

Final recommendations on the  
future electoral arrangements  
for Braintree in Essex

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

*November 2000*

# LOCAL GOVERNMENT COMMISSION FOR ENGLAND

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

Members of the Commission are:

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Peter Brokenshire  
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A large map illustrating the proposed ward boundaries for Braintree, Bocking and Great Notley is inserted inside the back cover of the report.





## Local Government Commission for England

28 November 2000

Dear Secretary of State

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

We have now prepared our final recommendations in the light of the consultation. We have substantially confirmed our draft recommendations, although some modifications have been made (see paragraph 223) in the light of further evidence. This report sets out our final recommendations for changes to electoral arrangements in Braintree.

We recommend that Braintree District Council should be served by 60 councillors representing 30 wards, and that changes should be made to ward boundaries in order to improve electoral equality, having regard to the statutory criteria. We recommend that elections of the whole council should continue to be held every four years.

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

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

Yours sincerely

PROFESSOR MALCOLM GRANT  
Chairman



## SUMMARY

The Commission began a review of Braintree on 30 November 1999. We published our draft recommendations for electoral arrangements on 16 May 2000, after which we undertook an eight-week period of consultation.

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

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

- **In 23 of the 33 wards the number of electors represented by each councillor varies by more than 10 per cent from the average for the district and 13 wards vary by more than 20 per cent from the average.**
- **By 2004 electoral equality is not expected to improve, with the number of electors per councillor forecast to vary by more than 10 per cent from the average in 23 wards and by more than 20 per cent in 18 wards.**

Our main final recommendations for future electoral arrangements (Figures 1 and 2 and paragraphs 223–224 are that:

- **Braintree District Council should have 60 councillors, as at present;**
- **there should be 30 wards, instead of 33 as at present;**
- **the boundaries of 27 of the existing wards should be modified and six wards should retain their existing boundaries;**
- **elections should continue to take place every four years.**

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

- **In 20 of the proposed 30 wards the number of electors per councillor would vary by no more than 10 per cent from the district average.**
- **This level of electoral equality is forecast to improve significantly so that the number of electors per councillor in 27 of the proposed 30 wards is expected to vary by no more than 10 per cent from the average for the district in 2004.**

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

- **revised warding arrangements and the redistribution of councillors for the towns of Halstead and Witham;**
- **new warding arrangements and the redistribution of councillors for the parish of Feering.**

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

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

Figure 1: The Commission's Final Recommendations: Summary

	<b>Ward name</b>	<b>Number of councillors</b>	<b>Constituent areas</b>	<b>Map reference</b>
1	Black Notley & Terling	2	Black Notley ward (part – Black Notley parish); Braintree West ward (part); Terling ward (Fairstead, Faulkbourne, Terling and White Notley parishes)	Large map and Map 2
2	Bocking Blackwater	3	Braintree East ward (part); Bocking South ward (part)	Large map
3	Bocking North	2	Bocking North ward (part)	Large map
4	Bocking South	2	Bocking North ward (part); Bocking South ward (part)	Large map
5	Bradwell, Silver End & Rivenhall	2	Coggeshall ward (part – Bradwell parish); Witham Silver End & Rivenhall ward (Rivenhall and Silver End parishes)	Map 2
6	Braintree Central	3	Bocking South ward (part); Braintree Central ward (part); Braintree West ward (part)	Large map
7	Braintree East	3	Braintree Central ward (part); Braintree East ward (part)	Large map
8	Braintree South	3	Braintree Central ward (part); Braintree West ward (part); Black Notley ward (part)	Large map
9	Bumpstead	1	<i>Unchanged</i> (Helions Bumpstead, Steeple Bumpstead and Sturmer parishes)	Map 2
10	Coggeshall & North Feering	2	Coggeshall ward (part – Coggeshall parish); Kelvedon ward (part – Feering North ward of Feering parish as proposed)	Map A3 and Map 2
11	Cressing & Stisted	1	Cressing ward (Cressing parish); Coggeshall ward (part – Stisted parish)	Map 2
12	Gosfield & Greenstead Green	1	Bocking North ward (part); Gosfield ward (Gosfield parish); Colne Engaine & Greenstead Green ward (part – Greenstead Green & Halstead Rural parish)	Large map and Map 2
13	Great Notley	3	Black Notley ward (part – Great Notley parish); Braintree West ward (part)	Large map and Map 2
14	Halstead St Andrew's	3	Halstead St Andrew's ward (St Andrew's North and St Andrew's South wards of Halstead parish); Halstead Trinity ward (part – Holy Trinity North ward (part) of Halstead parish)	Map A4 and Map 2
15	Halstead Trinity	2	Halstead Trinity ward (part – Holy Trinity North ward (part) and Holy Trinity South ward of Halstead parish)	Map A4 and Map 2
16	Hatfield Peverel	2	<i>Unchanged</i> (Hatfield Peverel parish)	Map 2

	<b>Ward name</b>	<b>Number of councillors</b>	<b>Constituent areas</b>	<b>Map reference</b>
17	Hedingham & Maplestead	3	Castle Hedingham ward (Castle Hedingham, Great Maplestead and Little Maplestead parishes); Sible Hedingham ward (Sible Hedingham parish); Stour Valley Central ward (part – Gestingthorpe and Wickham St Paul parishes)	Map 2
18	Kelvedon	2	Kelvedon ward (part – Kelvedon parish and Feering South ward of Feering parish as proposed)	Map A3 and Map 2
19	Panfield	1	Panfield ward (Panfield and Shalford parishes); Rayne ward (part – Bardfield Saling and Great Saling parishes)	Map 2
20	Rayne	1	Rayne ward (part – Rayne parish)	Map 2
21	Stour Valley North	1	Stour Valley Central ward (part – Belchamp Walter, Borley and Bulmer parishes); Stour Valley North ward (part – Belchamp Otten, Belchamp St Paul, Foxearth, Liston, Ovington, Pentlow and Tilbury Juxta Clare parishes)	Map 2
22	Stour Valley South	1	<i>Unchanged</i> (Alphamstone, Bures Hamlet, Great Henny, Lamarsh, Little Henny, Middleton, Pebmarsh and Twinstead parishes)	Map 2
23	The Three Colnes	2	Earls Colne ward (White Colne and Earls Colne parishes); Colne Engaine & Greenstead Green ward (part – Colne Engaine parish)	Map 2
24	Three Fields	2	<i>Unchanged</i> (Finchingfield, Great Bardfield and Wethersfield parishes)	Map 2
25	Upper Colne	1	Upper Colne ward (Birdbrook, Ridgewell, Stambourne and Toppesfield parishes); Stour Valley North ward (part – Ashen parish)	Map 2
26	Witham Chipping Hill & Central	2	Witham Chipping Hill ward (part – Chipping Hill ward (part) of Witham town); Witham Central ward (part – Central ward (part) of Witham town)	Map A2 and Map 2
27	Witham North	2	<i>Unchanged</i> (North ward of Witham town)	Map A2 and Map 2
28	Witham South	3	Witham South ward (part – South ward (part) of Witham town)	Map A2 and Map 2
29	Witham West	3	Witham Central ward (part – Central ward (part) of Witham town); Witham Chipping Hill ward (part – Chipping Hill ward (part) of Witham town); Witham South ward (part – South ward (part) of Witham town); Witham West ward (West ward of Witham town)	Map A2 and Map 2

	<b>Ward name</b>	<b>Number of councillors</b>	<b>Constituent areas</b>	<b>Map reference</b>
30	Yeldham	1	<i>Unchanged</i> (Great Yeldham and Little Yeldham parishes)	Map 2

*Notes: 1 Braintree and Bocking are the only unparished areas of the district and comprise the six current wards of Bocking North, Bocking South, Braintree East, Braintree Central, Braintree South and Braintree West.*

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

Figure 2: The Commission's Final Recommendations for Braintree

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (1999)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2004)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
1	Black Notley & Terling	2	2,314	1,157	-30	3,089	1,545	-16
2	Bocking Blackwater	3	5,312	1,771	7	5,802	1,934	5
3	Bocking North	2	3,385	1,693	2	3,848	1,924	5
4	Bocking South	2	3,612	1,806	9	3,951	1,976	7
5	Bradwell, Silver End & Rivenhall	2	3,707	1,854	12	3,727	1,864	1
6	Braintree Central	3	4,824	1,608	-3	5,859	1,953	6
7	Braintree East	3	3,827	1,276	-23	5,778	1,926	5
8	Braintree South	3	5,049	1,683	2	5,472	1,824	-1
9	Bumpstead	1	1,898	1,898	14	1,936	1,936	5
10	Coggeshall & North Feering	2	3,689	1,845	11	3,748	1,874	2
11	Cressing & Stisted	1	1,762	1,762	6	1,822	1,822	-1
12	Gosfield & Greenstead Green	1	1,997	1,997	20	2,065	2,065	12
13	Great Notley	3	3,198	1,066	-36	5,033	1,678	-9
14	Halstead St Andrew's	3	4,495	1,498	-10	5,660	1,887	3
15	Halstead Trinity	2	3,640	1,820	10	3,717	1,859	1
16	Hatfield Peverel	2	3,591	1,796	8	3,620	1,810	-2
17	Hedingham & Maplestead	3	4,945	1,648	-1	5,098	1,699	-8
18	Kelvedon	2	3,998	1,999	21	4,108	2,054	12
19	Panfield	1	1,673	1,673	1	1,707	1,707	-7
20	Rayne	1	1,671	1,671	1	1,711	1,711	-7
21	Stour Valley North	1	1,739	1,739	5	1,773	1,773	-4
22	Stour Valley South	1	1,746	1,746	5	1,766	1,766	-4
23	The Three Colnes	2	3,770	1,885	14	3,985	1,993	8
24	Three Fields	2	3,021	1,511	-9	3,359	1,680	-9
25	Upper Colne	1	1,709	1,709	3	1,723	1,723	-7
26	Witham Chipping Hill & Central	2	3,600	1,800	9	3,634	1,817	-1

Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (1999)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2004)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
27 Witham North	2	3,677	1,839	11	3,705	1,853	1
28 Witham South	3	4,803	1,601	-3	5,669	1,890	3
29 Witham West	3	5,235	1,745	5	5,239	1,746	-5
30 Yeldham	1	1,585	1,585	-4	1,690	1,690	-8
<b>Totals</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>99,472</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>110,294</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>
<b>Averages</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>1,658</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>1,838</b>	<b>-</b>

*Source: Electorate figures are based on information provided by Braintree 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 Braintree in Essex. We have now reviewed the 12 two-tier districts in Essex as part of our programme of periodic electoral reviews (PERs) of all 386 principal local authority areas in England. Our programme started in 1996 and is currently expected to be completed by 2004.

2 This was our first review of the electoral arrangements of Braintree. The last such review was undertaken by our predecessor, the Local Government Boundary Commission (LGBC), which reported to the Secretary of State in January 1976 (Report No. 132). The electoral arrangements of Essex County Council were last reviewed in November 1980 (Report No. 401). We completed a directed electoral review of Thurrock in 1996 and a periodic electoral review of Southend-on-Sea in 1999. We expect to undertake a periodic electoral review of Thurrock later this year, and of the County Council's electoral arrangements in 2002.

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

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

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

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

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

7 The broad objective of PERs is to achieve, so far as practicable, equality of representation across the district as a whole. Having regard to the statutory criteria, our aim is to achieve as low a level of electoral imbalance as is practicable. We will require particular justification for schemes which would result in, or retain, an electoral imbalance of over 10 per cent in any ward.

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

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

9 In July 1998, the Government published a White Paper, *Modern Local Government – In Touch with the People*, which set out legislative proposals for local authority electoral arrangements. In two-tier areas, it proposed introducing a pattern in which both the district and county councils would hold elections every two years, i.e. in year one half of the district council would be elected, in year two half the county council would be elected, and so on. The Government stated that local accountability would be maximised where every elector has an opportunity to vote every year, thereby pointing to a pattern of two-member wards (and divisions) in two-tier areas. However, it stated that there was no intention to move towards very large electoral areas in sparsely populated rural areas, and that single-member wards (and electoral divisions) would continue in many authorities.

10 Following publication of the White Paper, we advised all authorities in our 1999/00 PER programme, including the Essex districts, that the Commission would continue to maintain its current approach to PERs as set out in the October 1999 *Guidance*. Nevertheless, we considered that local authorities and other interested parties might wish to have regard to the Secretary of State's intentions and legislative proposals in formulating electoral schemes as part of PERs of their areas. The proposals have been taken forward in the Local Government Act 2000 which, among other matters, provides that the Secretary of State may make Orders to change authorities' electoral cycles. However, until such time as the Secretary of State makes any Orders under the 2000 Act, we will continue to operate on the basis of existing legislation, which provides for elections by thirds or whole-council elections in the two-tier district areas, and our current *Guidance*.

11 This review was in four stages. Stage One began on 30 November 1999, when we wrote to Braintree District Council inviting proposals for future electoral arrangements. We also notified Essex County Council, Essex Police Authority, the local authority associations, Essex Local Councils' Association, parish and town councils in the district, the Members of Parliament with constituency interests in the district and the Members of the European Parliament for the Eastern region, and the headquarters of the main political parties. We placed a notice in the local press, issued a press release and invited the District Council to publicise the review further. The closing date for receipt of representations, the end of Stage One, was 28 February 2000. At Stage Two we considered all the representations received during Stage One and prepared our draft recommendations.

12 Stage Three began on 16 May 2000 with the publication of our report, *Draft recommendations on the future electoral arrangements for Braintree in Essex*, and ended on 10 July 2000. Comments were sought on our preliminary conclusions. Finally, during Stage Four we reconsidered our draft recommendations in the light of the Stage Three consultation and now publish our final recommendations.



## 2 CURRENT ELECTORAL ARRANGEMENTS

13 The district of Braintree is the second largest by area in Essex, covering some 61,000 hectares. It is bounded by the districts of Uttlesford to the west, Chelmsford and Maldon to the south, and Colchester to the east. The district is bounded in the north and north-east by the River Stour, which also constitutes the county boundary with Suffolk. Braintree is an area of significant diversity, with densely populated urban areas such as Braintree, Bocking, Halstead and Witham and sparsely populated rural areas covering the majority of the district's total area. Braintree is served by good transport links, including the A12 and A120 trunk roads and train services to London Liverpool Street.

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

15 The electorate of the district is 99,472 (February 1999). The Council at present has 60 members who are elected from 33 wards, 12 of which are relatively urban, with the remainder being predominantly rural. Nine of the wards are each represented by three councillors, nine are each represented by two councillors and 15 are single-member wards. Elections are of the whole council.

16 Since the last electoral review there has been an increase in the electorate in Braintree district, with around 35 per cent more electors than two decades ago as a result of new housing developments.

17 At present, each councillor represents an average of 1,658 electors, which the District Council forecasts will increase to 1,838 by the year 2004 if the present number of councillors is maintained. However, due to demographic and other changes over the past two decades, the number of electors per councillor in 23 of the 33 wards varies by more than 10 per cent from the district average, in 13 wards by more than 20 per cent and in four wards by more than 30 per cent. The worst imbalance is in Black Notley ward where the councillor represents 132 per cent more electors than the district average.

*Map 1: Existing Wards in Braintree*

Figure 3: Existing Electoral Arrangements

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (1999)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2004)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
1	Black Notley	1	3,849	3,849	132	6,374	6,374	247
2	Bocking North	3	4,399	1,466	-12	4,978	1,659	-10
3	Bocking South	3	4,597	1,532	-8	5,087	1,696	-8
4	Braintree Central	3	5,444	1,815	9	6,764	2,255	23
5	Braintree East	3	6,849	2,283	38	8,631	2,877	57
6	Braintree West	3	5,436	1,812	9	6,072	2,024	10
7	Bumpstead	1	1,898	1,898	14	1,936	1,936	5
8	Castle Hedingham	1	1,457	1,457	-12	1,475	1,475	-20
9	Coggeshall	3	4,348	1,449	-13	4,423	1,474	-20
10	Colne Engaine & Greenstead Green	1	1,271	1,271	-23	1,291	1,291	-30
11	Cressing	1	1,285	1,285	-22	1,339	1,339	-27
12	Earls Colne	2	3,017	1,509	-9	3,214	1,607	-13
13	Gosfield	1	1,178	1,178	-29	1,192	1,192	-35
14	Halstead St Andrew's	2	4,087	2,044	23	5,242	2,621	43
15	Halstead Trinity	3	4,048	1,349	-19	4,136	1,379	-25
16	Hatfield Peverel	2	3,591	1,796	8	3,620	1,810	-2
17	Kelvedon	3	4,212	1,404	-15	4,321	1,440	-22
18	Panfield	1	1,334	1,334	-20	1,352	1,352	-26
19	Rayne	1	2,010	2,010	21	2,066	2,066	12
20	Sible Hedingham	2	2,920	1,460	-12	3,037	1,519	-17
21	Stour Valley Central	1	1,303	1,303	-21	1,332	1,332	-28
22	Stour Valley North	1	1,269	1,269	-23	1,291	1,291	-30
23	Stour Valley South	1	1,746	1,746	5	1,766	1,766	-4
24	Terling	1	1,248	1,248	-25	1,279	1,279	-30
25	Three Fields	2	3,021	1,511	-9	3,359	1,680	-9
26	Upper Colne	1	1,444	1,444	-13	1,458	1,458	-21
27	Witham Central	1	2,342	2,342	41	2,376	2,376	29
28	Witham Chipping Hill	2	3,411	1,706	3	3,413	1,707	-7

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (1999)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2004)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
29	Witham North	3	3,677	1,226	-26	3,705	1,235	-33
30	Witham, Silver End & Rivenhall	2	3,311	1,656	0	3,321	1,661	-10
31	Witham South	2	4,979	2,490	50	5,845	2,923	59
32	Witham West	2	2,906	1,453	-12	2,908	1,454	-21
33	Yeldham	1	1,585	1,585	-4	1,690	1,690	-8
	<b>Totals</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>99,472</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>110,293</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>
	<b>Averages</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>1,658</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>1,838</b>	<b>-</b>

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

Note: The 'variance from average' column shows by how far, in percentage terms, the number of electors per councillor varies from the average for the district. The minus symbol (-) denotes a lower than average number of electors. For example, in 1999, electors in Gosfield ward were relatively over-represented by 29 per cent, while electors in Black Notley ward were relatively under-represented by 132 per cent. Figures have been rounded to the nearest whole number.

