Council, Basildon Conservative Association, the Conservative Group, and Mr James have all endorsed our proposals for the Wickford area. We are therefore content to endorse our draft recommendations for Wickford Castledon, Wickford North and Wickford Park wards as final.

63 Under our final recommendations, Wickford Castledon and Wickford North wards would have 4 per cent and 3 per cent more electors per councillor than the district average, while Wickford Park ward would have 13 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the average. By 2004, Wickford Castledon and Wickford North wards would each have 2 per cent more electors per councillor than the district average. The level of electoral equality in Wickford Park ward would improve significantly over the next five years due to housing development, with the number of electors per councillor projected to improve to 7 per cent more than the average by 2004.

Fryerns Central and Fryerns East wards

64 The three-member Fryerns Central and Fryerns East wards are situated in the heart of Basildon New Town. Both wards contain well-established residential areas built by the Basildon Development Corporation. Under current arrangements, Fryerns Central and Fryerns East wards have 11 per cent and 16 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the district average (12 per cent and 15 per cent fewer respectively by 2004).

65 At Stage One the District Council proposed that a new three-member Fryerns ward should comprise the part of Fryerns East ward to the north of the A1321 Broadmayne, together with the part of Fryerns Central ward bounded by the A1235 Cranes Farm Road, Ghyllgrove and the A1321 Broadmayne. It proposed that the rest of Fryerns Central ward should be combined with the part of Fryerns East ward to the west of Timberlog Lane to form a new two-member St Martin's ward. It proposed that the rest of Fryerns East ward should form part of a revised two-member Vange ward, which would also include parts of the existing Pitsea West and Vange wards, as detailed later. The Liberal Democrats and Mr James both supported the District Council's proposed warding arrangements in this area, although they both proposed that St Martin's ward should be named Central ward.

66 In our draft recommendations report, we noted that there was consensus between the District Council, the Liberal Democrats and Mr James regarding ward boundaries in this area. However, we proposed one amendment to the District Council's proposals. We considered that the commercial and industrial estates adjoining the A127 Southend Arterial Road, to the north of the A1235 Cranes Farm Road, should form part of the new Fryerns ward, rather than St Martin's ward, which we considered would better reflect community ties than the alternative proposal. We also considered the issue of ward names, and proposed endorsing the District Council's suggested ward names for this area. We noted that the District Council originally proposed using the names suggested by the Liberal Democrats and Mr James, but revised them in the light of their own consultation.

67 At Stage Three, the District Council and Mr James supported our draft recommendations in this area, while the Conservative Group reiterated the Council's Stage One proposal. Basildon Conservative Association put forward an alternative scheme for the area. They proposed a new three-member Fryerns ward, comprising the polling districts of Moathouse, Whitmore, and Craylands, and the part of Ghyllgrove polling district bounded by Cranes Farm Road and the A1321 Broadmayne Road. They proposed that the part of Ghyllgrove polling district to the south of Broadmayne, which contains Basildon town centre, along with Fairhouse, and Timberlong polling districts should be joined with Luncies polling district from the current Pitsea West ward to form a two member Central ward. Under the Conservative Association's proposals, Fryerns ward would have 26 per cent more electors per councillor than the district average by 2004, and their proposed Central ward would have 8 per cent more than average.

68 Having carefully considered the representations received, we have not been persuaded to depart from our draft recommendations. We have carefully considered the Conservative Association's alternative proposals, but consider that their proposed Fryerns ward would have an unacceptably high level of electoral inequality. We remain of the view that our proposals will provide the best option of achieving electoral equality, whilst having regard to the statutory criteria. We are therefore content to endorse our draft recommendations for Fryerns and St Martin's wards as final.

69 Under our final recommendations, Fryerns ward would have 6 per cent more electors per councillor than the average for the district both now and in 2004, while St Martin's ward would have equal to the average number of electors per councillor initially, and 3 per cent more than average by 2004.

Laindon, Langdon Hills, Lee Chapel North, Nethermayne and Vange wards

70 These five three-member wards form part of Basildon New Town, and comprise a mixture of private and social housing, together with some parkland and a rural hinterland. Under current arrangements, Laindon and Langdon Hills wards have 10 per cent and 8 per cent more electors per councillor than the district average respectively. Lee Chapel North, Nethermayne and Vange wards have 16 per cent, 23 per cent and 12 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the average respectively. This level of electoral imbalance is projected to deteriorate marginally over the next five years.

