

Final recommendations on the  
future electoral arrangements  
for North Dorset

Report to the Electoral Commission

*April 2002*

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A large map illustrating the proposed ward boundaries for Gillingham and Shaftesbury is inserted inside the back cover of this report.



## WHAT IS THE BOUNDARY COMMITTEE FOR ENGLAND?

The Boundary Committee for England is a committee of the Electoral Commission, an independent body set up by Parliament under the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000. The functions of the Local Government Commission for England were transferred to the Electoral Commission and its Boundary Committee on 1 April 2002 by the Local Government Commission for England (Transfer of Functions) Order 2001 (SI 2001 No 3692). The Order also transferred to the Electoral Commission the functions of the Secretary of State in relation to taking decisions on recommendations for changes to local authority electoral arrangements and implementing them.

Members of the Committee are:

Pamela Gordon (Chair)  
Michael Clarke  
Kru Desai  
Robin Gray

Archie Gall (Director)

We are required by law to review the electoral arrangements of every principal local authority in England. Our aim 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, the number of councillors and ward names. We can also recommend changes to the electoral arrangements of parish and town councils.

This report sets out our final recommendations on the electoral arrangements for the district of North Dorset.



## SUMMARY

The Local Government Commission for England (LGCE) began a review of North Dorset's electoral arrangements on 27 March 2001. It published its draft recommendations for electoral arrangements on 9 October 2001, after which it undertook an eight-week period of consultation. As a consequence of the transfer of functions referred to earlier, it falls to us, the Boundary Committee for England, to complete the work of the LGCE and submit final recommendations to the Electoral Commission.

- **This report summarises the representations received by the LGCE during consultation on its draft recommendations, and contains our final recommendations to the Electoral Commission.**

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

- **in 17 of the 27 wards the number of electors represented by each councillor varies by more than 10 per cent from the average for the district and six wards vary by more than 20 per cent;**
- **by 2006 this situation is expected to worsen, with the number of electors per councillor forecast to vary by more than 10 per cent from the average in 16 wards and by more than 20 per cent in 11 wards.**

Our main final recommendations for future electoral arrangements (see Tables 1 and 2 and paragraphs 121-122) are that:

- **North Dorset Borough Council should have 33 councillors, the same as at present;**
- **there should be 28 wards, instead of 27 as at present;**
- **the boundaries of 21 of the existing wards should be modified, resulting in a net increase of one, and six wards should retain their existing boundaries;**
- **elections should continue to take place every four years.**

The purpose of these proposals is to ensure that, in future, each district councillor represents approximately the same number of electors, bearing in mind local circumstances.

- **In 20 of the proposed 28 wards the number of electors per councillor would vary by no more than 10 per cent from the district average.**
- **This improved level of electoral equality is forecast to continue, with the number of electors per councillor in 27 wards expected to vary by no more than 10 per cent from the average for the district in 2006.**

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

- **revised warding arrangements for the towns of Blandford Forum, Gillingham and Shaftesbury.**

All further correspondence on these final recommendations and the matters discussed in this report should be addressed to the Electoral Commission, which will not make an Order implementing them before 15 May 2002:

**The Secretary  
Electoral Commission  
Trevelyan House  
30 Great Peter Street  
London SW1P 2HW**

Table 1: Final Recommendations: Summary

	<b>Ward name</b>	<b>Number of councillors</b>	<b>Constituent areas</b>	<b>Map reference</b>
1	Abbey	2	The parishes of Anderson, Hilton, Milborne St Andrew, Milton Abbas, Winterborne Kingston, Winterborne Whitechurch and Winterborne Zelston	Map 2
2	Blackmore	2	<i>Unchanged</i> – the parishes of Lydlinch, Stalbridge and Stourton Caundle	Map 2
3	Blandford Damory Down	1	part of Blandford Forum parish (the proposed Blandford Damory Down parish ward)	Map 2 and Map A2
4	Blandford Hilltop	1	part of Blandford Forum parish (the proposed Blandford Hilltop parish ward)	Map 2 and Map A2
5	Blandford Langton St Leonards	1	part of Blandford Forum parish (the proposed Blandford Langton St Leonards parish ward)	Map 2 and Map A2
6	Blandford Old Town	1	part of Blandford Forum parish (the proposed Blandford Old Town parish ward)	Map 2 and Map A2
7	Blandford Station	1	part of Blandford Forum parish (the proposed Blandford Station parish ward)	Map 2 and Map A2
8	Bourton & District	1	the parishes of Bourton, Buckhorn Weston, Kington Magna and Silton and part of Gillingham parish (the proposed Gillingham Rural parish ward)	Map 2 and large map
9	Bulbarrow	1	the parishes of Ibberton, Okeford Fitzpaine, Turnworth, Winterborne Clenston, Winterborne Houghton and Winterborne Stickland	Map 2
10	Cranborne Chase	1	the parishes of Ashmore, Chettle, Farnham, Pimperne, Tarrant Gunville and Tarrant Hinton	Map 2
11	Gillingham Town	1	part of Gillingham parish (the proposed Gillingham Town parish ward)	Map 2 and large map
12	Hill Forts	2	the parishes of Child Okeford, Durweston, Hanford, Iwerne Courtney, Iwerne Minster, Iwerne Stepleton, Shillingstone and Stourpaine	Map 2
13	Lodbourne	1	part of Gillingham parish (the proposed Lodbourne parish ward)	Map 2 and large map
14	Lydden Vale	1	the parishes of Fifehead Neville, Glanvilles Wootton, Hazelbury Bryan, Mappowder, Pulham, Stoke Way and Woolland	Map 2
15	Marnhull	1	<i>Unchanged</i> – the parish of Marnhull	Map 2
16	Milton	1	part of Gillingham parish (the proposed Milton parish ward)	Map 2 and large map
17	Motcombe & Ham	1	<i>Unchanged</i> – the parish of Motcombe and part of Gillingham parish (Ham parish ward)	Map 2 and large map
18	Portman	1	the parishes of Blandford St Mary and Bryanston	Map 2
19	Riversdale	1	<i>Unchanged</i> – the parishes of Charlton Marshall and Spetisbury	Map 2
20	Shaftesbury Central	1	part of Shaftesbury parish (the proposed Shaftesbury Central parish ward)	Map 2 and large map

	<b>Ward name</b>	<b>Number of councillors</b>	<b>Constituent areas</b>	<b>Map reference</b>
21	Shaftesbury Christy's	1	part of Shaftesbury parish (the proposed Shaftesbury Christy's parish ward)	Map 2 and large map
22	Shaftesbury Grosvenor	1	part of Shaftesbury parish (the proposed Shaftesbury Grosvenor parish ward)	Map 2 and large map
23	Shaftesbury Underhill	1	part of Shaftesbury parish (the proposed Shaftesbury Underhill parish ward)	Map 2 and large map
24	Stour Valley	2	<i>Unchanged</i> – the parishes of Hinton St Mary, Hammon, Manston and Sturminster Newton	Map 2
25	The Beacon	1	the parishes of Cann, Compton Abbas, Fontmell Magna, Melbury Abbas and Sutton Waldron	Map 2
26	The Lower Tarrants	1	<i>Unchanged</i> – the parishes of Langton Long Blandford, Tarrant Crawford, Tarrant Keyneston, Tarrant Launceston, Tarrant Monkton, Tarrant Rawston and Tarrant Rushton	Map 2
27	The Stours	1	the parishes of East Orchard, East Stour, Fifehead Magdalen, Margaret Marsh, Stour Provost, Todber, West Orchard and West Stour	Map 2
28	Wyke	2	part of Gillingham parish (the proposed Wyke parish ward)	Map 2 and large map

*Notes 1 The whole district is parished.*

*2 The wards on the above table are illustrated on Map 2, Maps A1–A2 in Appendix A and the large map at the back of the report.*

Table 2: Final Recommendations for North Dorset

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2001)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2006)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
1	Abbey	2	2,961	1,481	4	3,106	1,553	3
2	Blackmore	2	2,754	1,377	-3	2,920	1,460	-3
3	Blandford Damory Down	1	1,495	1,495	5	1,443	1,443	-4
4	Blandford Hilltop	1	773	773	-46	1,428	1,428	-5
5	Blandford Langton St Leonards	1	1,454	1,454	2	1,437	1,437	-5
6	Blandford Old Town	1	1,431	1,431	0	1,465	1,465	-3
7	Blandford Station	1	1,742	1,742	22	1,437	1,437	-5
8	Bourton & District	1	1,538	1,538	8	1,548	1,548	3
9	Bulbarrow	1	1,506	1,506	6	1,506	1,506	0
10	Cranborne Chase	1	1,592	1,592	12	1,577	1,577	5
11	Gillingham Town	1	1,414	1,414	-1	1,570	1,570	4
12	Hill Forts	2	3,337	1,669	17	3,461	1,731	15
13	Lodbourne	1	1,512	1,512	6	1,509	1,509	0
14	Lydden Vale	1	1,379	1,379	-3	1,489	1,489	-1
15	Marnhull	1	1,653	1,653	16	1,480	1,480	-2
16	Milton	1	1,238	1,238	-13	1,426	1,426	-5
17	Motcombe & Ham	1	1,349	1,349	-5	1,650	1,650	9
18	Portman	1	1,383	1,383	-3	1,580	1,580	5
19	Riversdale	1	1,359	1,359	-5	1,460	1,460	-3
20	Shaftesbury Central	1	1,518	1,518	7	1,526	1,526	1
21	Shaftesbury Christy's	1	1,262	1,262	-11	1,446	1,446	-4
22	Shaftesbury Grosvenor	1	1,302	1,302	-9	1,447	1,447	-4
23	Shaftesbury Underhill	1	1,348	1,348	-5	1,381	1,381	-8
24	Stour Valley	2	2,912	1,456	2	3,200	1,600	6
25	The Beacon	1	1,550	1,550	9	1,563	1,563	4

	<b>Ward name</b>	<b>Number of councillors</b>	<b>Electorate (2001)</b>	<b>Number of electors per councillor</b>	<b>Variance from average %</b>	<b>Electorate (2006)</b>	<b>Number of electors per councillor</b>	<b>Variance from average %</b>
27	The Stours	1	1,419	1,419	0	1,478	1,478	-2
28	Wyke	2	2,642	1,321	-7	2,787	1,394	-8
	<b>Totals</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>47,011</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>49,730</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>
	<b>Averages</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>1,425</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>1,507</b>	<b>-</b>

*Source: Electorate figures are based on information provided by North Dorset District Council.*

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

# 1 INTRODUCTION

1 This report contains our final recommendations on the electoral arrangements for the district of North Dorset. The six two-tier districts in Dorset have now been reviewed as part of the programme of periodic electoral reviews (PERs) of all 386 principal local authority areas in England started by the LGCE in 1996. We have inherited that programme, which we currently expect to complete in 2004.

2 North Dorset's last review was undertaken by the Local Government Boundary Commission for England, which reported to the Secretary of State in August 1980 (Report no. 392). The electoral arrangements of Dorset County Council were last reviewed in June 1982 (Report no. 427). We expect to begin reviewing the County Council's electoral arrangements towards the end of the year.

3 In making final recommendations to the Electoral Commission, we have had regard to:

- the statutory criteria contained in section 13(5) of the Local Government Act 1992 (as amended by SI 2001 No 3692), i.e. the need to:
  - a) reflect the identities and interests of local communities;
  - b) secure effective and convenient local government; and
  - c) achieve equality of representation.
- Schedule 11 to the Local Government Act.

4 Details of the legislation under which the review of North Dorset was conducted are set out in a document entitled *Guidance and Procedural Advice for Local Authorities and Other Interested Parties* (LGCE, fifth edition, published in October 2001). This *Guidance* sets out the approach to the review.

5 Our task is to make recommendations on the number of councillors who should serve on a council, and the number, boundaries and names of wards. We can also propose changes to the electoral arrangements for parish and town councils in the district.

6 The broad objective of PERs is to achieve, so far as possible, equal representation across the district as a whole. Schemes which would result in, or retain, an electoral imbalance of over 10 per cent in any ward will have to be fully justified. Any imbalances of 20 per cent or more should only arise in the most exceptional circumstances, and will require the strongest justification.

