

Draft recommendations on the  
future electoral arrangements for  
St Helens

*September 2002*

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# WHAT IS THE BOUNDARY COMMITTEE FOR ENGLAND?

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

Members of the Committee are:

Pamela Gordon (Chair)  
Professor Michael Clarke CBE  
Robin Gray  
Joan Jones  
Ann M Kelly  
Professor Colin Mellors

Archie Gall (Director)

We are required by law to review the electoral arrangements of every principal local authority in England. Our aim is to ensure that the number of electors represented by each councillor in an area is as nearly as possible the same, taking into account local circumstances. We can recommend changes to ward boundaries, the number of councillors and ward names. We can also recommend changes to the electoral arrangements of parish councils.



## SUMMARY

The Local Government Commission for England (LGCE) began a review of the electoral arrangements for St Helens on 4 December 2001. As a consequence of the transfer of functions referred to earlier, it falls to us to complete the work of the LGCE.

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

We found that the current arrangements provide unequal representation of electors in St Helens:

- **in eight of the 18 wards the number of electors represented by each councillor varies by more than 10% from the average for the borough and four wards vary by more than 20% from the average;**
- **by 2006 this situation is expected to worsen, with the number of electors per councillor forecast to vary by more than 10% from the average in 10 wards and by more than 20% in four wards.**

Our main draft recommendations for future electoral arrangements (see Tables 1 and 2 and paragraphs 123-124) are that:

- **St Helens Borough Council should have 48 councillors, six fewer than at present;**
- **there should be 16 wards, instead of 18 as at present;**
- **the boundaries of all of the existing wards should be modified, resulting in a net reduction of two, and no wards should retain their existing boundaries.**

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

- **In 13 of the proposed 16 wards the number of electors per councillor would vary by no more than 10% from the borough average.**
- **This improved level of electoral equality is expected to improve further, with the number of electors per councillor in 15 wards expected to vary by no more than 10% from the average for the borough in 2006.**

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

- **revised warding arrangements and the redistribution of councillors for the parishes of Bold, Rainhill and Windle;**
- **revised warding arrangements and an increase in the number of councillors serving Seneley Green Parish Council;**
- **revised warding arrangements and a decrease in the number of councillors serving Eccleston Parish Council.**

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

- **We will consult on these proposals for eight weeks from 3 September 2002. We take this consultation very seriously. We may decide to move away from our draft recommendations in the light of comments or suggestions that we receive. It is therefore important that all interested parties let us have their views and evidence, *whether or not* they agree with our draft recommendations.**
- **After considering local views, we will decide whether to modify our draft recommendations. We will then submit our final recommendations to The Electoral Commission, which will be responsible for implementing change to local authority electoral arrangements.**
- **The Electoral Commission will decide whether to accept, modify or reject our final recommendations. It will also determine when any changes come into effect.**

You should express your views by writing directly to us at the address below by 28 October 2002:

**Team Leader  
St Helens Review  
The Boundary Committee for England  
Trevelyan House  
Great Peter Street  
London SW1P 2HW**

*Table 1: Draft recommendations: summary*

	<b>Ward name</b>	<b>Number of councillors</b>	<b>Constituent areas</b>	<b>Large map reference</b>
1	Billinge & Seneley Green	3	Billinge Chapel End parish; the proposed Seneley Green North parish ward of Seneley Green parish	2
2	Blackbrook	3	the proposed Seneley Green South parish ward of Seneley Green parish; part of Blackbrook ward; part of Broad Oak ward; part of Haydock ward	2
3	Bold	3	Bold parish; the proposed Rainhill East parish ward of Rainhill parish; part of West Sutton ward	4
4	Eccleston	3	Eccleston South parish ward; Eccleston West parish ward; Eccleston East parish ward; part of Grange Park ward; part of Queen's Park ward	1, 2 & 4
5	Haydock	3	the proposed Seneley Green East parish ward of Seneley Green parish; part of Haydock ward	2 & 3
6	Moss Bank	3	Moss Bank ward; part of Blackbrook ward	2
7	Newton East	3	part of Newton East ward; part of Newton West ward	3
8	Newton West	3	part of Newton East ward; part of Newton West ward	3 & 4
9	Newtown	3	part of Grange Park ward; part of Queens Park ward; part of Thatto Heath ward	2 & 4
10	Parr	3	part of Broad Oak ward; part of Sutton & Bold ward	2 & 4
11	Rainford	3	Rainford ward; the proposed Windle North parish ward of Windle parish; part of Windle ward	1 & 2
12	Rainhill	3	the proposed Eccleston South East parish ward of Eccleston parish; Rainhill South, Rainhill West and the proposed Rainhill North parish wards of Rainhill parish; part of Thatto Heath ward	4
13	Sutton	3	part of Marshall's Cross ward; part of Sutton and Bold ward	4
14	Thatto Heath	3	part of Grange Park ward; part of Thatto Heath ward; part of West Sutton ward	4
15	Town Centre	3	part of Marshall's Cross ward; part of Grange Park ward; part of Parr & Hardshaw ward; part of Queen's Park ward; part of West Sutton ward	2 & 4
16	Windle	3	the proposed Windle South parish ward of Windle parish; part of Windle ward; part of Queen's Park ward	1 & 2

*Notes: 1 The wards on the above table are illustrated on Map 2, in Appendix A, and on the large maps.*

*2 We have made a number of minor boundary amendments to ensure that existing ward boundaries adhere to ground detail. These changes do not affect any electors.*

Table 2: Draft recommendations for St Helens

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2001)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2006)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
1	Billinge & Seneley Green	3	9,457	3,152	11	9,547	3,182	9
2	Blackbrook	3	8,818	2,939	3	8,617	2,872	-1
3	Bold	3	8,222	2,741	-4	8,767	2,922	0
4	Eccleston	3	8,920	2,973	5	8,833	2,944	1
5	Haydock	3	8,956	2,985	5	9,243	3,081	6
6	Moss Bank	3	9,038	3,013	6	8,977	2,992	3
7	Newton East	3	8,272	2,757	-3	8,256	2,752	-5
8	Newton West	3	7,617	2,540	-11	8,007	2,669	-8
9	Newtown	3	8,953	2,984	5	8,855	2,952	1
10	Parr	3	8,472	2,824	-1	9,224	3,075	6
11	Rainford	3	7,083	2,361	-17	7,133	2,378	-18
12	Rainhill	3	8,338	2,779	-2	8,481	2,827	-3
13	Sutton	3	9,423	3,141	10	9,296	3,099	7
14	Thatto Heath	3	7,956	2,652	-7	8,728	2,909	0
15	Town Centre	3	8,835	2,945	4	9,490	3,163	9
16	Windle	3	8,147	2,716	-5	8,172	2,724	-6
	<b>Totals</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>136,507</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>139,626</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>
	<b>Averages</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>2,844</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>2,909</b>	<b>-</b>

Source: Electorate figures are based on information provided by St Helens Borough Council.

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

# 1 INTRODUCTION

1 This report contains our proposals for the electoral arrangements for the borough of St Helens, on which we are now consulting. We are reviewing the five metropolitan boroughs in Merseyside as part of our programme of periodic electoral reviews (PERs) of all 386 principal local authority areas in England. The programme started in 1996 and is currently expected to finish in 2004.

2 This is our first review of the electoral arrangements of St Helens. St Helens' last review was carried out by the Local Government Boundary Commission, which reported to the Secretary of State in April 1979 (Report no. 329).

3 In carrying out these metropolitan reviews we must have regard to:

- the statutory criteria contained in section 13(5) of the Local Government Act 1992 (as amended by SI 2001 no. 3692), i.e. the need to:
  - (a) reflect the identities and interests of local communities;
  - (b) secure effective and convenient local government; and
  - (c) achieve equality of representation.
- Schedule 11 to the Local Government Act 1972.

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

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

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

7 We are not prescriptive on council size. However, we believe that any proposals relating to council size, whether these are for an increase, a reduction or no change, should be supported by evidence and argumentation. Given the stage now reached in the introduction of new political management structures under the provisions of the Local Government Act 2000, it is important that whatever council size interested parties may propose to us, they can demonstrate that their proposals have been fully thought through, and have been developed in the context of a review of internal political management and the role of councillors in the new structure. 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 electorate should automatically result in an increase in the number of councillors, nor that changes should be made to the size of a council simply to make it more consistent with the size of other similar councils.

8 Under the provisions of the Local Government Act 1972 there is no limit on the number of councillors which can be returned from each metropolitan borough ward. However, the figure must be divisible by three. In practice, all metropolitan borough wards currently return three councillors. Where our recommendation is for multi-member wards, we believe that the number

of councillors to be returned from each ward should not exceed three, other than in very exceptional circumstances. Numbers in excess of three could result in an unacceptable dilution of accountability to the electorate and we have not, to date, prescribed any wards with more than three councillors.

9 The review is in four stages (see Table 3).

*Table 3: Stages of the Review*

Stage	Description
One	Submission of proposals to us
Two	Our analysis and deliberation
Three	Publication of draft recommendations and consultation on them
Four	Final deliberation and report to The Electoral Commission

10 Stage One began on 4 December 2001, when the LGCE wrote to St Helens Borough Council inviting proposals for future electoral arrangements. It also notified Merseyside Police Authority, the Local Government Association, the Lancashire Association of Town & Parish Councils, the Local Councils Association, parish councils in the borough, Members of Parliament with constituency interests in the borough, Members of the European Parliament for the North West Region, and the headquarters of the main political parties. It placed a notice in the local press, issued a press release and invited St Helens Borough Council to publicise the review further. The closing date for receipt of representations, the end of Stage One, was 25 March 2002.