71 At Stage One the District Council proposed that Laindon ward should be divided, with the area to the north of the A127 Southend Arterial Road being combined with part of Burstead ward (Ramsden Bellhouse and Ramsden Crays parishes, part of Billericay town and part of Wickford South ward) to form a new two-member Crouch ward, as detailed earlier. It proposed that the part of Laindon ward to the south of the A127 Southend Arterial Road should be combined with the part of Lee Chapel North ward to the north of the B148 St Nicholas Lane to form a three-member Laindon Park ward. It proposed that the remainder of the existing Lee Chapel North ward should be combined with the part of Langdon Hills ward to the north of the B1007 Laindon Link and the part of Nethermayne ward to the north of Basildon College to form a new three-member Lee Chapel ward. The Council also proposed a revised three-member Langdon Hills ward consisting of the remaining part of Langdon Hills ward, together with the part of Nethermayne ward to the west of the bridle-way leading from Green Lane.

72 The Council proposed that the existing Nethermayne ward, less the area forming part of the revised Langdon Hills ward, should be combined with the parts of the existing Vange ward to the west of Swan Mead Primary School and the B1419 Clay Hill Road, and to the west of Ramsay Drive and Vange Creek, to form a new two-member Clay Hill ward. It proposed that the part of Vange ward to the south-east of the B1419 Clay Hill Road and to the north of the B1464 London Road/High Road, should be contained with part of Fryerns East ward (as detailed previously) and the part of Pitsea West ward to the west of A132 South Mayne and to the north of the B1464 High Road to form a revised two-member Vange ward. In addition, the council proposed that the part of Vange ward to the south of the B1464 London Road/High Road and to the east of Ramsay Drive and Vange Creek should be included in a new three-member Pitsea South East ward.

73 Under the District Council's proposal, Clay Hill, Langdon Hills and Lee Chapel wards would have electoral variances of no more than 2 per cent from the average for the district, while Laindon Park ward would have 6 per cent fewer electors per councillor than average. This level of improved electoral equality was projected to remain largely unchanged over the next five years.

74 The Liberal Democrats put forward alternative electoral arrangements for the part of Laindon ward to the south of the A127 Southend Arterial Road. They proposed that the remainder of Laindon ward should form a two-member ward of the same name, and that Lee Chapel North ward, less Holy Trinity polling district, should be combined with the part of Langdon Hills ward to the north of the London Fenchurch Street to Shoeburyness railway line to form a revised three-member Lee Chapel North ward. They also proposed that Nethermayne ward, together with the Holy Trinity polling district, should form a new three-member ward, which could be called either Basildon South or Nethermayne ward. In addition, they proposed that Vange ward should be

combined with parts of Fryerns Central and Fryerns East wards, as detailed previously. Under the Liberal Democrats' proposal, all five wards would have electoral imbalances of no more than 7 per cent from the district average. This improved level of electoral equality was projected to remain largely unchanged over the subsequent five years.

75 Mr James supported the District Council's proposed Laindon Park ward boundaries, but suggested that the ward be named Laindon. His proposed South ward was broadly similar to the District Council's proposed Clay Hill ward, but he would retain the existing boundary between Langdon Hills and Nethermayne wards as its eastern boundary. His proposed Langdon Hills ward was identical to the Liberal Democrats' proposal. He proposed a new three-member Lee Chapel ward comprising the part of Lee Chapel North ward to the south of the B148 St Nicholas Lane, together with the part of Langdon Hills ward to the north of the London Fenchurch Street to Shoeburyness railway line. His proposal for the rest of Vange ward was identical to the District Council's proposal. Under Mr James' proposal, the number of electors per councillor in all four wards would vary by 3 per cent from the district average, while the number of electors per councillor in Laindon ward would vary by no more than 6 per cent from the average. The level of electoral equality was not projected to change significantly over the next five years.

76 In our draft recommendations report, we noted that there was a degree of consensus between the District Council, the Liberal Democrats and Mr James regarding ward boundaries for this area. In particular, all three proposals sought to utilise the London Fenchurch Street to Shoeburyness railway line as a ward boundary for much of its length. On balance, however, we considered that Mr James' proposals would provide a better balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria than the alternative proposals, and were content to substantially adopt them as part of our draft recommendations.

