

LOCAL
GOVERNMENT
COMMISSION
FOR ENGLAND

DRAFT
RECOMMENDATIONS
ON THE FUTURE
ELECTORAL
ARRANGEMENTS FOR
STEVENAGE IN
HERTFORDSHIRE

August 1997

LOCAL GOVERNMENT COMMISSION FOR ENGLAND

This report sets out the Commission's draft recommendations on the electoral arrangements for Stevenage in Hertfordshire.

Members of the Commission are:

Professor Malcolm Grant (Chairman)

Helena Shovelton (Deputy Chairman)

Peter Brokenshire

Professor Michael Clarke

Robin Gray

Bob Scruton

David Thomas

Adrian Stungo (Chief Executive)

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WHY YOUR LOCAL AUTHORITY IS UNDER REVIEW

The Local Government Commission is an independent body set up by Parliament. Its task is to review and make recommendations to the Government on whether there should be changes to the structure of local government, to the boundaries of individual local authority areas, and to their electoral arrangements, such as the number of councillors which residents in each area should have to represent them.

Because of changes in the electorate, the law requires the Commission to review periodically the electoral arrangements of every local authority in England.

In broad terms, the objective of this review is to ensure that, within each local authority area, the number of electors represented by each councillor is as nearly as possible the same, taking into account local circumstances. As part of the process, the Commission can recommend changes to ward boundaries and the creation of new wards.

This report sets out the Commission's draft recommendations on the electoral arrangements for the Stevenage area in Hertfordshire, and invites your comments. The Commission has not yet decided on its final recommendations and wishes to use this consultation period to seek further evidence. It would be prepared to modify or change its draft recommendations in the light of views expressed if, in its judgement, the statutory criteria and the achievement of electoral equality would be better served. Details of the draft recommendations and how to comment are set out in Chapters 4 and 5.

SUMMARY

The Commission began a review of the electoral arrangements for Stevenage on 10 December 1996.

- This report summarises the submissions the Commission received during the first stage of the review, and makes proposals for change.

The Commission found the existing electoral arrangements provide unequal representation of electors in Stevenage because:

- in 12 of the 14 wards the number of electors represented by each councillor varies by more than 10 per cent from the average for the borough, seven of which vary by more than 20 per cent;
- this electoral inequality is not projected to improve by 2001 when the number of electors per councillor is still expected to vary by more than 10 per cent from the average in 12 wards, with ten of those varying by more than 20 per cent.

The Commission's main draft recommendations for change to the existing electoral arrangements (Figure 1) are that:

- Stevenage Borough Council should have 39 councillors, as at present;
- there should be one fewer ward than at present, bringing the total number to 13;
- the boundaries of all existing wards should be modified;
- elections should continue to take place by thirds.

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

- In ten of the 13 wards, the number of electors per councillor would vary by 10 per cent or less from the borough average, with only one ward being in excess of 20 per cent from the average.
- The level of electoral equality is projected to improve by 2001, when the number of electors per councillor in all wards is expected to vary by less than 10 per cent from the borough average.

This report sets out the Commission's draft recommendations on which comments are invited.

- The Commission will consult on its draft recommendations for nine weeks.
- After considering local views, the Commission will make its 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 the Commission's final recommendations.
- The Secretary of State will determine when any changes come into effect.

You should express your views by writing directly to the Commission at the address below by 14 October 1997:

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

Figure 1:
The Commission's Draft Recommendations: Summary

Ward name	Number of councillors	Constituent areas	Map reference
1 Bandley Hill	3	Bandley Hill ward (part); Mobbsbury ward (part)	Map 2 and large map
2 Bedwell	3	Bedwell Plash ward (part); Chells ward (part); Monkswood ward (part); Shephall ward (part)	Map 2 and large map
3 Chells	3	Chells ward (part); Mobbsbury ward (part)	Map 2 and large map
4 Longmeadow	3	Bandley Hill ward (part); Longmeadow ward (part)	Map 2 and large map
5 Manor	3	Chells ward (part); Martins Wood ward (part); Mobbsbury ward (part); St Nicholas ward (part)	Map 2 and large map
6 Martins Wood	3	Martins Wood ward (part); Mobbsbury ward (part); St Nicholas ward (part)	Map 2 and large map
7 Old Town	3	Bedwell Plash ward (part); Martins Wood ward (part); Old Stevenage ward (part); Pin Green ward (part); Symonds Green ward (part)	Map 2 and large map
8 Pin Green	3	Bedwell Plash ward (part); Martins Wood ward (part); Pin Green ward (part)	Map 2 and large map
9 Roebuck	3	Longmeadow ward (part); Monkswood ward (part); Roebuck ward	Map 2 and large map
10 St Nicholas	3	St Nicholas ward (part); Wellfield ward (part)	Map 2 and large map
11 Shephall	3	Bandley Hill ward (part); Shephall ward (part)	Map 2 and large map
12 Symonds Green	3	Monkswood ward (part); Symonds Green ward (part)	Map 2 and large map
13 Woodfield	3	Old Stevenage ward (part); Symonds Green ward (part); Wellfield ward (part)	Map 2 and large map

1. INTRODUCTION

1 This report contains the Commission's draft recommendations on the electoral arrangements for the borough of Stevenage in Hertfordshire.