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

12 We are currently at Stage Three. This stage, which began on 3 September 2002 and will end on 28 October 2002, involves publishing the draft proposals in this report and public consultation on them. **We take this consultation very seriously and it is therefore important that all those interested in the review should let us have their views and evidence, whether or not they agree with these draft proposals.**

13 During Stage Four we will reconsider the draft recommendations in the light of the Stage Three consultation, decide whether to modify them, and submit final recommendations to The Electoral Commission. It will then accept, modify or reject our final recommendations. If The Electoral Commission accepts the recommendations, with or without modification, it will make an Order. The Electoral Commission will determine when any changes come into effect.

## 2 CURRENT ELECTORAL ARRANGEMENTS

14 The borough of St Helens is industrialised but is broken up by large green belt areas surrounding the previously independent administrations which amalgamated to form St Helens Metropolitan Borough Council in 1974. The main industry is manufacturing glass and the borough contains the World of Glass, Haydock Park Racecourse, Billinge Beacon and Kings Moss, as well as being home to St Helens Rugby League Football Club, winners of the World Championship Cup in 2000. The borough has excellent transport links with the M6 and the M62 motorways both passing through the area.

15 The borough contains seven parishes, but much of the area is unparished. It experienced a decline in population of 4.9% between 1981 and 1991 but this decline has now stabilised, with a decline of just 1% between 1991 and 2000.

16 The electorate of the borough is 136,507 (December 2001). The Council presently has 54 members who are elected from 18 wards, the majority of which are relatively urban. All wards are three-member wards.

17 At present, each councillor represents an average of 2,528 electors, which the Borough Council forecasts will increase to 2,586 by the year 2006 if the present number of councillors is maintained. However, due to demographic and other changes over the past two decades, the number of electors per councillor in eight of the 18 wards varies by more than 10% from the borough average, four wards by more than 20% and one ward by more than 30%. The worst imbalance is in Billinge & Seneley Green ward where each of the councillors represent 36% more electors than the borough average.

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

*Map 1: Existing wards in St Helens*

Table 4: Existing electoral arrangements in St Helens

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2001)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2006)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
1	Billinge & Seneley Green	3	10,332	3,444	36	10,387	3,462	37
2	Blackbrook	3	6,986	2,329	-8	7,022	2,341	-7
3	Broad Oak	3	6,628	2,209	-13	6,662	2,221	-12
4	Eccleston	3	8,542	2,847	13	8,587	2,862	13
5	Grange Park	3	7,486	2,495	-1	7,740	2,580	2
6	Haydock	3	9,029	3,010	19	9,277	3,092	22
7	Marshalls Cross	3	5,960	1,987	-21	5,991	1,997	-21
8	Moss Bank	3	8,215	2,738	8	8,257	2,752	9
9	Newton East	3	7,598	2,533	0	7,638	2,546	1
10	Newton West	3	8,295	2,765	9	8,629	2,876	14
11	Parr & Hardshaw	3	5,940	1,980	-22	6,109	2,036	-19
12	Queens Park	3	7,002	2,334	-8	7,038	2,346	-7
13	Rainford	3	6,940	2,313	-8	6,976	2,325	-8
14	Rainhill	3	9,646	3,215	27	9,697	3,232	28
15	Sutton & Bold	3	7,463	2,488	-2	8,413	2,804	11
16	Thatto Heath	3	7,198	2,399	-5	7,815	2,605	3
17	West Sutton	3	6,318	2,106	-17	6,422	2,141	-15
18	Windle	3	6,929	2,310	-9	6,966	2,322	-8
	<b>Totals</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>136,507</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>139,626</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>
	<b>Averages</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>2,528</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>2,586</b>	<b>-</b>

Source: Electorate figures are based on information provided by St Helens Borough Council.

Note: The 'variance from average' column shows by how far, in percentage terms, the number of electors per councillor varies from the average for the borough. The minus symbol (-) denotes a lower than average number of electors. For example, in 2001, electors in Parr & Hardshaw ward were relatively over-represented by 22%, while electors in Billinge & Seneley Green ward were relatively under-represented by 36%. Figures have been rounded to the nearest whole number.



### 3 SUBMISSIONS RECEIVED

19 At the start of the review members of the public and other interested parties were invited to write to the LGCE giving their views on the future electoral arrangements for St Helens Borough Council and its constituent parish councils.

20 During this initial stage of the review, officers from the LGCE visited the area and met officers and members from the Borough Council. We are grateful to all concerned for their co-operation and assistance. The LGCE received 36 representations during Stage One, including three borough-wide schemes from the Borough Council, the Liberal Democrats and Rainhill Parish Council. All of the submissions may be inspected at our offices and those of the Borough Council.

#### **St Helens Borough Council**

21 The Borough Council proposed a council of 48 members, six fewer than at present, serving 16 wards, compared to the existing 18. This scheme provided a generally good level of electoral equality with just two wards, Rainford and Sutton, having electoral variances of more than 10% by 2006. The variance in Rainford ward would be 18% from the borough average. The Council consulted on three options before finalising its submission, Option 1, an 18-ward proposal, Option 2, another 18-ward proposal and Option 3, a 16-ward proposal.

#### **The Liberal Democrats**

22 The Liberal Democrats put forward a scheme of 18 wards based on a council size of 54 members, Option 2 of the Council's consultation exercise. This scheme provided an excellent level of electoral equality with one ward having an electoral variance of 10% and the rest having variances of less than 10% in 2006.

#### **The Labour Party**

23 St Helens North Labour Party supported the Council's scheme and considered that 'the 16 ward boundary proposal did the most to maintain electoral equality without too much of an adverse effect on communities'. Rainford Branch Labour Party also supported the Council's scheme and considered that 'this proposal out of several studied best represents Rainford as a natural community'.

24 Moss Bank Ward Branch Labour Party also supported the Council's submission. The Billinge & Seneley Green branch of St Helens North Labour Party supported the Council's submission and stated that 'the proposal put forward succeeds in putting together wards of near equal size and at the same time retaining wards which on the whole represent existing communities'.

#### **The Conservative Party**

25 St Helens North Conservative Association supported the Council's submission but proposed four amendments to the Council's scheme.

#### **Parish councils**

26 Representations were received from six parish councils. Rainhill Parish Council proposed a borough-wide scheme of 15 wards based on a council size of 45 members. This scheme would have three wards with electoral variances of over 10% by 2006, with two of these variances being over 20%. It also put forward amendments to the Council's proposal to be considered if

the Committee adopted the Council's scheme.

27 Billinge Chapel End Parish Council wished to maintain the existing ward of Billinge & Seneley Green with the addition of another borough councillor and wished for the parish to remain unwarded and for it to continue returning nine councillors. It supported Option 2 of the Council's consultation exercise, the 18-ward scheme proposed by the Liberal Democrats.

28 Bold Parish Council questioned the Council's projected electorate figures for Bold parish and proposed the re-warding of Bold parish to create four parish wards as opposed to the current two.

29 Eccleston Parish Council supported the Liberal Democrats 18-ward scheme. However, if the Committee adopted the Council's submission, then it proposed three amendments to the Council's scheme to provide a better reflection of community identity.

30 Seneley Green Parish Council supported Option 1 of the Council's consultation exercise for an 18-ward scheme and also wished to increase the number of parish councillors representing the parish from eight to 10.

31 Windle Parish Council supported the Council's proposed reduction from 18 wards to 16 wards but strongly opposed the splitting of Windle parish between borough wards.

### **Other representations**

32 A further 23 representations were received from local community groups and local residents.

33 Rainhill Civic Society opposed all of the Council's three consultation options but especially Option 2. It mentioned a fourth option which would leave Rainhill virtually unchanged and expressed a wish for its reintroduction. Rainhill Crime and Disorder Group opposed the splitting of Rainhill and questioned the amount and nature of consultation undertaken by St Helens Council. It considered that St Helens could be divided into 15 or 16 wards in such a way as to meet the Committee's requirements.

34 A resident supported the Council's submission and considered that 'the reduction down to 48 councillors also reflects the new council structure following the move to a cabinet system'. The resident also felt that 'it can be demonstrated that a council of this size can effectively represent and respond to the needs of the local community'. Another resident opposed all of the Council's consultation options for Rainhill and questioned the amount and nature of consultation undertaken by St Helens Council. She stated that Rainhill was a long-standing community and she did not wish to see the number of councillors increase.

35 Another resident opposed all of the Council's three consultation options and mentioned a fourth option which would leave Rainhill virtually unchanged. If change were necessary then the resident wished this fourth option to be adopted. Two further residents opposed all of the Council's consultation options for Rainhill and wished to retain Rainhill as a single entity.

36 A resident proposed either maintaining the existing ward pattern or abolishing all wards to leave a single ward to be represented by 18 councillors. Another resident offered some suggestions for wards but did not provide detailed maps or figures.

37 Fourteen proforma letters were also received opposing the proposed changes to Rainhill parish, and particularly Option 2 of the Council's consultation exercise.

## 4 ANALYSIS AND DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS

**38 We have not finalised our conclusions on the electoral arrangements for St Helens and welcome comments from all those interested relating to the proposed ward boundaries, number of councillors, ward names, and parish council electoral arrangements. We will consider all the evidence submitted to us during the consultation period before preparing our final recommendations.**

39 As described earlier, the prime aim in considering the most appropriate electoral arrangements for St Helens is to achieve electoral equality. In doing so we have regard to section 13(5) of the Local Government Act 1992 (as amended): the need to secure effective and convenient local government; reflect the identities and interests of local communities; and secure the matters referred to in paragraph 3(2)(a) of Schedule 11 to the Local Government Act 1972 (equality of representation). Schedule 11 to the Local Government Act 1972 refers to the number of electors per councillor being 'as nearly as may be, the same in every ward of the district or borough'.