### 3 DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS

18 During Stage One we received 54 representations, including district-wide schemes from Braintree District Council and the Green Group, and representations from Braintree Constituency Liberal Democrats, the Conservative Group on the Council, 27 parish and town councils, five district councillors, two parish councillors and 16 local residents. In the light of these representations and evidence available to us, we reached preliminary conclusions which were set out in our report, *Draft recommendations on the future electoral arrangements for Braintree in Essex*.

19 Our draft recommendations were based on a combination of the Green Group's proposals, other representations received at Stage One and our own proposals. Our proposals achieved improved electoral equality and provided for a mixed-pattern of wards throughout the district. We proposed that:

- Braintree District Council should be served by 60 councillors, as at present, representing 29 wards, four fewer than at present;
- the boundaries of 27 of the existing wards should be modified, while six wards should retain their existing boundaries;
- there should be new warding arrangements for Feering, Halstead, Kelvedon and Witham parishes.

**Draft Recommendation**

Braintree District Council should comprise 60 councillors, serving 29 wards. The whole council should continue to be elected every four years.

20 Our proposals would have resulted in significant improvements in electoral equality. In 18 of the proposed 29 wards the number of electors per councillor would vary by no more than 10 per cent from the district average. This level of electoral equality was forecast to improve significantly, with only Black Notley ward varying by more than 10 per cent from the average in 2004.



## 4 RESPONSES TO CONSULTATION

21 During the consultation on our draft recommendations report, 148 representations were received. A list of all respondents is available on request from the Commission. All representations may be inspected at the offices of Braintree District Council and the Commission.

### **Braintree District Council**

22 The District Council accepted our proposed council size of 60, but proposed changes to 16 of our 29 proposed wards. It proposed that the Braintree and Bocking area should be represented by 17 councillors, rather than 16 as proposed under our draft recommendations, and that High Garrett should remain part of an unchanged Bocking North ward. In the south-east of the district, the Council proposed dividing Cressing parish between new Notley, Tye Green & Terling and Braintree & Halstead Rural wards. In addition, it proposed a new Coggeshall & North Feering ward and a revised Kelvedon ward. In the north of the district, the District Council proposed significant changes in the Stour Valley area, and new Four Fields and Gosfield & Hedingham wards. It proposed a minor change to the boundary between our proposed Halstead St Andrew's and Halstead Trinity wards, and favoured renaming Braintree Blackwater ward as Bocking Blackwater.

### **Political Parties**

23 Braintree Constituency Labour Party stated that its first preference remained the District Council's 52-member Stage One proposal, which it argued achieved better electoral equality than our draft recommendations. Nevertheless, it proposed that, if a council size of 60 was to be maintained, a number of changes should be made. In the south of the district, Braintree Constituency Labour Party proposed revised warding arrangements identical to those proposed by the District Council. It also proposed increasing the number of councillors for the Braintree and Bocking area from 16 to 17, and proposed amendments to our proposed Bocking North and Bocking South wards. In the north of the district, it proposed four new wards – Stour Valley, Bures & the Maplesteads, Four Fields and The Hedinghams & Gosfield – as also proposed by the District Council.

24 Braintree District Labour Group commented that at the initial briefing the main objective of electoral equality was emphasised. In this light, they argued that the Council prepared a 52-member scheme. They stated that, in the light of our draft recommendations, they considered they had been misinformed about the objectives of the review. Saffron Walden Constituency Labour Party proposed that St Andrew's North ward of Halstead Town Council should be divided into two two-member wards.

25 Braintree District Council Conservative Group ("the Conservative Group") supported our draft recommendations based on a council size of 60, but proposed a number of amendments to our proposed warding arrangements. They proposed retaining the existing Kelvedon and Witham Silver End & Rivenhall (renamed Silver End & Rivenhall) wards and creating a two-member

Coggeshall ward and a single-member Cressing & Bradwell ward, with Stisted parish being combined with areas to the north. The Conservative Group also proposed retaining the existing Earls Colne ward and creating a new Colne Valley ward comprising Colne Engaine, part of Greenstead Green & Halstead Rural, Great Maplestead, Little Maplestead and Gestingthorpe parishes. They proposed a revised Stour Valley South ward and combining Castle Hedingham and Sible Hedingham parishes in a new Hedingham ward. Finally, the Conservative Group proposed a minor boundary amendment in Halstead, as proposed by Halstead Town Council.

26 Braintree Constituency Liberal Democrats (“the Liberal Democrats”) also expressed support for our proposed council size of 60 and the retention of whole-council elections every four years. They proposed a number of amendments to our draft recommendations, identical to those proposed by the Conservative Group. In addition, the Liberal Democrats also argued that the Queenborough Lane area should not be included in Great Notley ward and that properties on the eastern side of London Road should not be included in Great Notley & Terling ward. In Bocking, they proposed including Rayne Road in Bocking South ward and renaming Braintree Blackwater ward as Bocking Blackwater.

27 Braintree District Council Green Group (“the Green Group”) expressed broad support for our draft recommendations, based on a council size of 60. They agreed with our proposals for Braintree and including High Garrett in a rural ward. The Green Group strongly opposed the District Council’s proposal to divide Cressing parish and proposed alternative warding arrangements for the south-eastern part of the district. They proposed creating a four-member Coggeshall & Kelvedon ward and a single-member Cressing, Bradwell & Stisted ward. They argued that an alternative to its preferred option would be to transfer Bradwell parish to our proposed Silver End & Rivenhall ward. Finally, they expressed support for the District Council’s proposed amendments for Halstead.

## **Members of Parliament**

28 Mr Alan Hurst, Member of Parliament for Braintree, considered that electoral equality throughout the district had not been adequately addressed by our draft recommendations and that the range of variances between wards was unacceptable. In particular, he argued that the number of councillors for the Braintree & Bocking area should be increased from 16 to 17 and that the High Garrett area should be retained in Bocking North ward, as it forms part of the wider Bocking community.

## **Parish and Town Councils**

29 At Stage Three, we received submissions from 27 parish and town councils. Black Notley, Bures Hamlet, Foxearth & Liston, Little Maplestead, The Hennys Middleton & Twinstead and Wethersfield parish councils expressed support for our draft recommendations in their respective areas and opposed the District Council’s proposals. Birdbrook, Finchingfield, Great Bardfield, Great Notley, Hatfield Peverel, Little Yeldham, Tilbury Juxta Clare & Ovington, Panfield and Sturmer parish councils also expressed support for our draft recommendations. Witham Town Council expressed support for a 52-member council, but accepted our draft recommendations for Witham. However, it proposed that Witham Central ward should be renamed Witham Chipping

Hill & Central ward. In addition, it strongly opposed draft recommendations elsewhere in the district, arguing that electoral equality had not been adequately addressed.

30 In the south-east of the district, Kelvedon Parish Council opposed our proposals for their area, arguing that there is “no commonality of interest” between the Kelvedon North and Silver End/Rivenhall areas, and favoured retaining the existing Kelvedon ward. Silver End Parish Council stated that it continued to support a reduction in councillors for the district and opposed our proposals for its area. It favoured combining Silver End and Rivenhall parishes with Bradwell parish and proposed that, rather than dividing Kelvedon, a larger part of Feering parish could be combined with Coggeshall. Feering Parish Council strongly opposed our draft recommendations, arguing that the village community would be divided under our proposals and that local residents would have difficulty reaching polling stations in Coggeshall.

31 Cressing Parish Council expressed some reservations regarding our proposed Cressing & Coggeshall ward and opposed the District Council’s Stage Three proposal to divide Cressing parish. It proposed combining Cressing with either Stisted or Bradwell parish in a single-member ward. Bradwell Parish Council welcomed our proposal to retain Bradwell and Stisted parishes in the same ward as Coggeshall parish, but felt that electoral inequality should be further addressed in this ward. Coggeshall Parish Council supported the District Council’s proposed Coggeshall & North Feering ward.

32 Halstead Town Council proposed a minor amendment to the boundary between our proposed Halstead St Andrew’s and Halstead Trinity wards. Bulmer Parish Council enclosed parish councillors’ comments. Some argued that rural areas “are going to be much worse off” under revised warding arrangements, while others expressed support for the Green Group’s proposals. Colne Engaine Parish Council preferred no change, but as a second preference supported the Conservative Group’s and Liberal Democrats’ proposed Colne Valley ward. Greenstead Green & Halstead Rural Parish Council proposed warding arrangements identical to those submitted by the Conservative Group and the Liberal Democrats for this area. Gestingthorpe Parish Council preferred no change, arguing that the parish does not have strong ties with Castle Hedingham and Sible Hedingham parishes.

## **Other Representations**

33 We received a further 115 representations, including two petitions, in response to our draft recommendations from local political groups, local organisations, councillors and residents.

34 Councillors L. Green (Braintree East ward) and D. Green (Bocking South ward) and County Councillors Card (Bocking division) and Bishop (Braintree East division) opposed our draft recommendations, arguing that electoral equality had not been addressed adequately, that Braintree should be represented by 17 councillors, and that High Garrett should be retained in Bocking North ward. A local resident considered that our proposals for Braintree and Bocking represented an improvement on current wards, but argued that this area should be represented by 17 councillors and that High Garrett should be retained in Bocking North ward.

35 Councillors Barlow (Witham Chipping Hill ward), Davidson (Kelvedon ward), Fyfe (Kelvedon ward), Joyce (Coggeshall ward) and Mann (Bocking North ward) opposed our draft recommendations for their respective areas and supported the District Council's proposals. Councillor Davidson and one local resident favoured the Council's Stage One proposal for a council size of 52. Another local resident generally favoured proposals which would not divide parishes between wards.

36 Councillor Tincknell (Witham South ward) and Town Councillor Jones (Witham town) and five local residents argued that electoral equality had not been addressed adequately by our draft recommendations. Seven local residents opposed our draft recommendations, arguing that they unnecessarily divided communities, and favoured the District Council's Stage Three proposals. Councillor Jones and a local resident supported our draft recommendations for Witham, but proposed that Witham Central ward should be renamed Witham Chipping Hill & Central ward. Another local resident proposed that Witham Central and Braintree Blackwater wards should be renamed Witham Chipping Hill & Central and Bocking Blackwater.

37 Councillor Turner (Black Notley ward) expressed broad support for our proposed Great Notley and Black Notley & Terling wards, although he proposed that the Queenborough Lane area and the unparished part of London Road should be transferred to our proposed Braintree Central ward. If this was not possible, he proposed renaming Great Notley ward as Braintree West & Great Notley. He also opposed the District Council's proposals to divide Cressing parish and proposed that Bradwell and Cressing parishes should be combined.

38 Councillor Broyd (Gosfield ward) opposed the District Council's Stage Three proposals to link Gosfield with Sible Hedingham and Castle Hedingham parishes, which he argued had not been the subject of consultation with parish councils or interested parties. He also opposed any proposal linking Gosfield with Bocking North ward and supported the Conservatives' and Liberal Democrats' proposal to link Gosfield with White Ash Green and Stisted. Ten local residents opposed our proposed The Three Colnes ward and favoured the Conservatives' and Liberal Democrats' proposals for this area. One local resident supported our proposed The Three Colnes ward and opposed the District Council's proposals. Another local resident opposed the District Council's proposals for Greenstead Green & Halstead Rural parish and stated that, although not ideal, he would support the Conservative Group's and Liberal Democrats' proposals. He also suggested that White Ash Green could be combined with Gosfield parish.

39 Six local residents opposed our proposals with regard to the existing Kelvedon ward and a further eight local residents opposed our proposal to include part of Kelvedon parish in Silver End & Rivenhall ward. We also received a petition containing 50 signatures opposing our proposals for the existing Kelvedon ward and supporting Kelvedon Parish Council's proposals for the area. Three local residents opposed our draft recommendation to include part of Feering parish in Cressing & Coggeshall ward, arguing that the Feering village community would be divided under our proposals. Two local residents opposed our proposed Cressing & Coggeshall ward and favoured creating a two-member Coggeshall & North Feering ward, while one local resident expressed support for our proposed Silver End & Rivenhall ward.

40 A local resident opposed our proposal to divide Feering and Kelvedon parishes between wards and to include the Queenborough Lane area in Great Notley ward and the unparished part of London Road in Black Notley & Terling ward. She also opposed the District Council's proposal to divide Cressing parish and proposed alternative warding arrangements for the south of the district. She proposed retaining the existing Hatfield Peverel, Kelvedon and Witham Silver End & Rivenhall (renamed Silver End & Rivenhall) wards, and creating two-member Coggeshall and Great Notley wards and a single-member Black Notley ward based on their respective parishes. She also proposed combining the existing Terling and Cressing wards with Stisted and Bradwell parishes in a new two-member ward. We received a petition from 37 residents opposing our draft recommendation to include the Queenborough Lane area within Great Notley ward. They argued that "[their] interest, association and sense of community are with Braintree town".

41 A local resident broadly supported our draft recommendations in the south of the district and strongly opposed the District Council's proposals to divide Cressing parish. A further 27 local residents strongly opposed the District Council's proposals to divide Cressing parish between district wards. Nine of these residents favoured Cressing Parish Council's proposal to join Cressing parish with either Bradwell and/or Stisted parish in a new single-member ward, while four residents favoured retaining the existing Cressing ward. Two local residents opposed both our draft recommendations and the District Council's proposals for the Cressing area, and proposed a single-member Cressing & Bradwell ward.

42 Councillor Bolton (Upper Colne ward) supported our draft recommendations for Upper Colne ward. Councillor Harley (Stour Valley North ward), Councillors Bragg, Pawsey and Watkins (Little Yeldham, Ovington & Tilbury Juxta Claire Parish Council) expressed support for our proposed Stour Valley North ward and opposed the District Council's proposals. Councillor O'Reilly-Cicconi (Castle Hedingham ward) opposed the District Council's proposals for Castle Hedingham ward, and one local resident supported our proposed Rayne and Panfield wards.



## 5 ANALYSIS AND FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS

43 As described earlier, our prime objective in considering the most appropriate electoral arrangements for Braintree is, so far as reasonably practicable and consistent with the statutory criteria, to achieve electoral equality. In doing so we have regard to section 13(5) of the Local Government Act 1992 – the need to secure effective and convenient local government, and reflect the identities and interests of local communities – and Schedule 11 to the Local Government Act 1972, which refers to the number of electors per councillor being “as nearly as may be, the same in every ward of the district or borough”.

44 In relation to Schedule 11, our recommendations are not intended to be based solely on existing electorate figures, but also on assumptions as to changes in the number and distribution of local government electors likely to take place within the ensuing five years. We also must have regard to the desirability of fixing identifiable boundaries and to maintaining local ties which might otherwise be broken.

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

46 Our *Guidance* states that we accept that the achievement of absolute electoral equality for the authority as a whole is likely to be unattainable. However, we consider that, if electoral imbalances are to be kept to the minimum, such an objective should be the starting point in any review. We therefore strongly recommend that, in formulating electoral schemes, local authorities and other interested parties should start from the standpoint of absolute electoral equality and only then make adjustments to reflect relevant factors, such as community identity and interests. Regard must also be had to five-year forecasts of change in electorates.

### **Electorate Forecasts**

47 The District Council submitted electorate forecasts for the year 2004, projecting an increase in the electorate of some 10 per cent from 99,472 to 109,598 over the five-year period from 1999 to 2004. It expects most of the growth to occur in the urban areas of Braintree and Bocking, Witham and Halstead, mostly due to large housing developments at King’s Park Village (Braintree East ward), Great Notley Garden Village (Black Notley ward) and Maltings Lane (Witham South ward), as well as a number of smaller developments in Halstead.

48 The Council estimated rates and locations of housing development with regard to structure and local plans, and the expected rate of building over the five-year period and assumed occupancy rates. In our draft recommendations report we were satisfied that they represented the best estimates that could reasonably be made at the time.

49 At Stage Three the District Council submitted revised five-year forecasts for a number of areas, resulting from a re-assessment of housing land supply against updated information. The

Council stated that the revised figures, affecting eight of the existing wards, were “an accurate and correct update of the March 1998 information previously supplied” to the Commission. The District Council ensured that the revised electorate figures were made available to all interested parties prior to the end of Stage Three.

50 We have examined in detail the evidence submitted by the District Council regarding electorate projections and the locations of new housing developments. While the majority of these changes do not alter significantly the electorate forecasts initially supplied, in Braintree West ward the number of electors is projected to increase by an additional 325 over the next five years, due to new housing developments. We accept that projecting electorates is an inexact science and recognise that predicting electorate growth in an area such as Braintree, which is subject to significant change, is particularly difficult. However, having given consideration to the detailed evidence provided by the District Council, we are content that they represent the best estimate that can reasonably be made at this time.

## **Council Size**

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

52 Braintree District Council is at present served by 60 councillors. At Stage One the District Council proposed a significant reduction in council size from 60 to 52. It argued that its scheme had been formulated bearing in mind the objectives set out in the Government’s White Paper, *Modern Local Government – In Touch with the People*, and the adoption of a new decision-making structure in April 1999, which it commented had resulted in a reduction in the total number of committees. The Council also noted that the Local Government Bill (now the Local Government Act 2000) contained provisions limiting the size of the executive and argued that the Council’s executive will contain up to 10 members, leaving approximately 42 backbench members. Finally, the Council argued that since its creation in 1974 the Council “has had 60 councillors which is more than any other council in Essex apart from Colchester and Tendring both of which have larger populations”.

53 The Green Group proposed retaining the existing council size of 60. They stated that while they had considered alternative council sizes, including a significant reduction to 40 councillors, in their view these alternative council sizes did not facilitate the achievement of electoral equality or the preservation of community ties in the rural areas of the district. The Green Group strongly opposed the District Council’s 52-member proposal, arguing that the proposed reduction in council size would adversely affect community identities in the district and that the proposals submitted had been subject to little or no consultation locally.

54 The Conservative Group also opposed the District Council’s proposed reduction in council size to 52, arguing that the proposal had neither been circulated to local parishes nor been adequately consulted upon or discussed in the council committee. They stated that their concerns centred on the lack of consultation on the Council’s proposal, which in their view indicated “an unwillingness to accept an all-party proposition”. The Liberal Democrats also opposed the

Council's proposed reduction in council size, arguing that it had not been properly consulted upon locally.