2 The Commission is currently reviewing the districts in Hertfordshire as part of its programme of periodic electoral reviews of all principal local authority areas in England. This is the Commission's first review of the electoral arrangements of Stevenage. The last such review was undertaken by the Commission's predecessor, the Local Government Boundary Commission (LGBC), which reported to the Secretary of State in February 1976 (Report No. 146). The electoral arrangements of Hertfordshire County Council were last reviewed in July 1980 (Report No. 390). It is intended that a review of the County Council's electoral arrangements will follow in due course.

3 In undertaking these reviews, the Commission is required to have regard to:

- the statutory criteria contained in section 13(5) of the Local Government Act 1992 (Appendix B), i.e. the need to:
 - (a) reflect the identities and interests of local people; 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 (Appendix C).

4 The Commission has also had regard to its own *Guidance and Procedural Advice for Local Authorities and Other Interested Parties* (published in March 1996 and supplemented in September 1996). This sets out its approach to the reviews.

5 The review is in four stages (Figure 2).

6 Stage One commenced on 10 December 1996. The Commission wrote to Stevenage Borough Council inviting it to submit proposals for its future electoral arrangements. Copies of that letter were sent to Hertfordshire County Council, the Hertfordshire Police Authority, the other district councils in Hertfordshire, the local authority associations, the Hertfordshire Association of Local Councils, the Member of Parliament and the Member of the European Parliament with constituency interests in the borough, and the headquarters of the main political parties. The Commission also placed a notice in the local press, issued a press release and invited the Borough Council itself to publicise the review. The closing date for receipt of representations, the end of Stage One, was 10 March 1997.

7 At Stage Two the Commission considered all the representations received during Stage One and formulated its draft recommendations.

8 Stage Three commenced on 13 August 1997 and will end on 14 October 1997. This stage involves the publication of the draft recommendations in this report and public consultation on them.

Figure 2:
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
Four	Final deliberation and report to the Secretary of State

9 During Stage Four the Commission will reconsider the draft recommendations in the light of the Stage Three consultation and submit final recommendations to the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions. 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 the Commission's final recommendations. If he 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

10 Stevenage is situated thirty miles from London, with good road and rail links to the capital and the north of England. It was designated Britain's first New Town in 1946. The borough covers around 2,600 hectares and has a population of just over 75,000. Six residential neighbourhoods, the first being Bedwell, were developed around Old Stevenage from 1952. These neighbourhoods were designed to be self-contained communities, with their own schools, health facilities, shops, community centres and churches. Industry in the borough has, until recently, been dominated by manufacturing, with employment concentrated in aerospace, mechanical and electronic engineering and chemicals. Today new industries such as computing, pharmaceuticals and financial services have become established. Stevenage is entirely unparished.

11 Since the last electoral review, there has been an increase in electorate in Stevenage, with around 6,650 (13 per cent) more electors than two decades ago. The Borough Council cites factors such as population movement, new housing developments and other socio-economic changes for the current electoral imbalances. Electors in the wards of Bandle Hill and Martins Wood, for example, have become comparatively under-represented on the Borough Council; conversely those of Mobbsbury, Monkswood and Shephall are relatively over-represented. The Borough Council envisages substantial development over the next five years in five wards: Bandle Hill, Martins Wood, Old Stevenage, Symonds Green and Wellfield.