40 In relation to Schedule 11, our recommendations are not intended to be based solely on existing electorate figures, but also on estimated changes in the number and distribution of local government electors likely to take place over the next five years. We must also have regard to the desirability of fixing identifiable boundaries and to maintaining local ties.

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

42 We accept that the achievement of absolute electoral equality for an authority as a whole is likely to be unattainable. However, we consider that, if electoral imbalances are to be minimised, the aim of electoral equality should be the starting point in any review. We therefore strongly recommend that, in formulating electoral schemes, local authorities and other interested parties should make electoral equality their starting point, and then make adjustments to reflect relevant factors such as community identity and interests. Five-year forecasts of changes in electorate must also be considered and we would aim to recommend a scheme which provides improved electoral equality over this five-year period.

### **Electorate forecasts**

43 Since 1975 there has been a 1.5% decrease in the electorate of St Helens borough. However, this decrease has shown signs of stabilisation in the last 10 years and the Borough Council submitted electorate forecasts for the year 2006, projecting an increase in the electorate of approximately 2.3% from 136,507 to 139,626 over the five-year period from 2001 to 2006. It expects most of the growth to be in the existing wards of Sutton & Bold and Thatto Heath due to substantial new developments in these areas, although a significant amount is also expected in the wards of Grange Park and Newton West. In order to prepare these forecasts, the Council estimated rates and locations of housing development with regard to structure and local plans, the expected rate of building over the five-year period and assumed occupancy rates. Advice from the Borough Council on the likely effect on electorates of changes to ward boundaries has been obtained.

44 We know that forecasting electorates is difficult and, having considered the Borough Council's figures, accept that they are the best estimates that can reasonably be made at this time.

## Council size

45 St Helens Borough Council presently has 54 members. The Borough Council proposed a council of 48 members, a reduction of six, the Liberal Democrats proposed retaining the current council size of 54, Rainhill Parish Council proposed a council of 45 members, a reduction of nine, and a resident proposed a council of 18 members, a reduction of 36 members.

46 In line with the modernisation agenda for the introduction of new political management schemes, St Helens introduced a 'Leader with Cabinet' executive form of decision-making in December 2001. Initially the Council considered that the existing council size of 54 members provided for effective and convenient local government as it 'anticipated an increase in formal meetings as a consequence of the development of the Overview and Scrutiny function under the new Constitution, which was to be adopted from 1 December 2001'. However, following the experience of operating under the new political management structure for three months, the Council considered that 'the size of the Council could be reduced without impacting on the efficiency of Members to meet the different demands of their new roles' and thus proposed a reduced council size of 48 members.

47 The new management system at the Council involved the introduction of the Overview and Scrutiny Commission, which comprises the 46 members who are not on the executive. This Commission initially met on a fortnightly basis but has moved to meeting every four weeks. The O & S Commission set up five panels consisting of 10 members each to deal with specific areas of policy and three of these panels have settled into a monthly cycle of meetings while the Budget Panel and the Call-in and Audit Panel meet less frequently. The Council argued that although the number of formal meetings had increased under the new arrangements, there were considerably more committees and sub-committees under the old system and that 'while most of those bodies did not meet as frequently as some of the recent creations, they involved a lot more members for longer periods'. For example, under the old system the Development Committee had 30 members, the Highways and Environmental Services, Education and Leisure Committees all had 28 members and there were also a number of task groups looking at specific areas.

48 The Council argued that 'there are also signs that certainly some of the Panels are moving away from the traditional Committee report approach and it is likely that as members become more clear as to how best to use the new system, they will be spending more time in gathering and feeding in the evidence of the community's views and less time in formal meetings considering officers' reports'. In conclusion, the Council considered that 'compared to the previous system, members are spending less time in formal meetings under the new Constitution, even allowing for the new Overview and Scrutiny arrangements. Furthermore, it is envisaged that as those arrangements bed in and the process develops, still less time will be required in formal meetings'. Therefore the Council concluded that a reduced council of 48 members would be capable of providing effective and convenient local government for the borough of St Helens.

49 The Liberal Democrats proposed retaining the current council size of 54 members as it considered that this would best enable councillors to deal with 'the increased responsibilities and workload of councillors over recent years'. The Liberal Democrats considered that these increased responsibilities included 'greater involvement with members of the public through a number of government initiatives, including Pathways areas, Sure Start projects and the increased number of tenants and residents associations', 'increased responsibilities on governing bodies of local schools given devolved budgets and greater autonomy for schools' and a 'greater involvement with health and social care issues' such as primary health trusts, joint working with health authorities and setting up local health forums. They also considered that since the Crime & Disorder Act councillors have 'had a far greater involvement with the

police, including attending police forums, crime prevention panels and regular meetings with the police on neighbourhood issues’.

50 The Liberal Democrats argued that while the expectation was that under the modernisation process councillors would attend fewer formal meetings and would become more involved with their communities ‘in reality this has not been the case’. They stated that ‘although councillors have become more involved with their communities, those who are not members of the Executive still have responsibilities within the Town Hall and are probably expected to attend more meetings than previously’. The Liberal Democrats considered that the Overview & Scrutiny Commission meant that all non-executive councillors were now members of at least one Scrutiny panel which meets on a regular basis and also stated that there are now ‘a greater number of presentations for members since the committee system ended’. The number of meetings attended by councillors in the last year of the old Committee system (1999-2000) was 151 and the projected number of meetings per year since the introduction of the new structure is at least 100, with Best Value working groups and Area Forums in addition. Finally, the Liberal Democrats concluded that ‘given all the circumstances our view is that there should be no reduction in the number of councillors’.

51 Rainhill Parish Council proposed a reduction in council size from 54 members to 45 members but in its original submission provided very little argumentation for this proposal. We wrote to the Parish Council requesting further evidence for its proposal and duly received further argumentation. Rainhill Parish Council considered that ‘the reduction to a 45-member council will in no way effect the efficient operation of the Council and it will still be able to more than adequately provide an effective service to all the residents of St Helens’. The Parish Council considered that the evidence submitted by the Council for its proposal for a reduction in council size to 48 members supports the Parish Council’s proposal. It considered that the Council had failed to identify a problem of low attendance at committee meetings and argued that ‘improved attendance at meetings would, we feel, make it possible to operate the existing committee structure with 45 councillors or possibly an even lower number of councillors’. Rainhill Parish Council pointed to the fact that the Council originally considered a scheme with 45 councillors as evidence that ‘both the Working Group and the Officers of St Helens Council considered that a 15-ward structure was viable’ and that this scheme was only discarded because it did not achieve good levels of electoral equality.

52 Referring again to the Council’s submission, Rainhill Parish Council stated that the ‘committee workload of councillors had reduced greatly over the past 12 months due to the move to a Cabinet/Executive structure’. It also pointed out that not only were meetings less frequent under the new arrangements, they were shorter and that ‘under the old system...full Council meetings would last two or three hours...under the present structure they last no more than 30 minutes on average’. Rainhill Parish Council stated that the attendance level at council meetings is very poor and argued that by increasing this attendance level the Council would be able to function with fewer members. It also considered that the seven parish councils of the borough represent an additional resource available to the Council and one which ‘if used as a communication channel to the community would further support the contention of the Parish Council that St Helens could effectively function with 45 councillors’.

53 A resident proposed a reduction in council size from 54 members to 18 members representing a single ward and argued that the councillors’ workload had been much reduced in recent years due to the transfer of such services as bus services, fire service, police force and council houses out of councillor’s direct control.

54 We carefully considered all the proposals for various council sizes submitted at Stage One and have been convinced by the Council’s proposal for a reduced council of 48 members. Although we recognise that the Council originally proposed retaining the existing council size of 54 members and can understand the Liberal Democrat’s reasons for supporting a council of this

size, we consider that the Council is right to have taken on board the experience of operating under the new political arrangements for three months. The Council has clearly given careful thought to the requirements of governance under the new structure and has taken what we consider to be an objective view on the number of councillors required for St Helens Council to provide effective and convenient local government. We share the view of the Council that members are spending less time in formal meetings than under the old management structure and concur that as these arrangements become more settled, the time demands on members with relation to formal meetings will decrease further. Rainhill Parish Council argued that attendance at council meetings is particularly low but although the absence rate for councillors is much higher than for local government employees we believe that this is a matter for local councils rather than for ourselves to address. We do not consider that a council size of 18, as proposed by a resident, would allow the Council to provide effective and convenient local government and, in light of this and the lack of any local support for such a council size, we have decided not to adopt this council size.

55 The Liberal Democrats and Rainhill Parish Council put forward extremely good submissions and we recognise the effort and work that has clearly gone into them, particularly Rainhill Parish Council's, in view of the lack of resources. However, having looked at the size and distribution of the electorate, the geography and other characteristics of the area, together with the responses received, we conclude that the achievement of electoral equality and the statutory criteria would best be met by a council of 48 members, as proposed by the Borough Council.

### **Electoral arrangements**

56 We have carefully considered all the representations received at Stage One, including the three borough-wide schemes from the Council, the Liberal Democrats and Rainhill Parish Council. The Council proposed a scheme consisting of 16 three-member wards, the Liberal Democrats proposed a scheme consisting of 18 three-member wards and Rainhill Parish Council proposed a scheme consisting of 15 three-member wards.

57 The Council stated that 'the changes proposed by the Council reflect, as far as possible, the local communities and existing parish ward boundaries subject to the requirement that electoral imbalance be kept to a minimum' and that 'the proposal of 16 wards represents a natural and coherent breakdown of the Borough'. The Council's scheme would provide a generally good level of electoral equality with just two wards having electoral variances of more than 10% by 2006 although one of these, Rainford, would be 18% below the borough average.