55 Black Notley, Earls Colne, Great Yeldham, Hatfield Peverel, Rivenhall, Wethersfield and White Colne parish councils, Councillor Galione (Terling ward), Councillor Bidgen (Hatfield Peverel ward), Councillor Cooper (Gestingthorpe parish) and three local residents all expressed opposition to the District Council's proposed reduction in council size. They argued that its proposals had not been consulted on locally and would result in the creation of large rural wards which would not reflect community ties in some areas. Coggeshall Parish Council expressed support for proposals based on a council size of 59, while Rayne Parish Council and Councillor Boyce (Earls Colne ward) favoured retaining the existing council size of 60.

56 In our draft recommendations report we stated that the Commission's starting point in its PER work is to assume that the current council size facilitates effective and convenient local government. We also stated that we do not generally seek a substantial increase or decrease in council size, but that we would be prepared to consider the case for change where there are both persuasive arguments and supporting evidence, particularly of a degree of local consensus in favour of change.

57 We carefully considered the size and distribution of the electorate, the geography and other characteristics of the area, together with the representations received. We stated that while we are prepared to consider evidence as to the effect which a new political management structure may have on council size, it is insufficient for interested parties to simply assert that the implementation of a particular structure will require a particular council size.

58 Notwithstanding the reasonable levels of electoral equality achieved by the District Council's scheme, we considered that there was insufficient evidence to warrant their proposed reduction in council size. In particular, it was difficult to ascertain from the Council's submission whether, as a result of a reduction to 52 members, the effectiveness of the council would be improved and community ties better reflected than under the current council size. The evidence we received from other interested parties suggested that it would not. With regard to the Government's modernisation agenda, we noted that there was no implicit or explicit assumption in either the White Paper or in the (then) Local Government Bill that the implementation of a new structure of internal political management would necessarily require a greater or smaller number of councillors. We also noted that the District Council's submission drew comparisons between the size of Braintree District Council relative to its population, and the levels of representation which exist in neighbouring Essex authorities at present. However, as our *Guidance* makes clear, we do not regard such comparisons between authorities as relevant to our consideration of council size.

59 In reaching our draft recommendation on council size, we looked to build on local consensus. In the case of Braintree, it was clear that no such consensus existed. Indeed, with the exception of the District Council's proposal, virtually every other representation received at Stage One opposed a reduction in council size to 52. Furthermore, we found no evidence that there had been significant local consultation on such a council size. We were aware, however, that the Council had consulted on two alternative schemes, Options A and B, based on council sizes of 59 and 60

respectively and that these options enjoyed a degree of support from parish councils in the district. Indeed, many of the submissions received at Stage One expressed support for one or other of the options put forward during the Council's consultation exercise. On the basis of the evidence received at Stage One we concluded that the statutory criteria and the achievement of electoral equality would best be met by a council of 60 members.

60 During Stage Three the District Council, the Green Group, the Conservative Group and the Liberal Democrats, Black Notley, Great Notley and The Hennys Middleton & Twinstead parish councils, Parish Councillor Macnee (Rayne parish) and a local resident expressed support for our draft recommendation for a council size of 60.

61 Braintree Constituency Labour Party expressed a preference for the District Council's Stage One proposal for a 52-member council. It argued that a reduction in council size is justified by new council structures and that Braintree remains one of the largest councils in Essex in terms of number of members. Braintree District Council Labour Group, Witham Town Council, Councillors Barlow (Witham Chipping Hill ward), Davidson (Kelvedon ward) and Tincknell (Witham South ward) and seven local residents also favoured the District Council's Stage One proposal, arguing that it ensured a significant degree of equality and would have left villages and parishes intact. County Councillors Card and Bishop also supported a reduction in council size to 52. Silver End Parish Council stated that it supported a reduction in council size.

62 We have carefully considered all the evidence received in response to our draft recommendations. We note that there remains a lack of consensus regarding the most appropriate council size for Braintree district. While our proposed council size of 60 was accepted or supported by the District Council, the Conservatives, Liberal Democrats and Greens, the Labour submissions continued to favour a council size of 52. We have not been persuaded by the evidence received that the statutory criteria of effective and convenient local government, and community identities and interests, would be better served under a council size of 52 than under the existing council size of 60. We have noted that Braintree Constituency Labour Party's submission drew comparisons between the council size and population of Braintree district and those of neighbouring Essex authorities but, as stated previously, these are not factors which we can take into account.

63 In the light of these considerations, we have decided to confirm our draft recommendation for a council size of 60 as final.

## **Electoral Arrangements**

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

65 Our proposals for Braintree were based on a council size of 60, which we considered to be the most appropriate council size for the district. Given this preliminary conclusion on the most appropriate council size, we were unable to adopt the District Council's proposals, which were

based on a council size of 52, although we considered that certain aspects of its proposals had some merit. We noted that the Green Group's proposals, based on a council size of 60, would provide for improved levels of electoral equality throughout the district. While we considered that their proposals had some merit, we were not been persuaded that they would adequately reflect community ties in several areas, most notably in the Black Notley area and the north of the district.

66 We sought, therefore, to build on the proposals put forward by the Green Group, the Liberal Democrats and other interested parties in the district in formulating our draft recommendations. We noted the arguments put to us about community identities in the district and tried to reflect such considerations in our draft recommendations where it would be consistent with our objective of achieving reasonable levels of electoral equality.

67 At Stage Three our draft recommendations received a mixed response. The District Council and the Labour Group proposed changes to 16 of our 29 proposed wards. The Liberal Democrats proposed changes to 14 wards, the Conservatives proposed changes to 12 wards and the Greens proposed changes to three wards. Our proposals for Witham received cross-party support, while our proposals for Hatfield Peverel and Black Notley & Terling were supported by the Conservatives, Liberal Democrats and Greens. While our proposals for Braintree and Bocking were broadly supported by the Conservatives, the Liberal Democrats and Greens, the District Council and Labour Group proposed that there should be an additional councillor for the area. The District Council and all four political groups proposed changes in the south-east of the district, and all but the Greens proposed changes in the north. In the light of representations received at Stage Three, we have been persuaded to modify our draft recommendations in the south-east of the district and in Halstead.

68 Braintree District Labour Group and a number of local councillors argued that insufficient emphasis had been placed on electoral equality in our draft recommendations. As outlined, we consider that electoral equality should be the starting point in any review. However, we are required to achieve a balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria guiding the review, namely, the need to reflect the identities and interests of local communities and secure effective and convenient local government. We recognise that, in order to reflect community identities and interests or secure convenient and effective local government, we may in some areas need to depart from electoral equality. Having considered all of the evidence presented to us as part of this review and the five-year forecasts of electorate, we consider that our final recommendations provide the most reasonable balance currently available between electoral equality and the statutory criteria for Braintree district.

69 For district warding purposes, the following areas, based on existing wards, are considered in turn:

- (a) Black Notley, Hatfield Peverel and Terling wards;
- (b) Witham (five wards);
- (c) Cressing, Coggeshall, Kelvedon and Witham Silver End & Rivenhall wards;
- (d) Braintree and Bocking (five wards);
- (e) Panfield, Rayne and Three Fields wards;
- (f) Colne Engaine & Greenstead Green, Earls Colne and Gosfield wards;
- (g) Halstead St Andrew's and Halstead Trinity wards;
- (h) Stour Valley Central, Stour Valley North and Stour Valley South wards;
- (i) Castle Hedingham and Sible Hedingham wards;
- (j) Bumpstead, Upper Colne and Yeldham wards.

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

### **Black Notley, Hatfield Peverel and Terling wards**

71 The three wards of Black Notley, Hatfield Peverel and Terling are located in the south-west of the district. Black Notley is a single-member ward containing the two parishes of Black Notley and Great Notley, while Hatfield Peverel ward is a two-member ward containing the parish of the same name. Terling is a predominantly rural single-member ward comprising the parishes of Fairstead, Faulkbourne, Terling and White Notley. Under existing arrangements, Black Notley ward has the highest level of electoral inequality in the district, with 132 per cent more electors per councillor than the district average, due to housing developments in the Great Notley area since the last electoral review. This level of electoral inequality is expected to increase to 251 per cent by 2004, due to further development at Great Notley and the redevelopment of the hospital site in Black Notley. Terling ward is relatively over-represented, with 25 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the district average (30 per cent fewer by 2004), while Hatfield Peverel ward has 8 per cent more electors per councillor than the district average (2 per cent fewer by 2004).

72 At Stage One the District Council proposed creating a two-member Hatfield Peverel & Terling ward, comprising Hatfield Peverel and Terling parishes. It proposed combining the remaining part of Terling ward with Cressing and Black Notley parishes and part of Braintree West ward to create a new two-member The Notleys & Cressing ward. It proposed that Great Notley parish should form a new two-member Great Notley ward. Under a council size of 52, Hatfield Peverel & Terling and The Notleys & Cressing wards would have 9 per cent more and 11 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the district average respectively (equal to the average and 1 per cent more by 2004). Great Notley ward would initially have 26 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the average, improving to 10 per cent more than the average by 2004.

73 The Green Group proposed creating a new three-member Terling & Hatfield Peverel ward comprising the existing wards of Terling and Hatfield Peverel, together with the part of Black Notley ward containing the hospital site. The remainder of the current Black Notley ward would form a revised three-member Black Notley ward. Under their proposed council size of 60, Black

Notley and Terling & Hatfield Peverel wards would have 10 per cent more and 4 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the district average by 2004.

74 Braintree Liberal Democrats proposed combining Fairstead and Terling parishes with Hatfield Peverel ward and including Faulkbourne parish in a ward with White Notley and Cressing parishes. They also proposed creating a two-member Great Notley ward and a single-member Black Notley ward. Hatfield Peverel Parish Council favoured retaining the existing Hatfield Peverel ward and opposed being combined with the small rural village of Terling, as proposed by the Council. Black Notley Parish Council and a local resident opposed the Council's proposed The Notleys & Cressing ward, arguing that it would cover an extremely large rural area containing very distinct settlements. Black Notley Parish Council also expressed support for a single-member Black Notley Village ward and a two-member Great Notley ward (the Council's Option B).

75 Councillor Galione (Terling ward) opposed the District Council's proposal to combine Terling parish with Hatfield Peverel ward and argued that the parishes in Terling ward "would be happy to include part of Black Notley in the ward, a village geographically and socially compatible". Councillor Bigden (Hatfield Peverel ward) objected to the Council's proposals for the area and favoured retaining the existing two-member Hatfield Peverel ward.

76 In our draft recommendations report we noted that a large number of the submissions received at Stage One favoured retaining separate representation for the rural communities in this area, although they proposed different warding arrangements. We also noted the preference of a number of respondents, including Hatfield Peverel Parish Council, for retaining a two-member ward for Hatfield Peverel, as also proposed under Option B of the Council's consultation exercise. We considered that this proposal had some merit, as Hatfield Peverel is a large rural village sharing few community ties with its adjoining rural areas. We also noted that under a council size of 60, Hatfield Peverel ward would have a reasonable level of electoral equality by 2004 and were content to put it forward as part of our draft recommendations.

77 We noted that there was a degree of support for creating a separate ward for the newly established Great Notley parish. We considered that this proposal had some merit, as Great Notley is a significant new "garden village" development on the edge of Braintree and shares relatively few ties with the older, more established village of Black Notley. This has been reflected in the formation of a separate parish council for the area. We were therefore content to put forward a separate ward for the area as part of our draft recommendations. We proposed, however, that Great Notley ward should be represented by three councillors, in order to take into account the projected growth in electorate in this area over the next five years. In order to improve electoral equality, we proposed that the new ward should include the whole of Great Notley parish together with the Queenborough Lane area and the area to the south of the River Brain which currently form part of Braintree West ward. We recognised that this is a well-established area, distinct from the Great Notley development, but noted that uniting them for district warding purposes with Great Notley would not affect parish boundaries in this area.

78 We considered that the Green Group's proposal to combine part of Black Notley parish with Terling ward had some merit, as it would retain rural parishes with similar interests within one

ward. We also noted Councillor Galione's view that the four parishes in Terling ward would be content to include part of Black Notley in the ward, though this was opposed by Black Notley Parish Council. However, we considered that the Black Notley village should not be divided and proposed including all of Black Notley parish in a new two-member Black Notley & Terling ward. This ward would unite all the small villages to the south of Braintree, north of Witham and west of the Braintree to Witham railway line. By combining Terling ward with the whole of Black Notley parish we were also able to retain separate wards for the urban and rural parts of the district in this area. The alternative of combining part or all of Terling ward with either Witham or Hatfield Peverel would, in our view, fail to adequately reflect community identities and interests.

79 To provide for a more clearly identifiable boundary between our proposed Great Notley and Black Notley & Terling wards, and to improve electoral equality, we proposed also including the area to the east of the A131 London Road and to the south of the A120 Braintree Bypass (currently in Braintree West ward) in Black Notley & Terling ward. While this ward would initially would have 30 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the average, it would improve to 15 per cent fewer by 2004 due to a housing development currently under construction on a former hospital site in Black Notley village.

80 At Stage Three the District Council expressed support for our proposed Great Notley and Hatfield Peverel wards. It argued, however, that our proposed two-member Black Notley & Terling ward would result in the area's "excessive over-representation" and proposed improving electoral equality in this ward by including the Tye Green area of Cressing parish to the west of the B1018. To reflect this change, the Council proposed renaming the ward Notleys, Tye Green & Terling.

81 Braintree Constituency Labour Party argued that our draft recommendations failed to achieve electoral equality, and submitted proposals identical to those submitted by the District Council. They argued that the division of Cressing parish "can be justified in that the two communities that make up the parish are very different". They also argued that the part of London Road which we proposed should form part of our Black Notley & Terling ward should be transferred to the new Great Notley ward.

82 The Green Group broadly supported our draft recommendations for this area, which they argued would preserve community ties. They strongly opposed the District Council's proposal to divide Cressing parish. They stated that they do not agree that our draft recommendations would provide excessive over-representation for this area, stating that in this case a larger variance should be considered in order to preserve community ties. The Conservative Group and the Liberal Democrats also broadly supported our draft recommendations, although the Liberal Democrats opposed including part of the A131 London Road in Black Notley & Terling ward. They proposed transferring the electors on the A131 to Braintree Central ward, as discussed below.

83 Black Notley Parish Council supported our proposed Black Notley & Terling ward providing the boundary of the parish of Black Notley was respected. It was also opposed to the District Council's proposal to include Tye Green with Black Notley & Terling, arguing that it is an

integral part of Cressing parish and that parishes should not be divided in order to improve electoral equality. Hatfield Peverel Parish Council supported our draft recommendation for their area and agreed that the village shares few community ties with adjoining areas. Great Notley Parish Council supported our draft recommendation for the ward and the inclusion of the Queenborough Lane area in the proposed ward. Cressing Parish Council opposed the District Council's proposal to divide Cressing parish and proposed combining Cressing with Stisted and Bradwell parishes in a single-member ward.

84 Councillor Davidson (Kelvedon ward) and Councillor Evans (Witham North ward) also favoured the District Council's proposal to include part of Cressing parish in Black Notley & Terling ward. Six local residents argued that our draft recommendations did not adequately address electoral equality in Black Notley & Terling ward and proposed that electoral equality could be further improved by including part of Cressing parish in the new ward. Councillor Turner (Black Notley ward) opposed the District Council's proposal to divide Cressing parish, arguing that Tye Green is an integral part of Cressing parish, and proposed combining Cressing and Bradwell parishes in a new ward. He expressed support for our proposed Black Notley & Terling ward and broadly supported our proposed Great Notley ward, but considered that the Queenborough Lane area and the unparished part of the A131 London Road should form part of Braintree Central ward. If such a change was not possible, Councillor Turner proposed that the ward should be renamed Braintree West & Great Notley to reflect the two communities.

85 We received a petition from 37 residents opposing our draft recommendation to include the Queenborough Lane area within Great Notley ward, arguing that "[their] interest, association and sense of community are with Braintree town". A local resident also argued that electors of the London Road and Queenborough Lane area "identify themselves very strongly as residents of Braintree". Another local resident broadly supported our proposed Hatfield Peverel and Great Notley wards, but opposed including the Queenborough Lane area in Great Notley ward and the unparished part of London Road in Black Notley & Terling ward. She also opposed the District Council's proposal to divide Cressing parish and proposed combining the existing Terling and Cressing wards with Stisted and Bradwell parishes in a new two-member ward. Another local resident supported our draft recommendations, but expressed concern regarding the inclusion of an unparished area of Braintree with parished areas to the south, and the large geographical area covered by proposed Black Notley & Terling ward. She also strongly opposed the District Council's proposals for this area. A further 28 local residents strongly opposed the District Council's proposals to divide Cressing parish between district wards.

86 We have carefully considered the representations received at Stage Three and a number of considerations have emerged. We note that there was significant support for our proposal to retain the existing Hatfield Peverel ward, as well as broad support for the creation of a new Great Notley ward. We acknowledge that there was some opposition to our proposal to include the unparished Queenborough Lane area with Great Notley parish in a new Great Notley ward. As stated previously, we recognise that this area is distinct from the Great Notley development, but note that combining these two areas for district warding purposes will provide significantly improved electoral equality in the Great Notley area. While we recognise that residents of this area have successfully campaigned against being included in a new Great Notley parish, we note that their inclusion in the same district ward as Great Notley would not affect parish boundaries.

Furthermore, while we recognise that this area has a separate identity to Great Notley, we have received little evidence to suggest that the Queenborough Lane area has a particular strong affinity with other areas in Braintree, from which it is divided by the A120 trunk road. We are therefore content to endorse our draft recommendations for Hatfield Peverel and Great Notley wards as final.

87 We note that there was a lack of consensus at Stage Three regarding our proposed Black Notley & Terling ward. While our proposals received a degree of support from the Green Group, the Conservative Group, the Liberal Democrats, a number of parish councils and local residents, alternative proposals were submitted by the District Council, the Labour Party and a number of residents. We note, however, that there was significant opposition from local residents in Cressing to the District Council's proposal to divide Cressing parish, arguing that such a proposal would divide the Cressing community. While we recognise that such a proposal would achieve a better level of electoral equality than our draft recommendations, we consider that it would fail to reflect community identities and interests. We are therefore not minded to put forward such a change.

88 We also note that there was some opposition to our proposed western boundary of Black Notley & Terling ward. In particular, there was some opposition to the inclusion of that part of the eastern side of the A131 London Road which is not part of Black Notley parish in the new ward. We remain of the view that our proposals would provide the most reasonable balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria for this area. We consider that our proposals would provide a strong boundary along the length of this road, as well as uniting all the properties on the eastern side of the road within one ward. Furthermore, we are not persuaded that electors in this area would be better represented as part of a Braintree ward from which they are divided by the A120 trunk road. In addition, the removal of this area from the ward would lead to a deterioration in the level of electoral equality for the proposed ward. We are therefore content to endorse our draft recommendation for Black Notley & Terling ward as final.