77 We considered that the District Council's and Mr James' proposed Laindon Park ward would provide a reasonable level of electoral equality, while utilising strong and easily identifiable boundaries. We examined the District Council's proposal for Lee Chapel ward and adjoining wards and we were not persuaded that this ward would satisfactorily reflect community ties. We considered that the part of the existing Langdon Hills ward to the north of the railway line shares stronger community ties with the areas north and east of the B1007 Laindon Link, and therefore considered that the London Fenchurch Street to Shoeburyness railway line would form a stronger boundary in this area than the B1007 Laindon Link.

78 In addition, we were not persuaded by the District Council's proposal to transfer the area including The Knares, to the north of Basildon College, to a new Lee Chapel ward. We considered that this area appears to share stronger community interests and identities with electors to the east of the A176 Nethermayne than with electors to the north of the railway line. Furthermore, we considered that electors in this area should be represented in the same ward as Basildon College and Basildon Hospital, which are important community foci in this area.

79 While the Liberal Democrats' proposed Lee Chapel North ward would provide a reasonable level of electoral equality, we did not consider that the areas in question had strong community ties with the existing Nethermayne ward. Furthermore, we noted that the Liberal Democrats' proposal would divide Great Knightleys and Falstones between two wards, and we considered that this would not provide a strong and easily identifiable ward boundary or reflect the interests

and identities of electors. In addition, we noted that their proposed Vange ward would cover a large area, linking communities to the south of the A132 South Mayne with the area to the south of the A13.

80 We were persuaded that Mr James' proposed Lee Chapel ward would better reflect community ties than the alternative proposals, while providing a reasonable level of electoral equality, and noted that it would utilise the London Fenchurch Street to Shoeburyness railway line as its southern boundary. We were also content to substantially adopt his proposed Langdon Hills ward. However, we considered that the District Council's proposal that Langdon Hills' eastern ward boundary should follow Green Lane and the bridleway has merit, as Lee Chapel Lane and contiguous roads would be included in the proposed Langdon Hills ward, with which they have good communication links.

81 As a consequence, we proposed that the part of Nethermayne ward to the east of Green Lane and the bridle-way should be combined with the part of Vange ward to the west of Ramsay Drive and Vange Creek. We also proposed that this three-member ward should be named Nethermayne ward. We noted that this proposal was broadly similar to proposals put forward by the District Council and Mr James. In addition, we were content to adopt the proposed two-member Vange ward put forward by the District Council and Mr James. While this proposed ward would include electors either side of the London Fenchurch Street to Shoeburyness railway line, we considered that it would include communities with similar interests and identities and noted that both sides of the railway line were linked by the B1419 Timberlog Lane and B1464 High Road. We also considered Mr James' proposal that Laindon Park ward should be named Laindon, but noted that the District Council's proposed ward name had been subject to local consultation.

82 At Stage Three, the District Council supported our draft proposals for Laindon Park, Langdon Hills, Lee Chapel North, Nethermayne and Vange wards. However, it argued that our proposed Lee Chapel ward should retain the existing ward name of Lee Chapel North in order to more clearly identify the area geographically. Mr James considered that we had adopted the major substance of his suggestions for Langdon Hills, Nethermayne and Lee Chapel North wards, and stated that, as a result, our draft recommendations had his full support.

83 Basildon Conservative Association supported our proposals for the area of Laindon ward to the north of the A127 Southend Arterial Road, but proposed a new two-member Laindon West ward consisting of the part of the existing Laindon ward to the west of High Road and South of the A127 Southend Arterial Road which they argued would reflect the old village of Laindon. They also proposed the creation of a two-member Laindon East ward consisting of the part of the existing Laindon ward to the east of the High Road with the exception of the Drake Road estate which they argued should be combined with the current Lee Chapel North ward in a revised Lee Chapel North ward. They argued that their proposed wards have a mutual sense of identity, and utilised shared local amenities.

