

Draft recommendations on the
future electoral arrangements for
Basildon in Essex

June 2000

LOCAL GOVERNMENT COMMISSION FOR ENGLAND

The Local Government Commission for England is an independent body set up by Parliament. Our task is to review and make recommendations to the Government on whether there should be changes to the structure of local government, the boundaries of individual local authority areas, and their electoral arrangements.

Members of the Commission are:

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

Barbara Stephens (Chief Executive)

We are statutorily required to review periodically the electoral arrangements – such as the number of councillors representing electors in each area and the number and boundaries of wards and electoral divisions – of every principal local authority in England. In broad terms our objective is to ensure that the number of electors represented by each councillor in an area is as nearly as possible the same, taking into account local circumstances. We can recommend changes to ward boundaries, and the number of councillors and ward names. We can also make recommendations for change to the electoral arrangements of parish and town councils in the district.

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

© Crown Copyright 2000

Applications for reproduction should be made to: Her Majesty's Stationery Office Copyright Unit

The mapping in this report is reproduced from OS mapping by the Local Government Commission for England with the permission of the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office, © Crown Copyright.

Unauthorised reproduction infringes Crown Copyright and may lead to prosecution or civil proceedings.
Licence Number: GD 03114G.

This report is printed on recycled paper.

CONTENTS

| | page |
|---|---------------------------|
| SUMMARY | <i>v</i> |
| 1 INTRODUCTION | <i>1</i> |
| 2 CURRENT ELECTORAL ARRANGEMENTS | <i>5</i> |
| 3 REPRESENTATIONS RECEIVED | <i>9</i> |
| 4 ANALYSIS AND DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS | <i>11</i> |
| 5 NEXT STEPS | <i>25</i> |
| | |
| APPENDICES | |
| | |
| A Proposed Electoral Arrangements from: Basildon District Council Billericay Branch Liberal Democrats Mr James | <i>27</i> |
| B The Statutory Provisions | <i>31</i> |

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

SUMMARY

The Commission began a review of the electoral arrangements for Basildon on 30 November 1999.

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

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

- **in eight of the 14 wards the number of electors represented by each councillor varies by more than 10 per cent from the average for the district, and two wards vary by more than 20 per cent from the average;**
- **by 2004 electoral equality is not expected to improve, with the number of electors per councillor forecast to vary by more than 10 per cent from the average in 10 wards and by more than 20 per cent in two wards.**

Our main draft recommendations for future electoral arrangements (Figures 1 and 2 and paragraphs 95–96) are that:

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

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

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

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

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

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

- **We will consult on our draft recommendations for 11 weeks from 20 June 2000. Because we take this consultation very seriously, we may move away from our draft recommendations in the light of Stage Three responses. It is therefore important that all interested parties let us have their views and evidence, *whether or not* they agree with our draft recommendations.**
- **After considering local views, we will decide whether to modify our draft recommendations and then make our final recommendations to the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions.**
- **It will then be for the Secretary of State to accept, modify or reject our final recommendations. He will also determine when any changes come into effect.**

You should express your views by writing directly to the Commission at the address below by 4 September 2000:

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

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

Figure 1: The Commission's Draft Recommendations: Summary

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

| | Ward name | Number of councillors | Constituent areas |
|----|------------------|------------------------------|----------------------------|
| 15 | Wickford North | 3 | <i>Unchanged</i> |
| 16 | Wickford Park | 2 | Wickford South ward (part) |

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

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

Figure 2: The Commission's Draft Recommendations for Basildon

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

Source: Electorate figures are based on Basildon District 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 district. The minus symbol (-) denotes a lower than average number of electors. Figures have been rounded to the nearest whole number.

1 INTRODUCTION

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

2 This is our first review of the electoral arrangements of Basildon. The last such review was undertaken by our predecessor, the Local Government Boundary Commission (LGBC), which reported to the Secretary of State in August 1977 (Report No. 231). The electoral arrangements of Essex County Council were last reviewed in 1980 (Report No. 401). We completed a directed electoral review of Thurrock in 1997 and a periodic electoral review of Southend-on-Sea in 1999. We expect to undertake a periodic electoral review of Thurrock in 2000 and a review of the County Council's electoral arrangements in 2002.

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

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

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

5 We also have regard to our *Guidance and Procedural Advice for Local Authorities and Other Interested Parties* (third edition published in October 1999). This sets out our approach to the reviews.

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

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

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

Figure 3: Stages of the Review

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

10 In July 1998 the Government published a White Paper, *Modern Local Government – In Touch with the People*, which set out legislative proposals for local authority electoral arrangements. In two-tier areas, it proposed introducing a pattern in which both the district and county councils would hold elections every two years, 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.

