

LOCAL
GOVERNMENT
COMMISSION
FOR ENGLAND

FINAL
RECOMMENDATIONS
ON THE FUTURE
ELECTORAL
ARRANGEMENTS FOR
NORTH
WARWICKSHIRE

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

November 1999

LOCAL GOVERNMENT COMMISSION FOR ENGLAND

This report sets out the Commission's final recommendations on the electoral arrangements for the borough of North Warwickshire.

Members of the Commission are:

Professor Malcolm Grant (Chairman)

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



Local Government Commission for England

2 November 1999

Dear Secretary of State

On 3 November 1998 the Commission began a periodic electoral review of North Warwickshire under the Local Government Act 1992. We published our draft recommendations in May 1999 and undertook an eight-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 some modifications have been made (see paragraphs 105-106) in the light of further evidence. This report sets out our final recommendations for changes to electoral arrangements in North Warwickshire.

We recommend that North Warwickshire Borough Council should be served by 35 councillors representing 17 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 be elected together every four years.

We note that you have now set out in the White Paper *Modern Local Government – In Touch with the People* (Cm 4014, HMSO), legislative proposals for a number of changes to local authority electoral arrangements. However, until such time as that new legislation is in place 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 Borough Council and other local people who have contributed to the review. Their co-operation and assistance have been very much appreciated by Commissioners and staff.

Yours sincerely

PROFESSOR MALCOLM GRANT
Chairman

SUMMARY

The Commission began a review of North Warwickshire on 3 November 1998. We published our draft recommendations for electoral arrangements on 25 May 1999, after which we undertook an eight-week period of consultation.

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

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

- **in 12 of the 19 wards the number of electors represented by each councillor varies by more than 10 per cent from the average for the borough and six wards vary by more than 20 per cent from the average;**
- **by 2003 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 12 wards and by more than 20 per cent in five wards.**

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

- **North Warwickshire Borough Council should have 35 councillors, one more than at present;**
- **there should be 17 wards, instead of 19 at present;**
- **the boundaries of 16 of the existing wards should be modified resulting in a net reduction of two, while three wards should retain their existing boundaries;**
- **elections should continue to take place every four years.**

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

- **In 14 of the proposed 17 wards the number of electors per councillor would vary by no more than 10 per cent from the borough average.**
- **This improved level of electoral equality is forecast to continue, with the number of electors per councillor in all wards expected to vary by less than 10 per cent from the borough average in 2003.**

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

- **new warding arrangements for Atherstone, Coleshill, Kingsbury and Polesworth parishes.**

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 15 December 1999:

**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	Map reference
1 Arley & Whitacre	3	Arley ward (the parish of Arley); Mancetter ward (part – the parish of Ansley); Nether Whitacre ward (part – the parish of Over Whitacre)	Map 2
2 Atherstone Central	2	Atherstone North ward (part – Atherstone North parish ward (part) of Atherstone parish); Atherstone South ward (part – Atherstone South parish ward (part) of Atherstone parish)	Large Map
3 Atherstone North	2	Atherstone North ward (part – Atherstone North parish ward (part) of Atherstone parish)	Large Map
4 Atherstone South & Mancetter	2	Atherstone North ward (part – Atherstone North parish ward (part) of Atherstone parish); Atherstone South ward (part – Atherstone South parish ward (part) of Atherstone parish); Mancetter ward (part – the parish of Mancetter)	Large Map
5 Baddesley & Grendon	2	Baddesley Ensor ward (the parish of Baddesley Ensor); Grendon ward (the parishes of Baxterley, Bentley, Grendon and Merevale)	Map 2
6 Coleshill North	2	Coleshill North ward (part – Coleshill North parish ward (part) of Coleshill parish)	Map A5
7 Coleshill South	2	Coleshill North ward (part – Coleshill North parish ward (part) of Coleshill parish); Coleshill South ward (part – Coleshill South parish ward of Coleshill parish)	Map A5
8 Curdworth	2	Curdworth ward (the parishes of Curdworth, Middleton and Wishaw); Nether Whitacre ward (part – the parishes of Lea Marsdon and Nether Whitacre); Kingsbury ward (part – Kingsbury parish ward (part) of Kingsbury parish)	Map A3
9 Dordon	2	<i>Unchanged</i> (the parish of Dordon)	Map 2
10 Fillongley	2	Fillongley ward (the parishes of Astley, Corley, Fillongley, Maxstoke and Shustoke); Coleshill South ward (part – the parishes of Great Packington and Little Packington)	Map 2

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

Ward name	Number of councillors	Constituent areas	Map reference
11 Hartshill	2	<i>Unchanged</i> (the parishes of Caldecote and Hartshill)	Map 2
12 Hurley & Wood End	2	Hurley ward (Hurley and Wood End parish wards of Kingsbury parish); Kingsbury ward (part – Kingsbury parish ward (part) of Kingsbury parish)	Map A4
13 Kingsbury	2	Kingsbury ward (part – Kingsbury parish ward (part) of Kingsbury parish)	Maps A3 and A4
14 Newton Regis & Warton	2	Newton Regis ward (the parishes of Newton Regis, Seckington and Shuttington); Warton ward (the parish of Austrey and the Warton parish ward of Polesworth parish)	Map 2
15 Polesworth East	2	Polesworth ward (part – the proposed Polesworth East parish ward of Polesworth parish)	Map A2
16 Polesworth West	2	Polesworth ward (part – Birchmoor parish ward and the proposed Polesworth West parish ward of Polesworth parish)	Map A2
17 Water Orton	2	<i>Unchanged</i> (the parish of Water Orton)	Map 2

Note: Map 2 and Appendix A, including the large map in the back of the report, illustrate the proposed wards outlined above.

Figure 2:
The Commission's Final Recommendations for North Warwickshire

Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (1998)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2003)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
1 Arley & Whitacre	3	4,270	1,423	2	4,454	1,485	2
2 Atherstone Central	2	2,834	1,417	2	2,968	1,484	2
3 Atherstone North	2	2,834	1,417	2	2,846	1,423	-2
4 Atherstone South & Mancetter	2	2,794	1,397	0	2,989	1,495	3
5 Baddesley & Grendon	2	3,083	1,542	11	3,083	1,542	6
6 Coleshill North	2	2,550	1,275	-8	2,656	1,328	-8
7 Coleshill South	2	2,660	1,330	-4	2,698	1,349	-7
8 Curdworth	2	2,778	1,389	0	2,777	1,389	-4
9 Dordon	2	2,409	1,205	-14	2,659	1,330	-8
10 Fillongley	2	2,755	1,378	-1	2,755	1,378	-5
11 Hartshill	2	2,793	1,397	0	2,987	1,494	3
12 Hurley & Wood End	2	2,782	1,391	0	3,124	1,562	8
13 Kingsbury	2	3,118	1,559	12	3,118	1,559	8
14 Newton Regis & Warton	2	2,738	1,369	-2	2,944	1,472	2
15 Polesworth East	2	2,754	1,377	-1	2,920	1,460	1
16 Polesworth West	2	2,779	1,390	0	2,947	1,474	2
17 Warter Orton	2	2,806	1,403	1	2,806	1,403	-3
Totals	35	48,737	—	—	50,731	—	—
Averages	—	—	1,392	—	—	1,449	—

Source: Electorate figures are based on information provided by North Warwickshire Borough 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 borough. 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 borough of North Warwickshire. We have now reviewed the districts in Warwickshire as part of our programme of periodic electoral reviews (PERs) of all principal local authority areas in England.

2 This was our first review of the electoral arrangements of North Warwickshire. The last such review was undertaken by our predecessor, the Local Government Boundary Commission (LGBC), which reported to the Secretary of State in May 1976 (Report No. 151). The electoral arrangements of Warwickshire County Council were last reviewed in December 1980 (Report No. 409). We intend reviewing the County Council's electoral arrangements in due course.

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

- the statutory criteria contained in section 13(5) of the Local Government Act 1992;
- the *Rules to be Observed in Considering Electoral Arrangements* contained in Schedule 11 to the Local Government Act 1972.

4 We are required to make recommendations to the Secretary of State on the number of councillors who should serve on the Borough 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 borough.

5 We have also had regard to our *Guidance and Procedural Advice for Local Authorities and Other Interested Parties* (updated in March 1998), which sets out our approach to the reviews.

6 First, 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 Second, the broad objective of PERs is then to achieve, so far as practicable, equality of representation across the district as a whole. For example, 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 Third, 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, i.e. 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 1998/99 PER programme, including the Warwickshire districts, that until any direction is received from the Secretary of State, the Commission would continue to maintain its current approach to PERs as set out in the March 1998 *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.

¹¹ This review was in four stages. Stage One began on 3 November 1998, when we wrote to North Warwickshire Borough Council inviting proposals for future electoral arrangements. We also notified Warwickshire County Council, Warwickshire Police Authority, Warwickshire and West Midlands Metropolitan County Association of Local Councils, parish and town councils in the borough, the Members of Parliament and the Member of the European Parliament with constituency interests in the borough, and the headquarters of the main political parties. We placed a notice in the local press, issued a press release and invited the Borough Council to publicise the review further. The closing date for receipt of representations, the end of Stage One, was 8 February 1999. At Stage Two we considered all the representations received during Stage One and prepared our draft recommendations.

¹² Stage Three began on 25 May 1999 with the publication of our report, *Draft Recommendations on the Future Electoral Arrangements for North Warwickshire*, and ended on 19 July 1999. Comments were sought on our preliminary conclusions. Finally, during Stage Four we reconsidered our draft recommendations in the light of the Stage Three consultation and now publish our final recommendations.

2. CURRENT ELECTORAL ARRANGEMENTS

13 The borough of North Warwickshire is predominantly rural. The main towns are Atherstone and Polesworth, with Kingsbury and Coleshill also being relatively urban. The borough is bordered by Birmingham and Coventry and the towns of Tamworth, Hinckley and Nuneaton. The M6 passes through the south of the borough and the M42 links the M6/M5/M40 with the M1 via the A42. Industrial estates at Atherstone, Coleshill, Mancetter and Arley have attracted new manufacturing, service and distribution industries. The remainder of the borough is more rural in character, comprising a number of small settlements. The whole of the borough is parished and has a total of 31 parishes.