7 The LGCE was not prescriptive on council size. Insofar as North Dorset is concerned, it started from the assumption that the size of the existing council already secures effective and convenient local government, but was willing to look carefully at arguments why this might not be so. However, the LGCE found it necessary to safeguard against upward drift in the number of councillors, and believed that any proposal for an increase in council size would need to be fully justified. In particular, it did not accept that an increase in electorate should automatically result in an increase in the number of councillors, nor that changes should be made to the size of a council simply to make it more consistent with the size of other similar councils.

8 This review was in four stages. Stage One began on 27 March 2001, when the LGCE wrote to North Dorset District Council inviting proposals for future electoral arrangements. It also notified Dorset County Council, the local authority associations, Dorset Association of Parish and Town Councils, parish and town councils in the district, the Members of Parliament with constituencies in the district, the Members of the European Parliament for the South West Region and the headquarters of the main political parties. It 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 16 July 2001. At Stage Two it considered all the representations received during Stage One and prepared its draft recommendations.

9 Stage Three began on 9 October 2001 with the publication of the LGCE's report, *Draft recommendations on the future electoral arrangements for North Dorset*, and ended on 3 December 2001. During this period it sought comments from the public and any other interested parties on its preliminary conclusions. In the light of representations received regarding the south of the district, we carried out a further period of consultation in relation to the most appropriate warding arrangements for that part of the district. On 1 February 2002 we wrote to the District Council, the relevant parish councils and other interested parties outlining our proposals for the area, and invited respondents to submit their views by 18 February 2002. Finally, during Stage Four we reconsidered the LGCE's draft recommendations in the light of the Stage Three consultation and we now publish the final recommendations.

## 2 CURRENT ELECTORAL ARRANGEMENTS

10 The district of North Dorset is located in the north and centre of the county. The district covers an area of around 60,871 hectares and has a population of 58,230. There are five towns in the district, Blandford Forum, Gillingham, Shaftesbury, Stalbridge and Sturminster Newton, together with an extensive rural hinterland. Agriculture and tourism both occupy important positions within the economy of the district.

11 The district contains 59 civil parishes, and is entirely parished. Blandford Forum comprises around 15 per cent of the district's total electorate.

12 The electorate of the district is 47,011 (February 2001). The Council presently has 33 members who are elected from 27 wards. Six of the wards are each represented by two councillors and the remaining 21 are single-member wards. The Council is elected as a whole every four years.

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

14 At present, each councillor represents an average of 1,425 electors, which the District Council forecasts will increase to 1,507 by the year 2006 if the present number of councillors is maintained. However, due to demographic and other changes over the past two decades, the number of electors per councillor in 17 of the 27 wards varies by more than 10 per cent from the district average and in six wards by more than 20 per cent. The worst imbalance is in Wyke ward where each of the three councillors represents 92 per cent more electors than the district average.

*Map 1: Existing Wards in North Dorset*

Table 3: Existing Electoral Arrangements

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2001)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2006)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
1	Abbey	2	2,431	1,216	-15	2,530	1,265	-16
2	Blackmore	2	2,754	1,377	-3	2,920	1,460	-3
3	Blandford East	2	2,946	1,473	3	3,060	1,530	2
4	Blandford West	2	3,949	1,975	39	4,150	2,075	38
5	Bourton & District	1	1,350	1,350	-5	1,350	1,350	-10
6	Bulbarrow	1	1,045	1,045	-27	1,010	1,010	-33
7	Cranborne Chase	1	1,445	1,445	1	1,430	1,430	-5
8	Gillingham Town	1	1,450	1,450	2	1,620	1,620	8
9	Hill Forts	2	2,556	1,278	-10	2,680	1,340	-11
10	Hills & Vale	1	1,363	1,363	-4	1,350	1,350	-10
11	Lodbourne	1	1,185	1,185	-17	1,120	1,120	-26
12	Lower Winterborne	1	1,219	1,219	-14	1,290	1,290	-14
13	Lydden Vale	1	1,151	1,151	-19	1,270	1,270	-16
14	Marnhull	1	1,653	1,653	16	1,480	1,480	-2
15	Milton	1	1,623	1,623	14	1,870	1,870	24
16	Motcombe	1	1,349	1,349	-5	1,650	1,650	9
17	Portman	1	1,677	1,677	18	1,880	1,880	25
18	Riversdale	1	1,359	1,359	-5	1,460	1,460	-3
19	Shaftesbury Central	1	1,137	1,137	-20	1,060	1,060	-30
20	Shaftesbury Christy's	1	1,753	1,753	23	2,010	2,010	33
21	Shaftesbury Grosvenor	1	1,656	1,656	16	1,840	1,840	22
22	Shaftesbury Underhill	1	884	884	-38	890	890	-41
23	Stour Valley	2	2,912	1,456	2	3,200	1,600	6

Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2001)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2006)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
24 The Beacon	1	1,015	1,015	-29	1,040	1,040	-31
25 The Lower Tarrant	1	1,188	1,188	-17	1,410	1,410	-6
26 The Stours	1	1,225	1,225	-14	1,280	1,280	-15
27 Wyke	1	2,736	2,736	92	2,880	2,880	91
<b>Totals</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>47,011</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>49,730</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>
<b>Averages</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>1,425</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>1,507</b>	<b>-</b>

Source: Electorate figures are based on information provided by North Dorset 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 2001, electors in Shaftesbury Underhill ward were relatively over-represented by 38 per cent, while electors in Wyke ward were significantly under-represented by 92 per cent. Figures have been rounded to the nearest whole number.

### 3 DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS

15 During Stage One the LGCE received 11 representations. These included district-wide schemes from the District Council, a local councillor and Blandford Forum Town Council, and further representations from seven parish and town councils, a local Civic Society and a local Liberal Democrat branch. In the light of these representations and evidence available to it, the LGCE reached preliminary conclusions which were set out in its report, *Draft recommendations on the future electoral arrangements for North Dorset*.

16 The LGCE's draft recommendations for the rural parts of the district were based on the District Council's proposals, subject to a small number of amendments where it considered that improvements could be made. However, it moved away from the District Council's scheme in a number of the urban areas, as it judged that the proposals submitted had not provided sufficient detail or evidence. It proposed that:

- North Dorset District Council should be served by 33 councillors, the same as at present, representing 27 wards, also the same as at present;
- the boundaries of 22 of the existing wards should be modified, while five wards should retain their existing boundaries;
- there should be new warding arrangements for the towns of Gillingham and Shaftesbury.

**Draft Recommendation**

North Dorset District Council should comprise 33 councillors, serving 27 wards. The Council should continue to be elected every four years.

17 The LGCE's proposals would have resulted in significant improvements in electoral equality, with the number of electors per councillor in only five of the 27 wards varying by more than 10 per cent from the district average. This level of electoral equality was forecast to improve further, with only Riversdale and The Lower Tarrants wards varying by more than 10 per cent from the average in 2006.



## 4 RESPONSES TO CONSULTATION

18 During the consultation on its draft recommendations report, the LGCE received 39 representations. A list of all respondents is available from us on request. All representations may be inspected at our offices and those of North Dorset District Council.

### **North Dorset District Council**

19 The District Council stated that, after having consulted widely, it was aware there was “considerable unhappiness with some of the proposals, notably in the south of the area”. It also stated that it accepted the draft recommendations, except for the proposed wards of Milborne St Andrews, Riversdale and The Lower Tarrants in the south of the district, and the proposals for the towns of Blandford Forum and Shaftesbury. It requested time to submit alternative proposals for the disputed three wards, submitted an alternative warding pattern for Blandford Forum and supported the submission of Shaftesbury Town Council for ward boundary modifications in the town. A further submission from the District Council confirmed that it was unable to prepare revised proposals by the end of Stage Three, but emphasised the need for the LGCE to reconsider its draft recommendations.

### **Members of Parliament**

20 Robert Walter, MP for North Dorset, expressed support for the submission by Mr S J Unwin, *Community of Interest*, which is discussed below.

### **North Dorset District Labour Party**

21 North Dorset District Labour Party (‘the Labour Party’) stated that it found the draft recommendations unacceptable. It supported the proposals for Shaftesbury, but objected to those for Blandford Forum and Gillingham. It proposed that Blandford Forum should have “single-member wards covering the whole area inside the bypass as well as Blandford Camp” and that Gillingham should also have single-member wards “wholly in the town”. The Labour Party claimed that some of the recommendations for the rural areas were “quite unbelievable” and was critical of wards where there were no road or community links. It was of the opinion that a “total rethink” was required.

### **Parish and Town Councils**

22 Blandford Forum Town Council expressed opposition to many of the proposed rural wards and submitted proposals for an alternative warding pattern for the district, based on a council size of 33. With regard to Blandford Forum itself, it stated that it considered that “all the area inside the bypass is a single community”. It proposed six single-member wards for the town, which would include Blandford Camp and the urban areas of Blandford St Mary and Langton Long Blandford. As the total electorate in 2006 provided by the Town Council exceeds the District Council’s projected electorate, we have been unable to use its figures in our considerations.

23 Shaftesbury Town Council generally supported the draft recommendations, but proposed some minor modifications to the boundaries of three of the four proposed town wards. Blandford St Mary Parish Council preferred to be linked with Bryanstone rather than with either Blandford Forum or Tarrant Keyneston. Chettle Parish Council opposed the draft recommendations for its area as they would separate Farnham and Chettle from the other villages in Cranborne Chase. It

proposed that the two villages should be in the same ward as Ashmore, Tarrant Gunville and Tarrant Hinton. South Tarrant Valley Parish Council also opposed the draft recommendations for the south-east of the district. It claimed that dividing the Lower Tarrants villages “would have a detrimental impact on community life within these small rural parishes”. Tarrant Monkton & Launceston Parish Council expressed “grave reservations” concerning the draft recommendations. Spetisbury Parish Council was opposed to the proposal to place it in a different ward from Charlton Marshall.

24 Hinton St Mary Parish Council supported the draft recommendations, whereas Milborne St Andrew Parish Council opposed them. Milton Abbas Parish Council was divided between support for the draft recommendations and Councillor Spencer’s proposals. Lower Winterborne Parish Council opposed the draft recommendations, preferring to retain the existing ward with the addition of Winterborne Clenston and Winterborne Stickland. Mappowder Parish Meeting regarded the draft recommendations as “nothing more nor less than disruptive of communities” while Winterborne Whitechurch Parish Council opposed them on community identity grounds. Okeford Fitzpaine and Stourpaine parish councils were opposed to the proposed Bulbarrow ward, the former because the “geographical obstructions and spread would reduce the effective representation” of the parishes, and the latter because it disliked being “grouped with distant villages with no common outlook”. Kington Magna & Buckhorn Weston, Lydlinch and Motcombe parish councils supported the proposals for Bourton & District, Blackmore and Motcombe & Ham wards respectively.

25 Milborne St Andrew, South Tarrant Valley, Stourpaine and Tarrant Monkton & Launceston parish councils, and Mappowder Parish Meeting expressed support for *Community of Interest*, the latter enclosing a petition of support with the names of three residents.

## **Other Representations**

26 A further 18 representations were received in response to the LGCE’s draft recommendations from councillors, local organisations and residents.

27 Councillor Oram (Blandford East ward) maintained that the District Council’s Stage One submission was “indecently rushed” and mainly given to “number crunching”. He expressed support for *Community of Interest*, but differed from it with regard to multi-member wards in the towns, for which he submitted his own proposals. Councillor Webb (The Stours ward) stated that he was part of the three-man team which worked on the District Council’s submission, and that the team had little time “to consider the wider aspects of the issues raised”. As a result, it submitted a scheme which, although “broadly adequate in representational equality terms” produced a quality of community consideration which was “almost nil”. He supported *Community of Interest* which “addresses the issues that the District Council submission failed to do, and in overall terms is a much superior approach”. Councillors Ash, (Blackmore ward), Campbell (District Council Leader and Hills & Vale ward), Whitehead, (The Lower Tarrants ward), Clarke (Abbey ward) and Ash (Blackmore Vale division) also supported *Community of Interest*. Councillor Hine (Motcombe ward) supported the proposed retention of the ward on its existing boundaries, albeit with the name of Motcombe & Ham.