58 The Liberal Democrats stated that 'we submit our proposals as well thought out and achieving a ward layout that gives the people of St Helens a fair and easily recognisable structure'. They also argued against the Council's submission, stating that they considered the 16-ward scheme to be flawed on the criteria of electoral equality, the retention of local communities, the use of natural boundaries and the provision of secure, convenient and effective local government. The Liberal Democrat's scheme would provide a good level of electoral equality with just one ward having an electoral variance of 10% by 2006.

59 Rainhill Parish Council stated that it appreciated that 'its proposal would bring about some slight imbalance in ward electoral numbers but on the plus side our proposal would ensure that the new ward structure maintains the long established structure of individual communities in St Helens'. It opposed the Council's submission, arguing that 'St Helens Council has taken a simplistic approach when producing a proposal wholly based on producing a ward structure with an equality of electoral numbers in each ward'. It also passed the resolution that 'the Parish Council does not believe that any of the three options under consideration by St Helens MBC fit the criteria used by the LGCE in that they do not reflect the identities and interests of the local community nor do they take account that town and parish boundaries should form the building blocks for principal local authority electoral arrangements. ...The Parish Council would

recommend that the Rainhill parish ward of St Helens MBC remain coterminous with that of the parish boundary and that 15 wards of three councillors be the plan adopted for the borough of St Helens'. However, Rainhill Parish Council's scheme provided a relatively poor level of electoral equality with three wards having electoral variances of more than 10% by 2006, and two of these wards having variances of over 20%. Rainhill Parish Council did propose an alternative arrangement for the warding of the existing Rainhill ward, to be considered if we decided to adopt the Council's 16-ward scheme.

60 During Stage One we also received correspondence from an anonymous source which raised the possibility of the Council's scheme having been designed to provide political advantage for a particular party. While we realise that the adoption of a particular scheme or warding arrangement will inevitably have political implications, we do not take account of these implications and merely attempt to ensure that the scheme put forward fulfils our statutory criteria. In light of this piece of correspondence we have paid particular attention to the Council's submission to ensure that it complies with these statutory criteria and our *Guidance* and, having examined the scheme in some detail, we are content that, for the most part, it does.

61 Having considered all the representations carefully, and having decided to adopt the Council's proposed council size of 48 members as the most appropriate for St Helens, it has been very difficult for us to adopt any of the wards proposed by the Liberal Democrats or Rainhill Parish Council. Both of these proposals are based on different council sizes to the one that we are adopting and therefore the wards in both schemes are of different sizes to those required under a council of 48 members resulting in higher levels of electoral inequality and thus making it very difficult to incorporate individual wards from these schemes into a borough-wide scheme based on a different council size. We are basing our proposals on the Council's scheme as we consider that it provides the best balance between electoral equality, the recognition of community identity and interests, and the provision of effective and convenient local government, given the constraints of a uniform three-member ward pattern. However, we propose moving away from the Council's proposals in certain areas to improve electoral equality and provide what we consider to be a better recognition of community identity.

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

- (a) Billinge & Seneley Green, Moss Bank, Rainford and Windle wards;
- (b) Eccleston, Grange Park, Rainhill and Thatto Heath wards;
- (c) Marshalls Cross, Sutton & Bold and West Sutton wards;
- (d) Blackbrook, Broad Oak, Parr & Hardshaw and Queens Park wards;
- (e) Haydock, Newton East and Newton West wards.

63 Details of our draft recommendations are set out in Tables 1 and 2, and illustrated on Map 2, in Appendix A and on the large maps.

### **Billinge & Seneley Green, Moss Bank, Rainford and Windle wards**

64 These four wards are in the north of the borough. Billinge & Seneley Green ward comprises the parishes of Billinge Chapel End and Seneley Green, Rainford ward comprises the parish of Rainford, and Windle ward includes Windle parish and an unparished area. The number of electors per councillor in Billinge & Seneley Green and Moss Bank wards is 36% and 8% above the borough average respectively (37% and 9% above by 2006). The number of electors per councillor in Rainford and Windle wards is 8% and 9% below the borough average respectively (8% and 8% below by 2006).

65 In this area, the Council proposed a warding arrangement broadly based on the existing wards. It proposed retaining four wards generally based on the existing boundaries but with

some amendments to provide an improved level of electoral equality. It proposed that Billinge & Seneley Green ward be renamed Billinge ward and proposed moving the southern boundary of the ward to run along the East Lancashire Road. It also proposed transferring Pewfall and Ashtons Cross into a revised Haydock ward with the eastern boundary of Billinge ward running north from the East Lancashire Road between Old Garswood Hall Farm and Pewfall to Tithe Barn Hillock and then north east to join the borough boundary. The Council proposed a largely unchanged Moss Bank ward but proposed amending the eastern boundary of the existing ward to include electors in the Laffak, Peebles Avenue and Paisley Avenue estates. It proposed an amended Rainford ward incorporating a substantial proportion of the existing Windle ward and using the East Lancashire Road as the southern boundary except where this road passes through Eccleston parish. Using the East Lancashire Road as the boundary in this area would necessitate the creation of a parish ward of Eccleston parish containing approximately 25 electors and so the Council proposed following the Eccleston parish boundary until it rejoins the East Lancashire Road. Although this proposed ward would have a high level of electoral variance (17% below the borough average rising to 18% below by 2006) the Council argued that 'it would be unrealistic to try and 'stretch' the ward any further as this would be an unnatural association with other communities which are too far away and unrelated'. Finally, the Council proposed an amended Windle ward to be renamed Denton's Green ward, consisting of the majority of the existing Windle ward to the south of the East Lancashire Road. The proposed ward would follow the existing southern boundary of Windle ward apart from in two areas. In the south-western area of the ward the proposed boundary would run south down Alder Hey Road before running east behind the allotments and rejoining the existing boundary at the rear of Percival Way. In the south-eastern area of the ward the boundary would run down Lingholme Road before turning north-east on Boundary Road. It would then run south-east along Duke Street before running north-east along Crab Street to the junction with North Road where it would turn north and run up North Road to rejoin the existing boundary.

66 The Liberal Democrats put forward a revised warding arrangement for this area but retained the existing Rainford ward. They proposed a revised Moss Bank ward consisting of the majority of the existing ward but transferring electors to the south-east of the railway line into a new ward with the name to be decided by the public. The Liberal Democrats also proposed a slightly revised Windle ward which would have a slightly amended southern boundary. Finally, they proposed an amended Billinge ward which would be based on the existing Billinge & Seneley Green ward but with an amended eastern boundary that would transfer all the electors on and to the east of Victoria Road into a new ward.

67 Rainhill Parish Council put forward a revised warding arrangement for this area including a ward based on the existing Rainford ward but with an amended southern boundary. This amended Rainford ward would have an electoral variance of 25% below the borough average by 2006 and Rainhill Parish Council argued that 'in order to preserve the community and geographical nature of this ward no alternative exists other than for it to have lower electoral numbers'. It also proposed amended wards in the Billinge and Moss Bank areas, with the existing Windle ward being split between the surrounding wards.

68 Rainford Branch Labour Party supported the Council's submission as it considered that 'this proposal out of several studied best represents Rainford as a natural community'. The Billinge & Seneley Green branch of St Helens North Labour Party supported the Council's submission as it considered that 'the proposal put forward succeeds in putting together wards of near equal size and at the same time retaining wards which on the whole represent existing communities'. The Moss Bank ward branch of the Labour Party also supported the Council's submission.

69 The St Helens North Conservative Association supported the Council's submission but proposed certain amendments. It proposed that the existing boundary between the proposed Dentons Green and Rainford wards be retained and argued that 'there is nothing to be gained by the residents from dividing the parish of Windle, thus destroying an established and

homogenous community'. It also proposed renaming the Council's proposed Dentons Green ward as Windle ward 'consistent with tradition and the parish of Windle located within its boundaries'. Finally, it proposed retaining the name of Billinge & Seneley Green for the ward that the Council propose naming Billinge thus 'acknowledging the co-existence of both Billinge and Seneley Green parish councils'.

70 Billinge Chapel End Parish Council stated that 'the area of this council is an identifiable area, a geographically comprehensive site surrounded by Green Belt' that 'has no relationship to anywhere else'. It wished to 'remain unwarded as a comprehensive unit of nine parish councillors' and considered that 'the District Council ward should remain with the addition of one District Councillor'. It also stated that it supported Option 2 of the Council's consultation exercise for an 18-ward borough-wide scheme.

71 Seneley Green Parish Council supported an 18-ward borough-wide scheme and wished to increase the number of parish councillors representing the parish council from eight to 10.

72 Windle Parish Council supported the Council's submission for a 16-ward borough-wide scheme but felt 'most strongly against the splitting-up of the parish'. It stated that it favoured the '16-ward proposal, but with the amendment that the parish area not be warded, but retained in its entirety, as in the 18-ward Option 2 proposal'.

73 A resident proposed that those parts of Eccleston and Windle wards to the north of the East Lancashire Road become part of an extended Rainford ward. He also proposed splitting the existing Billinge & Seneley Green ward, with Seneley Green merging with the part of the existing Haydock ward to the north of the East Lancashire Road.

74 We have carefully considered all the representations received at Stage One and, given our acceptance of the Council's proposed council size of 48 members and the generally good levels of electoral equality provided by the Council's scheme, we are basing our proposals in this area on the Council's scheme. As mentioned earlier, our adoption of this council size rather than a council size of 45 or 54 made it very difficult for us to adopt any of the wards proposed by the Liberal Democrats or Rainhill Parish Council. This is because the wards contained in their schemes are of different size to those contained in the Council's submission and thus would result in high electoral variances if adopted as part of a scheme based on a council of 48.