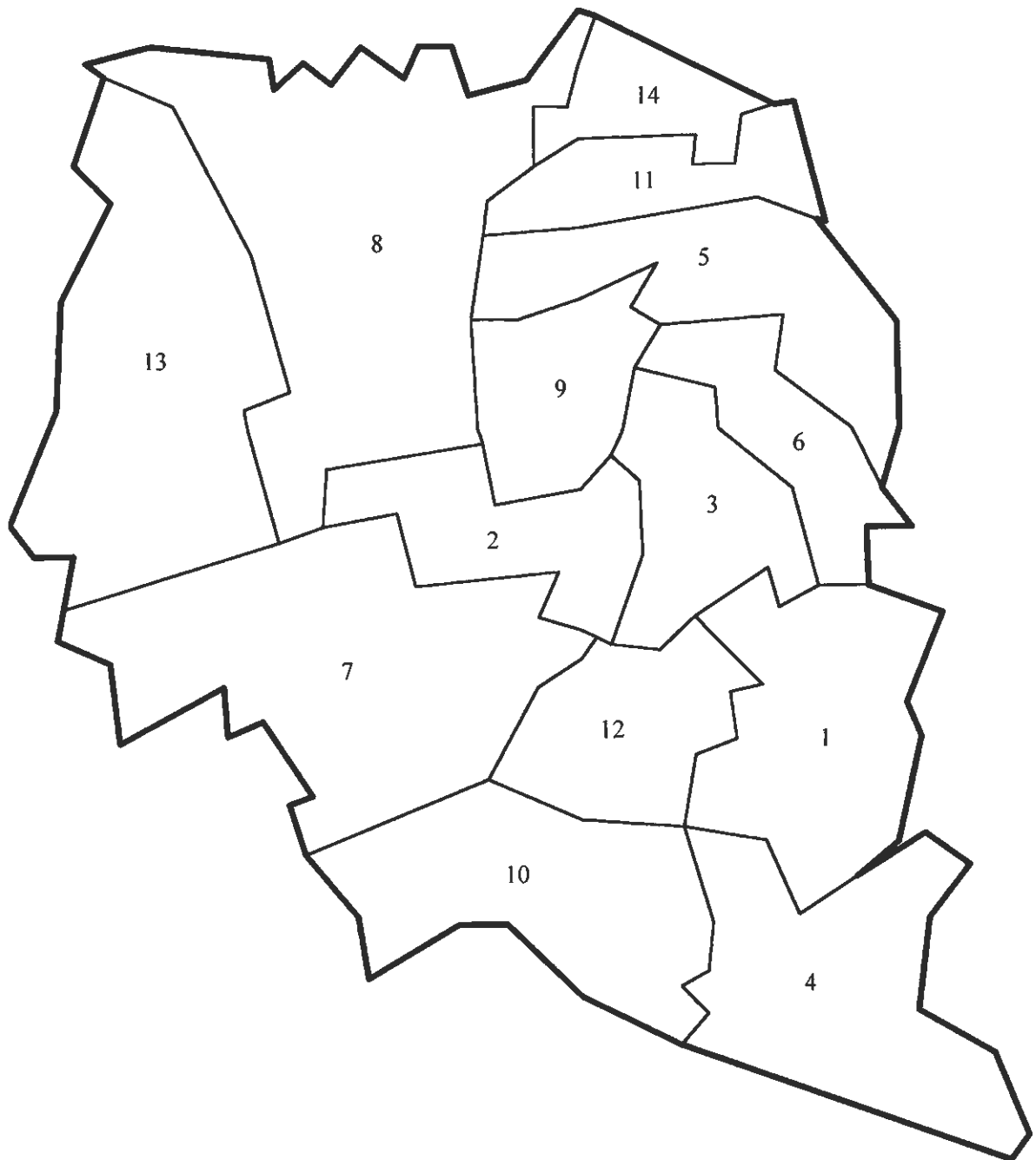
12 In order to compare levels of electoral inequality between wards the Commission calculated the extent to which the number of electors per councillor in each ward (the councillor:elector ratio) varies from the borough average in percentage terms. In the text which follows this calculation may also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

13 The electorate of the borough (February 1996) was 57,255. The Council presently has 39 members who are elected from 14 wards (Map 1 and Figure 3). Twelve of the 14 wards are each represented by three councillors, one ward elects

two members, while the remaining ward is represented by a single councillor. The Council holds elections by thirds.

14 At present, each councillor represents an average of 1,468 electors, which the Borough Council forecasts would increase to 1,564 by the year 2001 if the present number of councillors were maintained. However, due to demographic and other changes over the past two decades, the number of electors per councillor in 12 of the 14 wards varies by more than 10 per cent from the borough average; seven wards vary by more than 20 per cent, with one of those - Martins Wood - being more than 50 per cent from the average.