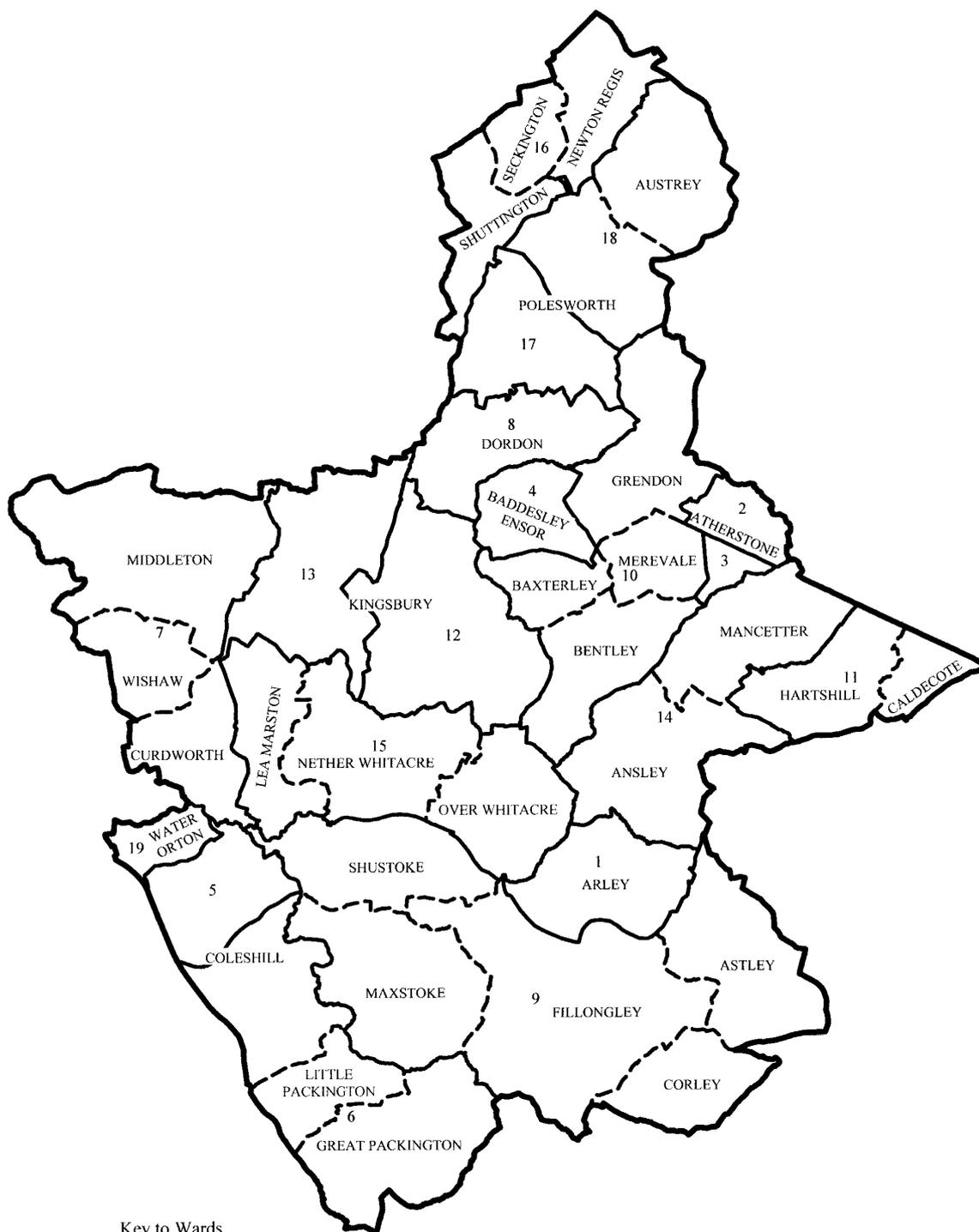
14 To compare levels of electoral inequality between wards, we calculated the extent to which the number of electors per councillor in each ward (the councillor:elector ratio) varies from the borough average in percentage terms. In the text which follows this calculation may also be described using the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

15 The electorate of the borough is 48,737 (February 1998). The Council presently has 34 members who are elected from 19 wards, seven of which cover the relatively urban areas with the remainder being predominantly rural. Two of the wards are each represented by three councillors, 11 are each represented by two councillors and six are single-member wards. The whole Council is elected every four years.

16 Since the last electoral review there has been an increase in the electorate in North Warwickshire, with around 10 per cent more electors than two decades ago as a result of new housing developments. The most notable increases have been in Atherstone and Polesworth wards, with both towns having 19 per cent more electors than 20 years ago.

17 At present, each councillor represents an average of 1,433 electors, which the Borough Council forecasts will increase to 1,492 by the year 2003 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 12 of the 19 wards varies by more than 10 per cent from the borough average, six wards by more than 20 per cent and one ward by more than 30 per cent. The worst imbalance is in Newton Regis ward where each of the three councillors represents 37 per cent fewer electors than the borough average.

Map 1:
Existing Wards in North Warwickshire



Key to Wards

- | | | |
|--------------------|--------------|--------------------|
| 1 Arley | 7 Curdworth | 13 Kingsbury |
| 2 Atherstone North | 8 Dordon | 14 Mancetter |
| 3 Atherstone South | 9 Fillongley | 15 Nether Whitacre |
| 4 Baddesley Ensor | 10 Grendon | 16 Newton Regis |
| 5 Coleshill North | 11 Hartshill | 17 Polesworth |
| 6 Coleshill South | 12 Hurley | 18 Warton |
| | | 19 Water Orton |

KEY	
EXISTING WARD BOUNDARY	—————
EXISTING PARISH BOUNDARY	- - - - -

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Figure 3:
Existing Electoral Arrangements

Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (1998)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2003)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
1 Arley	2	2,240	1,120	-22	2,342	1,171	-18
2 Atherstone North	2	3,714	1,857	30	3,724	1,862	30
3 Atherstone South	2	3,005	1,503	5	3,211	1,606	12
4 Baddesley Ensor	1	1,457	1,457	2	1,457	1,457	2
5 Coleshill North	2	2,957	1,479	3	3,063	1,532	7
6 Coleshill South	2	2,413	1,207	-16	2,451	1,226	-15
7 Curdworth	1	1,650	1,650	15	1,650	1,650	15
8 Dordon	2	2,409	1,205	-16	2,659	1,330	-7
9 Fillongley	2	2,595	1,298	-9	2,595	1,298	-9
10 Grendon	1	1,626	1,626	13	1,626	1,626	13
11 Hartshill	2	2,793	1,397	-3	3,029	1,515	6
12 Hurley	2	2,468	1,234	-14	2,564	1,282	-11
13 Kingsbury	2	3,513	1,757	23	3,763	1,882	31
14 Mancetter	3	3,478	1,159	-19	3,598	1,199	-16
15 Nether Whitacre	1	1,342	1,342	-6	1,382	1,382	-4
16 Newton Regis	1	909	909	-37	909	909	-37
17 Polesworth	3	5,533	1,844	29	5,905	1,968	37
18 Warton	1	1,829	1,829	28	1,997	1,997	39
19 Water Orton	2	2,806	1,403	-2	2,806	1,403	-2
Totals	34	48,737	—	—	50,731	—	—
Averages	—	—	1,433	—	—	1,492	—

Source: Electorate figures are based on information provided by North Warwickshire Borough 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 borough. The minus symbol (-) denotes a lower than average number of electors. For example, in 1998, electors in Newton Regis ward were relatively over-represented by 37 per cent, while electors in Atherstone North ward were relatively under-represented by 30 per cent. Figures have been rounded to the nearest whole number.

3. DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS

18 During Stage One we received five representations, including a borough-wide scheme from North Warwickshire Borough Council, and representations from Warwickshire County Council and three parish councils. 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 North Warwickshire*.

19 Our draft recommendations were based on the Borough Council's proposals, which achieved some improvement in electoral equality, and provided a pattern of two-member wards. However, we moved away from the Borough Council's scheme in a number of areas, generally using options generated by Council officers during the early stages of the review process, together with some of our own proposals. We proposed that:

- (a) North Warwickshire should be served by 35 councillors, compared with the current 34, representing 17 wards, two fewer than at present;
- (b) the boundaries of 16 of the existing wards should be modified, resulting in a net reduction of two, while three wards should retain their existing boundaries;
- (c) there should be new warding arrangements and a re-distribution of councillors for the parishes of Atherstone, Coleshill, Kingsbury and Polesworth.

20 Our proposals would have resulted in significant improvements in electoral equality, with the number of electors per councillor in only three wards varying by 10 per cent from the borough average. This level of electoral equality was forecast to improve further, with no wards varying by more than 10 per cent from the average in 2003.

Draft Recommendation

North Warwickshire Borough Council should comprise 35 councillors, serving 17 wards. The Council should continue to hold elections every four years.

4. RESPONSES TO CONSULTATION

²¹ During the consultation on our draft recommendations report, 15 representations were received. A list of all respondents is available on request from the Commission. All representations may be inspected at the offices of North Warwickshire Borough Council and the Commission.

North Warwickshire Borough Council

²² The Borough Council reiterated its Stage One proposals, stating that “whilst it is acknowledged that the Commission’s proposals meet its prime objective of achieving electoral equality, the Council is disappointed that the recommendations do not reflect the Government’s thinking of two-member wards in two-tier authorities”. It further highlighted the cross-party support for the scheme, stating that it reflects community interests, “and by 2003 only five wards will have a variance slightly higher than the 10 per cent tolerance.” The Borough Council also acknowledged the views of Warwickshire County Council “in respect of coterminous boundaries between wards and county divisions”, and pointed out that the Council’s proposals of 18 wards would allow pairing to create nine county divisions. At parish level, the Borough Council requested that the recommendations for the arrangements of Kingsbury parish be reconsidered in order to achieve greater electoral equality at parish level.

Warwickshire County Council

²³ The County Council urged the Commission to reconsider its draft recommendations “to consider amending proposed time tabling so that any ward changes are effected simultaneously with changes to county division boundaries”.

²⁴ It stated that it objected to the draft recommendations for all five Warwickshire districts on the basis that “the importance of coterminosity between the boundaries of divisions and wards in

achieving the statutory objectives of electoral reviews has not been given adequate weight”, and considered that “undue weight has been given to the objective of achieving equality of representation largely within the existing framework at district level at the expense of wider considerations”. It considered that this situation would cause “either significant inequality of representation or inadequate coterminosity between divisions and wards to emerge in the subsequent review of county council electoral divisions”. For North Warwickshire, it considered that the area should be divided into 16 wards facilitating the creation of eight county divisions, as opposed to the Borough Council’s nine.