75 Although the Council's proposal for an amended Rainford ward would provide a high level of electoral inequality (18% below the borough average by 2006) we consider that this variance is justified given the nature of the area. Rainford is a separate and distinct community which is geographically separated from the rest of the borough by substantial areas of open land and the strong natural barrier of the East Lancashire Road and we are of the opinion that any re-warding arrangement to provide improved electoral equality in this area would necessitate the creation of an artificial ward and would not provide for effective and convenient local government. We consider that the Council's proposal to use the East Lancashire Road as most of the southern boundary of an amended Rainford ward provides a strong boundary. However, we agree that the boundary should leave the East Lancashire Road to follow the existing northern boundary of Eccleston parish as we do not consider that creating a parish ward for very few electors provides for effective and convenient local government.

76 With one amendment, to provide what we consider to be a better and more easily identifiable boundary, we are adopting the Council's proposed Billinge ward. We propose moving the proposed boundary between the proposed Billinge and Haydock wards to run along the railway line as we consider that this provides for a stronger and more easily identifiable boundary with a minimal effect on electoral equality. As suggested by St Helens North Conservative Association, we are proposing that the Council's proposed Billinge ward be renamed Billinge & Seneley Green ward as we consider that this provides a better reflection of community identity. Also as

put forward by St Helens North Conservative Association, we are proposing to rename the Council's proposed Denton's Green ward as Windle ward as, despite the revised warding arrangement, most of the population of Windle parish would still be contained within the revised ward. We are content to endorse the Council's proposals in the rest of this area as we consider that they provide the best balance between the statutory criteria.

77 Under our draft recommendations the number of electors per councillor in the proposed Billinge & Seneley Green ward (comprising the parish of Billinge Chapel End and the proposed Seneley Green North parish ward of Seneley Green parish) and Moss Bank ward would be 11% and 6% above the borough average respectively (9% and 3% above by 2006). The number of electors per councillor in the proposed Rainford ward (including the parish of Rainford and the proposed Windle North parish ward of Windle parish) and Windle ward (including the proposed Windle South parish ward of Windle parish) would be 17% and 4% below the borough average respectively (18% and 6% below by 2006).

### **Eccleston, Grange Park, Rainhill and Thatto Heath wards**

78 These four wards are in the south-west of the borough. Eccleston ward comprises Eccleston parish and Rainhill ward comprises Rainhill parish. The number of electors per councillor in Eccleston and Rainhill wards is 13% and 27% above the borough average respectively (13% and 28% above by 2006). The number of electors per councillor in Grange Park and Thatto Heath wards is 1% and 5% below the borough average respectively (2% and 3% above by 2006).

79 The Council proposed a revised warding arrangement in this area. It proposed a revised Eccleston ward with an amended eastern boundary which would leave the existing boundary and run down Alder Hey Road before turning briefly west and then south down Holme Road. The boundary would then run south down the path to Prescott Road where it would run south-west to rejoin the existing boundary. It would then leave the existing boundary again in the south-east of the ward to run around the houses on Eilerslie Avenue, Nottingham Close and Sherwood Close until rejoining the existing boundary again. The Council proposed abolishing the existing Grange Park ward with the majority of the existing ward being split between a new Newtown ward and a new Town Centre ward. The new Newtown ward would border the revised Eccleston ward to the west and would then run to the south of the allotments and behind the houses on Percival Way in the north-east of the ward. The boundary would then run along Marsden Avenue before turning north along Rivington Road and then south-east along Lingholme Road. It would then run south-west along Cowley Hill Lane to the junction with Prescott Road before running south along Alexandra Drive to Stafford Road. The boundary would then run east along Ravenhead Road and then east to the railway line. It would run south-west along the railway line to the junction with Thatto Heath Road where it would run north briefly before running north-west along Springfield Road. At Broadway it would run south briefly before running west behind the houses to the north of Uplands Road and the east of Cumberland Avenue to rejoin the boundary with the proposed Eccleston ward on Prescott Road.

80 The Council also proposed an amended Thatto Heath ward which would use the Liverpool to Manchester railway line as its southern boundary, Marshalls Cross Road, the A569 and Burtonhead Road as its eastern boundary and the Wigan to Liverpool railway line as its northern boundary to the junction with Thatto Heath Road. Here the boundary would run north-west along Springfield Road before reaching Broadway where it would run south briefly before running west behind the houses to the north of Uplands Road and the east of Cumberland Avenue. The boundary would then run south-west along Prescott Road before turning south down Portico Lane and east along Scholes Lane. It would then run behind all the houses on the Scholes Park and Foxwood estates before rejoining the existing boundary. The proposed boundary would then leave the existing boundary again to run behind all the houses in the Nottingham Close, Eilerslie Avenue, Field Way and Gardeners Way area before running south-

east to meet the Liverpool to Manchester railway line. Finally the Council proposed an amended Rainhill ward including those properties in the Nottingham Close, Ellerslie Avenue, Field Way and Gardeners Way area. The proposed boundary would run south-west along the Liverpool to Manchester railway line to the A57 where the boundary would turn south-east and follow the A57 to the M62 and the borough boundary. The Council stated that 'ideally the existing ward boundary should not change as this, along with Rainford, is a clear case of settlement identity. Following the Local Government Commission rules however it is clear the electorate size of the existing ward is too great and adjustments will, reluctantly, be required in the interests of electoral equality'.

81 The Liberal Democrats proposed an alternative warding arrangement in this area. They proposed a largely unchanged Eccleston ward with the only amendment to the existing ward being the transferral of an area in the south of the ward into a new Rainhill North ward which would also include areas currently in the wards of Rainhill, Thatto Heath and West Sutton. The Liberal Democrats also proposed a new Rainhill South ward containing part of the existing Rainhill ward and part of the existing West Sutton ward. They also proposed a revised Thatto Heath ward and a new ward comprising parts of the existing Grange Park, Queens Park, West Sutton and Parr & Hardshaw wards.

82 Rainhill Parish Council put forward a revised warding arrangement for this area with a slightly amended Rainhill ward consisting of the existing ward with the addition of parts of the existing Eccleston and Thatto Heath wards. It also proposed amended wards in the Thatto Heath and Grange Park areas while Eccleston ward would be slightly enlarged to take in parts of the existing Grange Park and Queens Park wards. It also put forward a supplementary proposal for consideration if we decided to adopt the Council's 16-ward scheme. This proposal involved amending the boundaries of the new borough ward for Rainhill so that they would be coterminous with the Rainhill parish boundary. It also involved transferring electors on Ellerslie, Nottingham, Sherwood, Brookfield and Greenough Avenues plus the even numbers of this area of Rainhill Road into Eccleston ward, transferring electors on Teesdale and Gardners Way plus the odd numbers of this area of Rainhill Road into Thatto Heath ward, transferring electors to the west of School Lane and the north of Warrington Road into Sutton & Bold ward and, finally, transferring electors on Norlands Lane, Loyola Hey and the south side of Warrington Road into Sutton & Bold ward.

83 Eccleston Parish Council supported the Liberal Democrats' submission, stating that, it protected 'the integrity of Eccleston parish, allowing the parish to be the 'building block' of the new Eccleston ward' while at the same time allowing the 're-warding of the parish to take place so that an area which would fall into a separate borough ward can still remain part of Eccleston parish'. It opposed the Council's submission, stating that, it 'threatens the future integrity of the present Eccleston parish area in several ways'. The submission stressed the strength of the community with references to the parish magazine and the parish section in the Liberal Democrat Focus newsletter. Parish councillors sit on the governing bodies of all the schools in Eccleston and report back to the parish council. The parish council also proposed three amendments to be considered if we chose to adopt the Council's 16-ward scheme. The first of these was that the voters contained in Eccleston parish to the north of the East Lancashire Road should remain part of Eccleston parish and should 'not be threatened with removal in a parish review'. The second amendment was that Scholes Park should remain within Eccleston parish, while the final amendment was that the Foxwood estate should be transferred to the proposed Rainhill ward rather than being transferred to the proposed Thatto Heath ward.

84 Rainhill Civic Society stated that it found 'the division of its township by an arbitrary line quite unacceptable' and would prefer a fourth consultation option that would leave Rainhill virtually unchanged.

85 Rainhill Crime and Disorder Group stated that ‘the St Helens [Council] proposal ignores the principle that changes should reflect the interests of the local community by retaining the community as a coherent unit and has gone for a change based on equalisation of electors’. It argued that ‘Rainhill is not only clearly identifiable by its current boundaries but has 25 plus active voluntary organisations including a Parish Council’. It also expressed concern at the consultation process undertaken by the Council, stating that the proposals were published in a free newspaper that was not delivered to the whole community.

86 A resident opposed all three of the Council’s consultation options, arguing that ‘all three published proposals will cut Rainhill through the middle and we believe this is in total conflict with the desire to retain existing communities’. The resident stated that ‘the Village Hall, the graveyard, the St Ann Millenium Centre are all on the south side of Warrington Road but used by residents from both north and south of that road’ and considered that ‘it is quite unbelievable that the population to the north of Warrington Road should not be considered to be a part of the community whose facilities they use on a regular basis’.

87 Another resident stated that ‘Rainhill is an entity, a thriving community’ and would ‘much prefer like many others to keep Rainhill as a whole voting group’. Another resident opposed the proposals put forward by the Council due to the short period of consultation and the limited nature of the consultation. The same resident also stated that not enough detail was provided on the maps illustrating the proposals, but the primary objection was ‘the splitting of a community’. The resident considered that ‘Rainhill has a strong community spirit’ and that the ‘proposed boundary changes will impact on future parish boundaries and constitute the division of the ancient parish of Rainhill’.