11 Following publication of the White Paper, we advised all authorities in our 1999/2000 PER programme, including the Essex 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 October 1999 *Guidance*. Nevertheless, we considered that local authorities and other interested parties might wish to have regard to the Secretary of State’s intentions and legislative proposals in formulating electoral schemes as part of PERs of their areas. The proposals are now being taken forward in a Local Government Bill published in December 1999 and are currently being considered by Parliament.

12 Stage One began on 30 November 1999, when we wrote to Basildon District Council inviting proposals for future electoral arrangements. We also notified Essex County Council, Essex Police Authority, the local authority associations, Essex Local Councils Association, parish and town councils in the district, the Members of Parliament with constituency interests in the district and

the Members of the European Parliament for the Eastern Region, and the headquarters of the main political parties. We placed a notice in the local press, issued a press release and invited the District Council to publicise the review further. The closing date for receipt of representations, the end of Stage One, was 28 February 2000.

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

14 Stage Three began on 20 June 2000 and will end on 4 September 2000. This stage involves publishing the draft recommendations in this report and public consultation on them. **We take this consultation very seriously and it is therefore important that all those interested in the review should let us have their views and evidence, whether or not they agree with our draft recommendations.**

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

2 CURRENT ELECTORAL ARRANGEMENTS

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

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

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

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

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

Map 1: Existing Wards in Basildon

Figure 4: Existing Electoral Arrangements

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

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

Note: The 'variance from average' column shows by how far, in percentage terms, the number of electors per councillor varies from the average for the district. The minus symbol (-) denotes a lower than average number of electors. For example, in 1999, electors in Fryerns Central ward were relatively over-represented by 11 per cent, while electors in Billericay West ward were relatively under-represented by 18 per cent. Figures have been rounded to the nearest whole number.

3 REPRESENTATIONS RECEIVED

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

22 During this initial stage of the review, officers from the Commission visited the area and met with officers and members from the District Council. We are most grateful to all concerned for their co-operation and assistance. We received eight representations during Stage One, including district-wide schemes from the District Council, Billericay Branch Liberal Democrats and a local resident, all of which may be inspected at the offices of the District Council and the Commission.

Basildon District Council

23 The District Council proposed retaining a council of 42 members, but proposed that the district should be served by 16 wards, two more than at present. It suggested that 10 wards should each be represented by three councillors, while six wards should each be represented by two councillors.

24 As part of the review process, the Council undertook an extensive consultation exercise, including details of its proposals in its *District Diary*, which was delivered to 60,000 properties, and displaying its proposals in libraries. In addition, it forwarded copies of its proposals to parish and town councils, Members of Parliament with constituency interests in the district and the Council's five Area Committees. In the light of comments received, the District Council made a number of amendments to its initial proposals. The District Council's proposals would result in modifications to 12 of the existing 14 wards. The A127 would be utilised as a ward boundary for its entire length.

25 Under the District Council's proposals, only one ward would vary by more than 10 per cent from the district average. By 2004, no ward would vary by no more than 10 per cent from the average. The Council's proposals are summarised in Appendix A.

26 The District Council noted that while there was a "high level of support amongst members for these proposals", the Billericay and Wickford Area Committees had expressed disappointment that the District Council had not proposed a significant reduction in council size. In addition, they considered that a combination of two- and three-member wards would "cause confusion if elections are by thirds".

Billericay Branch Liberal Democrats

27 Billericay Branch Liberal Democrats ('the Liberal Democrats') also supported retaining the existing council size and increasing the number of wards in the district from 14 to 16. They further supported the District Council's proposals for wards to the north of the A127 Southend Arterial Road, together with the Council's revised warding arrangements for the existing Fryerns Central and Fryerns East wards. However, they put forward alternative electoral arrangements for

the rest of the district, which would involve modifications to all but two of the existing 14 wards. Their views were supported by Basildon District Council's Liberal Democrat Group.

28 Under the Liberal Democrats' proposals, the number of electors per councillor in 15 of the proposed 16 wards would vary by no more than 10 per cent from the district average. By 2004, all 16 wards would vary by no more than 10 per cent from the average. The Liberal Democrats' proposals are summarised in Appendix A.

Mr James

29 Mr James, a local resident, also put forward a district-wide proposal. He supported the District Council's proposal to retain the existing council size and its proposal for Billericay town, together with the Council's revised warding arrangements for the existing Fryerns Central, Fryerns East, Laindon, Pitsea East and Pitsea West wards. He put forward alternative arrangements for the rest of the district. Under Mr James' proposals, only one ward would vary by more than 10 per cent from the district average. By 2004, no ward would vary by more than 10 per cent from the average. Mr James' proposals are summarised in Appendix A.