89 Under our final recommendations, Black Notley & Terling, Great Notley and Hatfield Peverel wards would have 30 per cent fewer, 36 per cent fewer and 8 per cent more electors per councillor than the district average, improving to 16 per cent fewer, 9 per cent fewer and 2 per cent fewer by 2004 respectively. Our proposals are outlined on Map 2 and the large map at the back of the report.

### **Witham (five wards)**

90 The five wards of Witham Central, Witham Chipping Hill, Witham North, Witham South and Witham West are coterminous with the Witham Town Council area in the south of the district. Witham Chipping Hill, Witham South and Witham West wards are each represented by two councillors, while Witham North ward is represented by three councillors and Witham Central ward is represented by one councillor. Under existing arrangements, Witham Central and Witham South wards are significantly under-represented, with 41 per cent and 50 per cent more electors per councillor than the district average respectively (30 per cent and 60 per cent more by 2004). Witham North and Witham West wards are currently over-represented, with 26 per cent and 12 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the district average respectively (33 per cent

and 20 per cent fewer by 2004). Witham Chipping Hill ward has 3 per cent more electors per councillor than the district average (7 per cent fewer by 2004).

91 At Stage One, under its 52-member scheme, the District Council proposed reducing the number of councillors representing Witham from 10 to nine. It proposed combining the existing Witham North and Witham Central wards, together with Albert Road from Witham Chipping Hill ward, to create a new three-member Witham North & East ward. The Council proposed creating a new Witham West & Chipping ward comprising Witham West ward and part of Witham Chipping Hill ward, and retaining the existing Witham South ward, but increasing its representation from two to three councillors. Under the Council's proposed council size of 52, Witham North & East, Witham West & Chipping Hill and Witham South wards would have electoral variances of no more than 13 per cent from the district average, improving to no more than 8 per cent from the average by 2004.

92 The Green Group also proposed retaining the existing Witham North ward, but reducing its representation from three to two councillors. They put forward a revised Witham West ward, comprising the existing ward together with an area containing around 360 electors (Guithavon Road, Highfields Road, Millbridge Road, Blunts Hall Road, Cuppers Close, Spinks Lane and Stevens Road), currently located in Witham Central and Witham South wards. They proposed a new three-member Witham Central & Chipping Hill ward comprising the remaining part of Witham Central ward together with Witham Chipping Hill ward. Finally, they proposed a revised Witham South ward, to be represented by three councillors. Under the Green Group's proposals, Witham Central & Chipping Hill, Witham North, Witham South and Witham West wards would have electoral variances of no more than 10 per cent from the district average by 2004.

93 The Liberal Democrats generally supported the Council's Option A. This option would combine Witham Central and Witham Chipping Hill wards, would retain the existing Witham North and Witham South wards, but with two and three councillors respectively, and would combine Witham West ward with most of Terling ward. However, they opposed combining the rural parishes of Terling and Fairstead with the urban area of Witham. Witham Town Council expressed support for electoral arrangements for district wards "that respect the integrity of the parish boundaries and are coterminous with them" and strongly opposed combining any part of Witham with adjoining rural parishes. As outlined above, Councillor Galione also opposed combining part of Terling ward with Witham.

94 In our draft recommendations report we noted that there was a degree of consensus in favour of retaining separate representation for Witham, and against combining part of the town with adjoining rural parishes. We concurred with this assessment and considered that the urban community of Witham has identities and interests distinct from the largely rural parishes which neighbour the town.

95 We noted that while the District Council's proposals for this area would provide for reasonable levels of electoral equality under a council size of 52, our proposed council size of 60 limited the extent to which we were able to put forward their proposals for the area. Nevertheless, we considered that their proposal to combine part of Witham Chipping Hill ward with Witham West ward had some merit, particularly with regard to the communities located to the west of the

River Brain. We were content therefore to put it forward as part of our draft recommendations, with some modifications in order to provide for improved electoral equality. To further improve electoral equality in our proposed three-member Witham West ward, we proposed including an area containing 350 electors (Guithavon Road, Highfields Road, Millbridge Road, Blunts Hall Road, Cuppers Close and Stevens Road), as broadly proposed by the Green Group. We proposed combining the remaining part of Witham Chipping Hill ward with Witham Central ward, excluding the area transferred to our proposed Witham West ward. We considered that our proposed ward would unite within one ward the areas around the town centre, bounded by the River Brain, the Witham to Braintree railway line and the parish boundary.

96 We noted that the Green Group, the District Council and the Liberal Democrats proposed broadly retaining the existing Witham South ward. We considered that the existing ward reflects community ties well and noted that if its representation were increased from two to three councillors, it would have a reasonable level of electoral equality under a council size of 60. In the light of this broad consensus, we proposed broadly retaining the existing Witham South ward (less the area transferred to Witham West ward) and increasing its representation from two to three councillors. Finally, we proposed retaining the existing Witham North ward, but reducing its representation from three to two councillors, as proposed by the Green Group and the Liberal Democrats. We considered that the existing ward comprises a relatively distinct community within Witham, being separated from the remainder of the town by the Witham to Braintree railway line and the London Liverpool Street to Colchester railway line. We also noted that, under our proposed council size of 60, Witham North ward would have a reasonable level of electoral equality both now and in 2004.

97 At Stage Three, the District Council, the Green Group, the Conservative Group and the Liberal Democrats supported our proposed district warding arrangements for Witham town. Councillor Tincknell (Witham South ward) and a local resident supported the District Council's Stage One 52-member scheme. However, they stated that in the event of a council size of 60 being retained, the proposed wards in the Witham area were acceptable. Braintree Constituency Labour Party, Witham Town Council, Councillor Barlow (Witham Chipping Hill ward), Town Councillor Jones (Witham town) and one local resident stated a preference for a council size of 52, but on the basis of a council size of 60 accepted our draft recommendations for this area, but proposed that Witham Central ward should be renamed Witham Chipping Hill & Central ward, to reflect the historical significance of Chipping Hill. One further resident also proposed that Witham Central ward be renamed Witham Chipping Hill & Central ward.

98 We have given careful consideration to the evidence and representations received, and note that our proposals for the Witham area received a degree of local support at Stage Three. We also note that, under the District Council's revised electorate forecasts, the level of electoral equality in our proposed Witham North ward would not be adversely affected. We remain of the view that our proposed warding arrangements provide a good balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria. We are therefore content to endorse our draft recommendations as final, subject to renaming Witham Central as Witham Chipping Hill & Central ward, as proposed by a number of respondents at Stage Three. We recognise that Chipping Hill is a historic community in Witham and consider that it should be reflected in the ward name for the area.

99 Under our final recommendations, Witham Chipping Hill & Central and Witham North wards would have 9 per cent and 11 per cent more electors per councillor than the district average respectively, improving to 1 per cent fewer and 1 per cent more by 2004. Witham South and Witham West wards would have 3 per cent fewer and 5 per cent more electors per councillor than the district average respectively (3 per cent more and 5 per cent fewer by 2004). Our proposals are outlined on Map 2 and Map A2 in Appendix A.

### **Cressing, Coggeshall, Kelvedon and Witham Silver End & Rivenhall wards**

100 Cressing and Coggeshall wards are located to the north and north-east of Witham town, while Kelvedon and Witham Silver End & Rivenhall wards are located to its east, adjoining the district's boundary with Maldon and Colchester districts. Cressing ward is currently represented by one councillor and contains the parish of the same name. Witham Silver End & Rivenhall ward returns two councillors and comprises the parishes of Silver End and Rivenhall, while Kelvedon ward, returning three councillors, contains the parishes of Feering and Kelvedon. The parishes of Bradwell, Stisted and Coggeshall comprise the three-member Coggeshall ward. Coggeshall, Cressing and Kelvedon wards are all over-represented, with 13 per cent, 22 per cent and 15 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the district average respectively, while Witham Silver End & Rivenhall ward currently has equal to the district average number of electors per councillor. The level of electoral equality in each ward is expected to worsen over the next five years.

101 At Stage One the District Council proposed creating a new two-member The Notleys & Cressing ward, comprising Cressing, Black Notley, Fairstead, Faulkbourne and White Notley parishes and part of Braintree West ward, as outlined above. It proposed creating a new three-member Coggeshall & Earls Colne ward, comprising the two parishes of the same name, and combining Bradwell and Stisted parishes with Witham Silver End & Rivenhall ward to create a two-member Silver End, Rivenhall, Bradwell & Stisted ward. Under the Council's proposed council size of 52, all three wards would have variances of no more than 11 per cent from the average currently, and 1 per cent by 2004.

102 The Green Group proposed retaining the existing Witham Silver End & Rivenhall ward and a revised two-member Kelvedon ward comprising the existing ward, less an area containing around 300 electors in the northern rural part of Kelvedon ward, which they proposed combining with the existing Cressing and Coggeshall wards to form a revised three-member Cressing & Coggeshall ward. Under their proposed council size of 60, Cressing & Coggeshall, Kelvedon and Witham Silver End & Rivenhall wards would have electoral variances of no more than 11 per cent from the district average by 2004.

103 The Liberal Democrats proposed combining Stisted and Bradwell parishes with Gosfield and Greenstead Green & Halstead Rural parishes to form a revised Gosfield ward. They opposed linking Bradwell and Stisted parishes with Kelvedon or Feering parish, arguing that these parishes share "no historical or community identities", and proposed retaining the existing Kelvedon ward. They supported Option A in the remainder of the area. Black Notley Parish Council and a local resident opposed the District Council's proposed The Notleys & Cressing ward, arguing that it would cover a large geographical area and combine distinct communities

with few common links. Cressing Parish Council opposed the District Council's proposal for Cressing parish, arguing that it was "a purely political proposal" that had not been consulted upon locally. Although its first preference was to retain the existing Cressing ward, Cressing Parish Council agreed to the District Council's initial consultation proposals to combine Cressing and White Notley parishes in a new ward.

104 Rivenhall and Stisted parish councils strongly objected to the District Council's proposed Silver End, Rivenhall, Bradwell & Stisted ward, arguing that it would cover a large geographical area and would unite four distinct parishes with few direct community ties or communication links. Bradwell and Stisted parish councils both favoured retaining the existing Coggeshall ward. Coggeshall Parish Council expressed support for Option A of the District Council's consultation exercise, which would retain the existing Coggeshall ward.

105 Two local residents opposed the District Council's proposals for this area, arguing that Kelvedon and Feering have little in common with the largely rural villages of Bradwell and Stisted, and favoured retaining the existing Kelvedon ward, reducing its representation from three to two councillors. One resident opposed the District Council's proposal to join Coggeshall and Earls Colne parishes in one ward, while another resident noted that the existing Witham Silver End & Rivenhall ward does not contain any part of Witham and favoured renaming it Silver End & Rivenhall ward or Rivenhall & Silver End ward to more adequately reflect its constituent communities.

106 In our draft recommendations report we noted that there was a lack of consensus regarding the most appropriate warding arrangements for this area. We noted, however, that the majority of submissions received from parish councils and local residents opposed the District Council's proposals, arguing that they would combine communities with distinct interests and identities. In particular, a number of submissions commented on the differences between communities neighbouring the A12 trunk road, such as Rivenhall, Kelvedon and Feering, and those neighbouring the A120 Braintree Bypass, such as Coggeshall, Bradwell and Stisted. We were persuaded that the village of Earls Colne shares stronger ties with the other parishes in the Colne Valley than with Coggeshall. We also recognised that there is some merit in retaining the current Kelvedon ward, but reducing its representation to two councillors, as proposed by the District Council and the Liberal Democrats. However, under a council size of 60, such a ward would have 27 per cent more electors per councillor than the district average now and 18 per cent more by 2004.

107 We considered that the Green Group's proposals for this area had some merit. We noted that their proposals retained Bradwell, Stisted and Coggeshall parishes within the same ward, as at present. Their proposed Kelvedon ward would retain the urban core of Kelvedon and Feering parishes within one ward, with the more sparsely populated parts of each parish being combined with adjoining parishes to the north. In addition, in the light of our proposed Black Notley & Terling ward, as described above, we considered that their proposal to create a three-member Cressing & Coggeshall ward would provide a reasonable balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria. We recognised the preference of Cressing Parish Council to retain a single-member Cressing ward, but noted that with an electorate of some 1,300 such an arrangement would result in an unacceptably high level of electoral inequality. We were therefore unable to put it forward as part of our draft recommendations.

108 In the light of these considerations, we based our draft recommendations on the Green Group's proposals, with some modifications. We considered that the London Liverpool Street to Colchester railway line constitutes a significant boundary in this area and proposed that it should form the northern boundary of a revised Kelvedon ward. We proposed including the northern part of Kelvedon parish in a new Silver End & Rivenhall ward, and the northern part of Feering parish in a new Cressing & Coggeshall ward. We noted that the northern parts of Kelvedon and Feering parishes share no direct communication links with each other and that, while the northern part of Feering parish is directly linked to Coggeshall by the B1024 Coggeshall Road, the northern part of Kelvedon parish is also linked by Hollow Road to Silver End & Rivenhall ward. Furthermore, we noted that the inclusion of part of Kelvedon parish in Silver End & Rivenhall ward would result in improved levels of electoral equality in both of our proposed wards.

109 Under our draft recommendations, Cressing & Coggeshall, Kelvedon and Silver End & Rivenhall wards would have 18 per cent, 12 per cent and 8 per cent more electors per councillor than the district average respectively, improving to 9 per cent more, 5 per cent more and 2 per cent fewer by 2004. We recognised that our proposals for this area differed, to an extent, from the proposals put to us at Stage One, and therefore particularly welcomed further local views regarding this area at Stage Three.

110 At Stage Three the District Council opposed our draft recommendations and submitted alternative proposals for the area. It proposed creating a two-member Coggeshall & North Feering ward, comprising Coggeshall parish together with the part of Feering parish to the north of the London Liverpool Street to Colchester railway line. It proposed a revised two-member Kelvedon ward, comprising the remainder of the existing ward, and retaining the existing two-member Witham Silver End & Rivenhall ward. It noted that its proposed Kelvedon ward would achieve a poorer level of electoral equality and argued that electoral equality could be improved by transferring a larger part of Feering to a new Coggeshall & North Feering ward. Finally, the Council proposed creating a new Braintree & Halstead Rural ward, comprising the part of Cressing parish to the east of the B1018, Bradwell and Stisted parishes, and West ward of Greenstead Green & Halstead Rural parish.

111 The Green Group opposed our proposal to include part of Kelvedon parish in Silver End & Rivenhall ward. They noted "the very strong local feeling that Kelvedon should not be split and in this instance recognise that the community ties should be respected for Kelvedon". They considered that the District Council's proposals were better than our draft recommendations, but considered that there would remain strong opposition to the division of Feering parish. However, they outlined an alternative option for consideration. They suggested creating a four-member Coggeshall & Kelvedon ward, comprising Coggeshall, Kelvedon and Feering parishes. They argued that it was difficult to achieve electoral equality and the retention of community ties in this area because of the location of communities and the external district boundary, and that a four-member ward would have the advantage of avoiding splitting parishes. They proposed combining Cressing parish with Stisted and Bradwell parishes and retaining a two-member Silver End & Rivenhall ward. To further improve electoral equality in both wards, they also suggested that a further alternative would be to transfer Bradwell parish to Silver End & Rivenhall ward.

112 The Conservative Group and the Liberal Democrats also submitted alternative warding arrangements for this area. They proposed a single-member Cressing & Bradwell ward, comprising both of these parishes, and creating a two-member ward covering Coggeshall parish. They proposed retaining the existing Kelvedon and Silver End & Rivenhall wards, arguing that their proposals “recognise the strong community ties in this area” and that community relationships should have preference over electoral equality. Stisted parish would be combined with Gosfield and Halstead Rural parishes in a new ward.

113 Braintree Constituency Labour Party and Councillors Davidson and Fyfe (Kelvedon ward) submitted proposals identical to those submitted by the District Council for this area. The Labour Party and Councillor Davidson also restated their preference for a 52-member scheme. Councillor Joyce (Coggeshall ward) and County Councillor Bishop (Braintree East division) opposed our proposed Cressing & Coggeshall ward, arguing that Coggeshall has no community ties with Cressing. They argued that Coggeshall has more in common with the northern part of Feering, and proposed creating a two-member ward for this area. Councillor Joyce also argued that Bradwell and Stisted parishes have a close affinity with parts of Cressing and proposed that they should form a single-member ward.

114 Coggeshall Parish Council and two local residents proposed creating a two-member Coggeshall & North Feering ward, arguing that these areas have good community and transport links. Bradwell Parish Council stated that they were “pleased with the proposal to retain Bradwell and Stisted with Coggeshall”, but questioned whether ward boundaries could be amended to further improve electoral equality in this area. Two local residents opposed our proposed Cressing & Coggeshall ward and favoured creating a two-member Coggeshall & North Feering ward, while one local resident expressed support for our proposed Silver End & Rivenhall ward.

115 Kelvedon Parish Council opposed our proposal to include part of Kelvedon parish in Silver End & Rivenhall ward, arguing that “there are no direct road links between the Silver End and Coggeshall Road spines of the Kelvedon North ward”. It proposed retaining the existing Kelvedon ward. Silver End Parish Council also opposed including part of Kelvedon parish in Silver End & Rivenhall ward, arguing that “the Hollow Road link is unlit, liable to flood, poorly maintained and rarely used”. It argued that Silver End and Rivenhall parishes should be combined with Bradwell parish as they share similar interests and concerns.

116 Feering Parish Council, Parish Councillor Kimberley (Feering parish) and three local residents opposed our draft recommendation to divide Feering parish, arguing that the railway is not seen locally as a barrier within the village and that, under our proposals, local facilities would be divided between different district wards. Six local residents opposed our proposals with regard to the existing Kelvedon ward. Four of these local residents favoured retaining the existing warding arrangements. Eight local residents specifically opposed our proposal to include part of Kelvedon parish in Silver End & Rivenhall ward. We also received a petition containing 50 signatures opposing our proposals for the existing Kelvedon ward and supporting Kelvedon Parish Council’s proposals for the area.