28 Mr S J Unwin objected to the draft recommendations on community identity grounds, claiming that “some communities that have worked well together for as long as local memories go have been broken up” while others would be linked with communities which have natural barriers and no direct road links between them. He submitted an alternative 36-member scheme entitled *Community of Interest*, to which reference has already been made. He proposed a

mixture of single- and two-member wards in the rural areas and a pattern of multi-member wards in the towns of Blandford Forum, Gillingham and Shaftesbury.

29 Six residents expressed support for *Community of Interest*. One expressed “grave concern” about the draft recommendations, which would divide The Lower Tarrants ward, while another claimed that they would work against the “emphasis on supporting and revitalising rural villages” contained in the Government White Paper ‘Our Countryside – The Future’. Another resident opposed the proposals for Abbey ward, and proposed two new wards running up the valleys, one on the east and one on the west. Gillingham Civic Society objected to the proposal to retain the existing Motcombe ward, preferring Ham to be placed in a Gillingham town ward. It also proposed that the proposed two-member Wyke ward should be divided into two single-member wards, but supported the proposals for Bourton & District and Lodbourne wards.

### **Further Consultation**

30 In the light of alternative proposals expressed in *Community of Interest*, and the measure of support they received, we carried out a period of further consultation on the most appropriate warding arrangements for the south of the district. On 1 February 2002 we wrote to the District Council, relevant parish councils and other interested parties outlining our own proposals for the area, which took into account some of the community identity arguments put forward and which would significantly modify the LGCE’s draft recommendations for the existing Abbey, Bulbarrow, Cranborne Chase, Hill Forts, Hills & Vale, Lower Winterborne, Lydden Vale, Portman, Riversdale and The Lower Tarrants wards. We invited respondents to submit their views by 18 February 2002, and received 38 representations.

31 North Dorset District Council supported our proposals, but proposed dividing the proposed two-member Abbey ward into two single-member wards. This was also proposed by Lower Winterborne Parish Council. Support for our proposals was expressed by Blandford St Mary, Bryanston, Child Okeford, Hazelbury Bryan, Iwerne Minster, Okeford Fitzpaine, Pimperne, South Tarrant Valley, Stourpaine, Tarrant Gunville, Tarrant Hinton and Winterborne Clenston parish councils, and Mappowder Parish Meeting. We also received support from R Walter MP, Councillors Campbell (Hills & Vale), Oliver (Cranborne Chase), Oram (Blandford East), Webb (The Stours) and Whitehead (The Lower Tarrants) and four local residents. Qualified support was expressed by Winterborne Whitechurch Parish Council and Councillor Spencer (Hill Forts). Opposition to our proposals was expressed by the Labour Party, Durweston, Milborne St Andrew, Milton Abbas and Winterborne Houghton parish councils, Blandford Forum Town Council, Councillors Clarke (Abbey) and Jones (Lower Winterborne), and three local residents. Alternative proposals submitted by some of these respondents will be discussed in the relevant sections of this report.



## 5 ANALYSIS AND FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS

32 As described earlier, our prime objective in considering the most appropriate electoral arrangements for North Dorset is, so far as reasonably practicable and consistent with the statutory criteria, to achieve electoral equality. In doing so we have regard to section 13(5) of the Local Government Act 1992 (as amended) – the need to secure effective and convenient local government; reflect the identities and interests of local communities; and secure the matters referred to in paragraph 3(2)(a) of Schedule 11 to the Local Government Act 1972 (equality of representation). Schedule 11 to the Local Government Act 1972 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 estimated changes in the number and distribution of local government electors likely to take place over the next five years. We also must have regard to the desirability of fixing identifiable boundaries and to maintaining local ties.

34 It is therefore impractical to design an electoral scheme which results in 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 We accept that the achievement of absolute electoral equality for the authority as a whole is likely to be unattainable. However, we consider that, if electoral imbalances are to be minimised, the aim 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 make electoral equality their starting point, and then make adjustments to reflect relevant factors such as community identity and interests. Five-year forecasts of changes in electorate must also be considered and we would aim to recommend a scheme which provides improved electoral equality over this five-year period.

### **Electorate Forecasts**

36 Since 1975 there has been a 30 per cent increase in the electorate of North Dorset district. At Stage One the District Council submitted electorate forecasts for the year 2006, projecting an increase in the electorate of 6 per cent from 47,011 to 49,730 over the five-year period from 2001 to 2006. It expected this growth to be relatively evenly distributed across the district, although a significant amount of growth was expected in Milton, Motcombe, The Lower Tarrants and Shaftesbury Christy’s wards. In order to prepare these forecasts, the Council 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. Having accepted that this is an inexact science and, having considered the forecast electorates, the LGCE stated in its draft recommendations report that it was satisfied that they represented the best estimates that could reasonably be made at the time.

37 At Stage Three the Labour Party, while acknowledging the difficulty in projecting future electorate numbers, felt that the 2006 figures for the towns were under-estimated. Blandford Forum Town Council, while not challenging the projected numbers for 2006, claimed that “it has been recognised that they are well below the expected numbers”. However, neither party gave any evidence in support of their assertions, or any revised projected figures. In this light, we remain satisfied that the estimates provided by the District Council represent the best estimates currently available.

## **Council Size**

38 As already explained, the LGCE started its review by assuming that the current council size facilitates effective and convenient local government, although it was willing to carefully look at arguments why this might not be the case.

39 In its draft recommendations report, the LGCE adopted the District Council's proposal for retaining a council of 33 members as it considered that neither of the district-wide proposals submitted by Blandford Forum Town Council and Councillor Spencer provided substantive evidence as to why the current council size does not facilitate convenient and effective local government or why their proposed council sizes were preferable.

40 At Stage Three the only alternative to the LGCE's proposed council size of 33 was submitted by Mr Unwin, who proposed a 36-member council. He claimed that such a council size would reflect more clearly the identities and interests of local communities, secure more effective local government, maintain a significant number of local ties using clearly identifiable geographic and ancient parochial boundaries and prioritise what he termed 'communities of interest'. Councillor Oram supported Mr Unwin's proposed council size, stating that more councillors would be required as "the trend is for central government to be delegating/decentralising activities downwards". He further maintained that it would not be unreasonable to increase the number of councillors because of the projected increase in the district's electorate.

41 Having considered the arguments put forward, we are not persuaded that Mr Unwin's proposals necessarily mean that an increase in council size is justified. We believe that much of the substance of Mr Unwin's proposals can be accommodated by modifications which we are proposing to the LGCE's draft recommendations under a council size of 33. We also consider that Councillor Oram has not provided this substantive evidence as to why a council size of 33 would not facilitate convenient and effective local government.

42 In this light of this, we are confirming the LGCE's draft recommendations for a council of 33 members as final.

## **Parish Administrative boundaries**

43 During the course of this review, North Dorset District Council and Blandford Forum Town Council submitted proposals for the Blandford Forum area, which would necessitate the creation of parish wards. As these parish wards would have relatively few electors, and as we believe further consultation with the parishes concerned would be desirable, we have concluded that such action would not be appropriate. However, under the provisions of the Local Government and Rating Act 1997, district councils may undertake reviews of the parish arrangements in their areas and make recommendations to the Secretary of State. When we have completed our PER of North Dorset District Council, we suggest that there would be considerable benefit in North Dorset District Council conducting a review of the parish arrangements in the area concerned.

## **Electoral Arrangements**

44 As set out in the draft recommendations report, the LGCE carefully considered all the representations received at Stage One, including district-wide schemes from North Dorset District Council, Blandford Forum Town Council and Councillor Spencer. It noted that there was little consensus between the three sets of proposals with regard to the appropriate configuration of wards within the district. Consequently, the LGCE looked for the proposals which, it judged,

would provide the best balance between electoral equality and the other statutory criteria. In its opinion, it was the District Council's proposals which best met the aims of the review, and so it adopted them as the basis for its draft recommendations, subject to a small number of amendments where it considered that improvements could be made. The LGCE put forward its own proposals for a number of the urban areas as it judged that the submitted proposals failed to provide sufficient detail or evidence.

45 At Stage Three the District Council stated that it accepted the draft recommendations, except for the proposed wards of Milborne St Andrews, Riversdale and The Lower Tarrant in the south of the district, and the proposals for the towns of Blandford Forum and Shaftesbury. It emphasised the need for the Boundary Committee to reconsider the draft recommendations for these wards, submitted an alternative warding pattern for Blandford Forum and supported the submission from Shaftesbury Town Council for ward boundary modifications in the town.

46 The Labour Party proposed that Blandford Forum should have "single-member wards covering the whole area inside the bypass as well as Blandford Camp" and that Gillingham should also have single-member wards "wholly in the town". The Labour Party was critical of some of the recommendations for the rural areas and was of the opinion that a "total rethink" was required. Blandford Forum Town Council expressed opposition to many of the proposed rural wards and submitted proposals for an alternative warding pattern for the district, based on a council size of 33. With regard to Blandford Forum itself, it proposed six single-member wards for the town, which would include Blandford Camp and the urban areas of Blandford St Mary and Langton Long Blandford. Shaftesbury Town Council generally supported the draft recommendations, but proposed some minor modifications to the boundaries of three of the four town wards.

47 Mr SJ Unwin submitted an alternative district-wide scheme for a 36-member council entitled *Community of Interest*, which he claimed would be a better reflection of community interests and identities than the draft recommendations. He proposed a mixture of single- and two-member wards in the rural areas and a pattern of multi-member wards in the towns of Blandford Forum, Gillingham and Shaftesbury. These proposals were supported by R Walter, MP for Dorset North, Milborne St Andrews, South Tarrant Valley, Stourpaine and Tarrant Monkton & Launceston parish councils, Mappowder Parish Meeting, one county councillor, six district councillors and six local residents.

48 We note that the LGCE's recommendations for the south of the district have generated some opposition, and have also noted the level of support given to Mr Unwin's *Community of Interest* proposals. Having considered the arguments put forward, we are of the opinion that Mr Unwin's proposals have some merit, and of the opinion that the substance of his proposals can be accommodated by modifications which we are proposing to the LGCE's draft recommendations for the south of the district. Having engaged in limited further consultation with parish councils and respondents in the relevant area, which generally supported our proposed recommendations, we have decided to depart from the LGCE's draft recommendations in the south of the district.

49 The draft recommendations have been reviewed in the light of further evidence and the representations received during Stage Three. For district warding purposes, the following areas, based on existing wards, are considered in turn:

- (a) Blandford Forum (two wards);
- (b) Cranborne Chase, Hills & Vale, The Beacon and The Lower Tarrants wards;
- (c) Abbey, Lower Winterborne, Portman and Riversdale wards;
- (d) Blackmore, Bulbarrow, Hill Forts and Lydden Vale wards;
- (e) Marnhull, Stour Valley and The Stours wards;
- (f) Shaftesbury (four wards);
- (g) Bourton & District, Gillingham Town, Lodbourne, Milton, Motcombe and Wyke wards.

50 Details of our final recommendations are set out in Tables 1 and 2 and illustrated on Map 2 in Appendix A and on the large map inserted at the back of this report

### **Blandford Forum (two wards)**

51 The town (and parish) of Blandford Forum is situated in the south-east of the district and is currently served by two two-member wards: Blandford East and Blandford West. The area as a whole is under-represented. The number of electors per councillor is 3 per cent above the district average in Blandford East ward (2 per cent above in 2006) and 39 per cent above in Blandford West ward (38 per cent above in 2006).

52 At Stage One the District Council proposed that Blandford Forum parish should comprise five single-member district wards. Councillor Spencer proposed that an area comprising Blandford Forum parish, an area in the north of Langton Long Blandford parish and areas in the west of Tarrant Launceston and Tarrant Monkton parishes should together be covered by five councillors. Blandford Forum Town Council proposed that an area comprising Blandford Forum parish together with part of Blandford St Mary and Langton Long Blandford parishes together be covered by six single-member wards. It also proposed that the Letton area of Pimperne parish could be included in this area for district warding purposes.