Parish and Town Councils

30 We received representations direct from three parish and town councils. Billericay Town Council and the parish councils of Great Burstead & South Green and Ramsden Bellhouse supported the District Council's proposals for their local areas.

Other Representations

31 We received two further representations from local residents. One resident suggested that we should reduce the size of the council from 42 members to 28 members. Under this proposal, the number of electors per councillor in eight wards would vary by more than 10 per cent from the average, and two wards would have an electoral imbalance of more than 20 per cent from the average. This level of electoral imbalance is projected to deteriorate marginally over the next five years, with 10 wards projected to have an electoral imbalance of more than 10 per cent from the average and the number of electors per councillor in two wards projected to vary by more than 20 per cent from the average by 2004.

32 Another resident argued that Vange ward's existing boundaries should be retained and that we should modify the number of councillors per ward, to provide improved electoral equality.

4 ANALYSIS AND DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS

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

34 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.

35 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.

36 Our *Guidance* states that 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, the objective of electoral equality 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 electoral equality, and then make adjustments to reflect relevant factors, such as community identity. Regard must also be had to five-year forecasts of changes in electorates. We will require particular justification for schemes which result in, or retain, an electoral imbalance 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

37 The District Council submitted electorate forecasts for the year 2004, projecting an increase in the electorate of some 3 per cent from 126,364 to 130,756 over the five-year period from 1999 to 2004. It expects most of the growth to be in Wickford South ward, which is projected to have an additional 1,500 electors by 2004. The Council has estimated rates and locations of housing development with regard to structure and local plans, the expected rate of building over the five-year period and assumed occupancy rates. Advice from the District Council on the likely effect on electorates of changes to ward boundaries has been obtained.

38 We accept that forecasting electorates is an inexact science and, having given consideration to the District Council’s figures, are content that they represent the best estimates that can reasonably be made at this time.

Council Size

39 As already explained, the Commission’s starting point is to assume that the current council size facilitates convenient and effective local government, although we are willing to carefully look at arguments why this might not be the case. The Commission will not generally seek a substantial increase or decrease in council size but will be prepared to consider the case for change where there is persuasive evidence.

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

41 Having considered the size and distribution of the electorate, the geography and other characteristics of the area, together with the representations received, we have concluded that the achievement of electoral equality and the statutory criteria would best be met by a council of 42 members. On the balance of the evidence received at Stage One, we do not consider that we have received sufficient evidence to persuade us that electors in Basildon district should be represented by a significantly smaller number of councillors than at present.

Electoral Arrangements

42 In view of the degree of consensus behind large elements of the Council’s proposals, and the consultation exercise which it undertook with interested parties, we have concluded that we should substantially base our recommendations on the District Council’s scheme. We consider that this scheme would provide a better balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria than the current arrangements. However, to improve electoral equality further and having regard to local community identities and interests, we have decided to move away from the District Council’s proposals in the south of the district, where we have based our draft recommendations on Mr James’ proposal.

43 We have examined the proposals put forward by two local residents to retain the existing ward boundaries but modify the number of councillors representing each ward. We have not been persuaded that this approach would address current levels of electoral inequality, and we have discounted these proposals from our considerations. For district warding purposes, the following areas, based on existing wards, are considered in turn:

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

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

Billericay East, Billericay West, Burstead and Laindon wards

45 The wards of Billericay East, Billericay West and Burstead are all situated to the north of the A127 Southend Arterial Road. Billericay East ward comprises the two town council wards of Billericay North East and Billericay South East, while Billericay West ward comprises the town council wards of Billericay North and Billericay North West. Burstead ward contains Billericay South West town council ward and the parishes of Great Burstead & South Green, Little Burstead, Ramsden Bellhouse and Ramsden Crays. Laindon ward is not parished.

46 The town of Billericay and the adjoining Burstead community form the second largest settlement in the district. Laindon ward forms part of the Basildon New Town designated area, and straddles the A127 Southend Arterial Road. Under current arrangements, Billericay East and Burstead wards have 1 per cent and 2 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the district average (and equal to the average and 5 per cent fewer respectively by 2004). Billericay West and Laindon wards have 18 per cent and 10 per cent more electors per councillor respectively than the average (and 16 per cent and 12 per cent more by 2004).

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

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

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

50 We have considered the District Council's proposed warding arrangements in this area, and note that these proposals would achieve a reasonable level of electoral equality, have a degree of

local support and reflect the statutory criteria well. In particular, we note that they would utilise strong and easily identifiable boundaries, such as the A127 Southend Arterial Road, the London Liverpool Street to Southend Victoria railway line and the River Crouch.