The Liberal Democrats

²⁵ The Liberal Democrat Group on the Borough Council objected to the draft recommendations for the areas of Atherstone, Kingsbury and Over Whitacre. It proposed a boundary realignment between the proposed Atherstone North and Atherstone South ward. It also stated that Bodymoor Heath should remain in the existing Kingsbury ward, as proposed by Mr Jenns (Kingsbury Parish Councillor). The Liberal Democrats further objected to the proposed three-member Arley & Whitacre ward, and instead stated a preference for retaining the current single-member Nether Whitacre ward.

Members of Parliament

²⁶ Mike O’Brien, MP for North Warwickshire, objected to the draft recommendations for North Warwickshire, in particular the creation of a three-member ward, and supported the Borough Council’s proposals.

Parish and Town Councils

²⁷ We received representations from five parish and town councils. Arley Parish Council expressed its preference for retaining the existing arrangements for Arley. Kingsbury Parish Council objected to our draft recommendations for

Kingsbury, stating that the Piccadilly area has closer links with Kingsbury than the proposed Hurley & Wood End ward. It also stated that Bodymoor Heath should remain in Kingsbury due to its association with Kingsbury Water Park and objected to the proposed parish warding arrangements. Polesworth Parish Council supported the draft recommendations to divide Polesworth into two wards, but objected to the proposed boundary. The Parish Council supported an alternative boundary alignment put forward by the Polesworth Society. Coleshill Town Council objected to the recommendation to realign the boundary between Coleshill North and Coleshill South wards on the grounds that these arrangements would be confusing and proposed an alternative boundary. The Packington Estate Enterprises Limited wrote on behalf of the parishes of Great Packington and Little Packington objecting to our draft recommendations to include both parishes in Fillongley ward, stating that residents “have been well represented by Coleshill and whilst we accept that Fillongley is potentially more rural than Coleshill, our concerns and problems seem to be more in line with Coleshill”.

Other Representations

28 A further six representations were received from the Atherstone Civic Society, the Polesworth Society and four local residents. The Atherstone Civic Society objected to the draft recommendations for two-member wards in the rural areas arguing that “ in making wards large enough for two members, in rural parts of the borough it will be necessary to include more heavily populated industrial areas, effectively removing from the council the voice of small rural communities”. It put forward several alternative arrangements for the town of Atherstone, stating its objection to the “breaking up of parishes” in the area. The Polesworth Society supported the draft recommendations to split Polesworth into two two-member wards, but objected to the proposed boundary between these wards and proposed an alternative boundary.

29 Councillor Mrs Stuart objected to the proposals to remove Great Packington and Little Packington from Coleshill South ward, stating that the residents of these parishes have common interests with Coleshill, and expressed concern over representational issues.

30 Mr Jenns (Kingsbury Parish Councillor) objected to the recommendation to transfer the Bodymoor Heath area of Kingsbury ward to

Curdworth ward, stating that Kingsbury and Bodymoor Heath have a long historical connection. He also suggested a new name for the proposed Kingsbury West parish ward, should the draft recommendations be put forward as final. Mr Jenns further proposed that the Dosthill development remain in Kingsbury ward and be placed with the Whatley and Piccadilly areas at parish level and that the number of parish councillors for Kingsbury be increased.

31 One local resident proposed a change in the number of councillors for Kingsbury parish to create more even representation at parish level, but did not specify a number of councillors. Another resident objected to the draft recommendations for Atherstone, stating that Atherstone South has no community identity with Mancetter and expressed a preference for retaining the current arrangements.

5. ANALYSIS AND FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS

32 As described earlier, our prime objective in considering the most appropriate electoral arrangements for North Warwickshire is to achieve electoral equality. In doing so we have regard to the statutory criteria set out in the Local Government Act 1992 – the need to secure effective and convenient local government, and reflect the interests and identities 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”.

33 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 must have regard to the desirability of fixing identifiable boundaries and to maintaining local ties which might otherwise be broken.

34 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.

35 Our *Guidance* states that, while we accept that the achievement of absolute electoral equality for the authority as a whole is likely to be unattainable, 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. Regard must also be had to five-year forecasts of change in electorates. We will require particular justification for schemes which result in, or retain, an imbalance of over 10 per cent in any

ward. Any imbalances of 20 per cent and over should arise only in the most exceptional of circumstances, and will require the strongest justification.

Electorate Forecasts

36 At Stage One the Borough Council submitted electorate forecasts for the year 2003, projecting an increase in the electorate of some 4 per cent from 48,737 to 50,731 over the five-year period from 1998 to 2003. It expects most of the growth to be in Atherstone, Kingsbury and Polesworth, although some growth is also expected in Dordon ward. The Council 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 and assumed occupancy rates. In our draft recommendations report we accepted that this is an inexact science and, having given consideration to the forecast electorates, we were satisfied that they represented the best estimates that could reasonably be made at the time.

37 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

38 As already explained, the Commission's starting point is to assume that the current council size facilitates effective and convenient local government.

39 North Warwickshire Borough Council is at present served by 34 councillors. At Stage One the Borough Council proposed an increase in council size from 34 to 36, stating that its proposals, “reflect the Government's pattern of two-member wards in two-tier authorities with elections in alternative years”. However, in our draft recommendations report, we stated that until further direction is received from the Secretary of

State, we would continue to maintain our current approach to PERs as set out in the March 1998 *Guidance*. We also referred to our *Guidance* which states that proposals for increases in council size should be fully justified, and noted that the current council size of 34 members would also fit into a uniform pattern of two-member wards. No other comments concerning council size were received.

40 In our draft recommendations report we considered the size and distribution of the electorate, the geography and other characteristics of the area, together with the representations received. We concluded that the statutory criteria and the achievement of electoral equality would best be met by a council of 35 members.

41 During Stage Three, the Borough Council opposed the draft recommendations, reiterating its Stage One proposals including an increase in council size by two. No other specific comments were received. In the absence of further evidence and argumentation to justify why the Commission should recommend an overall increase in two councillors, we continue to consider that the statutory criteria would best be met by a council size of 35.

Electoral Arrangements

42 As set out in our draft recommendations report, we carefully considered all the representations received at Stage One, including the borough-wide scheme from the Borough Council involving a uniform pattern of 18 two-member wards, with changes to 16 of the existing boundaries. The Council considered that such a scheme would recognise the White Paper proposals for biennial elections. Under the Borough Council's proposals, the number of wards with an electoral variance of more than 10 per cent would be reduced from 12 to four. Five wards would have an electoral variance of more than 10 per cent by 2003.

43 We recognised the improved electoral equality achieved by the Borough Council's scheme, compared to the existing arrangements. However, as the Borough Council's scheme would retain imbalances of more than 10 per cent in five wards by 2003, we decided to move away from this scheme in a number of areas, involving the creation of a new three-member ward of Arley & Whitacre to improve electoral equality further while having regard to local community identities and interests.

44 Although the Council stated that it had attempted to reflect the White Paper proposals, following the publication of the Government's White Paper *Modern Local Government – In Touch With The People* we issued further guidance (October 1998) which stated that "in proceeding with its PER work the Commission will maintain the general approach set out in its March 1998 *Guidance*. It continued that until such a time as the Secretary of State directs otherwise, the Commission is not required to have regard to the Government's White Paper proposals", the guidance continues "however, the proposals are clearly a consideration which it would not be sensible to ignore". While we acknowledge the Council's intention in proposing a uniform pattern of two-member wards, our primary objective remains that of seeking electoral equality, while having regard to the statutory criteria.

45 At Stage Three the Borough Council stated that its "scheme goes a long way to meeting the aims and objectives of the review and it is considered that a great opportunity to provide a uniform pattern of wards will be missed, if the Commission's scheme is adopted".

46 We note the concerns raised by the Borough Council over proposals for three-member wards, given the White Paper proposals for biennial elections. However, if a cycle of biennial elections is introduced it is possible that three-member wards in two-tier authorities would continue to fit into such an electoral cycle; two councillors would be elected in year one, with the third councillor being elected in year three.

47 In light of all the evidence we have received during the review, we remain of the view that our proposals provide for improved electoral equality while having regard to the statutory criteria. We do not consider that retaining a three-member ward would be incompatible with any future move to biennial elections and therefore are not persuaded by the Borough Council's proposals to move substantially away from our draft recommendations.

48 As stated earlier, Warwickshire County Council opposed the draft recommendations. It noted that the degree of change under the draft recommendations "will cause either significant inequality of representation or inadequate coterminosity between divisions and wards to emerge in the subsequent review of county

electoral divisions". It stated that it "will become even more difficult if the government moves to implement district and county elections in alternate years as set out in its recent White Paper". We noted that although both North Warwickshire Borough Council and Warwickshire County Council expressed their concern that the borough wards and county divisions should be coterminous, there was no agreement on how many county councillors the borough would merit, with the Borough Council assuming nine divisions and the County Council assuming eight divisions.

49 This is an issue which has arisen in a number of review areas. It is indicative of the tensions which can arise between the achievement of electoral equality within the individual districts of a county, each of whose electoral arrangements can vary significantly in terms of councillor:elector ratios and ward sizes, and across county council electoral divisions, while also seeking some measure of coterminosity between the two. These tensions are not readily reconciled.

50 The County Council also opposed the use of the centre of roads as ward boundaries which it considered to be "problematical and not conducive to the objective to reflect the interests of local communities". It stated that "where changes to existing ward boundaries are to take effect, we believe that matching changes to county divisional boundaries should take place simultaneously", and recognised that "to achieve this it may be necessary to delay district changes or to bring the county electoral review forward".

51 With reference to North Warwickshire, the County Council stated "it is difficult to see how eight county divisions, with an average electorate of 6,340 could be created at the time of the next county review using the proposed wards as building blocks." The County Council proposed dividing the area into eight electoral divisions, "thus opening the door to coterminosity by combination".

52 In certain cases, it has been put to us that in reviewing district electoral arrangements we should prescribe that ward patterns and sizes should be such that they would be compatible with county council divisions. We do not believe this to be an approach the Commission should take. As a Commission, we rely heavily on local authorities and others to put proposals to us on how the electoral arrangements within their individual areas

might be improved. We believe that the interests of local democracy are best served by basing our recommendations on schemes which are generated locally, address the statutory criteria, and achieve a high level of electoral equality.

53 Nevertheless, we recognise that coterminosity between county divisions and district wards is capable of being conducive to effective and convenient local government, and we place a high value on its achievement as part of our reviews of county council electoral arrangements.

54 We received a further 13 representations commenting on specific aspects of our draft recommendations.

55 We have reviewed our draft recommendations in the light of further evidence and the representations received during Stage Three. For borough warding purposes, the following areas, based on existing wards, are considered in turn:

- (a) Dordon, Newton Regis, Polesworth and Warton wards;
- (b) Atherstone North, Atherstone South, Baddesley Ensor, Grendon, Hartshill and Mancetter;
- (c) Curdworth, Hurley, Kingsbury and Nether Whitacre wards;
- (d) Arley, Coleshill North, Coleshill South, Fillonlgey and Water Orton wards.