117 Cressing Parish Council opposed the District Council’s proposal to divide Cressing parish and proposed combining Cressing with Stisted and Bradwell parishes in a single-member ward. It recognised that such a proposal would lead to the creation of a large ward, and therefore

suggested as an alternative that the parish could be combined with either Bradwell or Stisted. As discussed previously, Black Notley Parish Council and Councillor Turner (Black Notley ward) also opposed the District Council's proposal to divide Cressing, arguing that Tye Green is an integral part of Cressing parish. Councillor Turner proposed combining Cressing and Bradwell parishes in a new single-member ward.

118 A further 28 local residents strongly opposed the District Council's proposals to divide Cressing parish between district wards. Nine of these residents favoured Cressing Parish Council's proposal to joining Cressing with Stisted or Bradwell parish in a new single-member ward, while four residents favoured retaining the existing Cressing ward. Two local residents opposed both our draft recommendations and the District Council's proposals for the Cressing area, and proposed a single-member Cressing & Bradwell ward. One local resident strongly opposed the District Council's proposal to divide Cressing parish and proposed combining the existing Terling and Cressing wards with Stisted and Bradwell parishes in a new two-member ward. She proposed retaining the existing Kelvedon ward and a revised two-member Coggeshall ward, comprising the parish of the same name.

119 We have carefully considered the representations received during the consultation period. We recognise that there was considerable local opposition to our proposals for this area. We note that a number of submissions proposed retaining the existing Kelvedon ward, while others proposed retaining the majority of the existing ward and transferring the northern part of Feering parish to a new Coggeshall & North Feering ward. We have also noted that there was significant opposition to our proposal to include part of Kelvedon parish in Silver End & Rivenhall ward. We have revisited our proposals in this area, and concur with respondents' assessment that the northern part of Kelvedon parish shares few links with the Silver End and Rivenhall area, and propose amending our proposals in this area, as detailed below.

120 As stated in our draft recommendations report, while we recognise that there is some merit in retaining the existing boundaries of Kelvedon ward, under a council size of 60, such a ward would have 27 per cent more electors per councillor than the district average now and 18 per cent more by 2004. We note that the alternative proposal, supported by the District Council and Coggeshall Parish Council among others, of transferring a small part of Kelvedon ward to a new Coggeshall & North Feering ward would have the advantage of retaining the majority of the existing ward, while significantly improving electoral equality in both wards. In addition, this warding arrangement would result in a separate ward for the Coggeshall area and would reflect the views of local residents who opposed combining it with Cressing parish. We have noted the comments suggesting that a larger part of Feering parish should be combined with Coggeshall, but have not pursued this option as we have received no detailed proposals for an alternative boundary between the wards and we consider that the railway line provides a clear, identifiable boundary.

121 We have not been persuaded that local circumstances are so exceptional in this area as to warrant a four-member Coggeshall & Kelvedon ward, as proposed by the Green Group. As stated in our *Guidance*, "we believe that the number of councillors to be returned from each ward should not exceed three, other than in very exceptional circumstances", as we consider that this "could result in an unacceptable dilution of accountability to the electorate".

122 In the light of these considerations, we propose amending our draft recommendations for this area. We propose a new two-member Coggeshall & North Feering ward, comprising Coggeshall parish and Feering North parish ward of Feering parish. We propose a revised two-member Kelvedon ward comprising the remaining part of the existing Kelvedon ward.

123 As discussed previously, we have not been persuaded to put forward the District Council's proposals for Cressing parish, which we consider would adversely affect community identities and interests in this area. We note, however, that there was a degree of support for the creation of a single-member ward combining Cressing parish with Stisted and/or Bradwell parishes. In particular, we note that Silver End Parish Council and the Green Group proposed combining Bradwell parish with the existing Silver End & Rivenhall ward. We note that this proposal would provide a reasonable level of electoral equality in the area, with Silver End & Rivenhall ward having 1 per cent more electors per councillor than the district average by 2004. We also note that a ward comprising Cressing and Stisted parishes would have 1 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the district average by 2004.

124 We therefore propose creating a single-member Cressing & Stisted ward, comprising Cressing and Stisted parishes, and a two-member Bradwell, Silver End & Rivenhall ward, comprising the three parishes of the same name. We consider that, in the light of our proposed Kelvedon and Coggeshall & North Feering wards, this warding arrangement would provide the most reasonable balance between electoral equality and community identities and interests, and put it forward as part of our final recommendations.

125 Under our final recommendations, Bradwell, Silver End & Rivenhall, Coggeshall & North Feering and Kelvedon wards would have 12 per cent, 11 per cent and 21 per cent more electors per councillor than the district average, improving to 1 per cent, 2 per cent and 12 per cent more by 2004. Cressing & Stisted ward would have 6 per cent more electors per councillor than the district average (1 per cent fewer by 2004). Our proposals are illustrated on Map 2 and Map A3 in Appendix A.

### **Braintree and Bocking (five wards)**

126 The five wards of Braintree Central, Braintree East, Braintree West, Bocking North and Bocking South cover the Braintree and Bocking urban area, the only unparished area of the district. Each ward is represented by three councillors. Under existing arrangements, Bocking North and Bocking South wards are over-represented, with 12 per cent and 8 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the district average respectively (10 per cent and 8 per cent fewer by 2004). Braintree Central, Braintree East and Braintree West wards are all under-represented, with 9 per cent, 38 per cent and 9 per cent more electors per councillor than the district average respectively. The level of electoral inequality in Braintree Central and Braintree East wards is expected to deteriorate to 23 per cent and 57 per cent more electors per councillor than the average by 2004 due to new housing developments, while Braintree West ward is projected to improve to 10 per cent more than the average by 2004.

127 At Stage One the District Council proposed creating a new three-member Braintree South ward comprising part of Braintree West ward and part of Braintree Central ward. It proposed a

revised three-member Braintree Central ward comprising the remaining part of the existing ward, the northern part of Braintree West ward and the western part of Braintree East ward. The Council proposed including the part of Braintree West ward to the south of the A120 in a new The Notleys & Cressing ward, as discussed previously. The Council also proposed revised Braintree East and Bocking South wards, and combining an area in the north of the existing Bocking South ward with Bocking North ward and Panfield parish in a new three-member Bocking North & Panfield ward. Under the District Council's proposed council size of 52, Braintree Central, Braintree East, Braintree West, Bocking North & Panfield and Bocking South wards would have electoral variances of no more than 11 per cent from the district average currently (and no more than 4 per cent from the average by 2004).

128 The Green Group proposed retaining the existing three-member Bocking North and Braintree West wards. They proposed a revised three-member Bocking South ward, which would include the Edinburgh Gardens area of Braintree East ward, and a new two-member Braintree North East ward comprising the part of Braintree East ward to the north of Coggeshall Road. They proposed a new three-member Braintree South East ward comprising the remaining part of Braintree East ward together with part of Braintree Central ward, and a revised Braintree Central ward. Under the Green Group's proposal, Bocking North, Bocking South, Braintree Central, Braintree North East and Braintree South East wards would have electoral variances of no more than 8 per cent from the district average by 2004, based on a council size of 60.

129 The Liberal Democrats generally supported Option A of the District Council's consultation exercise, but proposed several changes which they argued would better reflect community identities. They proposed creating a new single-member Bocking Village ward, containing around 2,300 electors, comprising the northern part of the existing Bocking North ward. They also considered that Braintree North ward and Bocking West ward would be more appropriate names for Bocking East ward and Bocking South ward, as proposed under Option A. Councillor Broyd (Gosfield ward) generally opposed the District Council's proposals and proposed a new Gosfield ward containing Gosfield parish, White Ash Green, Southey Green, Blackmore and Beazley End and the part of High Garrett within the Foley Corner junction.

130 Panfield Parish Council opposed the District Council's proposal to combine their area with part of Bocking, arguing that the rural village of Panfield has more in common with the parishes of Bardfield Saling, Great Saling and Shalford than with the largely urban Bocking area. Councillor Walsh also opposed the District Council's proposed Bocking North & Panfield ward, arguing that its proposals had not been consulted upon locally and that they "are geographically flawed, with the urban/rural boundaries compromised" and would not be conducive to effective representation.

131 In our draft recommendations report we noted that there was a lack of consensus with regard to the most appropriate warding arrangements for this area, largely due to the different council sizes proposed by the District Council and the Green Group. As stated previously, our proposed council size of 60 limited the extent to which we were able to put forward the District Council's proposals. We considered, however, that there was some merit in their proposal to combine the area to the south of the River Brain (currently in Braintree West ward) with the southern part of the existing Braintree South ward. We noted that the communities in this area

are largely self-contained and can only be accessed from Notley Road or Tortoiseshell Way, and did not consider that the Green Group's proposal to retain the existing Braintree West ward would best reflect community ties in this area.

132 We adopted the District Council's proposed Braintree South ward as part of our draft recommendations, with some amendments to provide for improved electoral equality as a three-member ward under a council size of 60. We considered that Flitch Way constitutes a significant barrier in this area, separating communities on either side of it, and proposed that it should form the northern boundary of Braintree South ward. To further improve electoral equality, we proposed including Godlings Way and all the roads leading from it in Braintree South ward. We proposed that the southern boundary for the ward should be the A120 Braintree Bypass.

133 We also proposed a revised three-member Braintree Central ward, which would broadly unite Braintree town centre within one ward, similar to that proposed by the District Council. Our proposed ward would contain the part of Braintree West ward to the north of the River Brain (excluding the Godlings Way area) and the part of Braintree Central ward to the north of Flitch Way. We proposed including Peel Crescent and the north side of Rayne Road, currently located in Bocking South ward, in the revised ward as we considered these areas to be relatively isolated from the remainder of Bocking South ward. In order to further improve electoral equality in our proposed Braintree Central ward, we proposed transferring the area to the east of and including Cressing Road, Trotters Field and Bishops Avenue (currently in Braintree Central ward) to a revised Braintree East ward, as discussed below. We noted that the Green Group also proposed combining this area with the adjoining area of Braintree East ward, albeit with different boundaries.

134 We noted that the District Council and the Green Group differed with respect to their proposals for the existing Braintree East ward. Both district-wide schemes proposed, however, creating a ward covering the southern part of the existing Braintree East ward, albeit with different ward boundaries, to provide for improved electoral equality under their respective council sizes. We considered that Coggeshall Road constitutes a significant boundary in this area and that the Green Group's proposal to create two new wards, utilising Coggeshall Road as the ward boundary, had some merit, and we put it forward as part of our draft recommendations, with some modifications. We proposed a revised Braintree East ward combining the part of the existing ward to the south of Coggeshall Road with the adjacent area in the north-east of Braintree Central ward, as discussed above. Under our proposals, the area to the north of Coggeshall Road (currently in Braintree East ward) and to the east of Bradford Street, The Causeway and Bocking End (currently in Bocking South ward) would form a new Braintree Blackwater ward. The River Blackwater would form the northern boundary of our proposed new ward.

135 In the Bocking area, we noted that the District Council's proposed Bocking North & Panfield ward was opposed by Panfield Parish Council and Councillor Walsh, who opposed combining the rural Panfield parish with the largely urban Bocking area. We concurred with their assessment and did not consider that the Council's proposals would adequately reflect community ties in this part of the district. We also noted that the Liberal Democrats' proposed Bocking Village ward would result in unacceptably high levels of electoral inequality in this area, based

on our proposed council size of 60, and were not persuaded to put it forward as part of our draft recommendations.

136 We noted that the Green Group proposed retaining the existing Bocking North ward, which under existing arrangements is projected to have a reasonable level of electoral equality by 2004. While this proposal had some merit, we stated in our draft recommendations report that we must have a view to the electoral arrangements in the whole of the area. We noted that, in order to retain Coggeshall Road as a ward boundary, as a result of our proposed electoral arrangements in the adjoining wards the boundary between Bocking North and Bocking South ward would need to be amended to provide for improved electoral equality in Bocking South ward (less the areas transferred to Braintree Central and Braintree Blackwater ward). We proposed transferring around 750 electors from Bocking North ward to a revised two-member Bocking South ward and proposed a revised two-member Bocking North ward. Under our draft recommendations the boundary between these two wards would run eastwards along the rear of the properties on the north side of King's Road, Bailey Bridge Road and Boleyns Avenue, thereby including the southern part of Church Road in Bocking South ward. In order to further improve electoral equality in our proposed Bocking North ward, we proposed transferring the area around High Garrett in the north-east of the existing ward (containing around 300 electors), to a new Gosfield & Greenstead Green ward. We considered that this area, which is less urban than the southern part of Bocking North ward, has some affinity with the adjoining area of Gosfield. This proposal would also reflect, to an extent, comments made by Councillor Broyd at Stage One.

137 Under our draft recommendations Braintree Blackwater, Braintree Central, Braintree East and Braintree South wards would have 7 per cent more, 13 per cent fewer, 23 per cent fewer and 11 per cent more electors per councillor than the district average respectively, improving to 5 per cent more, 3 per cent more, 4 per cent fewer and 5 per cent more by 2004. Bocking North and Bocking South wards would have 2 per cent and 9 per cent more electors per councillor than the district average respectively (8 per cent more in both wards by 2004). We recognised that our proposals for this area had departed from the schemes put to us at Stage One. We considered, however, that our draft proposals would provide a better balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria than the existing arrangements and the proposals received at Stage One.

138 As discussed previously, the District Council submitted revised electorate forecasts at Stage Three, and as a result, the 2004 electorate figures for all of the existing wards in Braintree and Bocking were modified. While most of the changes would not adversely affect our draft recommendations, in Braintree West ward an additional 325 electors are projected over the next five years. As a result of this change, our proposed Braintree Central and Braintree South wards would have 5 per cent fewer and 9 per cent more electors per councillor than the district average respectively by 2004, as compared to 3 per cent and 4 per cent more than the average respectively under our draft recommendations. In addition, the Council projected that the total electorate for the area covered by our proposed Bocking and Braintree wards (the unparished area of the district less High Garrett and Queenborough Lane areas) would increase from 30,281 to 30,710 by 2004, and its entitlement would therefore increase from 16.6 councillors to 16.7 councillors.

139 At Stage Three the District Council supported our proposed Braintree Blackwater, Braintree East and Braintree South wards, although it proposed that Braintree Blackwater ward should be

renamed Bocking Blackwater. The Council argued, however, that the unparished area of Braintree and Bocking should be represented by 17 councillors, rather than 16, as proposed under our draft recommendations. It proposed retaining the existing Bocking North ward (including High Garrett) and Bocking South ward (less the area transferred to Braintree Blackwater ward). It also broadly supported our proposed Braintree Central ward, but proposed retaining the existing northern boundary along Rayne Road, arguing that this is a significant boundary.

140 The Green Group agreed with our draft recommendations for this area and rejected the District Council's proposal to increase the number of councillors for Braintree from 16 to 17, arguing that its proposals would result in high electoral variances. The Conservative Group and the Liberal Democrats opposed the District Council's 17-member proposal and supported our draft recommendations for Braintree and Bocking, but favoured retaining the High Garrett area within Bocking North ward. The Liberal Democrats supported the District Council's proposal to rename Braintree Blackwater ward as Bocking Blackwater, and also proposed retaining Rayne Road as the boundary between Braintree Central and Bocking South ward and the inclusion of the Queenborough Lane area in a revised Braintree Central ward.

141 Alan Hurst, Member of Parliament for Braintree, favoured increasing the representation for Braintree and Bocking from 16 to 17 councillors, and stated he was unhappy about our proposal to remove High Garrett from Bocking North ward, arguing that he has "always seen that village as being part of the wider Bocking community".

142 Braintree Constituency Labour Party proposed warding arrangements identical to those proposed by the District Council. In addition, it proposed transferring 700 electors from Bocking North to Bocking South ward in order to improve electoral equality in Bocking North ward, and retaining Rayne Road as the boundary between Braintree Central and Bocking South wards. Councillors Green (Bocking South) and Green (Braintree East) opposed our proposal to include High Garrett in Gosfield & Greenstead Green ward, and argued that an additional councillor should be allocated to Bocking North ward. They also proposed that Braintree Blackwater ward should be renamed Bocking Blackwater, Marks Farm or Lyons Hall ward. Councillors Barlow (Witham Chipping Hill ward) and Mann (Bocking North ward), County Councillor Bishop (Braintree East division) and four local residents supported the District Council's proposals for this area.

143 We have carefully considered the representations received at Stage Three and note that there is a lack of consensus regarding the number of councillors for the Braintree and Bocking areas. We have considered the District Council's proposal to increase the number of councillors from 16 to 17. We recognise that significant growth is projected for this area and that as a result, under our draft recommendations for a council size of 60, the proposed wards in this area are entitled to 15.7 councillors currently, increasing to 16.7 councillors in five years' time (based on the revised electorate figures supplied by the Council). Therefore under our draft recommendations the Braintree and Bocking area would be over-represented at present. By 2004, on the basis of the Council's projections, the area would be under-represented. On the basis of the Council's proposals for 17 members, on the other hand, the area would remain over-represented in 2004.

144 In putting forward proposals for any area, we are required under the 1972 Local Government Act to ensure that “the ratio of the number of local government electors to the number of councillors to be elected shall be, as nearly as may be, the same in every ward” while having regard to any changes in the number or distribution of electors over the next five years. In addition, we must, under the 1992 Act, have regard to the need to reflect the identities and interests of local communities and to secure effective and convenient local government. We consider that our proposals for Braintree have received a degree of local support and by and large reflect the significant boundaries of Coggeshall Road, the River Blackwater, the River Brain and Flitch Way and the community ties within the town. We also note that the District Council’s alternative proposals for Bocking would result in higher electoral variances by 2004 than under our draft recommendations. In addition, considering the district as a whole, we are of the view that in attempting to increase representation for Braintree and Bocking the District Council has failed to adequately reflect community identities and interests in the rural area.

145 In the light of these considerations we remain of the view that, taking into account the current and projected electorates, this area should be represented by 16 councillors. We are also satisfied that, under a council size of 60, our warding arrangements provide the best balance achievable between the need for electoral equality and the statutory criteria. We consider that forecasting electorates is an inexact science but recognise that, if the current rate of demographic change in Braintree district, and Braintree and Bocking in particular, continues beyond 2004 we would need to consider whether a further periodic electoral review would be necessary.