51 While we note that the proposed Crouch ward would cover a relatively large geographical area, we have not found alternative electoral arrangements that would provide a better balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria. We note that the District Council's proposal to include Vine Cottages and Doeshill Farm in the proposed Crouch ward would better reflect the interests and identities of communities than the current arrangements, as these properties have no direct communication links with Wickford. In addition, we note that the District Council's proposals in this area have achieved a degree of local support.

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

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

Wickford North and Wickford South wards

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

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

56 Under the District Council's proposal, Wickford Castledon and Wickford North wards would have 6 per cent and 3 per cent more electors per councillors than the district average respectively,

while Wickford Park ward would initially have 13 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the average. The level of electoral equality in Wickford Castledon and Wickford North wards is projected to improve to 3 per cent and 2 per cent over the next five years. However, the electoral imbalance in Wickford Park ward would improve significantly due to housing development, with the number of electors per councillor projected to vary by 7 per cent more than the average by 2004.

57 The Liberal Democrats supported the District Council's proposed ward boundaries in this area, but suggested that the District Council's proposed Wickford Castledon and Wickford Park wards be named Wickford South West and Wickford South East respectively. Mr James supported the District Council's proposed Wickford North ward, and supported its proposal that the existing Wickford South ward should be replaced by two two-member wards. However, he argued that the District Council's proposed boundary between Wickford Castledon and Wickford Park wards did not equitably allocate the new development between wards, although he did not specify an alternative boundary. He expressed concern that, under the District Council's proposal, the level of under-representation in Wickford Park ward would continue to increase.

58 Having considered all the representations received in this area, we are content that the District Council's proposed warding arrangements would provide a good balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria, and enjoy a measure of local support. While we note Mr James' concerns regarding future under-representation in the proposed Wickford Park ward, we consider that the District Council's proposal achieves a reasonable balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria over the five-year period, and would have clear boundaries. In the absence of any other proposed boundary we are content to endorse it as part of our draft recommendations.

59 We have also considered the alternative ward names put forward at Stage One. On balance, we are content to adopt the District Council's proposed wards. However, we propose modifying the District Council's suggested boundary between the new Crouch and Wickford Castledon wards. We propose that the area to the west of Oak Chase and the track adjoining 196 London Road should be included in the new Crouch ward, to utilise a stronger boundary, as discussed previously. In particular, we note that properties on the south of London Road and to the west of Oak Chase would be divided from the proposed Wickford Castledon ward by agricultural land. We would welcome further evidence from local people and groups about ward names and boundaries in this area at Stage Three.

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

Fryerns Central and Fryerns East wards

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

62 At Stage One the District Council proposed that a new Fryerns ward should comprise the part of Fryerns East ward to the north of the A1321 Broadmayne, together with the part of Fryerns Central ward bounded by the A1235 Cranes Farm Road, Ghyllgrove and the A1321 Broadmayne. It proposed that the rest of Fryerns Central ward should be combined with the part of Fryerns East ward to the west of Timberlog Lane to form a new St Martin's ward. It proposed that the rest of Fryerns East ward should form part of a revised Vange ward, which would also include parts of the existing Pitsea West and Vange wards, as detailed later.

63 Under the District Council's proposal, Fryerns ward would have 6 per cent more electors per councillor than the district average (3 per cent by 2004), and St Martin's ward would have equal to the average number of electors per councillor both now and in 2004.

64 The Liberal Democrats and Mr James both supported the District Council's proposed warding arrangements in this area, although they both proposed that St Martin's ward should be named Central ward.

65 Having carefully considered the representations received at Stage One, we note that there is consensus between the District Council, the Liberal Democrats and Mr James regarding ward boundaries in this area. However, we propose one amendment to the District Council's proposals. We consider that the commercial and industrial estates adjoining the A127 Southend Arterial Road, to the north of the A1235 Cranes Farm Road, should form part of the new Fryerns ward, rather than St Martin's ward, which we consider would better reflect community ties than the alternative proposal.

66 We have also considered the issue of ward names, and propose endorsing the District Council's suggested ward names for this area. We note that the District Council originally proposed using the names suggested by the Liberal Democrats and Mr James, but revised them in the light of their own consultation. We would welcome further evidence on ward names at Stage Three.