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

Dordon, Newton Regis, Polesworth and Warton wards

57 These four wards lie in the northern part of the borough. Newton Regis and Warton wards are predominantly rural, while Dordon and the town of Polesworth are comparatively more urban. Newton Regis and Warton wards are each represented by one councillor, Dordon ward by two, and Polesworth ward by three. Under the existing electoral arrangements, Dordon and Newton Regis are over-represented by 16 per cent and 37 per cent respectively (7 per cent and 37 per cent by 2003), while Polesworth and Warton are under-represented by 29 per cent and 28 per cent respectively (37 per cent and 39 per cent by 2003).

58 At Stage One, the Borough Council proposed that Newton Regis ward and Warton ward be amalgamated into a new Newton Regis & Warton ward, represented by two councillors. It also proposed allocating an additional councillor to the town of Polesworth by splitting the existing Polesworth ward into two new wards, Polesworth East and Polesworth West, both returning two councillors. Finally, the Borough Council proposed no change to the present Dordon ward. Under these proposals, electoral equality would be improved in the area, with the number of electors per councillor in the proposed Newton Regis & Warton ward, Polesworth East and Polesworth West wards being 1 per cent above, 2 per cent below and 6 per cent above the borough average (4 per cent, 1 per cent above and 7 per cent by 2003). While the number of electors per councillor in Dordon ward would initially be 11 per cent below the borough average under a council size of 36 members, this figure was forecast to improve to 6 per cent by 2003.

59 The Borough Council received a representation during Stage One from Polesworth Parish Council, which it forwarded to us, supporting the proposals for two two-member wards.

60 In our draft recommendations report we noted the significantly improved levels of electoral equality that the Borough Council's proposed new Newton Regis & Warton ward would provide, while having regard to communities as defined by parishes, and proposed endorsing the Borough Council's proposals as part of our draft recommendations for this area. Under a council size of 35 members, the number of electors per councillor in Newton Regis & Warton ward would be 2 per cent below the borough average (2 per cent above by 2003). We also noted that there were few options available in the Dordon area which would both improve electoral equality and reflect community ties and that although Dordon would initially be over-represented by 14 per cent under a council size of 35, this is forecast to improve considerably to 8 per cent by 2003. We therefore proposed no change to Dordon ward as part of our draft recommendations.

61 No representations were received at Stage Three regarding the proposed Newton Regis & Warton and Dordon wards, and we therefore confirm our draft recommendations as final.

62 In our draft recommendations report we considered that electoral equality in Polesworth

could be further improved. We therefore proposed realigning the boundary between the proposed new wards, resulting in both wards having a variance of only 1 per cent below the borough average (1 per cent above by 2003).

63 At Stage Three we received a representation from the Polesworth Society, who supported the draft recommendation to split Polesworth ward into two new wards. However, it objected to the proposed boundary and suggested an alternative realignment, involving a transfer of electors from the proposed Polesworth East ward to Polesworth West ward. It argued that the Commission's proposed boundary "cuts communities in two by virtue of the ward boundary being the centre of three roads – Fairfield's Hill (part) Potters Lane and Common Lane in addition to the Coventry Canal". Under the Polesworth Society's proposal, the number of electors per councillor in Polesworth East and Polesworth West wards would be 1 per cent below and equal to the borough average initially (1 per cent and 2 per cent above by 2003). This proposal was supported by Polesworth Parish Council.

64 We have considered the alternative boundary put forward by the Polesworth Society and Polesworth Parish Council. These proposals would provide similar levels of electoral equality to our draft recommendations, and would retain whole streets together. In the light of the views put forward by both the Polesworth Society and the Parish Council, we conclude that these proposals would more closely reflect the communities in the area and consider this boundary amendment to be a suitable alternative to our draft recommendations for the area. We therefore propose modifying our draft recommendations for Polesworth as described above. Under our final recommendations, the electoral variances for Polesworth East and Polesworth West wards would be the same as those proposed by the Polesworth Society. Our final recommendations for the future warding arrangements for Polesworth are illustrated on Map A2.

Atherstone North, Atherstone South, Baddesley Ensor, Grendon, Hartshill and Mancetter wards

65 These wards generally lie in the east of the borough. Atherstone is the main town in North Warwickshire. At present, the town is split into two wards, Atherstone North and Atherstone South, both of which are represented by two councillors. The north of the present Mancetter ward borders the town of Atherstone, and is relatively urban in

comparison to the south of the ward which incorporates the parish of Ansley. This ward is represented by three councillors. The predominantly rural wards of Baddesley Ensor and Grendon are each represented by one councillor. Hartshill ward comprises the parishes of Hartshill and Caldecote. Under the current arrangements Hartshill is over-represented by 3 per cent (6 per cent by 2003), while Atherstone North and Atherstone South wards are currently under-represented by 30 per cent and 5 per cent respectively (30 per cent and 12 per cent by 2003). Baddesley Ensor, Grendon and Mancetter wards are over-represented by 2 per cent, 13 per cent and 19 per cent respectively (2 per cent, 13 per cent and 16 per cent by 2003).

66 At Stage One, the Borough Council proposed splitting the town of Atherstone into three wards; Atherstone North, Atherstone Central and Atherstone South & Mancetter. The proposed Atherstone North ward would include polling districts AC2 and AC3; the proposed Atherstone Central ward would include polling districts AC1 and the present Atherstone South polling districts of AD1 and AD2; and the proposed Atherstone South & Mancetter ward would comprise the existing Atherstone South polling district AD3, and the parish of Mancetter (less the Ridge Lane area, to be included in a proposed Ansley & Over Whitacre ward).

67 Under the Borough Council's scheme, Baddesley Ensor and Grendon wards would be combined in a new Baddesley & Grendon ward. The Council also proposed that the area of Plough Hill Road, Coleshill Road and Chapel End, currently in Hartshill ward, should be included in a modified Ansley & Over Whitacre ward. It proposed no further changes to Hartshill ward. As stated in our draft recommendations, the Borough Council's proposals for these areas would provide improved levels of electoral equality, with the number of electors per councillor in Atherstone North, Atherstone Central and Atherstone South & Mancetter wards being 1 per cent above, 1 per cent above and 2 per cent below the borough average respectively (3 per cent below, 3 per cent above and 1 per cent below in 2003). The number of electors per councillor in the proposed Baddesley & Grendon ward would be 14 per cent above the borough average (9 per cent in 2003), while in Hartshill ward it would be 2 per cent above the borough average (6 per cent in 2003).

68 We received a further representation at Stage One from Mancetter Parish Council, objecting to

the Council's proposal to transfer the Ridge Lane area of Mancetter parish into a proposed new Ansley & Over Whitacre ward.

69 In our draft recommendations report we considered that although the Council's scheme would provide for improved levels of electoral equality, it would involve placing part of Mancetter parish in a surrounding borough ward. This was opposed by Mancetter Parish Council and would not, in our opinion, reflect communities in the area. We therefore investigated alternative proposals and concluded that similar improvements to electoral equality could be achieved using whole parishes as building blocks and without transferring the Ridge Lane area to the proposed Ansley & Over Whitacre ward.

70 We proposed adopting the Council's proposals to divide Atherstone into three wards, but recommended that the new Atherstone South & Mancetter ward should comprise the whole parish of Mancetter, together with part of Atherstone, in order to retain existing community links. We further recommended modifying the proposed boundary between the wards of Atherstone Central and Atherstone North. Our draft recommendations would result in the number of electors per councillor in the wards of Atherstone North, Atherstone Central and Atherstone South & Mancetter being 5 per cent above, 2 per cent above and 3 per cent below the average respectively (1 per cent, 2 per cent and equal to the borough average by 2003).

71 In our draft recommendations report, we also concluded that the Borough Council's proposal for a new Baddesley & Grendon ward would provide an appropriate balance between achieving electoral equality while having regard to the statutory criteria. We further concluded that Hartshill ward should retain its current boundaries, given the existing levels of electoral equality, which, under a council size of 35, would improve further to be equal to the borough average (3 per cent above by 2003). This would obviate the need to ward Hartshill parish and include the Chapel End area in the Arley & Whitacre ward.

72 At Stage Three we received three representations regarding the draft recommendations for these wards from the Liberal Democrats', the Atherstone Civic Society and a local resident. The Liberal Democrats' proposed an alternative boundary between the proposed Atherstone North and Atherstone South wards, aligning the boundary along the A5 by-pass. Under this proposal the number of electors per councillor in Atherstone

North and Atherstone South & Mancetter wards would be approximately 2 per cent above and equal to the borough average (2 per cent below and 3 per cent above the borough average by 2003).

73 The Atherstone Civic Society put forward two alternative options for Atherstone. First, it proposed that Atherstone be divided into two wards, with an enlarged Atherstone North ward, to be represented by three councillors, and a modified Atherstone South ward, represented by two councillors, resulting in the number of electors per councillor in Atherstone North ward and Atherstone South ward being 1 per cent and 7 per cent below the borough average (1 per cent and equal to the borough average by 2003). Alternatively, it proposed splitting Atherstone into three wards; Atherstone North, Atherstone Central and Atherstone South, each consisting of approximately 2,240 electors, to be represented by two councillors each. The Atherstone Civic Society acknowledged that these wards would then be slightly over-represented, but stated that "Atherstone is under-represented on the Council in relation to its importance as the main centre and seat of local government". Under these proposals each ward would be approximately 19 per cent below the borough average (20 per cent by 2003). It also proposed that the parish of Ansley be removed from the existing Mancetter ward which should be represented by two councillors, resulting in the number of electors per councillor being 37 per cent below the borough average (36 per cent in 2003). The Atherstone Civic Society did not make alternative proposals for the parish of Ansley.

74 We also received a representation from a local resident who objected to the draft recommendations for Atherstone, in particular the proposal to include the parish of Mancetter in a ward with parts of Atherstone stating that "Mancetter is a separate and distinct area which has nothing to do with Atherstone".

75 We have carefully considered the alternative proposals put forward at Stage Three for Atherstone and Mancetter. The Liberal Democrat Group's proposal for a minor boundary alignment to our draft recommendations would provide for slightly improved levels of electoral equality initially, although slightly worse levels by 2003. However, we considered that this boundary amendment would better reflect the interests of the local community, keeping the area east of Queen's Road, and the whole of Witherley Road together.