84 The Conservative Association supported the retention of the existing Vange ward arguing that the area is one of the most well established and self-contained communities within the New Town. They opposed the proposal to include the Luncies polling district within the revised Vange ward, stating that communication links and community ties between the areas were poor, due to the fact that they were separated by the railway. They also opposed the transfer of parts of the

existing Vange ward to the proposed Nethermayne and Pitsea South East wards, and stated that their proposals would “help to preserve the unique identity of the village of Vange”. The Conservative Association also proposed largely retaining the existing Nethermayne and Langdon Hills wards, subject to the inclusion of the area to the west of Green Lane and the bridle-way in Langdon Hills ward.

85 Under Basildon Conservative Association’s proposals, Laindon East and West wards would have 1 per cent more and 1 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the district average respectively. While their proposed Nethermayne ward would have 5 per cent more electors than the district average by 2004, their proposed Vange and Lee Chapel North wards would have an electoral variation of 14 per cent and 16 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the district average respectively by 2004.

86 The Conservative Group reiterated the District Council’s Stage One proposals arguing that they have “more democratic integrity”. A local resident strongly opposed the transfer of areas to the north of the A127 Southend Arterial Road from Laindon ward to the proposed Crouch ward, arguing that communities either side of the road had a shared sense of identity. He expressed concern that under our draft recommendations, part of Lee Chapel North ward would be incorporated into a new Laindon Park ward and was concerned that removing part of the existing Lee Chapel North ward into the revised Laindon ward would create a ward that crosses parliamentary constituency boundaries. With regard to Vange ward, he supported the retention of the existing boundaries stating that Vange is a long-standing local community.

87 Another resident also argued that the existing Vange ward be retained. He was opposed to the transfer of the Mistle estate and Moss Drive estate from Vange ward to the proposed Nethermayne ward. Furthermore, he opposed the inclusion of the Luncies area in a revised Vange ward. He also argued that varying council size could provide a better solution to the issue of electoral inequality, but put forward no detailed alternative to our proposals.

88 We have carefully considered the representations received, and are content to endorse our draft recommendations as final, subject to adopting the District Council’s alternative ward name for the proposed Lee Chapel ward. We are content that the retention of the name Lee Chapel North would better reflect the community it contains, and therefore adopt it as part of our final recommendations.

89 While we have noted the concern expressed by the Conservatives that local identities were not sufficiently recognised in our draft recommendations, we feel that their alternative proposals would fail to adequately address the issue of electoral inequality. While their proposed Laindon East and West wards would achieve a reasonable level of electoral equality, they are dependent upon us endorsing their proposals for adjoining wards. As outlined above, we also remain of the view that the A127 Southend Arterial Road should be utilised as a ward boundary in the Laindon area.

90 We have noted the concern expressed regarding our proposed warding arrangements for the Vange area. We note, however, that the existing Vange ward is one of the smallest wards in the district, and by 2004 is projected to have 14 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the district

average. We continue to consider that this level of electoral inequality should be addressed, and do not consider that any of the alternative proposals received at Stage Three adequately do so.

91 We further note that our proposals are supported by the District Council and Mr James. We are therefore content to endorse as final our draft recommendations for Laindon Park, Langdon Hills, Lee Chapel North, Nethermayne and Vange wards.

92 Under our final recommendations, all five wards would currently have electoral variances of no more than 10 per cent from the district average. Laindon Park, Lee Chapel North and Nethermayne wards would have 6 per cent, 3 per cent and 1 per cent fewer electors per councillor than average respectively (6 per cent, 2 per cent and 4 per cent fewer by 2004), while Langdon Hills and Vange wards would have 9 per cent and 3 per cent more electors per councillor than average respectively (7 per cent and 5 per cent more by 2004).

Pitsea East and Pitsea West wards

93 The three-member Pitsea East and Pitsea West wards are situated in the east of the district. Under current arrangements, Pitsea East and Pitsea West wards have 17 per cent more and 8 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the average respectively. This level of electoral inequality is projected to be largely unchanged over the next five years.