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

Langdon Hills, Lee Chapel North, Nethermayne and Vange wards

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

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

70 The Council proposed that the rest of Nethermayne ward should be combined with the parts of Vange ward to the west of Swan Mead Primary School's playing fields and B1419 Clay Hill Road, and to the west of Ramsay Drive and Vange Creek, to form a new two-member Clay Hill ward. It proposed that the part of Vange ward to the south-east of B1419 Clay Hill Road and to the north of B1464 London Road/ High Road, in Vange ward, should form part of a revised two-member Vange ward together with part of Fryerns East ward, as detailed previously, and the part of Pitsea West ward to the west of A132 South Mayne and to the north of B1464 High Road. In addition, it proposed that the part of Vange ward to the south of B1464 London Road/ High Road and to the east of Ramsay Drive and Vange Creek should be included in a new three-member Pitsea South East ward.

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

72 The Liberal Democrats also proposed that the part of Laindon ward to the north of the A127 should be included in a new Crouch ward, but put forward alternative electoral arrangements for the remainder of this area. They proposed that the rest of Laindon ward should form a two-member ward of the same name, while it proposed that Lee Chapel North ward, less the Holy Trinity polling district, should be combined with the part of Langdon Hills ward to the north of the London Fenchurch Street to Shoeburyness railway line to form a revised three-member Lee Chapel North ward. They also proposed that Nethermayne ward, together with the Holy Trinity

polling district, should form a new three-member ward, which they suggested could be called Basildon South or Nethermayne ward. In addition, they proposed that Vange ward should be combined with parts of Fryerns Central and Fryerns East wards, as detailed previously.

73 Under the Liberal Democrats' proposal, Laindon and Langdon Hills, and the ward to be named either Basildon South or Nethermayne, would have electoral imbalances of no more than 3 per cent from the district average, while the number of electors per councillor in Vange ward would vary by 7 per cent from the average for the district. This level of improved electoral equality is projected to be largely unchanged over the next five years.

74 Mr James supported the District Council's proposed Laindon Park ward's boundaries, but suggested that the ward be named Laindon. His proposed South ward was broadly similar to the District Council's proposed Clay Hill ward, but he proposed retaining the existing boundary between Langdon Hills and Nethermayne wards as the new South ward's eastern boundary. His proposed Langdon Hills ward was identical to the Liberal Democrats' proposal. He proposed that a new three-member Lee Chapel ward should comprise the part of Lee Chapel North ward to the south of B148 St Nicholas Lane, together with the part of Langdon Hills ward to the north of the London Fenchurch Street to Shoeburyness railway line. His proposal for the rest of Vange ward was identical to the District Council's proposal.

75 Under Mr James' proposal, the number of electors per councillor in Langdon Hills, Lee Chapel and South wards would each vary by 3 per cent from the district average, while the number of electors per councillor in Laindon ward would vary by 6 per cent from the average. This level of electoral equality is not projected to change significantly over the next five years.

76 Having carefully considered all the representations received regarding this area, we note that there is a degree of consensus between the District Council, the Liberal Democrats and Mr James regarding a number of ward boundaries in this area. In particular, all three proposals sought to utilise the London Fenchurch Street to Shoeburyness railway line as a ward boundary for much of its length. On balance, we consider that Mr James' proposals would provide a better balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria than the alternative proposals, and we are content to substantially adopt it as our draft recommendations.

77 We consider that the District Council's and Mr James' proposed Laindon Park ward would provide a reasonable level of electoral equality, while utilising strong and easily identifiable boundaries, such as the A127 Southend Arterial Road and the London Fenchurch Street to Shoeburyness railway line. However, we have examined the District Council's proposal for Lee Chapel ward and adjoining wards and we have not been persuaded that this ward would satisfactorily reflect community ties. We consider that the area of the existing Laindon Hills ward to the north of the railway line shares stronger community ties with the areas north and east of the B1007 Laindon Link, and therefore consider that the London Fenchurch Street to Shoeburyness railway line forms a stronger boundary in this area than the B1007 Laindon Link.

78 In addition, we are not persuaded that the District Council's proposal to transfer the area including The Knares, to the north of Basildon College, to a new Lee Chapel ward would provide the optimum balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria. We note that this area

appears to share stronger community interests and identities with electors to the east of the A176 Nethermayne than with electors to the north of the railway line. Furthermore, we consider that electors in this area should be represented in the same ward as Basildon College and Basildon Hospital, which are important community foci in this area.

79 While the Liberal Democrats' proposed Lee Chapel North ward would provide a reasonable level of electoral equality, we do not consider that the area including Falstones and Mynchens has strong community ties with the existing Nethermayne ward. Furthermore, we note that the Liberal Democrats' proposal would divide Great Knightleys and Falstones between two wards, and we do not consider that this would provide a strong and easily identifiable ward boundary or reflect the interests and identities of electors on either road. In addition, their proposed Vange ward would cover a large area, from communities to the south of the A132 South Mayne to the area south of the A13.