53 The LGCE noted that it had received three different sets of proposals for the area concerned. It was not persuaded that the achievement of a good solution for the wider district area necessitated looking beyond Blandford Forum Town Council for alternative warding arrangements. Moreover, it noted that, under a council size of 33, the area comprising Blandford East and Blandford West wards merited five councillors, both now and in 2006. Consequently it did not adopt the proposals of Blandford Forum Town Council or Councillor Spencer for this area, but provided its own proposals, based on an overall representation of five councillors and on the existing wards. In view of the substantial under-representation in Blandford West ward, the LGCE proposed increasing the number of councillors representing the ward from two to three. It also proposed that the existing boundary between Blandford East and Blandford West wards should be retained, subject to making minor modifications in the centre of the town to provide a more clearly recognisable boundary, which would not affect any electors.

54 Under the LGCE's draft recommendations, the number of electors per councillor would be 3 per cent above the district average in Blandford East ward (2 per cent above in 2006) and 8 per cent below in Blandford West ward, both initially and in 2006.

55 At Stage Three the District Council stated that it "did not believe that it would be appropriate for Blandford to have only two wards". It proposed five single-member wards for the town, which would include two areas inside the ring road currently in Langton Long Blandford parish, one for a new housing development off of Stour Road and the other a small part of Downside

Close, most of which is in Blandford parish. Although 2006 electorate figures for these wards were provided, none were provided for any of the contiguous wards which would be affected by these proposals.

56 Blandford Forum Town Council stated that it considered that all the area inside the bypass “is a single community and this includes the urban areas of Blandford St Mary and Langton Long”. It also stated that within the town there are “areas with distinct historical, social and community interests”. As a consequence, it proposed six single-member wards, which, in addition to those areas outside Blandford Forum parish included in the District Council’s proposal, would include the urban part of Blandford St Mary parish and the Blandford Camp area of Tarrant Monkton and Tarrant Launceston parishes. The Town Council considered the urban parts of Blandford St Mary and Langton Long Blandford parishes, which are within the bypass, to be part of Blandford Forum. It stated that the Downside Close and Stour Road areas of Langton Long Blandford parish are “architecturally and emotionally linked to Blandford and are a non-contiguous part of the parish of Langton Long”. It further stated that the only road access to Blandford Camp at present is from Blandford Forum, whereas there is none from the two parishes in which the Camp area is currently placed.

57 The Labour Party was of the opinion that electors living inside the bypass feel they are part of the town, but that “within this area there are strong variations in community interests that can be easily identified”. It supported proposals for single-member wards covering this area and Blandford Camp. A local resident also expressed support. Councillor Oram (Blandford East) supported the draft recommendations for the town wards, contending that “no adequate justification for a move to single-member wards in Blandford Forum has yet been made by anyone”. Mr Unwin considered that the towns in the district did not merit warding due to the size of their electorates, and proposed a five-member ward for Blandford Forum based on the existing parish boundary. Blandford St Mary Parish Council expressed a preference to be linked with Bryanstone, rather than Blandford Forum or Tarrant Keyneston, on community identity grounds.

58 Having carefully considered the representations received, we have decided to move away from the LGCE’s draft recommendations for Blandford Forum, and propose instead single-member wards. We have noted the support expressed for single-member wards in the town, and accept the argument concerning the distinct areas in the town put forward by the Town Council and the Labour Party. We are unable to adopt Mr Unwin’s proposal for a single five-member ward for the town; as we state in our *Guidance*, “Numbers in excess of three could result in an unacceptable dilution of accountability to the electorate.”

59 We are still not persuaded that the achievement of a good solution for the wider district area necessitates looking beyond Blandford Forum Town Council for alternative warding arrangements. We have noted the representations from the District Council, Blandford Forum Town Council and the Labour Party for town wards which would include parts of neighbouring parishes. However, we have also noted opposition to this from Councillor Oram, Blandford St Mary Parish Council and Mr Unwin. As has already been said, we suggest that, when we have completed our PER of North Dorset District Council, there would be considerable benefit in North Dorset District Council conducting a review of the parish arrangements in the area. This would enable all interested parties to be consulted fully.

60 In proposing five single-member wards, we have adopted the District Council’s proposed wards, but modified them in order to stay within the parish boundaries. Blandford Old Town ward would cover the west of the parish, with its eastern boundary following Damory Street, Park Road, Milldown Road and the eastern side of The Milldown. This would also be the

western boundary of Blandford Damory Down ward, the eastern boundary of which would follow a straight line from Park Road to join the existing boundary between Blandford East and Blandford West wards. Its northern boundary would run along the rear of properties in Eastleaze Road, Badbury Drive, Liddington Crescent and Hinton Close. Blandford Hilltop ward would cover the north of the parish, with its southern boundary being the same as the northern boundary of Blandford Damory Down ward before running along the rear of properties in Salisbury Crescent, along Salisbury Road, Hunt Road, to the rear of properties in Elizabeth Road, Tudor Gardens and Philip Road, and along the ring road. The boundary of Blandford Station ward would follow parts of the eastern boundaries of Blandford Old Town and Blandford Damory Down wards and the southern boundary of Blandford Hilltop ward. Its eastern boundary, which would also be the western boundary of Blandford Langton St Leonards ward, covering the east of the town, would run to the rear of properties in Percy Gardens, St Leonards Avenue and Elizabeth Road.

61 Under our final recommendations, the number of electors per councillor in Blandford Damory Down, Blandford Hilltop, Blandford Langton St Leonards, Blandford Old Town and Blandford Station wards would be 5 per cent above, 46 per cent below, 2 per cent above, equal to the average and 22 per cent above the district average respectively (4 per cent, 5 per cent, 5 per cent, 3 per cent and 5 per cent below in 2006). Our final recommendations for these wards are illustrated on Map A2.

### **Cranborne Chase, Hills & Vale, The Beacon and The Lower Tarrant wards**

62 These four wards are situated in the east of the district and each is represented by a single councillor. Cranborne Chase ward comprises the parishes of Chettle, Farnham, Pimperne, Tarrant Gunville and Tarrant Hinton; Hills & Vale ward comprises the parishes of Ashmore, Fontmell Magna, Iwerne Minster and Sutton Waldron; The Beacon ward comprises the parishes of Cann, Compton Abbas, East Orchard, Margaret Marsh, Melbury Abbas and West Orchard, and The Lower Tarrants ward comprises the parishes of Langton Long Blandford, Tarrant Crawford, Tarrant Keyneston, Tarrant Launceston, Tarrant Monkton, Tarrant Rawston and Tarrant Rushton. The number of electors per councillor is 1 per cent above the district average in Cranborne Chase ward (5 per cent below in 2006), 4 per cent below in Hills & Vale ward (10 per cent below in 2006), 29 per cent below in The Beacon ward (31 per cent below in 2006) and 17 per cent below in The Lower Tarrants ward (6 per cent below in 2006).

63 At Stage One the District Council proposed a pattern of three single-member wards in this area. It proposed to modify The Beacon, Cranborne Chase and The Lower Tarrants wards and considered that its proposals would generally provide a satisfactory reflection of the statutory criteria. However, it noted that under its proposals some electoral inequality would remain in the modified The Lower Tarrants ward, which it considered could be addressed by an alternative proposal including electors from the 'Blandford Camp' area of Tarrant Launceston and Tarrant Monkton parishes in the Blandford Forum wards via "a corridor through Langford Long".

64 Councillor Spencer proposed a pattern of four single-member wards to cover the majority of this area. He proposed new Gardiner and Woodhouse wards, and modified Beacon and Cranborne Chase wards. Blandford Forum Town Council proposed a revised pattern of four single-member wards to cover much of this area. It proposed to revise The Beacon and Hills & Vale wards, a new Tarrants ward and a new Pimperne & Camp ward. The LGCE received one further submission in relation to this area. Tarrant Gunville Parish Council initially supported the retention of the status quo in its area. It subsequently made a further submission in support of

Councillor Spencer's 31-member scheme, stating that his proposals reflected community identity and interests.

65 The LGCE noted that, under the District Council's proposals, there would be substantial electoral inequality in The Lower Tarrants ward, which it considered could be addressed by transferring the Blandford Camp area to form part of Blandford ward, as proposed by Councillor Spencer. However, it was not persuaded that such an arrangement would provide a satisfactory reflection of local community identities and interests. It was also not persuaded that the proposed warding configuration put forward by Blandford Forum Town Council would provide a satisfactory reflection of local community identities and interests. Consequently, it investigated modifying the schemes which it had received so as to provide improvements to electoral equality across the area as a whole, while having regard to the statutory criteria. It noted that the configuration of parishes in this area did not lend itself easily to the achievement of electoral equality without the use of parish warding, which in the areas concerned it judged was unlikely to provide a satisfactory reflection of local community identities and interests. Consequently it adopted the District Council's proposed scheme for this area, although modified to transfer Tarrant Rawston parish to a modified Portman ward, which would secure a small improvement in electoral equality.

66 Under the LGCE's draft recommendations, the number of electors per councillor would be 17 per cent above the district average in Cranborne Chase ward, which would comprise the parishes of Ashmore, Iwerne Minster, Pimperne and Tarrant Gunville (10 per cent above in 2006), 9 per cent above in The Beacon ward, which would comprise the parishes of Cann, Compton Abbas, Fontmell Magna, Melbury Abbas and Sutton Waldron (4 per cent above in 2006) and 14 per cent above in The Lower Tarrants ward, which would comprise the parishes of Chettle, Farnham, Spetisbury, Tarrant Crawford, Tarrant Hinton, Tarrant Launceston, Tarrant Monkton and Tarrant Rushton (18 per cent above in 2006).

67 In response to the LGCE's draft recommendations, the District Council acknowledged that its own proposals and the draft recommendations for The Lower Tarrants ward were "not supportive of community cohesion and logical boundaries" and had encountered local opposition. In particular it stated that the proposals put constituent parts of the grouped parish into separate wards. It requested the LGCE to "rethink these decisions". Blandford Forum Town Council proposed that Blandford Camp should be transferred from Tarrant Launceston and Tarrant Monkton parishes and be placed in a single-member St Leonards & The Camp ward of Blandford Forum town. It proposed including the urban part of Langton Long Blandford parish with the urban part of Blandford St Mary parish in a single-member Langton/Blandford St Mary ward. It proposed a new single-member ward which would comprise the parishes of Ashmore, Chettle, Farnham, Tarrant Crawford, Tarrant Keyneston, Tarrant Rushton, Tarrant Rawston, Tarrant Hinton and Tarrant Gunville, and parts of the parishes of Langton Long Blandford, Tarrant Launceston and Tarrant Monkton. It further proposed a single-member ward which would comprise the parishes of Compton Abbas, Fontmell Magna, Iwerne Minster, Melbury Abbas and Sutton Waldron. Neither of the latter two proposed wards was named.

68 Chettle, South Tarrant Valley and Tarrant Monkton & Launceston parish councils and six local residents expressed opposition to the draft recommendations. Chettle Parish Council also stated that the villages of Ashmore, Chettle, Farnham, Tarrant Gunville and Tarrant Hinton should be placed in the same ward.

69 Mr Unwin opposed the proposed Cranborne Chase and The Lower Tarrants wards on community identity grounds and proposed four single-member wards for the area. He proposed

retaining the existing The Lower Tarrants ward. He also proposed a new Pimperne & Stourpaine ward, comprising the two parishes, a revised Cranborne Chase ward comprising the parishes of Ashmore, Chettle, Farnham, Iwerne Minster, Sutton Waldron, Tarrant Gunville and Tarrant Hinton and a revised The Beacon ward, comprising the parishes of Cann, Compton Abbas, Fontmell Magna and Melbury Abbas.