94 At Stage One the District Council proposed two new three-member wards for this area. It proposed a new Pitsea North West ward bounded to the north by the A127 Southend Arterial Road, to the west by the A132 East Mayne, to the south by Wickford Avenue, Balfour Way, Winifred Road, Rectory Road, Tyefields and Trenham Avenue, and by field boundaries to the east. It also proposed a new Pitsea South East ward comprising the remainder of the current Pitsea East and Pitsea West wards, less the area to the west of the A132 South Mayne and to the north of the B1464 High Road which it proposed should form part of a revised Vange ward. It also proposed that Pitsea South East ward should include the part of Vange ward to the east of Ramsay Drive and to the south of the B1464 High Road. Mr James supported the District Council's proposals but proposed that Pitsea North West and Pitsea South East should be named Pitsea West and Pitsea East respectively.

95 The Liberal Democrats proposed that the current western boundaries of Pitsea East and Pitsea West wards should be retained. They proposed a revised Pitsea East ward bounded to the north by the A127 Southend Arterial Road, to the east by field edges and to the south by Lanhams, Mayfair Avenue/Rectory Road and Wickford Avenue. They proposed that Luncies polling district, to the west of the A132 South Mayne, should be divided between the two wards. However, no detailed ward boundaries were submitted.

96 In our draft recommendations report, we endorsed the proposals put forward by the District Council and Mr James. We were persuaded that this proposal would provide a good balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria, and would utilise a number of strong and easily identifiable ward boundaries in this area, such as the A132 South Mayne and the B1464 High Road.

97 While we considered the Liberal Democrats’ proposals for these wards, we noted that they were dependent upon us endorsing their proposals for adjoining wards and, as indicated previously, we were not persuaded that their proposals would secure better electoral arrangements than the alternative proposals. Furthermore, we considered the alternative ward names put forward by Mr James, but were not persuaded that these names would better reflect either of the proposed wards’ constituent communities than the District Council’s proposal.

98 At Stage Three, the District Council and Mr James supported our draft recommendations for the Pitsea area. The Conservative Group reiterated the Council’s Stage One proposal. The Basildon Conservative Association largely endorsed our proposals for Pitsea South East and Pitsea North West wards. However, they proposed that the area located to the south of the London Fenchurch Street to Shoeburyness railway line should be removed from the proposed Pitsea South East ward and relocated back into the existing Vange ward. Furthermore, they proposed that Pitsea South East ward be renamed Pitsea to emphasise its focus on the village of Pitsea itself. They further proposed renaming Pitsea North West ward as Nevendon in order to reflect the fact that no part of the old village of Pitsea would be contained within its borders.

99 We received two further submissions in relation to this area. A local resident proposed no change to the existing Pitsea East and Pitsea West wards. He considered that regard should be given to the historical communities of the Basildon district, including Pitsea.

100 Having carefully considered the representations received, we note that there was a degree of local support for our draft recommendations for the Pitsea area. Whilst we have considered Basildon Conservative Association’s proposals, we note that their proposed Pitsea ward would have 16 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the average by 2004. In addition, we remain persuaded that the high level of electoral inequality in the Pitsea area should be addressed, and that the inclusion of part of the existing Vange ward would provide the best balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria. We have given further consideration to the issue of ward names at Stage Three. In relation to the Conservative’s proposals, we consider that while our proposed Pitsea North West ward no longer contains the old village of Pitsea itself, the area in question is now part of modern Pitsea, and that Nevendon only reflects a small part of the proposed ward. Whilst we acknowledge that our proposed ward names are not ideal, we feel they more clearly identify the areas in question than any of the alternatives proposed. Consequently, we are content to endorse our draft recommendations for Pitsea South East and Pitsea North West wards as final.

101 Under our final recommendations, Pitsea North West and Pitsea South East wards would have 3 per cent more and 1 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the district average respectively. This level of electoral equality is projected to be largely unchanged over the next five years.

Electoral Cycle

102 At Stage One we received two proposals relating to the District Council’s electoral cycle. The District Council supported the retention of the current electoral cycle of elections by thirds. Mr James argued that whole-council elections every four years would reduce “apathy and low

turnouts” at elections. Billericay and Wickford Area Committees considered that the combination of two and three-member wards would cause confusion if combined with election by thirds.

103 We carefully considered the representation made at Stage One. In our draft report, we considered that there was a majority view that the present electoral cycle should be retained, and we therefore proposed no change to the current electoral cycle of elections by thirds.