Map 1:
Existing Wards in Stevenage



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Key to Wards

- 1 Bandley Hill
- 2 Bedwell Plash
- 3 Chells
- 4 Longmeadow
- 5 Martins Wood

- 6 Mobbsbury
- 7 Monkswood
- 8 Old Stevenage
- 9 Pin Green
- 10 Roebuck

- 11 St Nicholas
- 12 Shephall
- 13 Symonds Green
- 14 Wellfield

Figure 3:
Existing Electoral Arrangements

Ward name	1996				2001 (Projected)		
	Number of councillors	Electorate	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
1 Bandley Hill	3	5,965	1,988	35	6,269	2,090	34
2 Bedwell Plash	3	3,727	1,242	-15	3,745	1,248	-20
3 Chells	2	3,284	1,642	12	3,294	1,647	5
4 Longmeadow	3	4,887	1,629	11	4,903	1,634	4
5 Martins Wood	3	6,954	2,318	58	8,351	2,784	78
6 Mobbsbury	3	3,120	1,040	-29	3,173	1,058	-32
7 Monkswood	3	2,274	758	-48	2,274	758	-52
8 Old Stevenage	3	5,587	1,862	27	6,152	2,051	31
9 Pin Green	3	3,568	1,189	-19	3,570	1,190	-24
10 Roebuck	3	3,988	1,329	-9	4,143	1,381	-12
11 St Nicholas	3	3,505	1,168	-20	3,516	1,172	-25
12 Shephall	3	3,177	1,059	-28	3,177	1,059	-32
13 Symonds Green	3	5,600	1,867	27	5,945	1,982	27
14 Wellfield	1	1,619	1,619	10	2,490	2,490	59
Totals	39	57,255	—	—	61,002	—	—
Averages	—	—	1,468	—	—	1,564	—

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

Note: The 'variance from average' column shows by how far, in percentage terms, the number of electors per councillor varies from the average for the borough. The minus symbol (-) denotes a lower than average number of electors. For example, in 1996 electors in Mobbsbury ward were relatively over-represented by 29 per cent, while electors in Martins Wood ward were relatively under-represented by 58 per cent. Figures have been rounded to the nearest whole number.

3. REPRESENTATIONS RECEIVED

15 At the start of the review, members of the public and other interested parties were invited to write to the Commission giving their views on the future electoral arrangements of Stevenage Borough Council.

16 During this initial stage of the review process, officers from the Commission visited the area to hold meetings with officers from the local authority. The Commission is most grateful to all concerned for their co-operation and assistance.

Stevenage Borough Council

17 Stevenage Borough Council submitted a scheme for substantial change to its electoral arrangements, modifying the boundaries of all 14 wards. It proposed the continuation of the present number of councillors (39), but a reduction in the number of wards from 14 to 13, each of which would be represented by three councillors. Elections would continue to be held by thirds.

18 The Borough Council's scheme would reduce electoral imbalances throughout the borough, and although the proposed Woodfield ward would be substantially over-represented initially, the planned development in the area should ensure that by 2001 the number of electors per councillor in the ward would vary from the borough average by just 8 per cent.

19 The Council undertook a consultation exercise prior to defining its Stage One submission to the Commission. It wrote to a number of local interests, including community groups, and distributed an information leaflet to all households in the borough. Its submission reflected a number of comments received during its consultation exercise.

Stevenage Constituency Conservative Association

20 The Stevenage Constituency Conservative Association (the 'Conservative Association') proposed a re-warding of the borough which would result in the establishment of 39 single-member wards. It argued that a single-member

ward structure "is preferable to that of multiple representation because it provides the residents with a specific person to whom they may refer". It contended that the proposed wards were based on existing neighbourhoods and were easily recognisable. The Conservative Association's scheme would lead to substantial improvements in electoral equality, with the number of electors per councillor varying by more than 10 per cent from the average in 15 of the 39 wards initially, but falling to zero by 2001.

Other Representations

21 No other representations were received.

4. ANALYSIS AND DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS

22 As indicated previously, the Commission's objective in considering the most appropriate electoral arrangements for Stevenage borough is to achieve electoral equality, having regard to the statutory criteria and to Schedule 11 to the Local Government Act 1972, which refers to the ratio of electors to councillors being "as nearly as may be, the same in every ward of the district or borough".

23 However, the Commission's function is not merely arithmetical, for three reasons. First, its recommendations are not intended to be based solely on existing electorate figures, but also on assumptions as to changes in the number and distribution of local government electors likely to take place within the ensuing five years. Second, it must have regard to the desirability of fixing identifiable boundaries, and to maintaining local ties which might otherwise be broken. Third, the Commission must consider the need to secure effective and convenient local government, and reflect the interests and identities of local communities.

24 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. In conducting its electoral reviews, the Commission's predecessor, the LGBC, considered that variations from the average number of electors per councillor for an authority as a whole should be kept to the absolute minimum: a variation of up to plus or minus 10 per cent in a particular ward might be "acceptable", but variations in excess of plus or minus 20 per cent were generally accepted only in very exceptional circumstances.

25 The Commission's view is that the LGBC's approach to this issue had merit, insofar as it combined a clearly defined tolerance threshold with the degree of flexibility necessary to achieve reasonable levels of electoral equality across a local authority's area. Accordingly, the Commission has decided to adopt this approach for the purposes of its reviews.