We further consider that the A5 provides a clear and easily identifiable boundary between the proposed Atherstone North ward and Atherstone South & Mancetter ward. We therefore propose adopting the Liberal Democrats' alternative boundary in this area.

76 The first option submitted by Atherstone Civic Society, to split Atherstone into two wards represented by five councillors, would provide for improved levels of electoral equality in the proposed Atherstone North ward, but would leave Atherstone South ward over-represented by approximately 7 per cent. The second option, splitting the town into three roughly equal wards would leave all three proposed wards significantly over-represented. Both these options would leave Mancetter significantly over-represented by 37 per cent.

77 Our draft recommendations for Atherstone would avoid splitting the parish of Mancetter between two wards, while Atherstone Civic Society's proposal for Mancetter would leave it significantly over-represented. We do not consider that placing parts of Atherstone and Mancetter in a single ward would be detrimental to community ties, as there is no clear physical divide between the two areas. We are not therefore persuaded by the view expressed by a local resident, that the two areas are separate and distinct and that this should outweigh the objective of seeking electoral equality.

78 In the light of the evidence received, we have decided to endorse our draft recommendations for the area, subject to a minor boundary amendment between Atherstone North and Atherstone South & Mancetter put forward by the Liberal Democrats, as described earlier. Our final recommendations for the future warding arrangements for Atherstone are illustrated on the large map at the back of the report.

79 No representations were received regarding the proposed wards of Baddesley & Grendon and Hartshill.

80 Under our final recommendations, the number of electors per councillor in Atherstone Central, Atherstone North, Atherstone South & Mancetter, Baddesley & Grendon and Harthill wards would be 2 per cent above, 2 per cent above, equal to, 11 per cent above and equal to the borough average respectively (2 per cent above, 2 per cent below, 3 per cent above, 6 per cent above and 3 above per in 2003).

Curdworth, Hurley, Kingsbury and Nether Whitacre wards

81 These four wards lie in the west of the borough. Kingsbury is predominantly urban in comparison to the surrounding wards of Curdworth, Hurley and Nether Whitacre. At present, the number of electors per councillor in the wards of Curdworth, Hurley, Kingsbury and Nether Whitacre is 15 per cent above, 14 per cent below, 23 per cent above and 6 per cent below the borough average respectively (15 per cent, 11 per cent, 31 per cent and 4 per cent by 2003). Curdworth and Nether Whitacre wards both return one councillor each, while Kingsbury and Hurley wards return two councillors each.

82 At Stage One, the Borough Council proposed an enlarged two-member Curdworth ward, additionally including the rural Bodymoor Heath area of the existing Kingsbury ward and the parish of Nether Whitacre. It also proposed creating a new two-member Hurley & Wood End ward, comprising the existing Hurley ward and the Piccadilly area of the existing Kingsbury ward, and the proposed housing development of Dosthill in the north of the existing Kingsbury ward. Kingsbury ward would then consist of the more urban centre of the existing Kingsbury ward. The scheme would provide improved levels of electoral equality in the wards of Curdworth and Hurley & Wood End, with both wards having 3 per cent more electors per councillor than the borough average (1 per cent less and 11 per cent more by 2003). The proposed Kingsbury ward would still be significantly under-represented with 15 per cent more electors per councillor than the borough average (11 per cent by 2003.)

83 Two further representations were received concerning this area during Stage One. Kingsbury Parish Council opposed the Borough Council's original proposal to include the settlement of Cliff in the proposed new Hurley & Wood End ward. In its submission, the Borough Council stated that, in view of these comments, Cliff should remain in Kingsbury ward. Kingsbury Parish Council also opposed the proposed housing development at Dosthill being included in Kingsbury ward. Nether Whitacre Parish Council opposed the proposal to split the "Whitacres" and include the parish of Nether Whitacre in the modified Curdworth ward.

84 In our draft recommendations report, we adopted the Borough Council's scheme for a

modified Curdworth ward. While we noted the views expressed regarding community ties between the parishes of Nether Whitacre and Over Whitacre, we stated that we were unable to find a suitable alternative which provided a more appropriate balance between electoral equality and community factors and therefore recommended that Nether Whitacre be included in the modified Curdworth ward. We also put forward the Borough Council's proposal for the new Hurley & Wood End ward as part of our draft recommendations, subject to a minor boundary amendment between the proposed Kingsbury and Hurley & Wood End wards. We proposed that this boundary should follow the railway line which runs through Kingsbury, to include the four electors south-east of the railway line in the current Kingsbury ward, in the Hurley & Wood End ward. We also recommended that the Dosthill development area in the north of Kingsbury ward be included in the new Hurley & Wood End ward.

85 In our draft recommendations report, we recognised the difficulty in securing improved levels of electoral equality in Kingsbury while reflecting community identities and interests due to the comparatively urban nature of the town and its surrounding rural hinterland. As mentioned in our draft recommendations report, we considered several options for Kingsbury ward. First, we considered proposals to include part of the urban centre of Kingsbury in a surrounding ward. However, we concluded that this would have a detrimental effect on community ties, which would not be outweighed by the improvements to electoral equality. Second, we considered reducing the under-representation in Kingsbury ward by allocating an additional councillor. However, this alternative would not secure improved levels of electoral equality, and would result in significant over-representation.

86 We noted that, under a council size of 35 members, electoral equality in the modified Kingsbury ward was forecast to improve from 12 per cent to 8 per cent by 2003, and having rejected the alternative proposals, we adopted the Borough Council's scheme as part of our draft recommendations. Given a 35-member council these proposals would result in the number of electors per councillor in both Curdworth and Hurley & Wood End wards being equal to the borough average (4 per cent below and 8 per cent above by 2003).

87 In response to our draft recommendations, we received comments from Kingsbury Parish Council and two local residents. Mr Jenns (Kingsbury Parish Councillor), objected to the draft recommendation to transfer the Bodymoor Heath area from the existing Kingsbury ward into Curdworth ward, stating that the area has an affinity with Kingsbury Water Park, continuing that the more rural nature of Bodymoor Heath did not make it incompatible with Kingsbury “for, while being a large village, Kingsbury itself can not really be considered urban in the same way that a suburb of a larger town or city is”. Kingsbury Parish Council, Mr Jenns and another local resident also commented on the parishing arrangements for Kingsbury. These comments are discussed later on in this chapter.

88 We have given careful consideration to the evidence and representations received. We acknowledge that under our proposals Kingsbury would still be under-represented by 12 per cent, but remain of the view that alternatives for the area, including combining the urban centre of Kingsbury with a surrounding ward, and allocating an additional councillor to the ward would not provide for a better balance between the need to seek electoral equality and reflect the statutory criteria. We recognise that Bodymoor Heath has an affiliation with Kingsbury, however, we consider that placing Bodymoor Heath with Curdworth, which is also rural in character, largely addresses the under-representation in the area, whilst having regard to the statutory criteria, and would retain the relatively compact town of Kingsbury in one ward. Under these proposals electoral equality for the modified Kingsbury ward improves significantly by 2003. No representations were received providing an alternative option for this area and we therefore confirm our draft recommendations as final. Details of our final recommendations for these wards are illustrated in Maps A3 and A4 on Appendix A.

89 Under our final recommendations the number of electors per councillor for the wards of Curdworth and Hurley & Wood End would be equal to the borough average (4 per cent below and 8 per cent above the borough average by 2003). In the modified Kingsbury ward, the number of electors per councillor would be 12 per cent above the borough average (8 per cent by 2003).

Arley, Coleshill North, Coleshill South, Fillongley and Water Orton wards

90 The wards of Arley, Coleshill North, Coleshill South, Fillongley and Water Orton cover the south

of the borough and each return two councillors. Arley ward is currently over-represented by 22 per cent (18 per cent in 2003), Fillongley by 9 per cent (9 per cent by 2003) and Water Orton by 2 per cent (2 per cent by 2003). The town of Coleshill is divided into two wards; Coleshill North and Coleshill South. Currently, Coleshill North is under-represented by 3 per cent while Coleshill South is over-represented by 16 per cent (7 per cent and 15 per cent by 2003).

91 In its Stage One proposal, the Borough Council proposed creating a new two-member Ansley & Over Whitacre ward, comprising the parishes of Ansley and Over Whitacre, the Ridge Lane area of Mancetter parish and the Chapel End area of Hartshill parish, as mentioned earlier. The Borough Council also proposed creating a new two-member Arley ward, comprising the existing Arley ward and the parish of Astley, currently in Fillongley ward. It further proposed a minor boundary amendment to reduce the electoral imbalance between Coleshill North and Coleshill South wards. Both these wards would continue to be represented by two councillors. Fillongley ward would be based on the existing ward, less the parish of Astley. The Council also proposed no change to the existing Water Orton ward. Under this scheme (involving a council size of 36) electoral equality would improve; Coleshill North and Coleshill South wards would have 6 per cent more and 8 per cent less electors per councillor than the borough average (6 per cent and 10 per cent in 2003). Ansley & Over Whitacre ward would be over-represented by 10 per cent, the proposed Arley ward would be over-represented by 12 per cent, Fillongley would be over-represented by 10 per cent and Water Orton would be under-represented by 4 per cent (12 per cent, 12 per cent, 13 per cent and equal to the borough average respectively by 2003).

92 Two further representations were received by the Borough Council concerning this area during Stage One, which were forwarded to us. Fillongley Parish Council objected to proposals to include Astley parish in the Arley ward for geographical and community identity reasons. Over Whitacre Parish Council also objected to splitting the “Whitacres” for social, cultural and economic reasons, and proposed that Over Whitacre be placed in the new Fillongley ward.

93 In our draft recommendations report we stated that, although the Borough Council’s proposals provided for improved levels of electoral equality,

we considered that further improvements could be made to electoral equality while better reflecting communities. Our recommendations for a new Atherstone South & Mancetter ward, as discussed earlier, would result in the Council's proposed Ansley & Over Whitacre ward being significantly over-represented. We therefore proposed creating a new three-member Arley & Whitacre ward comprising the parishes of Ansley, Arley and Over Whitacre. We considered that these parishes have a similar identity in that they share rural characteristics and are geographically well connected by road. We concluded that this proposed new ward would provide the most suitable balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria.