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

81 As a consequence, we propose that the part of Nethermayne ward to the east of Green Lane and the bridleway should be combined with the part of Vange ward to the west of Ramsay Drive and Vange Creek. We also propose that this ward should be named Nethermayne ward. We note that this proposal is broadly similar to proposals put forward by the District Council and Mr James. In addition, we are content to adopt the proposed Vange ward put forward by the District Council and Mr James. While this proposed ward would include electors either side of the London Fenchurch Street to Shoeburyness railway line, we note that it would include communities with similar interests and identities and that both sides of the railway line are linked by the B1419 Timberlog Lane and B1464 High Road.

82 We have also considered Mr James' proposal that Laindon Park ward should be named Laindon, but note that the District Council's proposed ward name has been subject to local consultation. However, we would welcome further evidence from local people and groups at Stage Three regarding our draft recommendations in this area.

83 Under our draft recommendations, Laindon Park, Lee Chapel and Nethermayne wards would have 6 per cent, 3 per cent and 1 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the district average respectively, while Langdon Hills ward would have 9 per cent more electors per councillor than the average. This level of electoral equality is not projected to change significantly over the next five years.

Pitsea East and Pitsea West wards

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

85 At Stage One the District Council proposed two new wards for this area. It proposed that a new Pitsea North West ward should be bounded to the north by the A127 Southend Arterial Road, to the west by the A132 East Mayne, to the south by Wickford Avenue, Balfour Way, Winifred Road, Rectory Road, Tyefields and Trenham Avenue, and by field boundaries to the east. It proposed that a new Pitsea South East ward should comprise the remainder of Pitsea East and Pitsea West wards, less the area to the west of the A132 South Mayne and to the north of the B1464 High Road which it proposed should form part of a revised Vange ward. It also proposed that Pitsea South East ward should include the part of Vange ward to the east of Ramsay Drive and to the south of the B1464 High Road.

86 Under the District Council's proposal, Pitsea North West and Pitsea South East wards would each have an electoral variance of no more than 3 per cent from the average, and no more than 2 per cent by 2004.

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

88 Under the Liberal Democrats' proposal, Pitsea East and Pitsea West wards would have 3 per cent and 4 per cent more electors per councillor respectively than the district average. This level of electoral equality is projected to remain largely unchanged over the next five years.

89 Mr James supported the District Council's proposed warding arrangements in this area, but proposed that Pitsea North West and Pitsea South East should be named Pitsea West and Pitsea East respectively.

90 Having carefully considered the representations received at Stage One, we are content to endorse the proposals put forward by the District Council and Mr James as our draft recommendations. We have been persuaded that this proposal would provide a good balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria, and would utilise a number of strong and easily identifiable ward boundaries in this area, such as the A132 South Mayne and B1464 High Road.

91 While we have considered the Liberal Democrats' proposals for these wards, we note that they are dependent upon us endorsing their proposals for adjoining wards and, as indicated previously, we have not been persuaded that their proposals would secure better electoral

arrangements than the alternative proposals. Furthermore, we have considered the alternative ward names put forward by Mr James, but have not been persuaded that these names would better reflect either of the proposed wards' constituent communities than the District Council's proposal.

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

Electoral Cycle

93 We received two representations regarding the District Council's electoral cycle. The District Council supported the retention of the current electoral cycle, while Mr James argued that whole-council elections every four years would reduce "apathy and low turnouts" at elections. In addition, the District Council stated that the Billericay and Wickford Area Committees consider that a combination of two- and three-member wards would "cause confusion if elections are by thirds".

94 We have carefully considered all the representations received. As we note in our *Guidance*, "there are champions within local government both for elections by thirds and for whole-council elections every four years. For our part, we will not seek to override local preferences or practices. However, where proposals are put to us for changes to electoral cycles we look for a measure of local consensus." At present, there appears to be a majority view that the present electoral cycle should be retained and we therefore propose no change to the current electoral cycle of elections by thirds for the District Council.

Conclusions

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

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

96 As already indicated, we have based our draft recommendations on the District Council's proposal, but propose departing from them in the following areas:

- we propose adopting Mr James' suggested Lee Chapel ward;

- a revised Nethermayne ward should reflect elements of alternative proposals put forward by the District Council and Mr James;
- the part of the existing Fryerns Central ward bounded by the A1235 Cranes Farm Road and A127 Southend Arterial Road should form part of the new Fryerns ward;
- the area to the west of Oak Chase and the track adjoining 196 London Road, currently in Wickford South ward, should be transferred to the new Crouch ward.