26 In its March 1996 *Guidance*, the Commission expressed the view that "proposals for changes in electoral arrangements should therefore be based

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

Electorate Projections

27 The Borough Council submitted electorate forecasts for the year 2001, projecting an increase of 3,747 (6.5 per cent) over the five-year period, from 57,255 to 61,002. The majority of this projected growth is forecast to be in the wards of Bandle Hill, Martins Wood, Old Stevenage, Symonds Green and Wellfield, where housing development is either already underway or has been granted planning permission. The Borough Council has estimated rates and locations of housing development with regard to structure and local plans, and the expected rate of building over the five-year period. Advice from the Borough Council on the likely effect on electorates of ward boundaries has been obtained. The Commission accepts that this is an inexact science, and having given consideration to projected electorates, is content that they represent the best estimates that can be made at this time.

Council Size

28 The Commission indicated in its March 1996 *Guidance* that it would normally expect the number of councillors serving a borough council to be in the range of 30 to 60. Stevenage Borough Council presently has 39 members. Both the Borough Council and the Conservative Association argued that the present council size should remain unchanged.

29 Having considered the size and distribution of the electorate, the geography and other characteristics of the area, together with the representations received, the Commission has concluded that the statutory criteria and the achievement of electoral equality would best be met by a council of 39 members. It would welcome further evidence on council size during Stage Three.

Electoral Arrangements

30 The Borough Council and the Conservative Association both recommended schemes which would involve a complete re-warding of the borough. While both schemes would maintain a 39-member council, the Borough Council's scheme provided for 13 wards each represented by three members, while the Conservative Association proposed 39 single-member wards. Both schemes would substantially improve electoral equality, particularly having regard to five-year forecasts of the electorate.

31 The Borough Council argued that multi-member wards allowed each ward to be represented, through one or other of its councillors, on all or almost all of the committees of the Council. It also highlighted the fact that the current arrangements already provided for a majority of three-member wards and that its proposals would enhance the present system of elections by thirds. Conversely, the Conservative Association argued that single-member wards would provide residents with a specific person to whom they may refer, obviate any undue influence that part of a large ward may exert and would bring the borough into line with other levels of government including county councils and the European Parliament.

32 The Commission generally supports the conclusions of *The Report of the Committee of Inquiry in the Conduct of Local Government Business* - the 'Widdicombe Report' - in its preference for single-member wards. However, both in its structural review work and in its electoral reviews, the Commission has been sensitive to local preferences and has put forward a mix of single- and multi-member ward recommendations.

33 In Stevenage, the practice of three-member wards is well-established - 12 of the 14 wards are currently represented by three councillors - and the

Commission considers that the Council's scheme has considerable merit: it builds on the current situation of multi-member wards, and would facilitate the current system of elections by thirds, the continuation of which was supported by the Conservative Association.

34 The Commission has also noted the extensive consultation exercise undertaken by the Borough Council before formulating its preliminary proposals. It distributed an information leaflet to each household in the borough, wrote to a number of interested parties, presented its initial conclusions to the council's local committees during the consultation period and placed its draft scheme on deposit at a number of council offices. The Commission understands that little support for change, to either the multi-member ward structure or the electoral cycle, was received during this consultation exercise.

35 In light of these factors, the Commission concludes that, on balance, the case for single-member wards has not been sufficiently made to disturb the existing multi-member ward approach. Accordingly, its preliminary conclusion is that the pattern of multi-member wards should continue in the borough. It would welcome further evidence on this issue before it formulates its final recommendations to the Secretary of State.

36 The Borough Council's proposals would produce a good level of electoral equality, particularly on 2001 figures. They have been prepared following consultation with local interests whose views have been taken into account. The Commission has concluded that they reflect the statutory criteria and they are therefore put forward for consultation in their entirety. The following areas are considered in turn:

- (a) Old Stevenage, St Nicholas, Symonds Green and Wellfield wards;
- (b) Chells, Martins Wood, Mobbsbury and Pin Green wards;
- (c) Bandle Hill, Longmeadow and Shephall wards; and
- (d) Bedwell Plash, Monkswood and Roebuck wards.

Details of the Commission's draft recommendations are shown in Figures 1 and 5, and illustrated in Map 2 and the large map at the back of this report.

Old Stevenage, St Nicholas, Symonds Green and Wellfield wards

37 At present, three of these four wards are relatively under-represented, with the number of electors per councillor exceeding the borough average by 27 per cent in Symonds Green and Old Stevenage wards and by 10 per cent in Wellfield. The number of electors per councillor in St Nicholas ward, on the other hand, is 20 per cent below the average. The Borough Council proposed that the area be re-warded, transferring part of the existing Symonds Green ward - the electors on both sides of Fairview Road and those electors east of this road (including Mozart Court) who are presently in the BAB polling district - to a new Old Town ward. It also proposed that Norton Green and Chadwell Road in Monkswood ward should be transferred to Symonds Green ward. This net loss in the number of electors in Symonds Green would result in the number of electors per councillor being almost equal to the average for the borough, both initially and in 2001.