70 Having given careful consideration to the evidence and representations received at Stage Three, we have noted the concern expressed on community identity grounds to the draft recommendations, particularly in the proposed Cranborne Chase and The Lower Tarrants wards. As a consequence, we have reexamined the LGCE's draft recommendations for part of this area. As we have already stated with regard to Blandford Forum, we are still not persuaded that the achievement of a good solution for the wider district area necessitates looking beyond Blandford Forum Town Council for alternative warding arrangements. For this reason we did not consider transferring Blandford Camp to a ward which would be part of Blandford Forum. Instead, we considered retaining the existing The Lower Tarrants ward, modifying the LGCE's proposed Cranborne Chase ward to comprise the parishes of Ashmore, Chettle, Farnham, Pimperne, Tarrant Gunville and Tarrant Hinton, while retaining the draft recommendations' proposal for The Beacon ward.

71 As this alternative had not been consulted upon locally, we were not aware of the degree of support it would receive in preference to the LGCE's draft recommendations. We therefore conducted a further period of limited consultation in this area, and the south of the district generally, during the period 2 to 18 February 2002. We outlined the alternative proposals for the area and requested correspondents to submit their views to the LGCE.

72 In all, we received 38 representations, ten of which related specifically to this area. Support for our alternative proposals as they related to their respective wards was expressed by Pimperne, South Tarrant Valley, Tarrant Gunville and Tarrant Hinton parish councils, Councillors Campbell (Hills & Vale), Oliver (Cranborne Chase) and Whitehead (The Lower Tarrants), and two local residents. Councillor Spencer (Hill Forts) regarded the proposals for Cranborne Chase and The Lower Tarrants wards as "much more acceptable". Blandford Forum Town Council reiterated its opposition to the proposal to retain the existing boundaries between Blandford Forum and neighbouring parishes and the Labour Party was opposed to the proposals for The Lower Tarrants ward, reiterating its view that Blandford Camp has "nothing in common with the tiny rural villages of the Tarrant Valley". However, as these issues have already been discussed in a previous section of this report, we do not intend to comment on them here. In the light of the support received during further consultation, we have decided to confirm our alternative proposals as our final recommendations for this part of the district.

73 Under our final recommendations, the number of electors per councillor would be 12 per cent above the district average (5 per cent above in 2006) in Cranborne Chase ward, which would comprise the parishes of Ashmore, Chettle, Farnham, Pimperne, Tarrant Gunville and Tarrant Hinton; 9 per cent above (4 per cent above in 2006) in The Beacon ward, which would comprise the parishes of Cann, Compton Abbas, Fontmell Magna, Melbury Abbas and Sutton Waldron and 17 per cent below (6 per cent below in 2006) in The Lower Tarrants ward, which would comprise the parishes of Langton Long Blandford, Tarrant Crawford, Tarrant Keyneston, Tarrant Launceston, Tarrant Monkton, Tarrant Rawston and Tarrant Rushton. Our final recommendations for these wards are illustrated on Map 2.

## **Abbey, Lower Winterborne, Portman and Riversdale wards**

74 These four wards are situated in the south of the district. Abbey ward is represented by two members and the remaining three wards are each represented by a single member. Abbey ward comprises the parishes of Hilton, Milborne St Andrew, Milton Abbas, Turnworth, Winterborne Clenston, Winterborne Houghton and Winterborne Stickland; Lower Winterborne ward comprises the parishes of Anderson, Winterborne Kingston, Winterborne Whitechurch and Winterborne Zelston; Portman ward comprises the parishes of Blandford St Mary, Bryanston and Durweston, and Riversdale ward comprises the parishes of Charlton Marshall and Spetisbury. The number of electors per councillor is 15 per cent below the district average in Abbey ward (16 per cent below in 2006), 14 per cent below in Lower Winterborne ward both now and in 2006, 18 per cent above in Portman ward (25 per cent above in 2006) and 5 per cent below in Riversdale ward (3 per cent below in 2006).

75 At Stage One the District Council proposed a pattern of four single-member wards in this area. It proposed a modified Portman ward and a modified Riversdale ward. The District Council also proposed that an area comprising Abbey ward, together with a number of neighbouring parishes, should form two new wards. It did not include proposals for new ward names in this area. It considered that its proposals would generally provide a satisfactory reflection of local community identities and interests. In addition to a new Woodhouse ward, Councillor Spencer proposed a further four single-member wards in this area. He proposed a revised Riversdale ward, a new Winterborne ward and modified Abbey and Portman wards.

76 Blandford Forum Town Council proposed that a single-member Riversdale ward should be retained on its existing boundaries. It proposed a modified single-member Abbey ward, a modified single-member Lower Winterborne ward and a further new single-member ward, for which it did not include a name, comprising the parishes of Bryanston, Durweston, Winterborne Houghton and Winterborne Stickland. The Town Council considered that the new wards which it had proposed would achieve improvements to electoral equality while providing a satisfactory reflection of local community identities and interests. We received one further submission in relation to this area. Winterborne Houghton Parish Council supported the retention of the existing Abbey ward, considering that the status quo worked well in its area.

77 The LGCE noted that all three schemes would achieve substantial improvements to electoral equality in the areas concerned. However, it considered that the proposals put forward by the District Council would provide the best balance between the need to secure improvements to electoral equality and the other statutory criteria, both in this area and in view of its proposals for neighbouring areas. Consequently, it adopted the District Council's proposals as part of its draft recommendations. However, as previously stated, it proposed transferring the parish of Tarrant Rawston from the proposed Lower Tarrants ward to the proposed Portman ward to secure a small improvement in electoral equality. The LGCE proposed that the existing ward names should be retained for each ward, except in the case of the ward formed from the southern part of Abbey ward and the western part of Lower Winterborne ward, which it proposed should be called Milborne St Andrew.

78 Under the LGCE's draft recommendations, the number of electors per councillor would be 7 per cent above the district average (5 per cent above in 2006) in Abbey ward, which would comprise the parishes of Hilton, Milton Abbas, Winterborne Houghton and Winterborne Stickland; equal to the average (1 per cent below in 2006) in Milborne St Andrew ward, which would comprise the parishes of Milborne St Andrew, Winterborne Clenston and Winterborne Whitechurch; 9 per cent below (6 per cent above in 2006) in Portman ward, which would

comprise the parishes of Blandford St Mary, Langton Long Blandford, Tarrant Keyneston and Tarrant Rawston) and 10 per cent above (11 per cent above in 2006) in Riversdale ward, which would comprise the parishes of Anderson, Charlton Marshall, Winterborne Kingston and Winterborne Zelston.

79 At Stage Three the District Council acknowledged that its own proposals and the draft recommendations for Milborne St Andrew and Riversdale wards were “not supportive of community cohesion and logical boundaries” and had encountered local opposition. It stated that the existing Lower Winterborne ward parishes share strong community links and that “access to Charlton Marshall by road is tortuous”. Blandford Forum Town Council proposed two single-member wards covering most of the area, neither of which was given a name. The first ward would comprise the parishes of Milborne St Andrew, Milton Abbas and Winterborne Houghton, while the second would comprise the parishes of Anderson, Winterborne Clenston, Winterborne Kingston, Winterborne Whitechurch, Winterborne Zelston and part of Blandford St Mary parish.

80 Blandford St Mary Parish Council stated that it preferred to be linked with Bryanstone rather than with either Blandford Forum or Tarrant Keyneston on the grounds of community identity. Milborne St Andrew Parish Council expressed support for *Community of Interest*. Milton Abbas Parish Council stated that its members felt that a scheme which followed the water table would be more suitable, bearing in mind the recent problems due to flooding. Lower Winterborne and Winterborne Whitechurch parish councils were opposed to the draft recommendations, claiming that the parishes in the existing Lower Winterborne ward had good community and geographical links. They recognised that the existing ward had a small electorate and suggested that this could be rectified by including the parishes of Winterborne Clenston and Winterborne Stickland, which “share the same common links as Winterborne Whitechurch”.

81 Mr Unwin opposed the LGCE’s proposed Riversdale ward on community identity grounds and queried the necessity for change as the existing ward “already has an acceptable electoral variance”. He proposed one two-member and three single-member wards for the area. He proposed the retention of the existing Abbey ward as a two-member ward, albeit with the parish of Turnworth being transferred to his proposed Shillingstone ward and the retention of the existing single-member Lower Winterborne and Riversdale wards. He further proposed modifying the existing Portman ward by transferring the parish of Durweston to his proposed Shillingstone ward.

82 Having given careful consideration to the evidence and representations received at Stage Three, we have noted the concern expressed on community identity grounds in the draft recommendations, particularly in the proposed Portman and Riversdale wards. As a consequence, we have reexamined the LGCE’s draft recommendations for this area. We considered retaining the existing single-member Portman and Riversdale wards and creating a two-member Abbey ward, which would keep together the parishes of the existing Lower Winterborne ward and most of the parishes of the existing Abbey ward. This ward would comprise the parishes of Anderson, Hilton, Milborne St Andrew, Milton Abbas, Winterborne Houghton, Winterborne Kingston, Winterborne Whitechurch and Winterborne Zelston.

83 As this alternative had not been consulted upon locally, we were not aware of the degree of support it would receive in preference to the LGCE’s draft recommendations. We therefore conducted a further period of limited consultation in this area, and the south of the district generally, during the period 2 to 18 February 2002. We outlined the alternative proposals for the area and requested correspondents to submit their views to the LGCE.

84 In all, we received 38 representations, thirteen of which related specifically to this area. The District Council expressed support for the proposals for Portman and Riversdale wards but proposed that Winterbourne Houghton parish should be included in Bulbarrow ward rather than Abbey ward. The District Council also suggested that the proposed two-member Abbey ward could be divided into a single-member Abbey ward, which would comprise the parishes of Hilton, Milborne St Andrew and Milton Abbas, and a single-member Lower Winterborne ward, which would comprise the parishes of Anderson, Winterborne Kingston, Winterborne Whitechurch and Winterborne Zelston. Blandford St Mary and Bryanstone parish councils supported the proposals for Portman ward and a local resident supported the proposals for Riversdale ward. Councillor Spencer (Hills & Vale) also supported the proposals for Abbey and Riversdale wards, regarding them as “much more acceptable”.

85 Lower Winterborne Parish Council, while supporting the alternative proposal for Riversdale ward, regarded the proposed Abbey ward as “geographically too large and ungainly”, linking two areas which have “precious little in common”. It considered that having two councillors covering the proposed ward would “blur the edges of responsibility and accountability”, leading to confusion among the electorate. It proposed a single-member Abbey ward, comprising the parishes of Hilton, Milborne St Andrew, Milton Abbas and Winterborne Houghton, and a single-member The Lower Winterbourne ward, which would have the same constituent parishes as the existing ward. Milborne St Andrew Parish Council stated that the proposed Abbey and Bulbarrow wards do not “represent the geographical and community links that exist”. Milton Abbas Parish Council regarded the draft recommendations’ proposals as “more logical than those now under consideration”. Winterborne Houghton Parish Council was opposed to the proposal for Abbey ward. It stated that the parish was “intrinsically linked” with Winterborne Stickland, culturally, geographically and socially, and that the two parishes should be in the same district ward. Winterbourne Whitechurch Parish Council gave qualified support to the alternative proposals, noting that the parish would “not be completely isolated from other villages along the Winterbourne Valley”.

86 Councillor Jones (Lower Winterborne) was opposed to the proposed Abbey ward, stating that the villages of the Winterborne Valley “have nothing in common” with Milborne St Andrew. Councillor Clarke (Abbey ward) proposed that Winterborne Houghton should be placed in Bulbarrow ward, with Winterborne Clenston being placed in Abbey ward. This proposal was also submitted by a local resident. Another local resident proposed that Abbey ward should comprise the parishes of Hilton, Milborne St Andrew and Milton Abbas, and that Winterborne ward should comprise the parishes of Anderson, Turnworth, Winterborne Clenston, Winterborne Houghton, Winterborne Kingston, Winterborne Stickland, Winterborne Whitechurch and Winterborne Zelston.