97 Figure 5 shows the impact of our draft recommendations on electoral equality, comparing them with the current arrangements, based on 1999 electorate figures and with forecast electorates for the year 2004.

Figure 5: Comparison of Current and Recommended Electoral Arrangements

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

98 As shown in Figure 5, our draft recommendations for Basildon District Council would result in a reduction in the number of wards varying by more than 10 per cent from the district average from eight to one. By 2004 no wards are forecast to vary by more than 10 per cent from the average for the district.

Draft Recommendation

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

Parish and Town Council Electoral Arrangements

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

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

101 We propose adopting the District Council’s proposal as our draft recommendation, as we note that it would facilitate our proposed district warding in this area, and has a measure of local support.

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

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

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

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

Map 2: The Commission's Draft Recommendations for Basildon

5 NEXT STEPS

104 We are putting forward draft recommendations on the future electoral arrangements for Basildon. Now it is up to the people of the area. We will take fully into account all representations received by 4 September 2000. Representations received after this date may not be taken into account. All representations will be available for public inspection by appointment at the offices of the Commission and the District Council, and a list of respondents will be available on request from the Commission after the end of the consultation period.

105 Views may be expressed by writing directly to us:

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

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

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

APPENDIX A

Basildon District Council's Proposed Electoral Arrangements

Our draft recommendations detailed in Figures 1 and 2 differ from those put forward by the District Council only in seven wards, where the Council's proposals were as follows:

Figure A1: Basildon District Council's Proposal: Constituent Areas

| Ward name | Constituent areas |
|--------------------|---|
| Clay Hill | Nethermayne ward (part); Vange ward (part) |
| Crouch | Burstead ward (part – the parishes of Ramsden Bellhouse and Ramsden Crays); Laindon ward (part); Wickford South ward (part) |
| Fryerns | Fryerns Central ward (part); Fryerns East ward (part) |
| Langdon Hills | Langdon Hills ward (part); Nethermayne ward (part) |
| Lee Chapel | Langdon Hills ward (part); Lee Chapel North ward (part); Nethermayne ward (part) |
| St Martin's | Fryerns Central ward (part); Fryerns East ward (part) |
| Wickford Castledon | Wickford South ward (part) |

Figure A2: Basildon District Council's Proposal: Number of Councillors and Electors by Ward

| Ward name | Number of councillors | Electorate (1999) | Number of electors per councillor | Variance from average % | Electorate (2004) | Number of electors per councillor | Variance from average % |
|--------------------------------------|-----------------------|-------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------------|
| Clay Hill (in Basildon New Town) | 2 | 5,963 | 2,982 | -1 | 5,963 | 2,982 | -4 |
| Crouch | 2 | 5,783 | 2,892 | -4 | 6,170 | 3,085 | -1 |
| Fryerns (in Basildon New Town) | 3 | 9,561 | 3,187 | 6 | 9,644 | 3,215 | 3 |
| Langdon Hills (in Basildon New Town) | 3 | 9,185 | 3,062 | 2 | 9,394 | 3,131 | 1 |
| Lee Chapel (in Basildon New Town) | 3 | 9,092 | 3,031 | 1 | 9,438 | 3,146 | 1 |
| St Martin's (in Basildon New Town) | 2 | 6,045 | 3,023 | 0 | 6,234 | 3,117 | 0 |
| Wickford Castledon | 2 | 6,358 | 3,179 | 6 | 6,436 | 3,218 | 3 |

Source: Electorate figures are based on Basildon District 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 district. The minus symbol (-) denotes a lower than average number of electors. Figures have been rounded to the nearest whole number.

Billericay Branch Liberal Democrats' Proposed Electoral Arrangements

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

Figure A3: Billericay Branch Liberal Democrats' Proposal: Constituent Areas

| Ward name | Constituent areas |
|--|---|
| Basildon South (or Nethermayne) (in Basildon New Town) | Lee Chapel North ward (part); Nethermayne ward (part) |
| Central (in Basildon New Town) | Fryerns Central ward (part); Fryerns East ward (part) |
| Fryerns (in Basildon New Town) | Fryerns Central ward (part); Fryerns East ward (part) |
| Laindon (in Basildon New Town) | Laindon ward (part) |
| Langdon Hills (in Basildon New Town) | Langdon Hills ward (part) |
| Lee Chapel North (in Basildon New Town) | Langdon Hills ward (part); Lee Chapel North ward (part) |
| Pitsea East (in Basildon New Town) | Pitsea East ward (part); Pitsea West ward (part) |
| Pitsea West (in Basildon New Town) | Pitsea East ward (part); Pitsea West ward (part) |
| Vange (in Basildon New Town) | Fryerns East ward (part); Vange ward |