146 With regard to our proposed warding arrangements within Braintree, we note that there was a degree of support for our proposed Braintree East, Braintree South and Braintree Central wards. In the light of this broad consensus, we have decided to endorse our proposals in this area as final, subject to a number of amendments. As stated above, the Council’s revised electorate forecasts for the existing Braintree West ward have resulted in higher levels of electoral imbalance in our proposed Braintree South and Braintree Central wards. To further improve electoral equality in these wards, we propose transferring the Godlings Way area from Braintree South ward to Braintree Central ward, such that the boundary between these wards in this area follows the River Brain. We have not been persuaded by the evidence received to amend the boundary between Braintree Central and Bocking South wards. We note that our proposals in this area received a degree of support and remain of the view that Peel Crescent and Rayne Road would be relatively isolated from the remainder of Bocking South ward under the alternative proposals. We also note that their inclusion in Bocking South ward would have a deleterious impact on electoral equality.

147 We note that there was also support for our proposed Braintree Blackwater ward, although a number of submissions proposed that the ward should be renamed. While Councillors Green (Bocking South) and Green (Braintree East) argued that it should be named either Bocking Blackwater, Marks Farm or Lyons Hall ward, the District Council, Braintree Constituency Labour Party, Councillor Mann (Bocking North), the Liberal Democrats and one local resident preferred that it be renamed Bocking Blackwater ward. It was argued that Coggeshall Road marks the historic boundary between Braintree and Bocking, and that therefore the ward name of Bocking Blackwater would better reflect the area covered by the ward. In view of the significant level of

support for the proposed ward name change to Bocking Blackwater, we have decided to adopt it as part of our final recommendations.

148 There was a lack of consensus among the submissions regarding the remainder of our proposals for the Bocking area. While a number of submissions supported our proposals, others proposed retaining High Garrett in Bocking North ward and amending the boundary between Bocking North and Bocking South wards. In particular, we have considered the District Council's and Braintree Constituency Labour Party's proposals in which they proposed an additional councillor for Bocking North ward. However, as discussed previously, we have not been persuaded to increase the number of councillors for Braintree and Bocking, and as a result, we are unable to adopt their proposals for this area. In relation to the High Garrett area, we have not been persuaded by the evidence received that there is significant local opposition to our draft recommendations, nor have we received evidence to suggest that the settlement is an integral part of the Bocking community. We are therefore confirming our draft recommendation to include High Garrett in Gosfield & Greenstead Green ward, as detailed below.

149 Under our final recommendations, Bocking Blackwater, Bocking North and Bocking South wards would have 7 per cent, 2 per cent and 9 per cent more electors per councillor than the district average respectively, and 5 per cent, 5 per cent and 7 per cent more than average by 2004. Braintree East, Braintree Central and Braintree South wards would have 23 per cent fewer, 3 per cent fewer and 2 per cent more electors per councillor than the district average currently, and 5 per cent more, 6 per cent more and 1 per cent fewer by 2004. Our proposals are illustrated on the large map inserted at the back of this report.

### **Panfield, Rayne and Three Fields wards**

150 The three wards of Panfield, Rayne and Three Fields are located in the western part of the district to the north-west of Braintree town. Panfield ward comprises the parishes of Panfield and Shalford, while Rayne ward comprises the Bardfield Saling, Great Saling and Rayne parishes. The two wards are each represented by a single councillor. Three Fields ward is represented by two councillors and contains Finchingfield, Great Bardfield and Wethersfield parishes. Under existing arrangements, Panfield, Rayne and Three Fields wards have 20 per cent fewer, 21 per cent more and 9 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the district average respectively (26 per cent fewer, 13 per cent more and 8 per cent fewer by 2004).

151 At Stage One the District Council proposed retaining the existing single-member Rayne ward, and combining Shalford parish with the existing Three Fields ward to create a new two-member Three Fields with Shalford ward. It also proposed that Panfield parish be combined with Bocking North ward and part of Bocking South ward to form a new Bocking North & Panfield ward, as detailed above. Under its proposed council size of 52, its proposed Bocking North & Panfield, Rayne and Three Fields with Shalford wards would have electoral variances of no more than 5 per cent from the district average both now and by 2004.

152 The Green Group proposed creating a new two-member Panfield & Rayne ward, comprising the existing single-member Panfield and Rayne wards, and retaining the existing Three Fields ward. Under their proposals Panfield & Rayne and Three Fields wards would have

6 per cent and 8 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the district average respectively by 2004.

153 The Liberal Democrats expressed general support for Option A of the District Council's consultation exercise, which proposed retaining Three Fields ward, and creating a revised single-member Rayne ward and a revised single-member Panfield ward comprising Panfield, Bardfield Saling and Great Saling parishes. Finchingfield, Great Bardfield and Wethersfield parish councils opposed the District Council's proposed Three Fields with Shalford ward, arguing that its proposals had not been consulted upon locally, and expressed support for either Option A or Option B of the Council's initial consultation exercise. Rayne Parish Council expressed support for the formation of a single-member Rayne ward. Panfield Parish Council and Councillor Walsh opposed the District Council's proposed Bocking North & Panfield ward, arguing that its proposals had not been consulted upon locally and that they would combine distinct rural and urban areas.

154 In our draft recommendations report we noted that there was significant support for retaining the existing Three Fields ward, and proposed this as part of our draft recommendations. We considered that the existing ward reflects community ties well and noted that, under a council size of 60, it would provide reasonable levels of electoral equality currently and in five years' time. We also noted that there was some support from local parishes and the Liberal Democrats for revised single-member Panfield and Rayne wards, as proposed under Options A and B of the Council's consultation exercise. We considered that this proposal had merit, as it would unite communities of a similar size and rural character and would create a separate ward for the significantly larger self-contained community of Rayne. We therefore proposed creating a single-member Panfield ward, comprising the four parishes of Bardfield Saling, Great Saling, Panfield and Shalford, and a single-member Rayne ward, comprising the parish of the same name. We recognised that the Green Group's proposed two-member Panfield & Rayne ward would also achieve a reasonable level of electoral equality, but we considered that our proposals would better reflect community ties in this area.

155 At Stage Three the District Council and Braintree Constituency Labour Party expressed support for our proposed Panfield and Rayne wards. They proposed, however, creating a new two-member Four Fields ward, comprising the existing Three Fields ward together with Toppesfield parish. The Green Group, the Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats supported our draft recommendations for this area in their entirety, but the Liberal Democrats proposed renaming Panfield ward as Panfield with Shalford. Great Bardfield, Finchingfield and Wethersfield parish councils expressed support for our proposal to retain the existing Three Fields ward. Wethersfield Parish Council strongly opposed the District Council's proposals in this area, arguing that Toppesfield has no historic links with any of the villages in the proposed Three Fields ward and criticising the Council for not consulting the parishes concerned on their proposal. Panfield Parish Council reiterated their view that Panfield should not be combined with Bocking, and stated that they were pleased that their views had been taken into account by the Commission in its draft recommendations. Parish councillor Macnee (Rayne parish) supported our proposed Rayne and Panfield wards.

156 Having carefully considered the representations received, we note that there is significant support for our proposed Rayne and Panfield wards, and are content to endorse them as part of our draft recommendations. We have not been persuaded to change the name of Panfield ward, which we consider enjoys a degree of local support, with the exception of the District Council.

157 We also note that, with the exception of the District Council and the Braintree Constituency Labour Party, all the submissions received regarding this area expressed support for our proposed Three Fields ward. In the light of this evidence, as well as evidence received at Stage One, we have not been persuaded to amend our draft recommendations for Three Fields ward. We have noted Wethersfield Parish Council's view that Toppesfield shares no links with the other villages in Three Fields ward and we have not been persuaded by the evidence supplied to combine these different communities. We remain of the view that the existing Three Fields wards would provide the most reasonable balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria, and are content to endorse it as part of our final recommendations.

158 Under our final recommendations Panfield, Rayne and Three Fields wards would have 1 per cent more, 1 per cent more and 9 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the district average respectively (7 per cent, 7 per cent and 9 per cent fewer by 2004).

### **Colne Engaine & Greenstead Green, Earls Colne and Gosfield wards**

159 These three wards are located in the central part of Braintree district. Colne Engaine & Greenstead Green ward covers the parishes of Colne Engaine and Greenstead Green & Halstead Rural, while Gosfield ward comprises the parish of the same name. Both wards are each represented by a single councillor. Earls Colne ward is represented by two councillors and contains the two parishes of Earls Colne and White Colne. Under existing arrangements, Colne Engaine & Greenstead Green, Earls Colne and Gosfield wards are over-represented, with 23 per cent, 9 per cent and 29 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the district average respectively. The level of electoral equality in each ward is expected to worsen over the next five years.

160 At Stage One the District Council proposed combining Gosfield and Greenstead Green & Halstead Rural parishes with Great Maplestead parish to create a single-member Gosfield & Halstead Rural ward. It proposed creating a single-member Pebmarsh, Bures & The Colnes ward, comprising Bures Hamlet, Colne Engaine, Pebmarsh and White Colne parishes. The Council proposed combining Earls Colne and Coggeshall parishes in a new Coggeshall & Earls Colne ward, as detailed above. Under the District Council's proposed council size of 52, Gosfield & Halstead Rural and Pebmarsh, Bures & The Colnes wards would have 4 per cent and 13 per cent more electors per councillor than the district average respectively (5 per cent fewer and 5 per cent more by 2004).

161 The Green Group proposed a revised Gosfield ward, comprising Gosfield and Greenstead Green & Halstead Rural parishes, and a revised Earls Colne ward, comprising the existing ward together with Colne Engaine parish. Under their proposed council size of 60, Gosfield and Earls Colne wards would have 6 per cent fewer and 7 per cent more electors per councillors than the district average respectively by 2004.

162 The Liberal Democrats proposed creating a new ward comprising Gosfield, Greenstead Green & Halstead Rural, Stisted and Bradwell parishes. They argued that while Gosfield is geographically closer to Bocking North, it has more in common with Greenstead Green & Halstead Rural parish. They also argued that Greenstead Green & Halstead Rural parish has “more in common with Gosfield than with the Maplesteads and Castle Hedingham parish”.

163 Gosfield Parish Council expressed a preference for retaining the existing arrangements, but stated that if change was necessary, it would favour the District Council’s proposals for the area. Earls Colne and White Colne parish councils expressed support for the creation of a two-member ward comprising Colne Engaine, Earls Colne and White Colne parishes, as proposed under Options A and B of the District Council’s consultation exercise. They opposed the District Council’s proposals, arguing that they would disrupt the historic links between communities in the Colne Valley and would unite dissimilar communities sharing few common interests. Colne Engaine Parish Council favoured retaining the existing warding arrangements, but stated that the District Council’s proposed Pebmarsh, Bures & The Colnes ward would be its second choice. It opposed being joined with Earls Colne parish, arguing that “a councillor could not successfully represent both a rural village and an urban conurbation”.

164 Councillor Broyd (Gosfield ward) generally opposed the District Council’s proposals. He argued that Gosfield ward could be amended to incorporate White Ash Green, Southey Green, Blackmore, Beazley End and the part of High Garrett within the Foley Corner junction. Councillor Boyce (Earls Colne ward) also opposed the District Council’s proposals for this area, arguing that they had not been consulted upon locally, would result in the creation of large rural wards and would unite the two distinct communities of Earls Colne and Coggeshall in one ward. She favoured creating a ward comprising Colne Engaine, White Colne and Earls Colne parishes, which she argued “are already geographically grouped together in the Colne Valley, and share many facilities such as schools, doctors’ surgeries, transport, sporting and social clubs”. She expressed support for Option B of the Council’s consultation exercise, although she argued that the proposal submitted by the Green Group also had merit. A local resident opposed the District Council’s proposed Coggeshall & Earls Colne ward, arguing that its proposals disregarded the historic community ties that exist between the parishes of Colne Engaine, Earls Colne and White Colne.

165 In our draft recommendations report we noted that there was a lack of consensus among the submissions received at Stage One. We noted, however, that the majority of the submissions received opposed the District Council’s proposals, on the basis that they would disrupt historic community ties, particularly in the Colne Valley area. We concurred with their assessment and did not consider that the District Council’s proposals would provide the most reasonable balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria in this area. We noted that Green Group, Councillor Boyce, White Colne and Earls Colne parish councils and Options A and B of the Council’s consultation exercise proposed creating a single-member ward comprising Colne Engaine, Earls Colne and White Colne parishes. We considered that this proposal would reflect community interests and identities well, in addition to providing for a reasonable level of electoral equality, and we put it forward as part of our draft recommendations. In order to reflect the totality of the area covered by this ward, we proposed naming it The Three Colnes.

166 Our draft recommendations for Coggeshall ward, as described above, limited the extent to which we were able to put forward the Liberal Democrats' proposals for this area. We considered that their view that Gosfield and Greenstead Green & Halstead Rural parishes have more in common with each other than with Bocking North ward or the parishes of Castle Hedingham ward had merit. We also considered Councillor Broyd's proposal to unite a number of small settlements with Gosfield in a new ward, but noted that such a proposal would require a significant amount of parish warding. We did, however, consider that his proposal to link Gosfield with part of the High Garrett area of Bocking North ward had merit. In the light of these considerations, we proposed creating a single-member Gosfield & Greenstead Green ward, comprising Gosfield and Greenstead Green & Halstead Rural parishes. We also proposed including the High Garrett area with the adjoining area of Gosfield rather than retaining its current links with the more urbanised area in the south of Bocking North ward. We recognised that our proposals for this area differed to an extent from the views put to us at Stage One and particularly welcomed further local views at Stage Three.

167 At Stage Three the District Council supported our proposed The Three Colnes ward. It proposed, however, combining the three parishes of Gosfield, Sible Hedingham and Castle Hedingham in a new three-member Hedinghams & Gosfield ward. It also proposed creating a new Braintree & Halstead Rural ward, comprising the part of Cressing parish to the east of the B1018, Bradwell and Stisted parishes, and West ward of Greenstead Green & Halstead Rural parish, as discussed previously.

168 The Green Group supported our draft recommendations in this area. The Conservative Group and the Liberal Democrats proposed a new single-member Colne Valley ward comprising Colne Engaine, Great Maplestead, Little Maplestead and Gestingthorpe parishes and Greenstead Green ward of Greenstead Green & Halstead Rural parish. They also proposed combining Gosfield parish with Stisted parish and West ward of Greenstead Green & Halstead Rural parish. Braintree Constituency Labour Party proposed a new The Hedinghams & Gosfield ward, identical to the District Council's proposed ward.

169 Councillor Broyd (Gosfield ward) supported the Conservative Group's and the Liberal Democrats' proposal to link Gosfield with White Ash Green and Stisted. He opposed the District Council's proposal to link Gosfield with Sible Hedingham and Castle Hedingham parishes, and any proposal linking the area to Bocking North. A local resident also supported the proposal to link the White Ash Green area with Gosfield. Greenstead Green & Halstead Rural Parish Council and a local resident submitted proposals identical to those submitted by the Conservative Group and the Liberal Democrats. Another local resident opposed the District Council's proposals for Greenstead Green & Halstead Rural parish and stated that, although they were not ideal, he would support the Conservative Group's and Liberal Democrats' proposals. He also suggested that White Ash Green could be combined with Gosfield parish.

170 Colne Engaine Parish Council requested no change to its existing warding arrangements, but argued that if this was not possible, it should be combined with Gestingthorpe, Great Maplestead and Little Maplestead parishes and Greenstead Green parish ward as proposed by the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats. Ten local residents opposed our proposed The Three Colnes ward and favoured the Conservatives' and Liberal Democrats' proposals for this area.

One local resident supported our proposed The Three Colnes ward and opposed the District Council's proposals.

171 We have carefully considered the representations received at Stage Three. We note that there continues to be a lack of consensus among the submissions received regarding the most appropriate warding arrangements for this area. In relation to the Three Colnes area, we note that the District Council and the Green Group supported our draft recommendation at Stage Three, as did Councillor Boyce, Earls Colne and White Colne parish councils at Stage One. We also recognise that there was some support expressed for the Conservative Group's and Liberal Democrats' proposals from Colne Engaine Parish Council and local residents. However, we note that their proposal would result in a detached ward, with Colne Engaine parish and Greenstead Green ward of Greenstead Green & Halstead Rural parish being separated from Great Maplestead and Little Maplestead parishes. As our *Guidance* states, "we take the view that the use of detached wards, other than to recognise the particular circumstances ... is undesirable, and we will not normally put them forward to the Secretary of State". We have found no evidence of any exceptional circumstances in this area and note a degree of support for our draft recommendations, and are therefore not persuaded to put forward the Conservative Group's and Liberal Democrats' proposals for this area.

172 As discussed previously, we do not consider that the District Council's proposed Braintree & Halstead Rural ward would adequately reflect community interests and identities and have not been persuaded to put it forward as part of our final recommendations. In addition, we do not consider that there is significant support for linking Gosfield with areas to its north, as proposed by the District Council and Braintree Constituency Labour Party at Stage Three. While we recognise concerns expressed at Stage Three regarding the level of electoral equality in our proposed Gosfield & Greenstead Green ward, we remain of the view that, taking the district as a whole, our proposals for this area remain the best achievable.

173 In the light of these considerations, and in the light our proposals in the adjoining areas, we are content to endorse our draft recommendations for this area as final. We remain of the view that our proposed Gosfield & Greenstead Green and The Three Colnes wards would provide the most reasonable balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria. Under our final recommendations Gosfield & Greenstead Green and The Three Colnes wards would initially have 20 per cent and 14 per cent more electors per councillor than the district average respectively, improving to 12 per cent and 8 per cent more by 2004. Our proposals for this area are illustrated on Map 2 and the large map at the back of this report.

### **Halstead St Andrew's and Halstead Trinity wards**

174 The town of Halstead is currently divided into two district wards, Halstead St Andrew's and Halstead Trinity, returning two councillors and three councillors respectively. Halstead St Andrew's ward, comprising the two parish wards of St Andrew's North and St Andrew's South, currently has 23 per cent more electors per councillors than the district average (and 43 per cent more by 2004), while Halstead Trinity ward, comprising the two parish wards of Holy Trinity North and Holy Trinity South, has 19 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the district average (25 per cent fewer by 2004).

175 At Stage One the District Council proposed amending the boundary between Halstead St Andrew's and Halstead Trinity wards to transfer the area to the south of the dismantled railway line to a revised Halstead Trinity ward. It also proposed reducing the number of councillors representing Halstead St Andrew's ward from three to two. Under its proposed council size of 52, Halstead St Andrew's and Halstead Trinity wards would have 6 per cent fewer and 19 per cent more electors per councillor than the district average respectively (10 per cent more in both wards by 2004).