94 In our draft recommendations report we noted that Fillongley ward is a large rural ward comprising much of the southern part of the borough. We also noted that under the Borough Council's proposals Fillongley ward would still be significantly over-represented, and we therefore recommended that the parish of Astley remain in Fillongley, as we considered that this would improve electoral equality and retain existing community links, reflecting the views of Fillongley Parish Council. We also proposed that the parishes of Great Packington and Little Packington, in the present Coleshill South ward, be included in the modified Fillongley ward. This would significantly improve electoral equality in the area and would include areas with similar community interests. We also proposed building on the Borough Council's scheme in the Coleshill area. Although the Borough Council's scheme provided for improved levels of electoral equality, given our draft recommendations for Fillongley, Coleshill South ward would be significantly over-represented. We therefore recommended an alternative boundary alignment between the two wards. Under our draft recommendations, the number of electors per councillor for Coleshill North and Coleshill South wards would be 6 per cent below and 6 per cent below the borough average respectively (6 per cent and 9 per cent in 2003).

95 We also put forward the Borough Council's recommendation for no change in the ward of Water Orton which, given a 35-member council, would have an electoral variance of 1 per cent (3 per cent in 2003).

96 In response to our draft recommendations, the Borough Council objected to the creation of a three-member ward, stating that "whilst it is

acknowledged that the Commission's proposals meet its prime objective of achieving electoral equality, the Council is disappointed that the recommendations do not reflect the Government's thinking of two-member wards in two-tier authorities".

97 The Liberal Democrat Group also objected to the proposed three-member Arley & Whitacre ward, on the grounds that Over Whitacre has long standing links with Nether Whitacre. The Group stated that "the present Nether Whitacre ward accurately represents the predominantly farming nature of this part of the borough and it should be retained as a single-member ward if at all possible". Arley Parish Council stated its preference for retaining the status quo.

98 We received two representations regarding the draft recommendations for Coleshill during Stage Three. Coleshill Town Council objected to the draft recommendations for the proposed Coleshill North and Coleshill South wards stating that the proposal "will not only be confusing but does little to rectify the imbalance between the two wards". Instead, it proposed an alternative option to include electors east of the High Street in Coleshill South ward. Its proposals would result in the number of electors per councillor in Coleshill North and Coleshill South wards being 8 per cent and 4 per cent below the borough average respectively (8 per cent and 7 per cent by 2003).

99 Packington Estate Enterprise Limited, writing on behalf of the parishes of Great Packington and Little Packington, objected to the draft recommendations to include the two parishes in Fillongley ward. It stated that the parishes "have been well represented by Coleshill and whilst we accept that Fillongley is potentially more rural than Coleshill, our concerns and problems seem to be more in line with Coleshill". Another local resident objected to our draft recommendations for Coleshill South ward, arguing that the Packington residents share common interests with Coleshill residents, and proposed that the parishes of Great Packington and Little Packington remain in Coleshill South ward.

100 We have carefully considered the representations received during the consultation period. We acknowledge the community ties between the parishes of Nether Whitacre and Over Whitacre, however, we did not receive any alternatives for the area at Stage Three which would provide for improved electoral equality while having regard to

the statutory criteria. We have sought to create new wards by using whole parishes as building blocks. We consider that the parishes of Ansley, Arley and Over Whitacre share rural characteristics and are geographically well connected by road and have concluded that these proposals strike a balance between the community factors and the achievement of electoral equality. We therefore propose confirming our draft recommendation for Arley and Whitacre ward as final.

101 The alternative option put forward by Coleshill Town Council for warding in Coleshill provides for similar levels of electoral equality between the two wards to those under our draft recommendations, while having the advantage of being locally generated. We have therefore decided to endorse this boundary amendment as part of our final recommendations. However, we did not consider that the community arguments expressed for retaining the parishes of Great Packington and Little Packington in the same ward outweigh the need to achieve electoral equality, as retaining them in Coleshill South ward would leave Fillongley ward over-represented by 7 per cent now, increasing to 10 per cent by 2003. We therefore confirm our draft recommendations for the area as final subject to a boundary amendment between the wards of Coleshill North and Coleshill South, as proposed by Coleshill Town Council. Details of our final recommendations for Coleshill can be found on Map A5 in Appendix A.

102 Under our final recommendations, the number of electors per councillor in Arley, Coleshill North, Coleshill South, Fillongley and Water Orton wards would be 2 per cent above, 8 per cent below, 4 per cent below, 1 per cent below and 1 per cent above the borough average (2 per cent, 8 per cent, 7 per cent, 5 per cent and 3 per cent below by 2003).

Electoral Cycle

103 At Stage One, we did not receive any representations regarding the electoral cycle. We therefore recommended no change to the current electoral cycle.

104 At Stage Three no further comments were received to the contrary, and we confirm our draft recommendation as final.

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 amendments:

- (a) in Atherstone town – we propose a minor boundary modification between the proposed Atherstone North and Atherstone South & Mancetter wards;
- (b) in Coleshill – we propose a minor boundary modification between Coleshill North and the proposed Coleshill South ward;
- (c) in Polesworth – we propose a minor boundary modification between the proposed Polesworth East and Polesworth West wards.

106 We conclude that, in North Warwickshire:

- (a) there should be an increase in council size from 34 to 35;
- (b) there should be 17 wards, two fewer than at present;
- (c) the boundaries of 16 of the existing wards should be modified;
- (d) elections should continue to be held for the whole council.

107 Figure 4 (opposite) shows the impact of our final recommendations on electoral equality, comparing them with the current arrangements, based on 1998 and 2003 electorate figures.

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 12 to three. By 2003 no wards are forecast to vary by more than 10 per cent from the average for the borough.

Final Recommendation

North Warwickshire Borough Council should comprise 35 councillors serving 17 wards, as detailed and named in Figures 1 and 2, and illustrated on Map 2 in Appendix A. Elections should continue to be held for the whole Council.

Figure 4 :
Comparison of Current and Recommended Electoral Arrangements

	1998 electorate		2003 forecast electorate	
	Current arrangements	Final recommendations	Current arrangements	Final recommendations
Number of councillors	34	35	34	35
Number of wards	19	17	19	17
Average number of electors per councillor	1,433	1,392	1,492	1,449
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	6	0	5	0

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 borough wards, it must also be divided into parish wards, so that each parish ward lies wholly within a single ward of the borough. Accordingly, in our draft recommendations report we proposed consequential changes to the warding arrangements for the parishes of Polesworth, Kingsbury, Atherstone and Coleshill to reflect the proposed borough wards.

¹¹⁰ The parish of Polesworth is currently served by 11 parish councillors. The parish is divided into three parish wards; Birchmoor returning one councillor, Polesworth returning seven councillors and Warton returning three councillors. To facilitate splitting Polesworth into two new wards, we proposed that Polesworth parish be divided into four parish wards. A new Polesworth West parish ward, coterminous with the proposed Polesworth West borough ward less the existing Birchmoor parish ward should be created, represented by three councillors. A new Polesworth

East parish ward, coterminous with the proposed new Polesworth East borough ward should be created, returning four councillors. We proposed no change to the existing Birchmoor and Warton parish wards.

¹¹¹ No representations were received at Stage Three concerning the parishing arrangements for Polesworth. However, in the light of evidence received during Stage Three, we have modified our recommendations for borough warding in Polesworth. We are therefore also modifying our proposed parish electoral arrangements to meet the requirements of Schedule 11.

Final Recommendation

Polesworth Parish Council should comprise 11 parish councillors, as at present, representing four wards: Polesworth West parish ward (returning three councillors); Polesworth East parish ward (returning four councillors); Birchmoor parish ward (returning one councillor); and Warton parish ward (returning three councillors). The boundaries of these two new parish wards should reflect the proposed borough wards, and are illustrated and named on Map A2.

112 The parish of Atherstone is currently served by 15 councillors representing two parish wards; Atherstone North parish ward returning eight councillors, and Atherstone South parish ward returning seven parish councillors. In our draft recommendations we proposed modifying Atherstone North borough ward and creating a new Atherstone Central borough ward and a new Atherstone South & Mancetter borough ward. We therefore proposed that a new Atherstone Central parish ward be created, returning six parish councillors, coterminous with the proposed borough ward of the same name. Atherstone North parish ward would be modified to be coterminous with the borough ward of the same name and would also return six parish councillors. We also proposed modifying Atherstone South parish ward so that it comprises that part of Atherstone parish falling in the proposed Atherstone South & Mancetter borough ward and be represented by three councillors.

113 No representations were received concerning the parishing arrangements for Atherstone. However, in the light of new evidence received at Stage Three, we have modified our proposals for the wards of Atherstone North and Atherstone South & Mancetter. We therefore propose that the parish ward boundary be realigned to reflect the modified borough wards.

Final Recommendation

Atherstone Parish Council should comprise 15 councillors, as at present, representing three wards: Atherstone North parish ward (returning six councillors); Atherstone South parish ward (returning three councillors); and Atherstone Central parish ward (returning six councillors). The boundaries of these three parish wards should reflect the proposed borough ward boundaries, and are illustrated and named on the large map at the back of the report.

114 The parish of Kingsbury is currently served by 11 councillors representing three parish wards: Hurley parish ward represented by two parish councillors; Wood End parish ward represented by two parish councillors; and Kingsbury parish ward represented by seven parish councillors. In our draft recommendations report, we proposed that in order to facilitate the inclusion of the existing Bodymoor Heath area in the modified Curdworth

borough ward, a new Kingsbury West parish ward be created, covering this area and returning two parish councillors. We also proposed creating a new Kingsbury Central parish ward, coterminous with the borough ward of the same name. We recommended that Wood End parish ward additionally include the Piccadilly area of the parish and the Dosthill development site, and that Hurley parish ward should additionally include the four electors to the east of the railway line who are being transferred to the new Hurley & Wood End borough ward, under our proposals for borough warding.

115 In response to our consultation report, several representations were received regarding the proposed parishing arrangements for Kingsbury. Kingsbury Parish Council objected to the Piccadilly area being included in Wood End parish ward and suggested instead that Piccadilly should form a parish ward with the Whateley and Dosthill areas.

116 Mr Jenns (Kingsbury Parish Councillor) supported the parish council's views that a parish ward be created for Piccadilly, Whateley and Dosthill. Mr Jenns also suggested that Kingsbury be represented by more parish councillors and proposed that Kingsbury Central and Kingsbury West parish wards should instead be named Kingsbury and Bodymoor Heath. Another local resident also stated that there should be a change in the number of councillors for Kingsbury, to create electoral equality at parish level.

117 Having considered all the evidence received, we propose adopting the proposals from Kingsbury Parish Council and local residents for a new Piccadilly, Dosthill and Whateley parish ward. However, the Parish Council did not comment on the number or distribution of parish councillors. In the absence of the views of the Parish Council on an increase in the total number of parish councillors, we propose retaining a council size of 11 and, in the light of comments received at Stage Three we have attempted to provide a degree of electoral equality at parish level. We recommend that the proposed Piccadilly & Whately parish ward should return one parish councillor.