Figure A4: Billericay Branch Liberal Democrats' Proposal: Number of Councillors and Electors by Ward

| Ward name | Number of councillors | Electorate (1999) | Number of electors per councillor | Variance from average % | Electorate (2004) | Number of electors per councillor | Variance from average % |
|--|-----------------------|-------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------------|
| Basildon South (or Nethermayne) (in Basildon New Town) | 3 | 9,099 | 3,033 | 1 | 9,177 | 3,059 | -2 |
| Central (in Basildon New Town) | 2 | 6,045 | 3,023 | 0 | 6,234 | 3,117 | 0 |
| Fryerns (in Basildon New Town) | 3 | 9,561 | 3,187 | 6 | 9,644 | 3,215 | 3% |
| Laindon (in Basildon New Town) | 2 | 6,077 | 3,039 | 1 | 6,326 | 3,163 | 1 |
| Langdon Hills (in Basildon New Town) | 2 | 6,174 | 3,087 | 3 | 6,329 | 3,165 | 1 |

| Ward name | Number of councillors | Electorate (1999) | Number of electors per councillor | Variance from average % | Electorate (2004) | Number of electors per councillor | Variance from average % |
|---|-----------------------|-------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------------|
| Lee Chapel North (in Basildon New Town) | 3 | 8,768 | 2,923 | -3 | 9,436 | 3,145 | 1 |
| Pitsea East (in Basildon New Town) | 3 | 9,319 | 3,106 | 3 | 9,611 | 3,204 | 3 |
| Pitsea West (in Basildon New Town) | 3 | 9,385 | 3,128 | 4 | 9,528 | 3,176 | 2 |
| Vange (in Basildon New Town) | 3 | 8,380 | 2,793 | -7 | 8,563 | 2,854 | -9 |

Source: Electorate figures are based on Billericay Branch Liberal Democrats' 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 district. The minus symbol (-) denotes a lower than average number of electors. Figures have been rounded to the nearest whole number.

Mr James' Proposed Electoral Arrangements

Our draft recommendations detailed in Figures 1 and 2 differ from those put forward by Mr James in four wards (although Mr James suggested that we should examine alternative ward boundaries for Crouch, Wickford Castledon and Wickford Park wards), where the Mr James' proposals were as follows:

Figure A5: Mr James' Proposal: Constituent Areas

| Ward name | Constituent areas |
|--------------------------------------|---|
| Central (in Basildon New Town) | Fryerns Central ward (part); Fryerns East ward (part) |
| Fryerns (in Basildon New Town) | Fryerns Central ward (part); Fryerns East ward (part) |
| Langdon Hills (in Basildon New Town) | Langdon Hills ward (part) |
| South (in Basildon New Town) | Nethermayne ward; Vange ward (part) |

Figure A6: Mr James' Proposal: Number of Councillors and Electors by Ward

| Ward name | Number of councillors | Electorate (1999) | Number of electors per councillor | Variance from average % | Electorate (2004) | Number of electors per councillor | Variance from average % |
|--------------------------------------|-----------------------|-------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------------|
| Central (in Basildon New Town) | 2 | 6,045 | 3,023 | 0 | 6,234 | 3,117 | 0 |
| Fryerns (in Basildon New Town) | 3 | 9,561 | 3,187 | 6 | 9,644 | 3,215 | 3 |
| Langdon Hills (in Basildon New Town) | 2 | 6,229 | 3,115 | 3 | 6,329 | 3,165 | 2 |
| South (in Basildon New Town) | 3 | 9,340 | 3,113 | 3 | 9,265 | 3,088 | -1 |

Source: Electorate figures are based on Mr James' 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 district. The minus symbol (-) denotes a lower than average number of electors. Figures have been rounded to the nearest whole number.

APPENDIX B

The Statutory Provisions

Local Government Act 1992: the Commission's Role

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

7 In relation to shire districts:

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

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

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

- (d) the desirability of fixing ward boundaries which are and will remain easily identifiable; and

(e) any local ties which would be broken by the fixing of any particular ward boundary.

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

(f) the number or distribution of electors in the parish is such as to make a single election of parish councillors impracticable or inconvenient; and

(g) it is desirable that any area or areas of the parish should be separately represented on the parish council.

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

(h) any change in the number or distribution of electors of the parish which is likely to take place within the period of five years immediately following the consideration;

(i) the desirability of fixing boundaries which are and will remain easily identifiable; and

(j) any local ties which will be broken by the fixing of any particular boundaries.

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