176 The Green Group proposed amending the boundary between Halstead St Andrew's and Halstead Trinity wards to transfer the area to the north of Trinity Street and to the east of Chapel Hill, including all of Sloe Hill, to a revised three-member Halstead St Andrew's ward, as proposed under Options A and B of the Council's consultation exercise. Halstead Trinity ward would be represented by two councillors. Under a council size of 60, Halstead St Andrew's and Halstead Trinity wards would have 3 per cent and 1 per cent more electors per councillor than the district average respectively by 2004. The Liberal Democrats generally supported Option A for this area.

177 In our draft recommendations report we noted that while the District Council, the Green Group and the Liberal Democrats proposed different boundary amendments, their proposals would broadly retain the existing warding structure in Halstead town. We also noted that the Liberal Democrats' and Green Group's proposals, based on Options A and B, would result in a significant improvement in the level of electoral equality in both wards under a council size of 60, and we therefore put them forward as part of our draft recommendations. Under our draft recommendations, Halstead St Andrew's and Halstead Trinity wards would have 9 per cent fewer and 8 per cent more electors per councillor than the district average respectively, improving to 2 per cent and 1 per cent above the average by 2004.

178 At Stage Three the District Council generally supported our draft recommendations for this area, but proposed a minor amendment to the boundary between Halstead St Andrew's and Halstead Trinity wards, as proposed by Halstead Town Council. Halstead Town Council proposed that Trinity Church, Trinity School, Vicarage Court and 28-38 Chapel Hill should remain part of Halstead Trinity ward rather than being transferred to Halstead St Andrew's ward. The Green Group and Braintree Constituency Liberal Democrats also supported Halstead Town Council's proposed amendments. The Conservative Group proposed amending the boundary between the two wards to include a larger area around Holy Trinity Church and School in Halstead Trinity ward, including Trinity Street, part of Colne Valley Close, Beridge Road, The Pippins and Slough Farm Road.

179 Having carefully considered the representations received at Stage Three, we are content to endorse our draft recommendations for Halstead as final, subject to a boundary amendment as proposed by Halstead Town Council. We note that its proposal received significant support at Stage Three and consider that it would better reflect community ties than our draft recommendations, without adversely affecting electoral equality.

180 Under our final recommendations, Halstead St Andrew's and Halstead Trinity wards would have 10 per cent fewer and 10 per cent more electors per councillor than the district average

respectively, improving to 3 per cent and 1 per cent more than the average by 2004. Our proposals are illustrated on Map 2 and Map A5 in Appendix A.

### **Stour Valley Central, Stour Valley North and Stour Valley South wards**

181 The three wards of Stour Valley Central, Stour Valley North and Stour Valley South cover the rural north-eastern part of the district and are each represented by one councillor. Stour Valley Central ward comprises the five parishes of Belchamp Walter, Borley, Bulmer, Gestingthorpe and Wickham St Paul, while Stour Valley North ward covers the eight parishes of Ashen, Belchamp Otten, Belchamp St Paul, Foxearth, Liston, Ovington, Pentlow and Tilbury Juxta Clare. Stour Valley South ward contains the eight parishes of Alphamstone, Bures Hamlet, Great Henny, Lamarsh, Little Henny, Middleton, Pebmarsh and Twinstead. Under existing arrangements, Stour Valley Central and Stour Valley North wards have 21 per cent and 23 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the district average respectively (28 per cent and 30 per cent fewer by 2004), while Stour Valley South ward has 5 per cent more electors per councillor than the district average (3 per cent fewer by 2004).

182 At Stage One the District Council put forward a revised single-member Stour Valley North ward comprising the existing ward together with Borley, Ridgewell and Stambourne parishes. It proposed a revised Stour Valley South ward containing the remainder of Stour Valley Central ward, the whole of Stour Valley South ward (excluding Pebmarsh and Bures Hamlet parishes) and Little Maplestead parish. The District Council proposed combining Pebmarsh and Bures Hamlet parishes with Colne Engaine and White Colne parishes in a new Pebmarsh, Bures & The Colnes ward, as outlined above. The District Council's proposed Stour Valley North and Stour Valley South wards would have 9 per cent and 11 per cent more electors per councillor than the district average respectively (equal to the average and 3 per cent more by 2004), based on a council size of 52.

183 The Green Group proposed retaining the existing Stour Valley South ward and amending Stour Valley Central ward to include Great Maplestead and Little Maplestead parishes. They also proposed a revised two-member Stour Valley North ward comprising the existing ward, Yeldham ward, discussed later, and Ridgewell parish. Under the Green Group's proposals, Stour Valley Central, Stour Valley North and Stour Valley South wards would have 1 per cent more, 7 per cent fewer and 3 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the district average by 2004.

184 The Liberal Democrats proposed retaining the existing Stour Valley South ward, and creating a new ward comprising the nine parishes of Belchamp Otten, Belchamp St Paul, Belchamp Walter, Borley, Bulmer, Foxearth, Liston, Pentlow and Wickham St Paul, which in their view would "represent an established geographical and social community with an appropriate electorate". The Liberal Democrats also proposed combining Ashen and Ovington parishes with Upper Colne ward to create a new ward. Under their proposals Tilbury Juxta Clare parish would be combined with the currently Yeldham ward.

185 Gestingthorpe Parish Council stated that their prime concern was that district councillors should not be required to cover a larger number of parishes, which in their view would impose a heavier workload on councillors. Councillor Cooper (Gestingthorpe parish) strongly objected

to the District Council's proposals for the area, arguing that they would result in the creation of geographically large rural wards containing a large number of parishes, which would "make genuine representation almost impossible". Great Maplestead and Little Maplestead parish councils opposed the District Council's proposals to place their parishes in different wards, arguing that they share strong social community links and common interests.

186 Little Yeldham, Tilbury Juxta Clare & Ovington Parish Council opposed the District Council's proposals for their area, arguing that Tilbury Juxta Clare should remain in the same ward as Ovington and other rural villages, rather than forming part of Yeldham ward. Councillor Watkins (Little Yeldham, Ovington & Tilbury Juxta Claire Parish Council) also opposed combining the village community of Tilbury Juxta Clare parish with Yeldham ward and requested no change to the current arrangements. Foxearth & Liston Parish Council argued that their traditional links have been with other parishes in Stour Valley North ward, particularly with Pentlow parish.

187 In our draft recommendations report we noted that a number of submissions expressed concern, particularly regarding the District Council's proposals, that new warding arrangements would lead to the creation of larger rural wards and would not reflect community identities. While addressing the degree of over-representation that exists in this area makes larger wards to some degree inevitable, we considered that this would be particularly problematic under the District Council's proposals, which were based on a council size of 52. We noted that the Green Group and the Liberal Democrats both proposed retaining the existing single-member Stour Valley South ward, as also proposed under Options A and B of the District Council's consultation exercise. We considered this proposal had merit, as Stour Valley South ward would provide a reasonable level of electoral equality under our proposed council size of 60, and we put it forward as part of our draft recommendations.

188 We recognised that the existing Stour Valley North and Stour Valley Central wards, each represented by one councillor, are significantly over-represented under existing arrangements and therefore considered that some change was necessary in order to improve electoral equality in this area. We noted the Green Group's proposal to include Yeldham ward and Ridgewell parish (currently in Upper Colne ward) in a revised two-member Stour Valley North ward. We considered that their proposal would result in the creation of a large rural ward which would combine several distinct communities and which therefore would not be conducive to convenient and effective local government.

189 We noted the Liberal Democrats' proposals to create a single-member ward comprising Stour Valley North ward (excluding Ashen and Ovington parishes) and Stour Valley Central ward (excluding Gestingthorpe parish). We concurred with their assessment that these parishes share some common geographical and community ties and put forward their proposals as part of our draft recommendations, subject to some modifications. We noted Little Yeldham, Tilbury Juxta Clare & Ovington Parish Council's preference to retain Tilbury Juxta Clare and Ovington parishes together with the other small village communities of Stour Valley North ward, rather than combining them with Yeldham ward. We therefore proposed that Ovington and Tilbury Juxta Clare parishes should form part of a revised single-member Stour Valley North ward. To provide for improved electoral equality in Stour Valley North ward, we proposed combining

Wickham St Paul parish, currently located in the southern part of the existing Stour Valley Central ward, with Gestingthorpe parish in a new Hedingham & Maplestead ward, as detailed below.

190 At Stage Three the District Council proposed including Wickham St Paul parish in our proposed Stour Valley South ward. It proposed a revised Stour Valley North ward comprising the eight parishes of Belchamp Walter, Borley, Bulmer, Foxearth, Gestingthorpe, Great Maplestead, Little Maplestead and Liston. The Green Group supported our draft recommendations for this area. The Conservative Group and the Liberal Democrats generally supported our draft recommendations, but proposed including Bulmer, Belchamp Walter and Borley parishes in Stour Valley North ward and transferring Wickham St Paul parish to Stour Valley South ward.

191 Braintree Constituency Labour Party proposed a new Stour Valley ward, comprising the northern part of Stour Valley South ward (Lamarsh, Middleton, Little Henny, Great Henny and Twinstead parishes), the northern part of Stour Valley Central ward (Borley, Belchamp Walter and Bulmer parishes) and part of Stour Valley North ward (Liston, Foxearth and Belchamp Otten parishes). It proposed a new Bures & Maplesteads ward comprising the seven parishes of Alphamstone, Bures Hamlet, Gestingthorpe, Great Maplestead, Little Maplestead, Pebmarsh and Wickham St Paul, and a revised Upper Colne ward combining Birdbrook, Ridgewell and Stambourne parishes from the current ward with Ashen, Belchamp St Paul, Ovington and Pentlow parishes from Stour Valley North ward. Tilbury Juxta Clare parish would become part of a revised Yeldham ward. It noted that while these wards would contain a large number of parishes many of these were currently combined to form joint parish councils.

192 Foxearth & Liston Parish Council, Councillor O’Harley (Stour Valley North ward), Councillors Bragg, Pawsey and Watkins (Little Yeldham, Tilbury Juxta Clare & Ovington Parish Council) expressed support for our proposed Stour Valley North ward, and opposed the District Council’s proposals, arguing that they would sever traditional ties between the parishes in this area. The Hennys, Middleton & Twinstead Parish Council also supported our draft recommendations for this area, while Little Yeldham, Tilbury Juxta Clare and Ovington Parish Council supported our proposal to retain Tilbury Juxta Clare in the same ward as Ovington.

193 Bures Hamlet Parish Council supported our proposed Stour Valley South ward and argued that the proposal to link Bures Hamlet with Pebmarsh and the Colnes “is not desirable”. In a submission from Bulmer Parish Council, a number of parish councillors felt that rural areas “are going to be much worse off” under revised warding arrangements, while others expressed support for the Green Group’s proposals. Little Maplestead Parish Council noted that the District Council’s proposals would group the similar parishes of Little Maplestead, Great Maplestead and Gestingthorpe with areas to their north and east. However, it argued that the proposed ward is too large due to geographical spread and the greater demands placed on councillors by containing eight villages in one ward. Gestingthorpe Parish Council requested no change to the current Stour Valley Central ward, arguing that it is of a similar size to the other parishes in the ward and shares schooling links.

194 We have carefully considered the representations received at Stage Three and have not been persuaded to amend our draft recommendations in this area. We note that our draft recommendations received significant support from local parishes and that many of these submissions opposed the District Council's proposals on the grounds that they would disrupt community ties in the Stour Valley area. We concur with their assessment and remain of the view that our draft recommendations would provide the most reasonable balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria.

195 Under our final recommendations, Stour Valley North and Stour Valley South wards would both have 5 per cent more electors per councillor than the district average initially, and would improve marginally to 4 per cent fewer than the average by 2004.

### **Castle Hedingham and Sible Hedingham wards**

196 Castle Hedingham and Sible Hedingham wards are located in the centre of the district and are represented by one and two councillors respectively. Castle Hedingham comprises the three parishes of Castle Hedingham, Great Maplestead and Little Maplestead, and currently has 12 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the district average. Sible Hedingham contains the parish of the same name and also has 12 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the district average. The level of electoral equality in each ward is expected to worsen over the next five years.

197 At Stage One the District Council proposed creating a new two-member The Hedinghams ward, comprising Sible Hedingham and Castle Hedingham parishes. The Council proposed that Great Maplestead parish should form part of a new Gosfield & Halstead Rural ward and that Little Maplestead parish should be combined with parts of Stour Valley South and Stour Valley Central wards in a revised Stour Valley South ward, as also outlined above. The District Council's proposed The Hedinghams ward would have 1 per cent more electors per councillor than the district average (5 per cent fewer by 2004), based on a council size of 52.

198 The Green Group proposed a new three-member Sible Hedingham & Upper Colne ward comprising Castle Hedingham, Sible Hedingham, Birdbrook, Stambourne and Toppesfield parishes. As outlined above, they proposed including Great Maplestead and Little Maplestead parishes in a revised Stour Valley Central ward. The Green Group's proposed Sible Hedingham & Upper Colne ward would have 8 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the district average by 2004.

199 The Liberal Democrats favoured retaining the existing Castle Hedingham and Sible Hedingham wards. They opposed including Toppesfield parish in the same ward as Sible Hedingham parish, arguing that they do not share any community interests. They recognised that retaining the existing Sible Hedingham ward would result in a degree of over-representation but considered this preferable to forcing links with communities with which it has nothing in common.

200 Castle Hedingham Parish Council & Burial Board argued that the interests and concerns of Castle Hedingham would be more effectively met if it were linked with Sible Hedingham

parish. Great Maplestead and Little Maplestead parish councils opposed the District Council's proposals to divide the two parishes between different wards, arguing that they share very strong social links and community interests. They favoured retaining Great Maplestead, Little Maplestead and Castle Hedingham parishes in the same ward, as proposed under Options A and B of the District Council's consultation exercise. Gestingthorpe Parish Council opposed larger wards in rural areas, while Councillor Cooper (Gestingthorpe parish) opposed the District Council's proposal.

201 In our consultation report we noted that there was some support for retaining the parishes of the existing Castle Hedingham ward within the same ward, and in particular the links between Great Maplestead and Little Maplestead parishes. We considered that there is a natural affinity between the two parishes of Great Maplestead and Little Maplestead and were not persuaded that the District Council's proposals would adequately reflect community interests and identities in this area. We noted that the Liberal Democrats proposed retaining the existing Sible Hedingham ward. While we recognised their concern about limited links with parishes to its north, we were not persuaded to put forward this proposal as we considered that the high level of electoral inequality in this area should be addressed.

202 We noted that both the District Council and Castle Hedingham Parish Council & Burial Board proposed uniting the two parishes of Castle Hedingham and Sible Hedingham in one ward. We considered this proposal had some merit, as these two areas are very similar in nature and share a degree of commonality. We noted that the Green Group also proposed including these two parishes in a new ward, but were not persuaded that their proposed Sible Hedingham & Upper Colne ward, which would combine a number of distinct areas in a geographically disparate ward, would be conducive to convenient and effective local government.

203 In the light of these considerations, we proposed creating a new three-member Hedingham & Maplestead ward, comprising the existing Castle Hedingham and Sible Hedingham wards, which we considered would reflect the balance of the views expressed at Stage One. To further improve electoral equality in our proposed ward, we proposed also including Gestingthorpe and Wickham St Paul parishes from the current Stour Valley Central ward.

204 At Stage Three the District Council and Braintree Constituency Labour Party proposed combining the three parishes of Gosfield, Sible Hedingham and Castle Hedingham in a new three-member Hedinghams & Gosfield ward, as discussed previously. They proposed that the remainder of the existing Castle Hedingham ward, Great Maplestead and Little Maplestead parishes, should be combined with parts of the existing Stour Valley Central and Stour Valley North wards in a revised Stour Valley North ward (also outlined above). The Green Group supported our draft recommendations for this area. The Conservative Group and the Liberal Democrats proposed combining Sible Hedingham and Castle Hedingham parishes in a new two-member Hedingham ward. They proposed that Great Maplestead and Little Maplestead parishes be combined with Colne Engaine parish and Greenstead Green parish ward to form a new Colne Valley ward, as also outlined above.

205 Gestingthorpe Parish Council argued that they do not have particular ties with Castle Hedingham and Sible Hedingham parishes, and that their "ties with the Maplesteads are because

we form one church benefice”. They favoured remaining part of Stour Valley Central ward. Little Maplestead Parish Council stated that, in principle, they supported our proposed Heddingham & Maplestead ward, “particularly as this ward included Gestingthorpe with whom Little Maplestead has close links”. The Parish Council opposed the District Council’s proposals, arguing that they would cover a large geographical area covering eight diverse villages. Councillor O’Reilly-Cicconi (Castle Heddingham ward) opposed the District Council’s proposals for Castle Heddingham ward and generally opposed any proposal which would result in “large rural wards which would negate the councillor’s effectiveness”.

206 We have carefully considered the representations received at Stage Three and note that our proposals received a degree of support at Stage Three. As discussed previously, we have not been persuaded that the District Council’s and Braintree Constituency Labour Party’s proposals would provide the most reasonable balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria. Our proposals in the Stour Valley area, as discussed above, limit the extent to which we are able to consider the Conservative Group’s and Liberal Democrats’ proposals for this area. In addition, we note that our draft recommendations would result in levels of electoral equality comparable to those achieved under their proposals. Similarly, we have not been persuaded to adopt Gestingthorpe Parish Council’s proposals, which favoured retaining Gestingthorpe parish in Stour Valley Central ward, which would no longer exist under our proposed warding arrangements.

207 In the light of these considerations and our final recommendations for the adjoining areas of the district, we are content to endorse our draft recommendation for Heddingham & Maplestead ward as final. Under our final recommendations Heddingham & Maplestead ward would have 1 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the district average (8 per cent fewer by 2004).

### **Bumpstead, Upper Colne and Yeldham wards**

208 The three wards of Bumpstead, Upper Colne and Yeldham are located in the north-western part of the district and are each represented by one councillor. Bumpstead ward contains Helions Bumpstead, Steeple Bumpstead and Sturmer parishes, while Upper Colne ward contains Birdbrook, Ridgewell, Stambourne and Toppesfield parishes. Yeldham ward comprises the two parishes of Great Yeldham and Little Yeldham. Under existing arrangements, Bumpstead, Upper Colne and Yeldham wards have 14 per cent more, 13 per cent fewer and 4 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the district average respectively (5 per cent more, 21 per cent fewer and 8 per cent fewer by 2004).