118 As stated earlier, we have proposed that, for borough council election purposes, the area should form part of an enlarged Curdworth ward. However, we have noted the views that the Bodymoor Heath area shares a community identity with Kingsbury and consider that the parish ward name should reflect these links by retaining the

name Kingsbury. We therefore confirm our draft recommendations to name the parish ward Kingsbury West as final.

Final Recommendation

Kingsbury Parish Council should be served by 11 councillors, as at present, representing five wards: Kingsbury West parish ward (returning one councillor); Kingsbury Central parish ward (returning five councillors); Hurley parish ward (returning two councillors); Wood End parish ward (returning two councillors); and Piccadilly & Whateley parish ward (returning one councillor). The parish ward boundaries should reflect the proposed borough ward boundaries in the area, as illustrated and named on Maps A3 and A4 in Appendix A.

¹¹⁹ The parish of Coleshill is currently represented by 10 parish councillors representing two parish wards; Coleshill North and Coleshill South, each returning five councillors. In our draft recommendations report we proposed a minor boundary amendment between the existing Coleshill North and Coleshill South borough wards.

¹²⁰ As described earlier, Coleshill Town Council proposed an alternative boundary between Coleshill North and Coleshill South wards, which we have adopted as part of our final recommendations. We therefore propose that the parish ward boundary be realigned to reflect the modified borough wards, and that both parish wards continue to be served by five parish councillors.

Final Recommendation

Coleshill Parish Council should comprise 10 parish councillors, as at present, representing two wards: Coleshill North parish ward (returning five councillors); and Coleshill South parish ward (returning five councillors). The boundaries of these two wards should be coterminous with the proposed borough wards, and are illustrated and named on Map A5.

¹²¹ In our draft recommendations report we proposed that there should be no change to the electoral cycle of parish councils in the borough, and are confirming this as final.

Final Recommendation

For parish councils, whole Council elections should continue to take place every four years, on the same cycle as that of the Borough Council.

6. NEXT STEPS

¹²² Having completed our review of electoral arrangements in North Warwickshire and submitted our final recommendations to the Secretary of State, we have fulfilled our statutory obligation under the Local Government Act 1992.

¹²³ It now falls to the Secretary of State to decide whether to give effect to our recommendations, with or without modification, and to implement them by means of an order. Such an order will not be made earlier than six weeks from the date that our recommendations are submitted to the Secretary of State.

¹²⁴ All further correspondence concerning our recommendations and the matters discussed in this report should be addressed to:

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

APPENDIX A

Final Recommendations for North Warwickshire: Detailed Mapping

The following maps illustrate the Commission's proposed ward boundaries for the North Warwickshire area.

Map A1 illustrates, in outline form, the proposed ward boundaries within the borough and indicates the areas which are shown in more detail on Map A2 and the large map inserted at the back of the report.

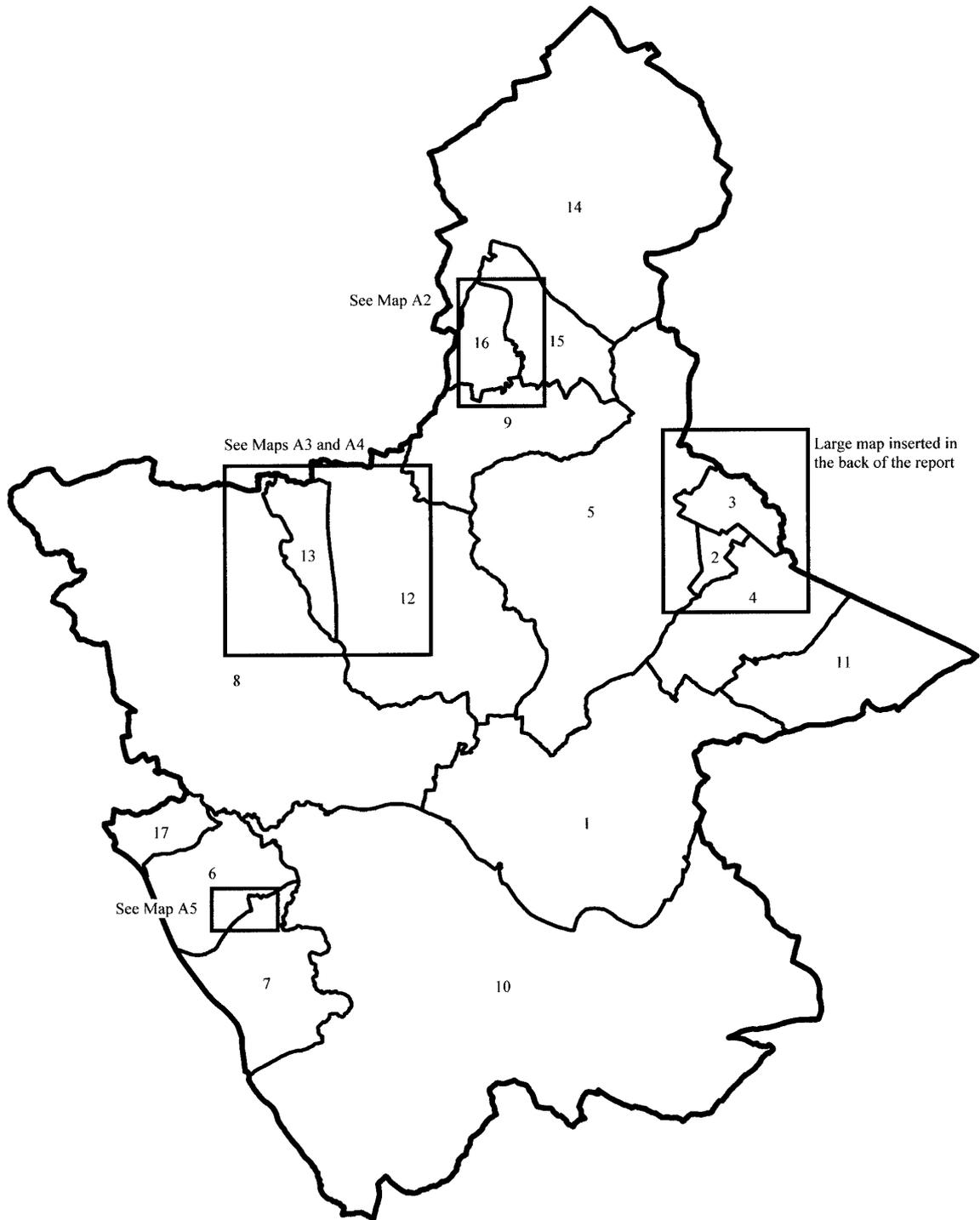
Map A2 illustrates the proposed borough and parish warding for Polesworth.

Maps A3 and A4 illustrates the proposed borough and parish warding arrangements for Kingsbury.

Map A5 illustrates the proposed borough and parish warding for Coleshill.

The **large map** inserted in the back of the report illustrates the proposed warding arrangements for Atherstone.