87 Having considered the representations received during the further consultation period, we note that opinion is divided over the alternative proposals for Abbey ward. We also note there is some support for creating two single-member wards, although there are differences in the proposed constituent parishes. However, as two single-member wards would have unacceptable levels of electoral inequality, we are not able to recommend them. We note further that, under our alternative proposals, the constituent parishes of the existing Lower Winterbornes ward would be kept together, whereas under the LGCE’s draft recommendations they would be divided. In this light, and the support expressed for the alternative proposals, we propose confirming our alternative proposals for these wards as final, albeit with one modification. We have noted the representations concerning Winterborne Houghton and propose transferring the parish from Abbey ward to Bulbarrow ward, in recognition of its close links with Winterborne Stickland. We do not propose transferring Winterborne Clenston from Bulbarrow to Abbey ward

as the three parishes have close community ties, which would be more easily maintained by being in the same ward.

88 Under our final recommendations, the number of electors per councillor would be 4 per cent above the district average (3 per cent above in 2006) in Abbey ward, which would comprise the parishes of Anderson, Hilton, Milborne St Andrew, Milton Abbas, Winterborne Kingston, Winterborne Whitechurch and Winterborne Zelston; 3 per cent below (5 per cent above in 2006) in Portman ward, which would comprise the parishes of Blandford St Mary and Bryanstone and 5 per cent below (3 per cent below in 2006) in Riversdale ward, which would comprise the parishes of Charlton Marshall and Spetisbury. Our final recommendations for these wards are illustrated on Map 2.

### **Blackmore, Bulbarrow, Hill Forts and Lydden Vale wards**

89 These four wards are situated in the centre and west of the district. Blackmore and Hill Forts wards are each represented by two councillors while Bulbarrow and Lydden Vale wards are each represented by a single councillor. Blackmore ward comprises the parishes of Lydlinch, Stalbridge and Stourton Caundle; Bulbarrow ward comprises the parishes of Ibberton, Mappowder, Okeford Fitzpaine, Stoke Wake and Woolland; Hill Forts ward comprises the parishes of Child Okeford, Hanford, Iwerne Courtney, Iwerne Stepleton, Shillingstone and Stourpaine, and Lydden Vale ward comprises Fifehead Neville, Glanvilles Wootton, Hazelbury Bryan and Pulham parishes. The number of electors per councillor is 3 per cent below the district average in Blackmore ward both now and in 2006; 27 per cent below in Bulbarrow ward (33 per cent below in 2006); 10 per cent below in Hill Forts ward (11 per cent below in 2006) and 19 per cent below in Lydden Vale ward (16 per cent below in 2006).

90 At Stage One the District Council proposed that the boundaries of all the wards in this area should be modified with Bulbarrow and Lydden Vale wards remaining single-member wards and Hill Forts ward becoming a single-member ward. It proposed that two members should represent the area covered by the existing Blackmore ward and that two members should represent the area covered by the parishes of Hinton St Mary and Sturminster Newton. The District Council further proposed a new single-member ward comprising the parishes of Okeford Fitzpaine and Shillingstone. Councillor Spencer proposed a modified single-member Lydden Vale ward and a modified two-member Hill Forts or Hayward ward. He made similar proposals to those put forward by the District Council in the Stalbridge and Sturminster Newton areas. Blandford Forum Town Council proposed modified single-member Bulbarrow, Hill Forts and Lydden Vale wards, two single-member wards covering the existing Blackmore ward and a two-member Sturminster Newton ward. It proposed that a new single-member ward should comprise the parishes of Child Okeford, Hammoon, Hinton St Mary and Manston. Stourpaine Parish Council opposed the District Council's proposed Bulbarrow ward and expressed support for Councillor Spencer's proposals.

91 The LGCE noted that there was no consensus on the warding arrangements in this area. In the south and east of this area it judged that the District Council's proposals best met the aims of the review. Consequently, it adopted the District Council's proposals for modified Lydden Vale, Bulbarrow and Hill Forts wards as part of its draft recommendations and for a ward comprising Okeford Fitzpaine and Shillingstone, to be called Shillingstone ward. In the remaining area, comprising Blackmore ward and much of Stour Valley ward, it noted that it had received proposals generally preferring two single-member wards in each of these areas. However, it was not persuaded that it had received adequate evidence in support of the proposed divisions of these wards. Consequently, in view of the good electoral equality which would be retained, it

proposed that a two-member Blackmore ward should be retained on its existing boundaries while a modified two-member Stour Valley ward should comprise the parishes of Hinton St Mary and Sturminster Newton.

92 Under the LGCE's draft recommendations, the number of electors per councillor would be 3 per cent below the district average (unchanged in 2006) in Blackmore ward, comprising the parishes of Lydlinch, Stalbridge and Stourton Caundle; 5 per cent above (1 per cent above in 2006) in Bulbarrow ward, comprising the parishes of Bryanston, Durweston, Ibberton, Stourpaine, Stoke Way, Turnworth and Woolland); 3 per cent above (2 per cent above in 2006) in Hill Forts ward, comprising the parishes of Child Okeford, Hammoon, Hanford, Iwerne Courtney and Iwerne Stepleton); 10 per cent below (7 per cent below in 2006) in Lydden Vale ward, comprising the parishes of Fifehead Neville, Glanvilles Wootton, Hazlebury Bryan, Mappowder and Pulham; 7 per cent above (2 per cent above in 2006) in Shillingstone ward, comprising the parishes of Okeford Fitzpaine and Shillingstone, and 4 per cent below (equal to the average in 2006) in Stour Valley ward, comprising the parishes of Hinton St Mary and Sturminster Newton.

93 At Stage Three the District Council supported the draft recommendations for these wards. Okeford Fitzpaine Parish Council stated that "historically the present Bulbarrow ward has been closely linked, especially Okeford Fitzpaine, Ibberton and Woolland", whereas it maintained that the proposed Bulbarrow ward would reduce the effectiveness of the councillor due to the "geographical obstructions and spread". It was of the opinion that the proposed Shillingstone ward could be made to work but it would need a name which was not the same as the name of one of the constituent parishes. It proposed the alternative names of Conygar or Cookwell. Mappowder Parish Meeting was opposed to the proposed Bulbarrow ward. Stourpaine Parish Council was opposed to "being grouped with distant villages with no common outlook in Bulbarrow ward". Lydlinch Parish Council supported the retention of the existing Blackmore ward, and Hinton St Mary Parish Council expressed support for the draft recommendations.

94 Blandford Forum Town Council supported the draft recommendations for Blackmore and Stour Valley wards, but otherwise proposed an alternative warding pattern for the area. It proposed a single-member ward comprising the parishes of Hilton, Glanvilles Wootton, Pulham, Mappowder, Stoke Way, Woolland, Turnworth and Winterborne Stickland. It also proposed a single-member ward comprising the parishes of Hammoon, Handford, Iwerne Stepleton, Shillingstone and Stourpaine, and single-member ward comprising the parishes of Fifehead Neville, Hazlebury Bryan and Okeford Fitzpaine. It further proposed a single-member ward comprising the parishes of Child Okeford, East Orchard, Manston, Shroton and West Orchard. None of these proposed wards was named.

95 Mr Unwin also proposed an alternative warding pattern for this area. He proposed a two-member Blackmore ward, comprising the parishes of Stalbridge and Sturton Caundle; a single-member Lydden Vale ward, comprising the parishes of Fifehead Neville, Hazlebury Bryan and Lydlinch and a single-member Bulbarrow ward, comprising the parishes of Glanvilles Wootton, Ibberton, Mappowder, Okeford Fitzpaine, Pulham, Stoke Wake and Woolland. He further proposed a single-member Hill Forts ward, comprising the parishes of Child Okeford, Hanford, Iwerne Stepleton and Shroton, and a two-member Sturminster Newton ward, comprising the parish of Sturminster Newton.

96 Having given careful consideration to the evidence and representations received at Stage Three, we have noted the concern expressed on community identity grounds about the draft recommendations, particularly with regard to the proposed Bulbarrow ward. In particular, we

were aware of the potential problems for effective representation due to its length from east to west and to the lack of road links between Durweston and Turnworth, thus effectively dividing the ward in two. We noted the preference of Okeford Fitzpaine Parish Council for retaining its link with Ibberton in Bulbarrow ward. We were also aware that, in proposing that Bryanston should remain in the same ward as Blandford St Mary, we removed one of the constituent parishes from the proposed Bulbarrow ward. As a consequence, we reexamined the LGCE's draft recommendations for this area. We considered transferring the parishes of Okeford Fitzpaine, Winterborne Stickland and Winterborne Clenston to Bulbarrow ward. Having visited the area, we were persuaded that this would provide reasonable links within the ward. In the interests of electoral equality, and being satisfied concerning community and geographical links, we considered transferring the parishes of Stoke Way and Woolland from the proposed Bulbarrow ward to Lydden Vale ward.

97 Having reexamined the draft recommendations with regard to the proposed Bulbarrow, Cranborne Chase and Shillingstone wards, we considered creating a two-member Hill Forts ward, which would combine the parishes of Iwerne Minster, Shillingstone and Stourpaine with the draft recommendation's proposed Hill Forts ward, so linking parishes along and to the west of the A350. In the interest of electoral equality, we considered transferring the parishes of Hammoon and Manston to the proposed Stour Valley ward, which would restore the ward to its existing boundaries. We were not persuaded that the solution to the electoral arrangements in these wards was to be found in either Mr Unwin's or Blandford Forum Town Council's proposals, as both would have consequential effects on contiguous wards. In the light of support expressed by the District Council, Blandford Forum District Council and Lydlinch Parish Council, we further considered confirming the draft recommendations for Blackmore ward as final.

98 As this alternative had not been consulted upon locally, we were not aware of the degree of support it would receive in preference to the LGCE's draft recommendations. We therefore conducted a further period of limited consultation in this area, and the south of the district generally, during the period 2 to 18 February 2002. We outlined the alternative proposal for the area and requested correspondents to submit their views to the Commission.

99 In all we received 38 representations, eight of which related specifically to this area. The District Council expressed support for the proposals for Hill Forts and Lydden Vale wards, but proposed that Winterbourne Houghton parish should be included in Bulbarrow ward rather than Abbey ward. Hazelbury Bryan, Iwerne Minster and Winterborne Clenston parish councils, and Mappowder Parish Meeting expressed support for the alternative proposals as they related to their respective district wards. Durweston Parish Council proposed that Durweston should remain in a ward with Bryanstone. This was supported by Councillor Spencer because of the "traditional links" between the two parishes. Councillor Spencer was opposed to the inclusion of Iwerne Minster in Hill Forts ward as "the parish traditionally looks north" and preferred Hammoon and Manston to be part of Hill Forts ward. This was also proposed by a local resident.

100 Having considered the representations received during the further consultation period, we propose modifying our alternative proposals for these wards. As discussed in paragraph 87, we have been persuaded, on community identity grounds, that Winterborne Houghton should be included in Bulbarrow ward, rather than Abbey ward. We are also persuaded that Durweston does not sit comfortably in Bulbarrow ward, with which its links are tenuous. However, we are not able to recommend that it should be in Portman ward, as this would lead to an unacceptably high electoral variance. We therefore propose that Durweston should be placed in Hill Forts ward, as the parish has existing links with Stourpaine, and road links would be better with other

constituent parishes than with those in Bulbarrow ward. Although this would mean the ward having an electoral variance of over 10 per cent, this would be lower than other possible alternatives. We are not persuaded that Iwerne Minster should be in a different ward, particularly as the Parish Council supports its inclusion in Hill Forts ward, and transferring it to another ward would have consequential effects on a number of contiguous wards. Neither are we persuaded that retaining Hammoon and Manston in Hill Forts ward would justify the consequential increase in electoral variance in the ward. We propose confirming the draft recommendations for Blackmore ward, and confirming the alternative proposals for Hill Forts, Lydden Vale and Stour Valley wards as final.