104 At Stage Three, the District Council made no comment on the issue of electoral cycle. In its submission, Basildon Conservative Association supported retention of the current electoral cycle of thirds. A local resident argued that election by thirds should not be combined with two member wards as this could cause a sense of disenfranchisement. He argued that if the Commission proposed a departure from three-member wards, it should propose a change to either whole-council elections or elections by halves. We remain of the view that elections by thirds should be retained, as this is the preference of both the District Council, and Basildon Conservative Association and there is no evidence or significant support for a change to the electoral cycle. While we note the concern expressed that a mixed pattern of wards and election by thirds may cause confusion, we note that a significant number of district councils have such a pattern.

Conclusions

105 Having considered carefully all the representations and evidence received in response to our consultation report, we have decided substantially to endorse our draft recommendations, subject to the following amendment to one ward name in order to more clearly identify the geographical area this ward covers:

- we propose that Lee Chapel ward should retain the existing ward name of Lee Chapel North.

106 We conclude that, in Basildon:

- a council of 42 members should be retained;
- there should be 16 wards, two more than at present;
- the boundaries of 12 of the 14 existing wards should be modified;
- elections should continue to be held by thirds.

107 Figure 4 shows the impact of our final recommendations on electoral equality, comparing them with the current arrangements, based on 1999 and 2004 electorate figures.

Figure 4: Comparison of Current and Recommended Electoral Arrangements

	1999 electorate		2004 forecast electorate	
	Current arrangements	Final recommendations	Current arrangements	Final recommendations
Number of councillors	42	42	42	42
Number of wards	14	16	14	16
Average number of electors per councillor	3,009	3,009	3,113	3,113
Number of wards with a variance more than 10 per cent from the average	8	1	10	0
Number of wards with a variance more than 20 per cent from the average	2	0	2	0

108 As Figure 4 shows, our recommendations would result in a reduction in the number of wards with an electoral variance of more than 10 per cent from eight to one with no wards varying by more than 20 per cent from the district average. This level of electoral equality would improve further by 2004, with no wards varying by more than 10 per cent from the average. We conclude that our recommendations would best meet the need for electoral equality, having regard to the statutory criteria.

Final Recommendation

Basildon District Council should comprise 42 councillors serving 16 wards, as detailed and named in Figures 1 and 2, and illustrated on Map 2 and the large map inside the back cover. The Council should continue to hold elections by thirds.

Parish and Town Council Electoral Arrangements

109 In undertaking reviews of electoral arrangements, we are required to comply as far as is reasonably practicable with the provisions set out in Schedule 11 to the 1972 Act. The Schedule provides that if a parish is to be divided between different district wards, it must also be divided into parish wards, so that each parish ward lies wholly within a single ward of the district. Accordingly, we recommend consequential changes to the warding arrangements for Billericay Town to reflect the proposed district wards.

110 Billericay Town Council is currently served by 21 councillors representing five wards: Billericay North, Billericay North East, Billericay North West, Billericay South East and Billericay South West. At Stage One the District Council proposed that Billericay town should be represented by 20 councillors, and be covered by three town wards: Billericay East, Billericay South West and Billericay West. Billericay East and Billericay West Town Council wards would

reflect the district wards of the same name, while Billericay South west ward would reflect the part of Billericay Town Council area in the proposed Burstead ward. At Stage One, Billericay Town Council supported the District Council’s proposal.

111 At Stage Three, Billericay Town Council supported our draft recommendations for this area. We therefore propose confirming our draft recommendations as final as we note that it would facilitate our proposed district warding in this area, and has a measure of local support.

Final Recommendation
Billericay Town Council should comprise 20 councillors, one fewer than at present, representing three wards: Billericay East (returning eight councillors), Billericay South West (returning three councillors) and Billericay West (returning nine councillors). The town ward boundaries should reflect the proposed district ward boundaries in the area, as illustrated and named on the large map at the back of this report.

112 In our draft recommendations report, we proposed that there should be no change to the electoral cycle of parish and town councils in the district, and are confirming this as final.

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

Map 2: The Commission's Final Recommendations for Basildon

6 NEXT STEPS

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

114 It now falls to the Secretary of State to decide whether to give effect to our recommendations, with or without modification, and to implement them by means of an order. Such an order will not be made before 9 January 2001.

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

The Secretary of State
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Local Government Sponsorship Division
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London SW1E 5DU