88 Another resident stated that Rainhill has a ‘huge range of community societies and assets in the way of schools, churches, village hall, millennium centre, doctors clinic, library, historic railway and heritage’ and that the Council’s proposals were ‘a surefire way to tear the spirit out of a community’. The resident mentioned a fourth option that would leave the majority of Rainhill unchanged and hoped that ‘if change is indeed necessary, this option is adopted’. Fourteen further residents opposed the proposed changes to Rainhill in proforma letters and considered that ‘if the changes to the borough ward boundaries go ahead, in time the parish boundaries will also change and Rainhill will no longer be the parish community, as we know it today’. These residents all particularly objected to Option two of the Council’s three consultation options.

89 Another resident proposed that the Foxwood Estate and other parts of Eccleston to the west of Rainhill Road become part of Rainhill. This resident also proposed that the boundary between Rainhill and Thatto Heath should be Elton Head Road, Rainhill Road and the footpath at the bottom of Edge Street rather than Pendlebury Brook, as at present. Rainhill could then be divided into two wards of Rainhill North and Rainhill South, with the Liverpool to Manchester railway line being the boundary.

90 We have carefully considered all representations received at Stage One and, given our acceptance of the Council’s proposed council size of 48 members and the generally good levels of electoral equality provided by the Council’s scheme, we are basing our proposals in this area on the Council’s scheme. As mentioned earlier, our adoption of this council size rather than a council of 45 or 54 made it very difficult for us to adopt any of the wards proposed by the Liberal Democrats or Rainhill Parish Council as the wards contained in their schemes are of different size to those contained in the Council’s submission and thus would result in high electoral variances if adopted as part of a scheme based on a council of 48.

91 However, although our proposals are based on the Council’s scheme, in Eccleston we propose moving away from the Council’s proposal to provide a better reflection of community identity along with an improvement in electoral equality. As proposed by Eccleston Parish Council in its amendments to the Council’s proposals, we are retaining Scholes Park in the

proposed Eccleston ward as we consider that there are too few electors in this area to provide a parish ward. We also propose moving the Foxwood estate and Benedicts Court from the proposed Thatto Heath ward and retaining them in a revised Eccleston ward, as this provides an improvement in electoral equality as well as providing what we consider to be a better reflection of community identity.

92 We are content to adopt the Council's proposals for the rest of this area as we consider that they provide the best balance between the statutory criteria. We recognise that the proposed Rainhill ward is not an ideal solution but consider that given the circumstances it is the best option. We are constrained in this area by the borough boundary to the north and the west and, although we appreciate the efforts of Rainhill Parish Council and local residents to provide an alternative solution we consider that these amendments would lead to a high level of electoral inequality in neighbouring wards. We are unable to consider any ward in isolation and thus, although we appreciate that this may not be the ideal solution for Rainhill, we consider that having taken the circumstances of the borough into account this option provides the best balance between our statutory criteria. We would, however, welcome local comment on our proposals at Stage Three.

93 Under our draft recommendations the number of electors per councillor in the proposed Eccleston ward (including Eccleston East, Eccleston West and the proposed Eccleston South parish wards of Eccleston parish) and Newtown ward would be 5% above the borough average in both (1% above in both by 2006). The number of electors per councillor in the proposed Rainhill ward (including the proposed Eccleston South East parish ward of Eccleston parish and Rainhill South, West and the proposed Rainhill North parish wards of Rainhill parish) and Thatto Heath ward would be 2% and 7% below the borough average (3% below and equal to the borough average by 2006).

### **Marshalls Cross, Sutton & Bold and West Sutton wards**

94 These three wards are in the south-east of the borough and are predominantly unparished although Sutton & Bold ward includes Bold parish. The number of electors per councillor in Marshalls Cross and West Sutton wards is 21% and 17% below the borough average respectively (21% and 15% below by 2006). The number of electors per councillor in Sutton & Bold ward is 2% below the borough average (11% above by 2006).

95 The Council proposed a revised warding arrangement in this area. A new Bold ward would comprise most of the existing Sutton & Bold ward and would also comprise parts of the existing Rainhill and West Sutton wards. This proposed ward would have the borough boundary as its southern and eastern boundary while to the west the boundary would run down the centre of the A57. The northern boundary of the proposed ward would run along the Liverpool to Manchester railway line from where it meets the A57 to where it meets the A569, where the boundary would leave the railway line and run south down Clock Face Road. After the junction with Leach Lane, the boundary would leave the road and run behind the houses on the eastern side of Clock Face Road before turning north-east and running along the dismantled railway to Reginald Road. The proposed boundary would then run east along Reginald Road and Bold Road before turning north behind the properties on Hills Moss Road and following the Bold parish boundary to the borough boundary.

96 The Council also proposed a revised Sutton ward, which as its southern boundary would have the boundary with Bold ward, described earlier. To the west, this proposed ward would follow the A569 north before turning east along Robins Lane and then running north and east to include all properties in Sutton Village within the proposed ward. The boundary would then run briefly east along the Liverpool to Manchester railway line before turning south and rejoining the boundary with Bold ward described earlier. The existing Marshalls Cross ward would be split between the proposed Sutton and Town Centre wards and the existing West Sutton ward being

split between the proposed Bold and Thatto Heath wards. The boundaries of the Council's proposed Thatto Heath ward are described in the preceding section and the boundaries of the proposed Town Centre ward are described in the following section.

97 The Liberal Democrats proposed an alternative warding arrangement in this area, including a new Sutton ward comprising parts of the existing Marshalls Cross, Parr & Hardshaw and West Sutton wards. They also proposed a revised ward in the south-east of the borough, comprising parts of the existing Bold and West Sutton wards. Under the Liberal Democrat's proposals the existing West Sutton ward would be split between a new Rainhill South ward, a new Sutton ward and a revised Thatto Heath ward.

98 Rainhill Parish Council proposed an amended warding pattern in this area, with an amended ward in the Marshalls Cross area also including part of the existing Sutton & Bold ward, while a revised ward in the Sutton & Bold area would comprise part of the existing Sutton & Bold ward and part of the existing West Sutton ward.

99 St Helens North Conservative Association suggested an amendment to the Council's submission regarding the proposed Bold ward. It stated that 'the proposed boundary leaves Clock Face Road and appears to run between two houses and then behind a row of houses' and suggested that instead of this 'Clock Face Road should be used as the boundary to its junction with the disused railway line'.

100 Bold Parish Council put forward proposals for the re-warding of the parish and these are discussed in more detail in the parishing section at the end of this chapter.

101 A resident proposed abolishing the existing West Sutton ward and moving the Sutton Heath estate into a revised Thatto Heath ward. He proposed increasing the existing Marshalls Cross ward to include Sherdley Park, Lea Green, Sutton Manor, Four Acre and Sutton Leach as well as moving the northern part of the existing West Sutton ward into a new St Helens Central ward.

102 We have carefully considered all representations received at Stage One and, given our acceptance of the Council's proposed council size of 48 members and the generally good levels of electoral equality provided by the Council's scheme, we are basing our proposals in this area on the Council's scheme. As mentioned earlier, our adoption of this council size rather than a council of 45 or 54 made it very difficult for us to adopt any of the wards proposed by the Liberal Democrats or Rainhill Parish Council as the wards contained in their schemes are of different size to those contained in the Council's submission and thus would result in high electoral variances if adopted as part of a scheme based on a council of 48.

103 In this area, with just one amendment, we are content to endorse the Council's proposals in full. This amendment is to the proposed Sutton ward and its purpose is to improve levels of electoral equality. Under the Council's proposals, the revised Sutton ward would have an electoral variance of 12% above the borough average by 2006 and we consider that, given the nature of the area, this is unnecessarily high. We are proposing an amendment to transfer all those electors in the area to the south of Robins Lane, to the west of New Street and Irwin Road, on and to the north of Olga Road and to the east of Marina Avenue from the proposed Sutton ward to the proposed Town Centre ward. This area that we are transferring is currently contained in the same ward as properties to the north of Robins Lane and thus we are of the opinion that this area will already have some affinity with the properties to the north. However, we have also looked carefully at an alternative option to reduce the electoral variance in the proposed Sutton ward, and this would involve moving the area bounded by the Liverpool to Manchester railway line to the north, by the dismantled railway line to the west, by Reginald Road and Bold Road to the south and by the former Bold Power Station to the east, from the proposed Sutton ward into the proposed Bold ward. This alternative would reduce the electoral

variance of the proposed Sutton ward to an acceptable level and although, at this stage, we are proposing the first amendment detailed above, we would welcome local comment as to which of these two options would gain most support locally. The Council's proposal for a revised Thatto Heath ward would include the Sutton Heath estate, as proposed by a resident but, in light of the fact that no area can be considered in isolation and because we are adopting the majority of the Council's scheme in this area, we have been unable to adopt the other proposals put forward by this resident. As stated earlier, we are content to endorse the Council's proposals for the remainder of this area.

104 Under our draft recommendations the number of electors per councillor in the proposed Bold ward (including Bold parish and the proposed Rainhill East parish ward of Rainhill parish) and Sutton ward would be 4% below and 10% above the borough average respectively (equal to and 7% above the borough average by 2006).

### **Blackbrook, Broad Oak, Parr & Hardshaw and Queens Park wards**

105 These four wards are in the centre of the borough and are unparished. The number of electors per councillor in Blackbrook, Broad Oak, Parr & Hardshaw and Queens Park wards is 8%, 13%, 22% and 8% below the borough average respectively (7%, 12%, 19% and 7% below by 2006).