101 Under our final recommendations, the number of electors would be 3 per cent below the district average (unchanged in 2006) in Blackmore ward, comprising the parishes of Lydlinch, Stalbridge and Stourton Caundle; 6 per cent above (equal to the average in 2006) in Bulbarrow ward, comprising the parishes of Ibberton, Okeford Fitzpaine, Turnworth, Winterborne Clenston, Winterborne Houghton and Winterborne Stickland; 17 per cent above (15 per cent above in 2006) in Hill Forts ward, comprising the parishes of Child Okeford, Durweston, Iwerne Courtney, Iwerne Minster, Iwerne Stepleton, Shillingstone and Stourpaine; 3 per cent below (1 per cent below in 2006) in Lydden Vale ward, comprising the parishes of Fifehead Neville, Glanvilles Wootton, Hazlebury Bryan, Mappowder, Pulham, Stoke Way and Woolland and 2 per cent above (6 per cent above in 2006) in Stour Valley ward, comprising the parishes of Hammoon, Hinton St Mary, Manston and Sturminster Newton. Our final recommendations for these wards are illustrated on Map 2.

### **Marnhull, Stour Valley and The Stours wards**

102 These three wards are broadly situated in the north-west of the district. Stour Valley is represented by two councillors, while Marnhull and The Stours wards are each represented by a single councillor. Marnhull ward comprises the parish of the same name; Stour Valley ward comprises the parishes of Hammoon, Hinton St Mary, Manston and Sturminster Newton, and The Stours ward comprises the parishes of East Stour, Fifehead Magdalen, Stour Provost, Todber and West Stour. The number of electors per councillor is 16 per cent above the district average in Marnhull ward (2 per cent below in 2006), 2 per cent above in Stour Valley ward (6 per cent above in 2006) and 14 per cent below in The Stours ward (15 per cent below in 2006).

103 At Stage One, in addition to the proposals outlined above affecting Stour Valley ward, the District Council proposed further modifications to wards in this area. It proposed a modified single-member The Stours ward, while Marnhull ward would be retained on its existing boundaries. Councillor Spencer also proposed that Marnhull ward should be retained on its existing boundaries, although he noted that it could also include Todber parish. In addition to the proposals outlined above affecting Stour Valley ward, he also proposed that the parishes of Fifehead Magdalen and West Stour be combined with parishes in the Blackmore area, and the parishes of East Stour, Stour Provost and Todber be combined with parishes in the Beacon area. Blandford Forum Town Council also proposed that Marnhull ward should be retained on its present boundaries. In addition to the proposals outlined above affecting Stour Valley ward, it also proposed a new, unnamed, single-member ward, comprising the parishes of Buckhorn Weston, Fifehead Magdalen, Kington Magna, Stour Provost, Todber and West Stour.

104 The LGCE noted that there was some consensus in favour of retaining the existing Marnhull ward and, in view of the good electoral equality which would result by 2006, it adopted this ward as part of its draft recommendations. In the remaining area it adopted the District Council's proposed The Stours ward as it judged that it would provide the best balance of the need to

between electoral equality and the other statutory criteria. Under the LGCE's draft recommendations the number of electors per councillor would be 16 per cent above the district average (2 per cent below in 2006) in Marnhull ward, comprising the parish of Marnhull and equal to the average (2 per cent below in 2006) in The Stours ward, comprising the parishes of East Orchard, East Stour, Fifehead Magdalen, Margaret Marsh, Stour Provost, Todber, West Orchard and West Stour.

105 At Stage Three the District Council supported the draft recommendations for these wards. Blandford Forum Town Council proposed an alternative warding pattern for the area. It proposed a single-member ward comprising the parishes of Marnhull and Todber and a single-member ward comprising the parishes of Cann, East Stour, Fifehead Magdalene, Margaret Marsh, Stour Provost and West Stour. Neither of these wards was named. Mr Unwin also proposed an alternative warding pattern for the area. He proposed a two-member Marnhull & District ward, comprising the parishes of East Orchard, Fifehead Magdalene, Hammoon, Hinton St Mary, Manston, Marnhull, Margaret Marsh, Stour Provost, Todber, West Orchard and West Stour.

106 We have carefully considered the representations received during the consultation period. We note that adopting either of the alternative warding patterns proposed for this area would have a consequential effect on the proposed contiguous wards. In this light, and noting the support received from the District Council for the LGCE's draft recommendations, we are confirming the draft recommendations as final. Under our final recommendations, the number of electors per councillor would be 16 per cent above the district average (2 per cent below in 2006) in Marnhull ward, comprising the parish of Marnhull, and equal to the average (2 per cent below in 2006) in The Stours ward, comprising the parishes of East Orchard, East Stour, Fifehead Magdalen, Margaret Marsh, Stour Provost, Todber, West Orchard and West Stour. Our final recommendations for these wards are illustrated on Map 2.

### **Shaftesbury (four wards)**

107 The town (and parish) of Shaftesbury is situated in the north-east of the district and is currently served by four single-member wards: Shaftesbury Central, Shaftesbury Christy's, Shaftesbury Grosvenor and Shaftesbury Underhill. The number of electors per councillor is 20 per cent below the district average in Shaftesbury Central ward (30 per cent below in 2006); 23 per cent above in Shaftesbury Christy's ward (33 per cent above in 2006); 16 per cent above in Shaftesbury Grosvenor ward (22 per cent above in 2006) and 38 per cent below in Shaftesbury Underhill ward (41 per cent below in 2006).

108 At Stage One the District Council, Councillor Spencer and Blandford Forum Town Council each proposed that Shaftesbury town should comprise four single-member district wards, as at present, although Councillor Spencer proposed that Motcombe parish should be warded with the town. However, they did not provide detailed proposals for the re-warding of the town area. Shaftesbury Town Council proposed modifications to ward boundaries in Shaftesbury which, it considered, would better reflect the areas concerned. The Shaftesbury & District Branch of the Liberal Democrats also put forward revisions to the four district wards in Shaftesbury.

109 The LGCE noted that it had not received detailed proposals relating to the urban area from the District Council, Councillor Spencer and Blandford Forum Town Council. It was also not persuaded that it had received adequate evidence in support of the schemes proposed by Shaftesbury Town Council or Shaftesbury & District Liberal Democrats, which indicated how they would reflect the identity and interests of the communities of the town. Consequently it put forward its own proposals in relation to Shaftesbury. The LGCE noted further that, under a

council size of 33, Shaftesbury parish merits four district councillors, and it did not consider that combining neighbouring parishes with parts of Shaftesbury parish would offer a good reflection of local community identities. It therefore based its proposals on modifications to the existing arrangements, taking into account the need to secure improvements between electoral equality and the other statutory criteria. In view of the high level of under-representation in Shaftesbury Grosvenor ward, it proposed transferring an area around Crookhays from Shaftesbury Grosvenor ward to Shaftesbury Central ward. It proposed modifying further Shaftesbury Central ward by adding an area of Shaftesbury Christy's ward in the Old Boundary Road area. Noting the over-representation in Shaftesbury Underhill ward, the LGCE proposed transferring an area generally to the west of Salisbury Road and the A350 from Shaftesbury Christy's ward to Shaftesbury Underhill ward. Finally, it proposed further modifying the boundaries of Shaftesbury Underhill ward by including an area around Yeatmans Close, currently in Shaftesbury Central ward. Under the LGCE's draft recommendations the number of electors per councillor would be 7 per cent above the district average in Shaftesbury Central ward (1 per cent above in 2006), 11 per cent below in Shaftesbury Christy's ward (4 per cent below in 2006), 9 per cent below in Shaftesbury Grosvenor ward (4 per cent below in 2006) and 5 per cent below in Shaftesbury Underhill ward (8 per cent below in 2006).

110 At Stage Three Shaftesbury Town Council generally supported the LGCE's draft recommendations, but proposed modifications to the boundaries of three of the four proposed wards. It proposed that Salisbury Street, from its junction with High Street to its junction with Old Boundary Road should be transferred from the proposed Underhill ward to Central ward, as "geographically, Salisbury Street is very much a continuation of High Street". It further proposed that Grosvenor Road and Crookhays should remain in Grosvenor ward, with The Venn being transferred to Central ward, stating that "historically Grosvenor Road formed the basis of Grosvenor ward and moving it would cause confusion among residents". The District Council supported the Town Council's proposals. Both Blandford Forum Town Council and the Labour Party supported the proposals for four single-member wards but did not provide any further details. Mr Unwin proposed a single four-member ward, claiming that the LGCE and Shaftesbury Town Council's proposals "do not reflect any genuine interests of communities within this small town". Councillor Oram (Blandford East) considered Shaftesbury to be the only town in North Dorset which "seemingly has any justification for single-member wards".

111 We have carefully considered the representations received during the consultation period, in particular the modifications to the LGCE's draft recommendations proposed by Shaftesbury Town Council and supported by the District Council. However, adopting these modifications would result in two of the four wards, Shaftesbury Grosvenor and Shaftesbury Underhill, having electoral variances of over 10 per cent by 2006. Consequently, we do not propose modifying the draft recommendations for these wards. We are also unable to adopt Mr Unwin's proposal for a single four-member ward for the town; as we state in our *Guidance*, "Numbers in excess of three could result in an unacceptable dilution of accountability to the electorate."

112 We are, therefore, confirming the draft recommendations for these wards as final. Under our final recommendations the number of electors per councillor would be 7 per cent above the district average in Shaftesbury Central ward (1 per cent above in 2006); 11 per cent below in Shaftesbury Christy's ward (4 per cent below in 2006); 9 per cent below in Shaftesbury Grosvenor ward (4 per cent below in 2006) and 5 per cent below in Shaftesbury Underhill ward (8 per cent below in 2006). Our final recommendations for these wards are illustrated on the large map inside the back cover of this report.

## **Bourton & District, Gillingham Town, Lodbourne, Milton, Motcombe and Wyke wards**

113 These six wards are situated in the north of the district and each is represented by a single councillor. Bourton & District ward, which is formed of two geographically separate areas, comprises the parishes of Bourton, Buckhorn Weston, Kington Magna and Silton. Each of the wards of Gillingham Town, Lodbourne, Milton and Wyke comprises parts of Gillingham parish, while Motcombe ward comprises the parish of that name and part of Gillingham parish. The number of electors per councillor is 5 per cent below the district average in Bourton & District ward (10 per cent below in 2006); 2 per cent above in Gillingham Town ward (8 per cent above in 2006); 17 per cent below in Lodbourne ward (26 per cent below in 2006); 14 per cent above in Milton ward (24 per cent above in 2006); 5 per cent below in Motcombe ward (9 per cent above in 2006) and 92 per cent above the district average in Wyke ward (91 per cent above in 2006).

114 At Stage One the District Council proposed that Motcombe ward should be retained on its existing boundaries, but be renamed Motcombe & Ham ward. It further proposed that Bourton & District ward should be combined with a rural part of Gillingham parish to connect the two separate parts of Bourton & District ward. It proposed that this new single-member ward should be called Bourton Rural. The District Council proposed that, in the remaining area, comprising the wards of Gillingham Town, Lodbourne and Milton, together with the majority of the existing Wyke ward, there should be five single-member wards, although it did not provide detailed proposals for these areas. In addition to proposing that Motcombe parish should form part of Shaftesbury ward, Councillor Spencer also proposed that Bourton & District ward should be expanded to include part of Gillingham parish and form a single-member Gillingham Rural ward. He proposed that the remainder of Gillingham should comprise five single-member wards, although he did not provide detailed proposals for this area. Blandford Forum Town Council proposed that eight councillors should represent the area covered by the parishes of Gillingham, East Stour, Silton, Bourton and Motcombe

115 The LGCE noted that it had not received detailed proposals relating to the warding of Gillingham Town and that there was no consensus for warding in the remaining area outside Gillingham Town. It therefore put forward its own proposals in this area. In particular, in view of the satisfactory level of electoral equality and the absence of strong evidence in favour of alternative proposals, it proposed retaining Motcombe ward on its existing boundaries but renamed Motcombe & Ham ward. It also adopted the District Council's proposal to combine the existing part of Bourton & District ward with a rural part of Gillingham parish, but retaining the name Bourton & District for the ward. In the remaining area the LGCE noted that it had not received viable proposals meeting the aims of the review, and so put forward its own proposals. It proposed transferring an area around Wessex Way and Lammas Close from Milton ward to Lodbourne ward and transferring Lodbourne Green from Lodbourne ward to Gillingham Town ward. It proposed further modifying Gillingham Town ward by transferring an area to the west of Orchard Road from this ward to Wyke ward. Noting the severe under-representation which exists in Wyke ward, it proposed increasing the representation of this ward to two councillors.