38 The Council also proposed a boundary modification to St Nicholas ward with a number of electors being transferred from the current Wellfield ward. This increase in the electorate of St Nicholas ward would result in an electoral variance of 4 per cent (2 per cent in 2001).

39 The Council proposed that the wards of Old Stevenage and Wellfield be reconfigured to create two new wards, splitting the existing Old Stevenage ward along Martins Way. The northern part of Old Stevenage and the majority of Wellfield ward would form the new Woodfield ward, while the remainder of the Old Stevenage ward and parts of the wards of Bedwell Plash, Martins Wood, Pin Green and Symonds Green would form the new Old Town ward. The Council projected a significant increase in the electorate of the proposed Woodfield ward which would result in the initial electoral variance of 34 per cent being reduced to 8 per cent by 2001. As stated above, the Council based its electorate projections on information on housing presently under construction or which has already received planning permission. The Commission is, therefore, content that the forecast electorate for 2001 appears to be a realistic projection for the area.

40 The Council argued that the proposed Old Town ward would cover an area of more established housing which existed prior to the development of the New Town. The Commission is content that the significant modifications to the

ward boundaries of Old Stevenage and Wellfield would not have a detrimental effect on community identity and that they would reflect the different type and age of the developments in the area.

41 The Commission has concluded that the Borough Council's proposals for these wards would provide the most appropriate electoral arrangements and, therefore, puts them forward for consultation.

Chells, Martins Wood, Mobbsbury and Pin Green wards

42 These four wards are situated in the east of the borough. Chells and Martins Wood wards are both relatively under-represented, with the number of electors per councillor varying from the borough average by 12 per cent and 58 per cent respectively (5 per cent and 78 per cent in 2001). Conversely, the two wards of Mobbsbury and Pin Green are relatively over-represented, by 29 per cent and 19 per cent respectively (32 per cent and 24 per cent in 2001).

43 The Borough Council proposed a number of boundary realignments between these wards including the transfer of an area currently in Bedwell Plash ward to Pin Green ward, and a realignment of the boundary between the wards of Bandle Hill and Chells. The Council also proposed the creation of a new Manor ward, covering an area similar to the current Mobbsbury ward. Under the Council's scheme, the revised Chells ward would gain an additional (third) councillor.

44 These proposals would result in the number of electors per councillor being 6 per cent above the average in Chells (equalling the average in 2001), 7 per cent above the average in Pin Green (equalling the average in 2001), 3 per cent above the average in Martins Wood (2 per cent in 2001) and 15 per cent below the average in the new Manor ward (where projected development would improve electoral equality to 5 per cent by 2001).

45 The Council argued that these proposals broadly reflect areas of community, based on either the original neighbourhoods or historic areas, such as (Chells) Manor, a name which is used by a number of local organisations.

46 The Commission is content that the improvements to electoral equality would not, on its understanding, have a detrimental effect on the community ties in the area, given the similarities

with the existing warding pattern and the Council's arguments for community foci in each proposed ward. The Commission therefore puts these proposals forward for consultation.

Bandle Hill, Longmeadow and Shephall wards

47 In the south-east of the borough lie the wards of Bandle Hill, Longmeadow and Shephall. Bandle Hill and Longmeadow are both relatively under-represented, by 35 per cent and 11 per cent respectively (34 per cent and 4 per cent in 2001), while Shephall ward is relatively over-represented by 28 per cent (32 per cent in 2001). The Borough Council proposed the transfer of some areas currently in Bandle Hill ward to the wards of Shephall and Longmeadow. The Commission is content that such proposals would not adversely affect local ties and would continue to reflect the communities in this area.

48 The Borough Council's proposals for these three wards would improve electoral equality so that the number of electors per councillor would be only 4 per cent above the average in Bandle Hill (3 per cent in 2001), 2 per cent above the average in Longmeadow (4 per cent below the average in 2001) and 3 per cent above the average in Shephall (2 per cent below the average in 2001). Overall, these proposals would result in a significant improvement to electoral equality and, on the Commission's understanding, would reflect the statutory criteria.

Bedwell Plash, Monkswood and Roebuck wards

49 The three wards of Bedwell Plash, Monkswood and Roebuck are all currently over-represented, by 15 per cent, 48 per cent and 9 per cent respectively (20 per cent, 52 per cent and 12 per cent in 2001). The Borough Council proposed a reduction in the number of wards covering this area from three to two, with the disbandment of the current Monkswood ward. The two modified wards of Bedwell (comprising part of the current Bedwell Plash ward) and Roebuck would between them cover the majority of the current Monkswood ward, with the rest of that ward being transferred to Symonds Green ward.