Map A1:
Final Recommendations for North Warwickshire: Key Map

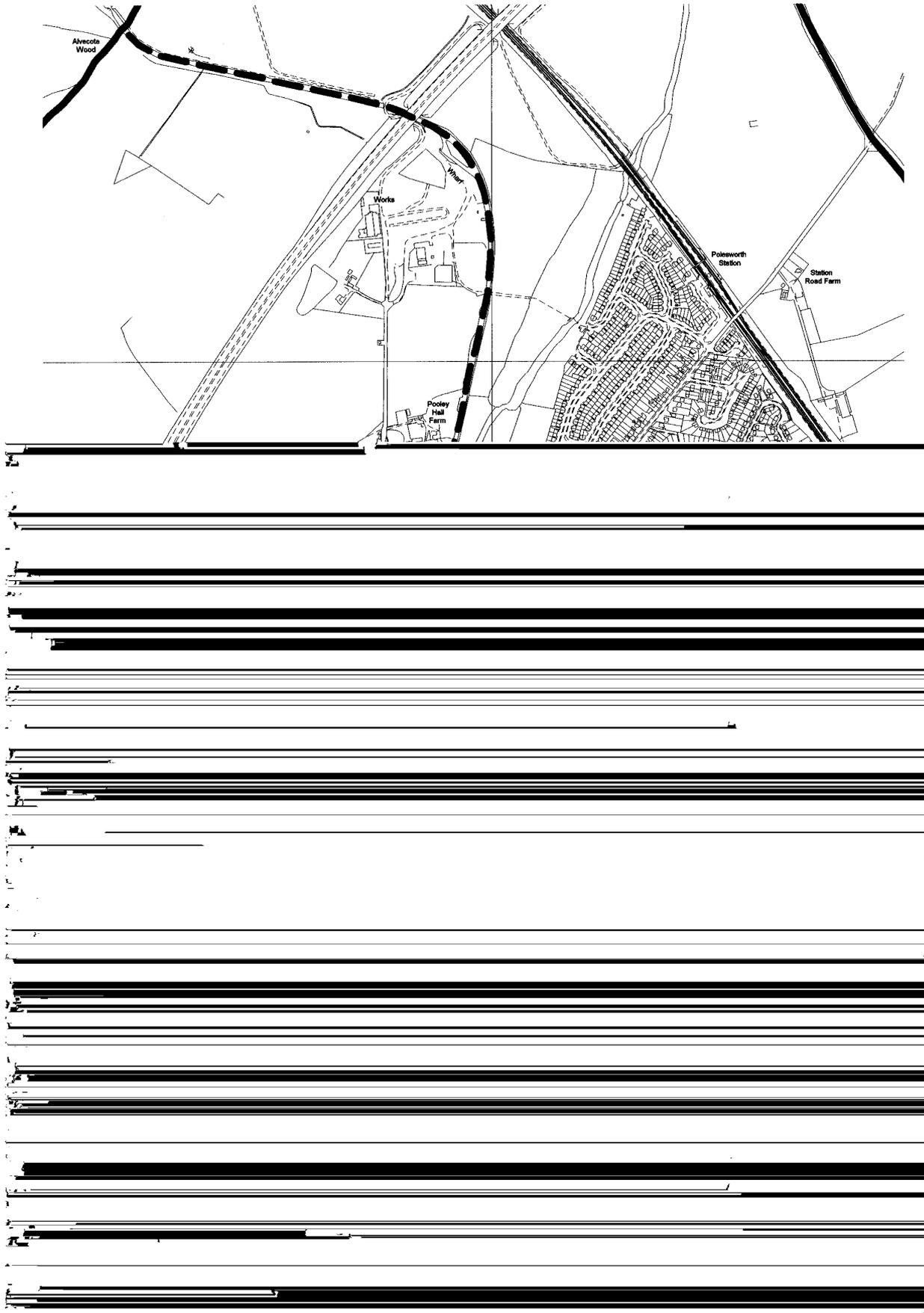


Key to Wards

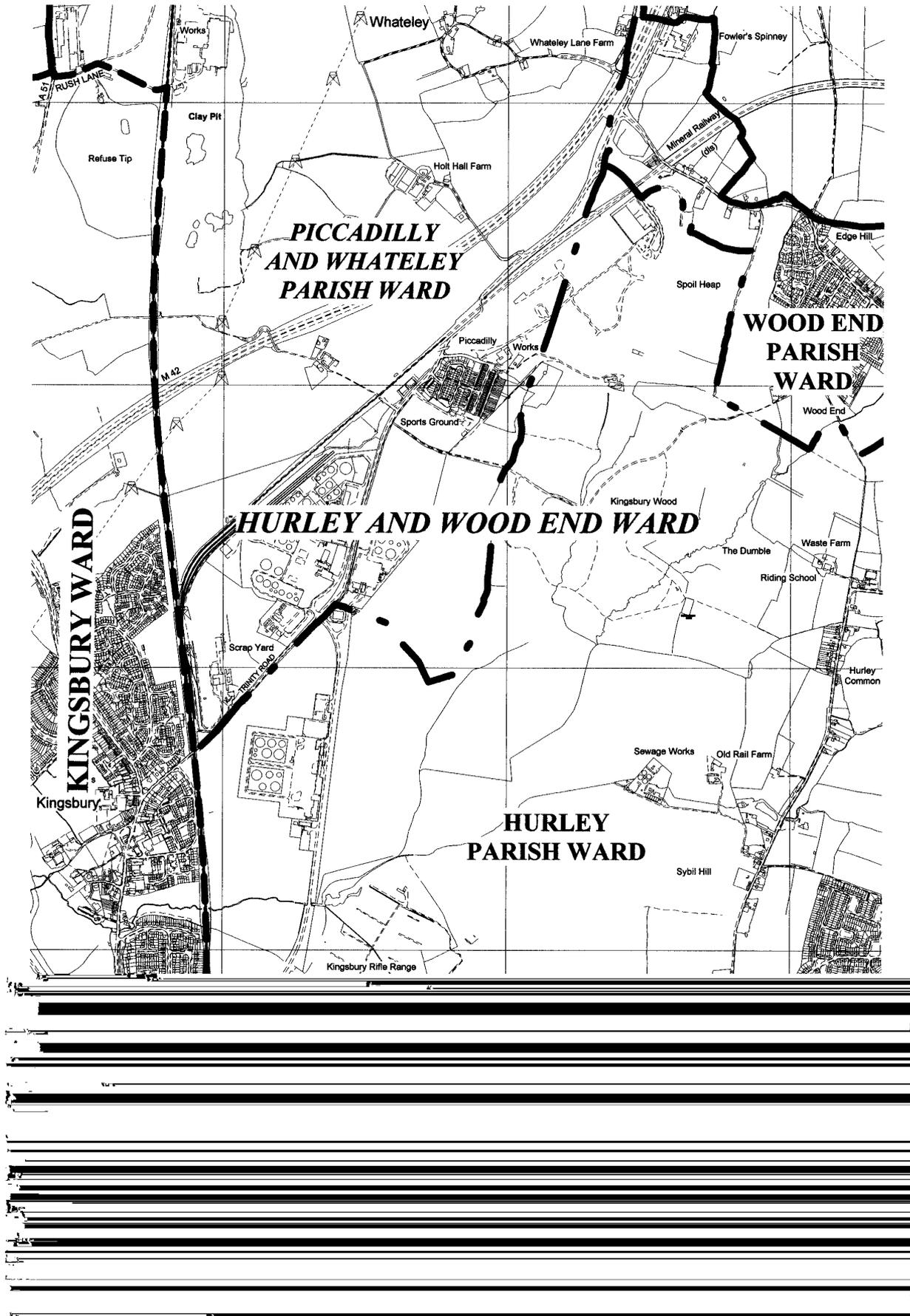
- | | | |
|----------------------------------|------------------------|----------------------------|
| 1 Arley and Whitacre | 7 Coleshill South | 13 Kingsbury |
| 2 Atherstone Central | 8 Curdworth | 14 Newton Regis and Warton |
| 3 Atherstone North | 9 Dordon | 15 Polesworth East |
| 4 Atherstone South and Mancetter | 10 Fillongley | 16 Polesworth West |
| 5 Baddesley and Grendon | 11 Hartshill | 17 Water Orton |
| 6 Coleshill North | 12 Hurley and Wood End | |

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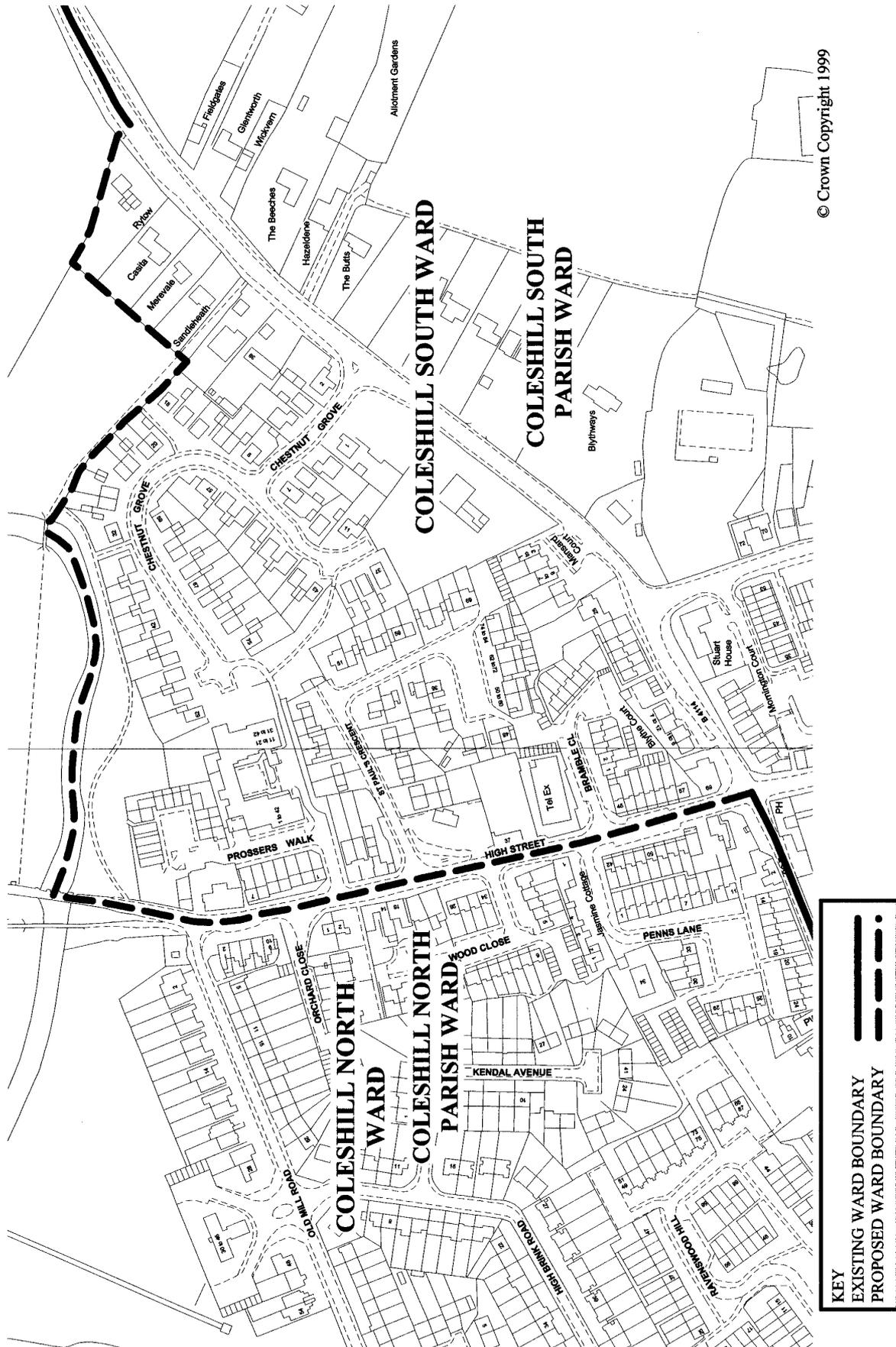
*Map A2:
Proposed borough and parish warding for Polesworth*



Map A4:
Proposed borough and parish warding for Kingsbury



Map A5:
Proposed borough and parish warding for Colehill



APPENDIX B

Draft Recommendations for North Warwickshire

Our final recommendations, detailed in Figures 1 and 2, differ from those we put forward as draft recommendations in respect of a number of wards, where our draft proposals are set out below.

*Figure B1:
The Commission's Draft Recommendations: Constituent Areas*

Ward name	Constituent areas
Atherstone North	Atherstone North ward (part – Atherstone North parish ward (part) of Atherstone parish)
Atherstone South & Mancetter	Atherstone South ward (part – Atherstone South parish ward (part) of Atherstone parish); Mancetter ward (part – the parish of Mancetter)
Coleshill North	Coleshill North ward (part – Coleshill North parish ward (part) of Coleshill parish)
Coleshill South	Coleshill North ward (part – Coleshill North parish ward (part) of Coleshill parish); Coleshill South ward (Coleshill South parish ward of Coleshill parish)
Polesworth East	Polesworth ward (part – the proposed Polesworth East parish ward of Polesworth parish)
Polesworth West	Polesworth ward (part – Birchmoor parish ward and the proposed Polesworth West parish ward of Polesworth parish)

Figure B2:

The Commission's Draft Recommendations: Number of Councillors and Electors by Ward

Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (1998)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2003)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
Atherstone North	2	2,913	1,457	5	2,925	1,463	1
Atherstone South & Mancetter	2	2,715	1,358	-3	2,910	1,455	0
Coleshill North	2	2,605	1,303	-6	2,711	1,356	-6
Coleshill South	2	2,605	1,303	-6	2,641	1,322	-9
Polesworth East	2	2,767	1,384	-1	2,933	1,467	1
Polesworth West	2	2,766	1,383	-1	2,934	1,467	1

Source: Electorate figures are based on information provided by North Warwickshire Borough 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 borough. The minus symbol (-) denotes a lower than average number of electors. Figures have been rounded to the nearest whole number.