209 At Stage One the District Council proposed a revised Bumpstead ward comprising the existing ward and Birdbrook parish, and a new Great Yeldham ward, comprising the current Yeldham ward together with Toppesfield parish. As described previously, the Council proposed including Stambourne and Ridgewell parishes in a revised Stour Valley North ward. The District Council’s proposed Bumpstead and Great Yeldham wards would, on the basis of a council size of 52, have 15 per cent and 4 per cent more electors per councillor than the district average respectively (6 per cent more and equal to the average by 2004).

210 The Green Group proposed retaining the existing Bumpstead ward and creating a new Sible Hedingham & Upper Colne ward, comprising Sible Hedingham and Castle Hedingham parishes and Upper Colne ward (excluding Ridgewell parish), as described above. They proposed including Yeldham ward and Ridgewell parish of Upper Colne ward in a revised two-member Stour Valley North ward, also as described previously. Under the Green Group's proposed council size of 60, Bumpstead ward would have 6 per cent more electors per councillor than the district average by 2004.

211 The Liberal Democrats generally supported Option A of the Council's consultation exercise, which proposed retaining the existing Bumpstead ward. However, they opposed including Toppesfield parish in the same ward as Sible Hedingham parish, arguing that these parishes do not have any community interests in common, and proposed creating a new ward comprising the parishes in the existing Upper Colne ward and Ashen parish, which in their view have close community links.

212 Stambourne Parish Council opposed the District Council's proposals, arguing that new wards would be created "at the expense of the rural communities", and favoured retaining the existing Upper Colne ward, consisting of parishes which are all located around the River Colne. Great Yeldham Parish Council supported the District Council's proposal to include Toppesfield parish in a revised Yeldham ward. It also expressed support for including Tilbury Juxta Clare parish in Yeldham ward, as proposed under Options A and B of the District Council's consultation exercise. Little Yeldham, Tilbury Juxta Clare & Ovington Parish Council opposed the District Council's proposals for their area, arguing that Tilbury Juxta Clare should remain in the same ward as Ovington parish and other rural villages, rather than forming part of Yeldham ward. Councillor Watkins (Little Yeldham, Ovington & Tilbury Juxta Claire Parish Council) also opposed combining Tilbury Juxta Clare parish with Yeldham ward. Sturmer Parish Council opposed proposals which would require "district councillors in rural areas to cover more villages than at present".

213 In our draft recommendations report we stated that we did not consider that the District Council's proposals for this area would adequately reflect the statutory criteria under our proposed council size of 60, and were not persuaded to put them forward as part of our draft recommendations. We were also not persuaded to put forward the Green Group's proposed Sible Hedingham & Upper Colne ward, which we considered would result in the creation of a large, disparate ward comprising several distinct communities. We noted that the Green Group and the Liberal Democrats both supported retaining the existing Bumpstead ward. We recognised that Bumpstead is a relatively isolated ward containing well-defined communities and note that, under a council size of 60, the existing ward would have a reasonable level of electoral equality both now and in five years' time. We therefore proposed retaining the existing Bumpstead ward as part of our draft recommendations.

214 As stated previously, we considered that the Liberal Democrats' proposals for the Upper Colne and Stour Valley areas reflected community ties well. In particular, we considered that Ashen parish has strong communication and geographical links with the parishes to the south, and proposed including it in a revised single-member Upper Colne ward. We received several proposals for the existing Yeldham ward at Stage One, but noted that our proposals in the

adjoining areas of Upper Colne and the Stour Valley limited the extent to which we were able to consider alternative proposals. We also noted that the existing Yeldham ward comprises two parishes with strong communications and community links and that, under a council size of 60, it would have reasonable levels of electoral equality both now and in five years' time. In the light of these considerations, we proposed retaining the existing Yeldham ward.

215 At Stage Three the District Council supported our proposal to retain the existing Bumpstead ward, but it put forward two alternative proposals for Upper Colne and Yeldham wards. The District Council proposed a substantially revised Upper Colne ward comprising Ashen, Belchamp Otten, Belchamp St Paul, Birdbrook, Ovington, Pentlow, Ridgewell and Stambourne parishes, and transferring Tilbury Juxta Clare parish to Yeldham ward. Alternatively, the Council stated it would be prepared to accept our draft recommendation to retain the existing Yeldham ward, provided that Tilbury Juxta Clare parish was transferred to a revised Upper Colne ward.

216 The Green Group, the Conservative Group and the Liberal Democrats supported our draft recommendations for Bumpstead, Upper Colne and Yeldham wards. Braintree Constituency Labour Party proposed a revised Upper Colne ward comprising the seven parishes of Birdbrook, Stambourne, Ridgewell, Ashen, Ovington, Belchamp St Paul and Pentlow, and transferring Tilbury Juxta Clare parish to a revised Yeldham ward.

217 Birdbrook Parish Council expressed full agreement with our proposed Upper Colne ward. Councillor Bolton (Upper Colne ward) also supported our proposed Upper Colne ward, arguing that "the proposed new ward has much to commend in its composition, communication, geographical location, close community and rural links". Sturmer Parish Council supported our draft recommendation to retain the existing Bumpstead ward. Councillor Pawsey (Little Yeldham, Ovington and Tilbury Juxta Clare Parish Council) supported the retention of the existing Yeldham ward.

218 Having considered the representations received, we note that our proposals received a significant level of support at Stage Three. We have carefully considered the District Council's and Braintree Constituency Labour Party's proposals for this area and note that our proposed Stour Valley North ward, discussed above, limits the extent to which we are able to consider their proposals. We note that the District Council's alternative option for this area would retain the existing Yeldham ward, as proposed under our draft recommendations, but note that under such an arrangement their proposed Upper Colne ward would have 13 per cent more electors per councillor than the district average, which in our view would be an unreasonably high level of electoral inequality, given the alternative warding options available for this area.

219 We are content, therefore, to confirm our draft recommendations for this area as final. Under our final recommendations Upper Colne and Yeldham wards would have 3 per cent more and 4 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the district average (6 per cent and 8 per cent fewer by 2004). Bumpstead ward would initially have 14 per cent more electors per councillor than the district average, improving to 5 per cent more by 2004.

## **Electoral Cycle**

220 At Stage One we received five representations regarding the District Council’s electoral cycle. The District Council argued that the existing electoral cycle of whole-council elections every four years “is clearly understood by the electorate and the Council administers its elections effectively and efficiently”. It also stated that there was all-party support for its proposal to retain the existing system. The Liberal Democrats, Rayne Parish Council, Councillor Boyce (Earls Colne ward) and Foxearth & Liston Parish Council also supported retaining the existing electoral cycle. White Colne Parish Council stated that it had “no views on the frequency of elections or a proportion of members retiring every year”.

221 In our draft recommendations report we noted that there appeared to be a majority view that the present electoral cycle should be retained and we therefore proposed no change to the current electoral cycle of whole-council elections for the District Council.

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

## **Conclusions**

223 Having carefully considered all the representations and evidence received in response to our consultation report, we have decided substantially to endorse our draft recommendations, subject to the following amendments:

- In the south-east of the district, we propose a revised two-member Kelvedon ward, a two-member Coggeshall & North Feering ward and single-member Bradwell, Silver End & Rivenhall and Cressing & Stisted wards, based on a combination of the proposals submitted at Stage Three.
- We propose amending the boundary between Braintree South and Braintree Central wards, to provide for improved electoral equality.
- We propose that our proposed Braintree Blackwater and Witham Central wards should be renamed Bocking Blackwater and Witham Chipping Hill & Central, respectively.

224 We conclude that, in Braintree:

- there should be 60 councillors, as at present;
- there should be 30 wards, three fewer than at present;
- the boundaries of 27 of the existing wards should be modified;
- the Council should continue to hold whole-council elections every four years.

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

*Figure 4: Comparison of Current and Recommended Electoral Arrangements*

	1999 electorate		2004 forecast electorate	
	Current arrangements	Final recommendations	Current arrangements	Final recommendations
Number of councillors	60	60	60	60
Number of wards	33	30	33	30
Average number of electors per councillor	1,658	1,658	1,838	1,838
Number of wards with a variance more than 10 per cent from the average	23	10	23	3
Number of wards with a variance more than 20 per cent from the average	13	4	18	0

226 As Figure 4 shows, our recommendations would result in a reduction in the number of wards with an electoral variance of more than 10 per cent from 23 to 10. By 2004, only three wards are forecast to vary by more than 10 per cent from the average for the district. We conclude that our recommendations would best meet the need for electoral equality, having regard to the statutory criteria.

**Final Recommendation**  
 Braintree District Council should comprise 60 councillors serving 30 wards, as detailed and named in Figures 1 and 2, and illustrated on Map 2 and in Appendix A. The Council should continue to hold whole-council elections every four years.

**Parish and Town Council Electoral Arrangements**

227 In undertaking reviews of electoral arrangements, we are required to comply as far as is reasonably practicable with the provisions set out in Schedule 11 to the 1972 Act. The Schedule provides that if a parish is to be divided between different district wards, it must also be divided into parish wards, so that each parish ward lies wholly within a single ward of the district. Accordingly, in our draft recommendations report we proposed consequential changes to the warding arrangements for Witham, Kelvedon, Feering and Halstead parishes to reflect the proposed district wards.

228 The town of Witham is currently served by 16 councillors representing five wards: Central ward (represented by two councillors), Chipping Hill ward (three councillors), North ward (four councillors), South ward (four councillors) and West ward (three councillors).

229 In our draft recommendations we proposed that the town should in future be divided between four district wards – Witham Central, Witham North, Witham South and Witham West. In order to reflect revised district warding arrangements we proposed that the number of town councillors and boundaries of Witham Central, Witham South and Witham West wards should be amended. Witham North would remain unchanged, and Witham Chipping Hill ward would no longer exist.

230 At Stage Three we received a degree of support for our proposals in Witham town. Witham Town Council, Councillors Barlow and Jones (Witham town) and two local residents proposed that Witham Central was should be renamed Witham Chipping Hill & Central to reflect the historic significance of Chipping Hill. In addition, a local resident proposed that Witham West and Witham South wards should each be divided into two parish wards, represented by three and two councillors respectively.

231 As discussed previously, we have endorsed our draft recommendations for district warding arrangements in Witham town, subject to renaming Witham Central ward as Witham Chipping Hill & Central ward. In the absence of a detailed proposal or significant support for the creation of additional wards in Witham town, we have not been minded to put forward the local resident’s proposal to divide Witham West and Witham South wards. We consider that if there was support for such a change, it could be carried out as part of a future parishing review. As a consequence, we are content to confirm our proposals for town council warding arrangements in Witham as final, subject to the aforementioned name change.

**Final Recommendation**  
Witham Town Council should comprise 16 councillors, as at present, representing four wards: Chipping Hill & Central ward (returning three councillors), North ward (three councillors), South ward (five councillors) and West ward (five councillors). The parish ward boundaries should reflect the proposed district ward boundaries in the area, as illustrated and named on Map A2 in Appendix A.

232 The parish of Kelvedon is currently served by 11 councillors and is not warded. In our draft recommendations we proposed that the parish should be divided between the two district wards of Kelvedon and Silver End & Rivenhall. As a consequence of our draft recommendations we proposed that Kelvedon parish should also be divided into two parish wards, Kelvedon North and Kelvedon South, reflecting the proposed district ward boundary. As a result, we also proposed that each ward should have separate representation on the parish council.

233 At Stage Three, Kelvedon and Silver End parish councils, Councillor Davidson (Kelvedon ward) and 14 local residents opposed our proposal to include part of Kelvedon parish in Silver End & Rivenhall ward for district warding purposes, as discussed previously. We also received

a petition containing 50 signatures which opposed our proposals for the existing Kelvedon ward and supported Kelvedon Parish Council’s proposals for the area. We have been persuaded to amend our draft recommendations in this area and propose creating a revised Kelvedon ward comprising the whole of Kelvedon parish and part of Feering parish, as also discussed above. As a result, it is no longer necessary to ward Kelvedon parish for district warding purposes and we propose that the existing electoral arrangements for the parish should be retained.

234 The parish of Feering is currently served by nine councillors and is not warded. In our draft recommendations we proposed that the parish should be divided between the two district wards of Kelvedon and Cressing & Coggeshall. As a consequence of our draft recommendations we proposed that Feering parish should also be divided into two parish wards, Feering North (returning one councillor) and Feering South (returning eight councillors), reflecting the proposed district ward boundary.

235 At Stage Three there was some opposition to our proposed Kelvedon and Coggeshall & Cressing district wards. As discussed previously, we have been persuaded to amend our proposals in this area and propose a two-member Coggeshall & North Feering ward, containing the northern part of Feering parish. As a consequence of our proposals in this area, we are confirming our draft recommendations for warding arrangements in Feering parish as final.

**Final Recommendation**  
Feering Parish Council should comprise nine councillors, as at present, representing two wards: Feering North (returning one councillor) and Feering South (eight councillors). The boundary between the two parish wards should reflect the proposed district ward boundary, as illustrated and named on Map A3 in Appendix A.

236 Halstead Town Council is currently represented by 12 councillors and is divided into four parish council wards – Holy Trinity North, Holy Trinity South, St Andrew’s North and St Andrew’s South – each returning three town councillors. In our draft recommendations report we proposed modifying the district ward boundary between Halstead St Andrew’s and Halstead Trinity wards. As a consequence of our proposals, we proposed modifying the level of representation of, and the boundary between, Holy Trinity North and St Andrew’s North parish wards to reflect the proposed district ward boundary. Holy Trinity South and St Andrew’s South wards would remain unchanged.

237 At Stage Three, our draft proposals in the Halstead area received broad support, although a number of respondents supported Halstead Town Council’s proposal to transfer Holy Trinity Church and School from Halstead St Andrew’s to Halstead Trinity ward. In addition, Saffron Walden Constituency Labour Party proposed that the four-member St Andrew’s North town council ward should be divided between two two-member town council wards so that this area does not dominate the interests of other wards.

238 As discussed previously, we are broadly confirming our draft recommendations for the Halstead area as final, subject to the minor boundary amendment proposed by Halstead Town

Council. As a consequence of our proposals, we are content to confirm our draft recommendations for warding arrangements in Halstead town as final, subject to the boundary amendment described above. In the absence of a detailed proposal or significant evidence supporting the creation of additional wards in Halstead town, we have not been persuaded to put forward Saffron Walden Constituency Labour Party's proposals for this area. We consider that if there was support for such a change, it could be carried out as part of a future parishing review.

**Final Recommendation**

Halstead Town Council should comprise 12 councillors, as at present, representing four wards: Holy Trinity North (returning two councillors), Holy Trinity South (three councillors), St Andrew's North (four councillors) and St Andrew's South (three councillors). The boundary between the four parish wards should reflect the proposed district ward boundary, as illustrated and named on Map A4 in Appendix A.

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

**Final Recommendation**

For parish and town councils, whole-council elections should continue to take place every four years, on the same cycle as that of the District Council.

*Map 2: The Commission's Final Recommendations for Braintree*

## 6 NEXT STEPS

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

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

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

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



## APPENDIX A

### **Final Recommendations for Braintree: Detailed Mapping**

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

**Map A1** illustrates, in outline form, the proposed ward boundaries within the district and indicates the areas which are shown in more detail in Maps A2, A3 and A4 and the large map at the back of the report.

**Map A2** illustrates the proposed warding of Witham town.

**Map A3** illustrates the proposed ward boundary between Kelvedon and Coggeshall & North Feering wards and between the proposed Feering North and Feering South parish wards.

**Map A4** illustrates the proposed ward boundary between Halstead St Andrew's and Halstead Trinity wards.

The **large map** inserted in the back of the report illustrates the existing and proposed warding arrangements for Braintree, Bocking and Great Notley.

*Map A1: Draft Recommendations for Braintree: Key Map*

*Map A2: Proposed Warding of Witham Town*

*Map A3: Proposed Ward Boundary between Kelvedon and Coggeshall & North Feering Wards*

*Map A4: Proposed Ward Boundary between Halstead St Andrew's and Halstead Trinity Wards*



## APPENDIX B

### Draft Recommendations for Braintree

Our final recommendations, detailed in Figures 1 and 2, differ from those we put forward as draft recommendations in respect of a number of wards, where our draft proposals are set out below. The only other change from draft to final recommendations, which is not included in Figures B1 and B2, is that we propose to rename Braintree Blackwater ward as Bocking Blackwater, and Witham Central ward as Witham Chipping Hill & Central.

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

Ward name	Constituent areas
Braintree Central	Bocking South ward (part); Braintree Central ward (part); Braintree West ward (part)
Braintree South	Black Notley ward (part – Black Notley parish (part)); Braintree Central ward (part); Braintree West ward (part)
Cressing & Coggeshall	Cressing ward (Cressing parish); Coggeshall ward (Bradwell, Coggeshall and Stisted parishes); Kelvedon ward (part – Feering North ward of Feering parish as proposed)
Halstead St Andrew's	Halstead St Andrew's ward (St Andrew's North and St Andrew's South wards of Halstead parish); Halstead Trinity ward (part – Holy Trinity North ward of Halstead parish (part))
Halstead Trinity	Halstead Trinity ward (part – Holy Trinity North ward (part) and Holy Trinity South ward of Halstead parish)
Kelvedon	Kelvedon ward (part – Kelvedon South ward of Kelvedon parish as proposed and Feering South ward of Feering parish as proposed)
Silver End & Rivenhall	Kelvedon ward (part – Kelvedon North ward of Kelvedon parish as proposed); Witham Silver End & Rivenhall ward (Rivenhall and Silver End parishes)

*Figure B2: The Commission's Draft Recommendations: Number of Councillors and Electors by Ward*

Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (1999)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2004)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
Braintree Central	3	4,348	1,449	-13	5,241	1,747	-5
Braintree South	3	5,525	1,842	11	6,009	2,003	9
Cressing & Coggeshall	3	5,847	1,949	18	5,976	1,992	8
Halstead St Andrew's	3	4,540	1,513	-9	5,705	1,902	3
Halstead Trinity	2	3,595	1,798	8	3,672	1,836	0
Kelvedon	2	3,724	1,862	12	3,834	1,917	4
Silver End & Rivenhall	2	3,585	1,793	8	3,595	1,798	-2

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

*Notes: 1 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.*

*2 The figures shown differ from those produced in our draft recommendations report due to revisions to electorate forecasts by the District Council at Stage Three.*