116 Under the LGCE's draft recommendations, the number of electors would be 8 per cent above the district average (3 per cent above in 2006) in Bourton & District ward, comprising the parishes of Bourton, Buckhorn Weston, Kington Magna and Silton and the proposed Gillingham Rural parish ward of Gillingham parish; 1 per cent below (4 per cent above in 2006) in Gillingham Town ward, comprising the proposed Gillingham Town parish ward of Gillingham parish; 6 per cent above (equal to the average in 2006) in Lodbourne ward, comprising the

proposed Lodbourne parish ward of Gillingham parish; 13 per cent below (5 per cent below in 2006) in Milton ward, comprising the proposed Milton parish ward of Gillingham parish; 5 per cent below (9 per cent above in 2006) in Motcombe & Ham ward, comprising the parish of Motcombe and the Ham parish ward of Gillingham parish, and 7 per cent below (8 per cent below in 2006) in Wyke ward, comprising the proposed Wyke parish ward of Gillingham parish.

117 At Stage Three the District Council supported the draft recommendations for this area. The Labour Party stated that Gillingham “must have all of its single-member wards wholly in the town and not added to a large rural area”. In particular, it was of the opinion that Ham ward should be “part of a town ward”. Gillingham Civic Society stated that “it should be quite unacceptable that Ham be combined with Motcombe” due to Motcombe being “geographically contiguous with Shaftesbury” and considering the projected increase in Ham’s electorate. It also proposed dividing the proposed two-member Wyke ward into two single-member wards, expressing concern that “in the event of the two councillors being of different political persuasion, the electorate could be confused by rivalry”, whereas “councillors with the same party allegiance would probably make their own arbitrary division of their ward”. Motcombe Parish Council and Councillor Hine (Motcombe ward) supported the LGCE’s proposals to retain Motcombe ward on its existing boundaries. Kington Magna & Buckhorn Weston Parish Council supported the LGCE’s proposed Bourton & District ward. Blandford Forum Town Council supported the draft recommendations for Bourton & District and Motcombe & Ham wards. It proposed five single-member Gillingham wards covering the area of the LGCE’s proposed Gillingham Town, Lodbourne, Milton and Wyke wards, but provided no further details. Mr Unwin proposed a six-member Gillingham ward, comprising the Gillingham Town wards of Ham, Gillingham Town, Lodbourne, Milton and Wyke, and a new Motcombe ward, comprising the parishes of Motcombe and East Stour. He also proposed retaining the existing Bourton & District ward. Councillor Oram (Blandford East) supported two-member wards for Gillingham, and suggested that Ham parish ward should be combined with Gillingham Town ward, with other parts of Gillingham Town ward being reallocated “to provide better electoral balance”.

118 We have carefully considered the representations received during the consultation period. We note that there was some opposition expressed to the proposal to retain the existing Motcombe ward. However, in view of the support expressed by the District Council, a district councillor, Motcombe Parish Council and Blandford Forum Town Council, and the acceptable levels of electoral equality both initially and in 2006, we propose endorsing the draft recommendations for this ward as part of our final recommendations. We note also the concern expressed by Gillingham Civic Society with regard to the proposed two-member Wyke ward. However, in the absence of detailed alternative proposals, we do not propose modifying the draft recommendations for the ward. We further note the lack of consensus and lack of detailed submissions among those who expressed opposition to the draft recommendations for the Gillingham, Lodbourne and Wyke wards. In the absence of there being any clear consensus on alternative proposals, and in the light of the support expressed by the District Council for the draft recommendations, we are confirming the draft recommendations for these wards as final.

119 Under our final recommendations, the number of electors would be 8 per cent above the district average (3 per cent above in 2006) in Bourton & District ward, comprising the parishes of Bourton, Buckhorn Weston, Kington Magna and Silton and the proposed Gillingham Rural parish ward of Gillingham parish; 1 per cent below (4 per cent above in 2006) in Gillingham Town ward, comprising the proposed Gillingham Town parish ward of Gillingham parish; 6 per cent above (equal to the average in 2006) in Lodbourne ward, comprising the proposed Lodbourne parish ward of Gillingham parish; 13 per cent below (5 per cent below in 2006) in Milton ward, comprising the proposed Milton parish ward of Gillingham parish; 5 per cent

below (9 per cent above in 2006) in Motcombe & Ham ward, comprising the parish of Motcombe and the Ham parish ward of Gillingham parish, and 7 per cent below (8 per cent below in 2006) in Wyke ward, comprising the proposed Wyke parish ward of Gillingham parish. Our final recommendations for these wards are illustrated on the large map at the back of this report.

## **Electoral Cycle**

120 By virtue of the amendments made to the Local Government Act 1992 by the Local Government Commission for England (Transfer of Functions) Order 2001, we have no powers to make recommendations concerning the electoral cycle.

## **Conclusions**

121 Having considered carefully all the representations and evidence received in response to the LGCE's consultation report, we have decided to endorse substantially its draft recommendations, subject to the following amendments:

- in Blandford Forum town, we propose that there should be five single-member wards of Blandford Damory Down, Blandford Hilltop, Blandford Langton St Leonards, Blandford Old Town and Blandford Station, instead of the two-member Blandford East ward and the three-member Blandford West ward;
- we propose retaining the existing Riversdale and The Lower Tarrants wards;
- we propose modifying the boundaries of Abbey, Bulbarrow, Cranborne Chase, Hill Forts, Lydden Vale, Portman and Stour Valley wards;
- we propose abolishing the proposed Milborne St Andrew ward.

122 We conclude that, in North Dorset:

- there should be no change from the existing council size of 33;
- there should be 28 wards, one more than at present;
- the boundaries of 21 of the existing wards should be modified.

123 Table 4 shows the impact of our final recommendations on electoral equality, comparing them with the current arrangements, based on 2001 and 2006 electorate figures.

Table 4: Comparison of Current and Recommended Electoral Arrangements

	2001 electorate		2006 forecast electorate	
	Current arrangements	Final recommendations	Current arrangements	Final recommendations
Number of councillors	33	33	33	33
Number of wards	27	28	27	28
Average number of electors per councillor	1,425	1,425	1,507	1,507
Number of wards with a variance more than 10 per cent from the average	17	8	16	1
Number of wards with a variance more than 20 per cent from the average	6	2	11	0

124 As Table 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 17 to 8, with two wards, Blandford Hilltop and Blandford Station, varying by more than 20 per cent from the district average. This level of electoral equality would improve further in 2006, with only one ward, Hill Fords, varying by more than 10 per cent from the average. We conclude that our recommendations would best meet the statutory criteria.

#### **Final Recommendation**

North Dorset Borough Council should comprise 33 councillors serving 28 wards, as detailed and named in Tables 1 and 2, and illustrated on Map 2 and in Appendix A including the large map inside the back cover.

### **Parish and Town Council Electoral Arrangements**

125 When reviewing parish electoral arrangements, we are required to comply as far as is reasonably practicable with the rules set out in Schedule 11 to the 1972 Act. The Schedule states that if a parish is to be divided between different district wards, it should also be divided into parish wards, so that each parish ward lies wholly within a single ward of the district. In the LGCE's draft recommendations report it proposed consequential changes to the warding arrangements for the parishes of Gillingham and Shaftesbury to reflect the proposed district wards, and two minor modifications to the boundaries between Blandford East and Blandford West parish wards.

126 The parish of Gillingham is currently served by 15 councillors who represent five wards: Gillingham Town, Ham, Lodbourne, Milton and Wyke. Wyke ward is represented by four councillors, Ham ward is represented by two councillors, and the remaining three wards are each represented by three councillors.

127 In the light of its draft recommendations in this area, the LGCE proposed creating a new Gillingham Rural parish ward and modifying the parish ward boundaries to reflect the district ward boundaries, as shown on the large map at the back of the report. It also proposed modifying

the level of representation of the wards to reflect the new configuration, thereby increasing the number of parish councillors serving the town from 15 to 17. The LGCE proposed that Wyke ward should return six councillors, Gillingham Town, Lodbourne and Milton wards should each return three councillors and Gillingham Rural and Ham wards should each return a single councillor.

128 In response to the LGCE's consultation report, no further comments were received with regard to parishing arrangements in this area. Therefore, in the light of the confirmation of the proposed district wards in the area, we are confirming the draft recommendation for warding Gillingham parish as final.

**Final Recommendation**

Gillingham Town Council should comprise 17 councillors, two more than at present, representing six wards: Gillingham Town (returning three councillors), Gillingham Rural (one), Ham (one), Lodbourne (three), Milton (three) and Wyke (six). The parish ward boundaries should reflect the proposed district ward boundaries in the area as illustrated and named on the large map at the back of the report

129 The parish of Shaftesbury is currently served by 12 councillors representing four three-member wards: Shaftesbury Central, Shaftesbury Christy's, Shaftesbury Grosvenor and Shaftesbury Underhill.

130 In the light of its draft recommendations for district warding in Shaftesbury, the LGCE proposed modifying the boundaries between the parish wards to reflect the new district warding arrangements. It did not propose modifying the level of representation of any of the wards concerned.

131 In response to the LGCE's consultation report, no comments were received with regard to parishing arrangements in this area. Therefore, in the light of the confirmation of the proposed district wards in the area, we are confirming the draft recommendation for warding Shaftesbury parish as final.

**Final Recommendation**

Shaftesbury Town Council should comprise 12 councillors, as at present, representing four wards: Shaftesbury Central, Shaftesbury Christy's, Shaftesbury Grosvenor and Shaftesbury Underhill, each returning three councillors. The boundaries between the four parish wards should reflect the proposed district ward boundaries as illustrated and named on the large map at the back of the report.

132 The parish of Blandford Forum is currently served by 16 councillors, representing two eight-member wards: Blandford East and Blandford West.

133 In its draft recommendations, the LGCE proposed making minor modifications to the boundaries between Blandford East and Blandford West parish wards to reflect recognisable ground features. These would not affect any electors.

134 In response to the LGCE’s consultation report and the further consultation in the area, we are proposing to create five new parish wards, the boundaries of which will reflect the district ward boundaries as shown on Map A2. We are proposing to modify the level of representation of the wards to reflect the new configuration, with the number of parish councillors remaining the same as at present. We propose that Blandford Damory Down, Blandford Hilltop, Blandford Langton St Leonards and Blandford Station wards should each return three councillors and that Blandford Old Town ward should return four councillors.

**Final Recommendation**  
Blandford Forum Town Council should comprise 16 councillors, the same as at present, representing five wards: Blandford Damory Down (returning three councillors), Blandford Hilltop (three), Blandford Langton St Leonards (three), Blandford Old Town (four) and Blandford Station (three). The boundaries between the five parish wards should reflect the proposed district ward boundaries as illustrated and named on Map A2.

*Map 2: Final Recommendations for North Dorset*

## 6 WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

135 Having completed the review of electoral arrangements in North Dorset and submitted our final recommendations to the Electoral Commission, we have fulfilled our statutory obligation under the Local Government Act 1992 (as amended by SI 2001 No 3692).

136 It is now up to the Electoral Commission to decide whether to endorse our recommendations, with or without modification, and to implement them by means of an Order. Such an Order will not be made before 15 May 2002.

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

The Secretary  
Electoral Commission  
Trevelyan House  
30 Great Peter Street  
London SW1P 2HW



## APPENDIX A

### **Final Recommendations for North Dorset: Detailed Mapping**

The following maps illustrate our proposed ward boundaries for the North Dorset area.

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

**Map A2** illustrates the proposed district and parish warding of Blandford Forum.

The **large map** inserted at the back of this report illustrates the proposed warding arrangements for Gillingham and Shaftesbury.

*Map A1: Final Recommendations for North Dorset: Key Map*

*Map A2: Proposed District and Parish Warding of Blandford Forum*