106 The Council proposed a revised warding arrangement in this area, with the wards of Broad Oak, Parr & Hardshaw and Queens Park being replaced by a revised Blackbrook ward and the new wards of Newtown, Parr and Town Centre. The proposed Parr ward would use the St Helens Canal as its northern boundary and the Sankey Brook and Sutton Brook as its western boundary. The southern boundary would run behind the housing in Sutton Village before following the railway line, and then Bold parish boundary to the borough boundary, which forms the eastern boundary of the proposed ward. The proposed Town Centre ward would use Robins Lane, Burtonhead Road and the Wigan to Liverpool railway line as its southern boundary. The western boundary would be formed by Ravenhead Road, Alexandra Drive, Cowley Hill Lane, Duke Street and Crab Street. The northern boundary would then follow North Road and Oldfield Street before running to the south of Pilkingtons Cowley Hill works and then along St Helens Canal. The eastern boundary of the proposed ward would consist of Sankey Brook and Sutton Brook. The Council stated that this new ward would 'add strength and much needed focus to the Town Centre whilst reflecting and recognising existing communities'. The revised Blackbrook ward would use the East Lancashire Road as its northern boundary and the St Helens Canal and Sankey Brook as its southern boundary. The eastern boundary of the proposed ward would follow the Seneley Green parish boundary to Vicarage Road where it would turn south-east before turning south down Legh Road. The boundary would then run to the south of the houses on Windermere Road before running south down Wagon Lane to meet St Helens Canal. The western boundary of the proposed Blackbrook ward would leave St Helens Canal at Islands Brow and would run to the west of the houses on Hinckley Road. At the junction with Chain Lane the boundary would run south-east along Chain Lane before running north along Erskine Close and to the east of the houses on Renfrew Avenue. The boundary would then follow the Seneley Green parish boundary again before rejoining the East Lancashire Road. The boundaries of the proposed Newtown ward are described earlier in this chapter.

107 The Liberal Democrats proposed an alternative warding arrangement in this area, with a revised Blackbrook ward comprising parts of the existing Blackbrook and Broad Oak wards and a new Parr ward comprising parts of the existing Broad Oak, Parr & Hardshaw and Sutton & Bold wards. The remainder of the existing Parr & Hardshaw ward would form part of a new ward also containing part of the existing Blackbrook ward. The existing Queens Park ward would be split between a revised Queens Park ward and a new ward also containing much of the existing Grange Park ward.

108 Rainhill Parish Council proposed a revised warding arrangement in this area, with amended wards in the Blackbrook, Broad Oak, Parr & Hardshaw and Queens Park areas.

109 St Helens North Conservative Association commented that in the Council's submission 'there appears to be an unnecessary deviation in the boundary between Blackbrook and Haydock on its north east boundary'. It stated that 'there may be good reason for this but the Group would like to understand why the boundary has been proposed as shown'.

110 A resident proposed a new St Helens Central ward including parts of the existing Queens Park, Grange Park, Parr & Hardshaw and Moss Bank wards. He also proposed amending the existing Broad Oak ward to contain the eastern part of the existing Parr & Hardshaw ward while the area north of Black Brook currently contained in Broad Oak ward should be moved into either the Blackbrook or Haydock ward. Another proposal was to transfer the area currently contained in Moss Bank ward south of the East Lancashire Road and east of either Carr Mill Road or the Liverpool to Wigan railway line into a revised Blackbrook ward. The same resident proposed splitting the area to the south of the East Lancashire Road, currently contained in Billinge & Seneley Green ward, between revised Blackbrook and Haydock wards. Finally, the resident proposed either splitting the existing Queens Park ward between a new St Helens Central ward and revised Windle and Eccleston wards, or merging the existing Queens Park ward with the existing Grange Park ward to the north of the A58.

111 We have carefully considered all representations received at Stage One and, given our acceptance of the Council's proposed council size of 48 members and the generally good levels of electoral equality provided by the Council's scheme, we are basing our proposals in this area on the Council's scheme. As mentioned earlier, our adoption of this council size rather than a council of 45 or 54 made it very difficult for us to adopt any of the wards proposed by the Liberal Democrats or Rainhill Parish Council as the wards contained in their schemes are of different size to those contained in the Council's submission and thus would result in high electoral variances if adopted as part of a scheme based on a council of 48.

112 In this area, with one minor amendment which does not affect any electors, we propose adopting the Council's proposals as we consider that they provide the best balance between electoral equality, the recognition of community identity and the provision of strong and easily identifiable boundaries. The amendment that we are putting forward concerns the boundary between the proposed Blackbrook and Parr wards. We are proposing to move the proposed boundary to run to the north of the sewage works along Black Brook before following the western edge of the sewage works down to Sankey Brook to rejoin the Council's proposed boundary. We consider that this would provide a stronger and more easily identifiable boundary than that proposed by the Council, which runs through the middle of the sewage works. Our proposed amendment would not affect any electors. Due to the fact that no area can be considered in isolation and because of the fact that we are adopting the majority of the Council's scheme in this area, we have been unable to adopt any of the proposals put forward by a resident in this area.

113 Under our draft recommendations the number of electors per councillor in the proposed Blackbrook ward (including the proposed Seneley Green South parish ward of Seneley Green parish), Parr ward and Town Centre ward would be 3% above, 1% below and 4% above the borough average respectively (1% below, 6% above and 9% above by 2006).

### **Haydock, Newton East and Newton West wards**

114 These three wards are in the east of the borough and are unparished. The number of electors per councillor in Haydock, Newton East and Newton West wards is 19% above, equal to and 9% above the borough average respectively (22%, 1% and 14% above by 2006).

115 The Council proposed a slightly revised warding arrangement in this area, with an extended Haydock ward and slightly amended Newton East and Newton West wards. The proposed Haydock ward would have the borough boundary for its eastern boundary and the boundary with the proposed Billinge ward, described earlier, as its northern boundary. As its western boundary the proposed Haydock ward would use the boundary with Blackbrook ward described above. The southern boundary would run along St Helens Canal and Sankey Brook and would follow the existing boundary to the borough boundary. The boundary between the proposed Newton East and Newton West wards would run north from the borough boundary along a very similar path to that of the existing boundary before running north and east along the dismantled railway. The boundary would then run north along Victoria Road before turning east along Crow Lane East and then north-west along Ashton Road. It would then run north behind Newton-le-Willows Community High School and Sports Centre to meet the M6 where it would run south-east before turning north along Rob Lane to meet the borough boundary.

116 The Liberal Democrats proposed a slight amendment to the boundary between the wards of Newton East and Newton West to provide a better level of electoral equality. The revised boundary would run along Crow Lane East to the junction with Victoria Road where it would turn south along the centre of Victoria Road before reaching the railway, where it would rejoin the existing boundary. An amended ward in the Haydock area would comprise the majority of the existing Haydock ward and part of the existing Billinge & Seneley Green ward.

117 Rainhill Parish Council proposed a slight amendment to the existing Haydock ward and a slight amendment to the boundary between the existing Newton East and Newton West wards.

118 St Helens North Conservative Association commented on the Council's proposed boundary between Blackbrook and Haydock wards and this is discussed in the previous section.

119 A resident proposed a slight amendment to the existing boundary between Newport East and Newport West wards and suggested moving the boundary to Victoria Road. The same resident also proposed transferring that part of the existing Haydock ward to the north of the East Lancashire Road to an amended Seneley Green ward.

120 We have carefully considered all representations received at Stage One and, with four minor amendments, are proposing to adopt the Council's proposals for this area as we consider that they provide the best balance between the statutory criteria. The first of these amendments concerns the boundary between the proposed Billinge & Seneley Green ward and Haydock ward and this amendment is discussed further in an earlier section. The second amendment is to the boundary between the proposed wards of Haydock and Blackbrook and does not affect any electors. The Council's proposed boundary runs to the east and north of Legh Vale County Primary School and we consider that a stronger boundary would be provided by running the boundary to the south and west of the school before rejoining the Council's proposed boundary on Legh Road. The third amendment concerns the boundary between the proposed Haydock and Newton West wards and this concerns only four electors. The Council proposed retaining much of the existing boundary to the west of the properties on Common Road but we consider that a stronger boundary would be provided by running the boundary directly behind the properties on the west of Common Road. Finally, we propose amending the Council's proposed boundary between the proposed Newton East and Newton West wards very slightly so that the boundary would run directly behind the properties on the west side of Catherine Way, the Newton Community Hospital and Valley View rather than along a path slightly to the west of these properties, as we consider that this would provide a stronger boundary.

121 Under our draft recommendations the number of electors in the proposed Haydock ward (including the proposed Seneley Green East parish ward of Seneley Green parish), Newton East ward and Newton West ward would be 5% above, 3% below and 11% below the borough

average respectively (6% above, 5% below and 8% below by 2006).

## Electoral cycle

122 Under section 7(3) of the Local Government Act 1972, all Metropolitan boroughs have a system of elections by thirds.

## Conclusions

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

- there should be a reduction in council size from 54 to 48;
- there should be 16 wards;
- the boundaries of all of the existing wards should be modified, resulting in a net reduction of two wards.

124 As already indicated, we have based our draft recommendations on the Borough Council's proposals, but propose to depart from them in the following areas:

- we are proposing amendments to the proposed Billinge, Eccleston, Haydock, Sutton and Town Centre wards;
- we are proposing minor amendments to the proposed Blackbrook, Haydock, Newton East, Newton West and Parr wards;
- as put forward by St Helens North Conservative Association we are proposing that the proposed Billinge ward be renamed as Billinge & Seneley Green ward and that the proposed Dentons Green ward be renamed Windle ward.