50 These proposals would result in the number of electors per councillor in the proposed wards of Bedwell and Roebuck initially exceeding the borough average by 12 per cent and 2 per cent respectively, falling to 5 per cent above and 1 per cent below the average by 2001.

Electoral Cycle

51 Both the Borough Council and the Conservative Association expressed support for continuing with the present system of elections by thirds. In the light of the local support for elections by thirds and the absence of any representations requesting a change to whole council elections, the Commission has concluded that the present system should be retained. It would welcome further views from local people during Stage Three.

*Figure 4:
Comparison of Current and Recommended Arrangements*

	1996 electorate		2001 projected electorate	
	Current arrangements	Draft recommendations	Current arrangements	Draft recommendations
Number of councillors	39	39	39	39
Number of wards	14	13	14	13
Average number of electors per councillor	1,468	1,468	1,564	1,564
Number of wards with a variance more than 10 per cent from the average	12	3	12	0
Number of wards with a variance more than 20 per cent from the average	7	1	10	0

Conclusions

52 Having considered all the evidence and representations received, the Commission proposes that there should continue to be 39 councillors; that there should be 13 wards compared to the current 14; that elections should continue to be held by thirds; and that the boundaries of all of the existing wards should be modified.

53 Figure 4 shows the impact of the Commission's draft recommendations on electoral equality, comparing them with the current arrangements, as based on 1996 electorate figures and with projected electorates for the year 2001.

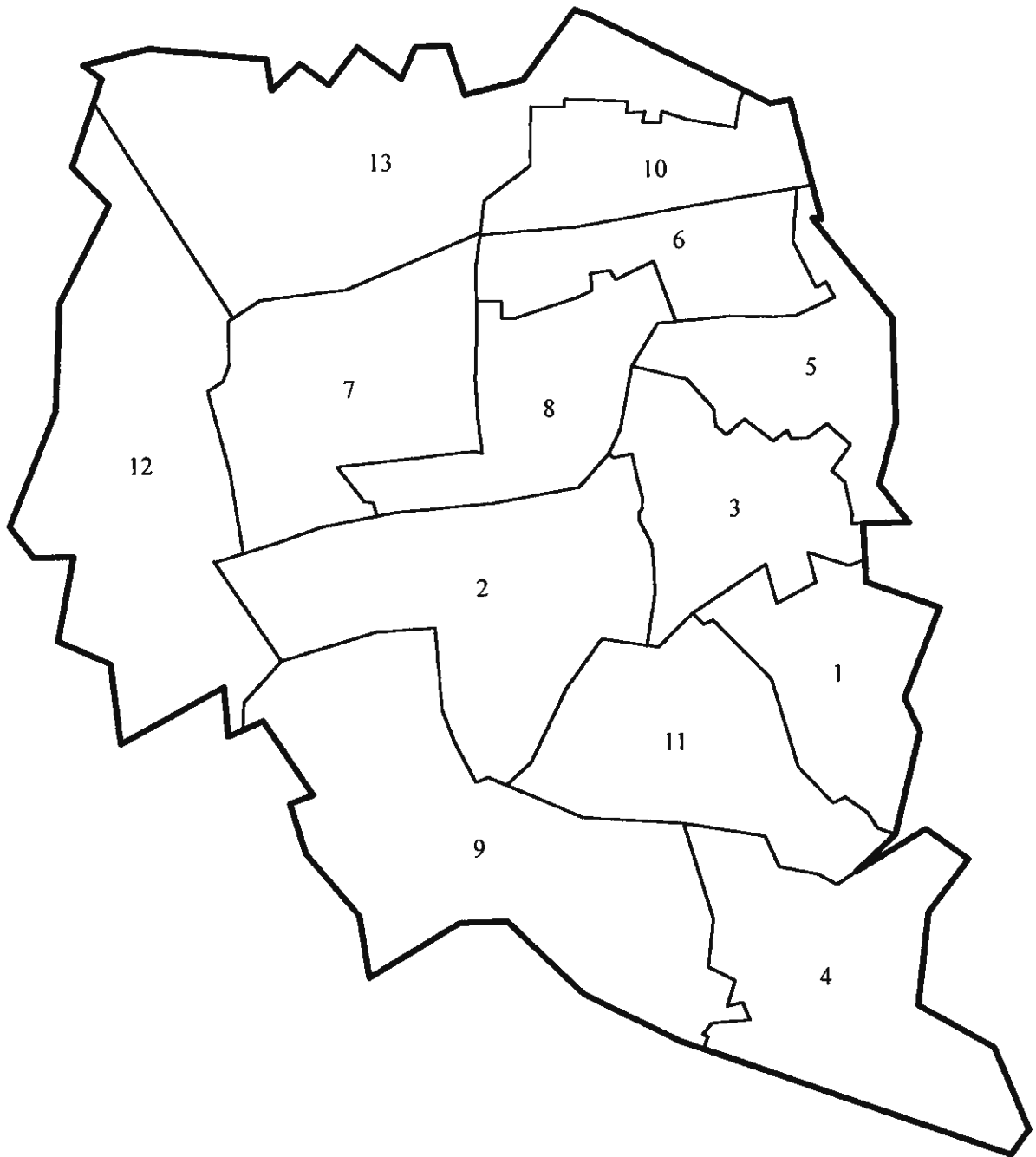
54 As Figure 4 shows, the Commission's draft recommendations would result in a reduction from 12 to three in the number of wards where the number of electors per councillor varies by more than 10 per cent from the average, with no ward having an electoral variance of above 10 per cent by 2001. Under these proposals, the average number of electors per councillor would remain at 1,468. The Commission concludes that its proposals best meet the need for electoral equality, having regard to the statutory criteria.

Draft Recommendation

Stevenage Borough Council should comprise 39 councillors serving 13 wards, as detailed and named in Figures 1 and 5 and illustrated in Map 2 and the large map at the back of this report. Elections should continue to be held by thirds.

55 The Commission has not finalised its conclusions on the electoral arrangements for Stevenage and welcomes comments relating to the proposed ward boundaries, number of councillors, electoral cycle and ward names. The Commission will consider all the evidence submitted to it during the consultation period before reaching final recommendations.

Map 2:
The Commission's Draft Recommendations for Stevenage



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Key to Wards

- | | | |
|----------------|----------------|------------------|
| 1 Bandley Hill | 6 Martins Wood | 11 Shephall |
| 2 Bedwell | 7 Old Town | 12 Symonds Green |
| 3 Chells | 8 Pin Green | 13 Woodfield |
| 4 Longmeadow | 9 Rocbuck | |
| 5 Manor | 10 St Nicholas | |

Figure 5:
The Commission's Proposed Electoral Arrangements

Ward name	1996				2001 (Projected)		
	Number of councillors	Electorate	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
1 Bandle Hill	3	4,584	1,528	4	4,850	1,617	3
2 Bedwell	3	4,940	1,647	12	4,948	1,649	5
3 Chells	3	4,681	1,560	6	4,697	1,566	0
4 Longmeadow	3	4,491	1,497	2	4,499	1,500	-4
5 Manor	3	3,724	1,214	-15	4,911	1,637	5
6 Martins Wood	3	4,540	1,513	3	4,797	1,599	2
7 Old Town	3	4,678	1,559	6	4,768	1,589	2
8 Pin Green	3	4,698	1,566	7	4,700	1,567	0
9 Roebuck	3	4,482	1,494	2	4,645	1,548	-1
10 St Nicholas	3	4,585	1,528	4	4,585	1,528	-2
11 Shephall	3	4,558	1,519	3	4,596	1,532	-2
12 Symonds Green	3	4,392	1,464	0	4,700	1,567	0
13 Woodfield	3	2,902	967	-34	4,306	1,435	-8
Totals	39	57,255	—	—	61,002	—	—
Averages	—	—	1,468	—	—	1,564	—

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

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

5. NEXT STEPS

56 The Commission is putting forward draft recommendations for the future electoral arrangements for Stevenage. Now it is up to the people of the area. The Commission will take fully into account all representations received by 14 October 1997. Representations received after this date may not be taken into account by the Commission. All representations will be available for public inspection by appointment and a list of respondents will be available on request after the end of the consultation period.

57 Views may be expressed by writing directly to the Commission:

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

58 In the light of representations received, the Commission will review its draft recommendations to consider whether they should be altered, before reporting finally to the Secretary of State. After the submission of its final recommendations, all further correspondence should be sent to the Secretary of State, who cannot make an Order giving effect to the Commission's recommendations until six weeks after he receives them.

APPENDIX A

Draft Recommendations for Stevenage: Detailed Mapping

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

APPENDIX B

Scope of the Commission's Review: The Statutory Provisions The Local Government Acts 1972 and 1992

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:

- (a) "to reflect the identities and interests of local communities"; and
- (b) "to 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 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. These are set out in Appendix C.

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

APPENDIX C

Schedule 11 to the Local Government Act 1972: Rules to be Observed in Considering Electoral Arrangements

1 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.

2 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.

3 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.

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

- (f) the number or distribution of electors for 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.

5 Where it is decided to divide any such parish into parish wards, in considering the size and boundaries of the wards and in 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.

6 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.