125 Table 5 shows how our draft recommendations will affect electoral equality, comparing them with the current arrangements (based on 2001 electorate figures) and with forecast electorates for the year 2006.

*Table 5: Comparison of current and recommended electoral arrangements*

	2001 electorate		2006 forecast electorate	
	Current arrangements	Draft recommendations	Current arrangements	Draft recommendations
Number of councillors	54	48	54	48
Number of wards	18	16	18	16
Average number of electors per councillor	2,528	2,844	2,586	2,909
Number of wards with a variance more than 10% from the average	8	3	10	1
Number of wards with a variance more than 20% from the average	4	0	4	0

126 As shown in Table 5, our draft recommendations for St Helens Borough Council would result in a reduction in the number of wards with an electoral variance of more than 10% from eight to three. By 2006 only one ward is forecast to have an electoral variance of more than 10%.

**Draft recommendation**

St Helens Borough Council should comprise 48 councillors serving 16 wards, as detailed and named in Tables 1 and 2, and illustrated on Map 2 and in Appendix A and the large maps.

**Parish council electoral arrangements**

127 When reviewing electoral arrangements, we are required to comply as far as possible with the rules set out in Schedule 11 to the 1972 Act. The Schedule provides that if a parish is to be divided between different borough wards it must also be divided into parish wards, so that each parish ward lies wholly within a single ward of the borough. Accordingly, we propose consequential warding arrangements for the parishes of Eccleston, Rainhill, Seneley Green and Windle to reflect the proposed borough wards. We also propose amending the internal warding arrangements of Bold parish as proposed by Bold Parish Council.

128 The parish of Bold is currently served by 12 councillors representing two wards: Bold North (returning five councillors) and Bold South (returning seven councillors). At Stage One Bold Parish Council questioned the Council's projected electorate figures for Bold ward and put forward three options for re-warding Bold parish. The first option was that of largely retaining the current North and South parish ward boundaries and reversing the number of parish councillors per ward so that North ward would be represented by seven councillors and South ward would be represented by five councillors. The second option was to increase the number of parish wards to four, comprising one for the new development on the site of the former Bold Power Station, one for the area east of Clock Face Road to the north of the motorway, one for the area west of Clock Face Road to the north of the motorway and one for the area to the south of the motorway. The final option was to abolish the existing parish wards and reduce the number of parish councillors. Bold Parish Council proposed the adoption of Option two and stated that a 'major strength of this option was that it addressed the existing distinction between the communities of Clock Face Village and Bold Heath and the fairly significant remoteness from the two of the new development on the Power Station site which, it is clear, will create a new and distinct community'. No further comments were received during Stage One.

129 Having considered the evidence received, we are content that the second option put forward by Bold Parish Council creating four parish wards recognises the community identity and interests in the area while providing for strong, easily identifiable boundaries and we are therefore content to adopt this parish warding arrangement as part of our draft recommendations.

**Draft recommendation**

Bold Parish Council should comprise 12 councillors, as at present, representing four wards: Bold East (returning three councillors), Bold North (returning four councillors), Bold South (returning one councillor) and Bold West (returning four councillors). The parish ward boundaries are illustrated and named on the large maps.

130 The parish of Eccleston is currently served by 13 councillors representing three wards: Eccleston East (returning three councillors), Eccleston South (returning five councillors) and

Eccleston West (returning five councillors). In light of the scheme for borough warding that the Borough Council proposed in this area, it proposed new parish warding arrangements, with the existing Eccleston South parish ward being divided, with three councillors representing the part of the parish that would fall within the proposed Eccleston borough ward, one councillor representing the part of the parish that would fall within the proposed Thatto Heath borough ward and one councillor representing the part of the parish that would fall within the proposed Rainhill borough ward. The Council recognised that the level of representation provided by these parish warding arrangements would not provide the best balance of representation between the new parish wards, but considered that this was something that could be addressed in a subsequent parish review.

131 Eccleston Parish Council proposed reducing the number of parish councillors from 13 to 12 with the existing Eccleston West and Eccleston East parish wards being represented by five and three councillors respectively and the existing Eccleston South parish ward being divided into two new parish wards. The first of these would contain that part of the existing Eccleston South parish ward that would fall within the proposed Eccleston borough ward and would be represented by three councillors, while the second would contain that part of the existing Eccleston South parish ward that would fall within the proposed Rainhill borough ward and would be represented by one councillor.

132 Having carefully considered the evidence received, and in light of the scheme we are adopting for borough warding in this area, we are proposing our own parish warding arrangement here. We are proposing to divide the existing Eccleston South into two new parish wards with the area of the existing Eccleston South parish ward that would fall within our proposed Eccleston borough ward forming a revised Eccleston South parish ward to be represented by three councillors, while the part of the existing Eccleston South parish ward that would fall within our proposed Rainhill borough ward would form a new Eccleston South East parish ward to be represented by one councillor. We recognise that this arrangement does not provide for the best balance of representation between the new parish wards but this equality of representation was very difficult to obtain given the nature of the scheme that we are adopting at borough level for this area. As proposed by the Council, we would recommend a subsequent parish review to address this problem and possibly review the existing parish boundary with a view to making the proposed Eccleston South East parish ward part of Rainhill parish, an area with which it seems to have more in common.

**Draft recommendation**

Eccleston Parish Council should comprise 12 councillors, a reduction of one, representing four wards: Eccleston East (returning three councillors), Eccleston South (returning three councillors), Eccleston South East (returning one councillor) and Eccleston West (returning five councillors). The boundaries between the parish wards should reflect the proposed borough ward boundaries, as illustrated and named on the large maps.

133 The parish of Rainhill is currently served by 14 councillors representing three wards: Rainhill North (returning six councillors), Rainhill South (returning four councillors) and Rainhill West (returning four councillors). In light of the scheme for borough warding that the Borough Council proposed in this area, it proposed a new parish warding arrangement with Rainhill North parish ward being divided with four councillors representing the northern part of the ward and two councillors representing the southern part of the ward. It also proposed addressing the level of representation in a subsequent parish review. Rainhill Parish Council stated that 'Rainhill is a long established community and residents wish to retain both the existing borough and parish boundaries as they currently exist'.

134 Having considered the evidence received and in light of the scheme we are adopting for borough warding in this area, which makes it impossible for us to retain the existing parishing arrangements, we are content to adopt the Council's proposed parish warding scheme in this area.

**Draft recommendation**

Rainhill Parish Council should comprise 14 parish councillors, as at present, representing four wards: Rainhill East (returning two councillors), Rainhill North (returning four councillors), Rainhill South (returning four councillors) and Rainhill West (returning four councillors). The boundaries between the parish wards should reflect the proposed borough ward boundaries, as illustrated and named on the large maps.

135 The parish of Seneley Green is currently served by eight councillors and is unwarded. In light of the borough warding scheme that it put forward for this area, the Council proposed warding Seneley Green parish and creating three parish wards. It proposed that the majority of the parish that would fall within the proposed Billinge borough ward should be represented by six councillors, the area of the parish that would fall within the proposed Blackbrook borough ward should be represented by one councillor and that the area of the parish that would fall within the proposed Haydock ward should also be represented by one councillor. Seneley Green Parish Council considered that 'any attempt to ward the parish would...be a retrograde step' and wished for the parish to remain in a single borough ward. It also wished to increase the number of parish councillors representing the parish from eight to 10 stating that 'this was considered some time ago by St Helens MBC but was left in abeyance until this review'.

136 Having carefully considered the evidence received and in light of the borough warding scheme for this area, we are adopting the Council's proposed parish wards but are increasing the number of parish councillors from eight to 10 at the request of Seneley Green Parish Council. Due to the fact that we are dividing the existing borough ward between three revised borough wards we are unable to avoid warding Seneley Green parish, as Schedule 11 to the 1972 Act states that if a parish is to be divided between different borough wards it must also be divided into parish wards, so that each parish ward lies wholly within a single ward of the borough. The two parish wards that would form part of the revised Blackbrook and Haydock borough wards would each be represented by two councillors, while the parish ward that would form part of a revised Billinge borough ward would be represented by six councillors.

**Draft recommendation**

Seneley Green Parish Council should comprise 10 parish councillors, two more than at present, representing three wards: Seneley Green East (returning two councillors), Seneley Green North (returning six councillors) and Seneley Green South (returning two councillors). The boundaries between the parish wards should reflect the proposed borough ward boundaries, as illustrated and named on the large maps.

137 The parish of Windle is currently served by nine councillors and is unwarded. In light of the borough warding scheme that it put forward for this area, the Council proposed warding Windle parish and creating two parish wards. It proposed that the area of the parish that would fall within the proposed Rainford ward should be represented by one councillor, while the area of the parish that would fall within the proposed Windle ward should be represented by eight councillors. Windle Parish Council stated that it was 'in agreement with a reduction to 16 wards but felt most strongly against the splitting-up of the parish'.

138 Having carefully considered the evidence received and in light of the borough warding scheme for this area we are adopting the Council's proposed parish warding scheme for this area.

**Draft recommendation**

Windle Parish Council should comprise nine parish councillors, as at present, representing two wards: Windle North (returning one councillor) and Windle South (returning eight councillors). The boundaries between the parish wards should reflect the proposed borough ward boundaries, as illustrated and named on the large maps.

*Map 2: Draft recommendations for St Helens*



## 5 WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

139 There will now be a consultation period, during which everyone is invited to comment on the draft recommendations on future electoral arrangements for St Helens contained in this report. We will take fully into account all submissions received by 28 October 2002. Any received *after* this date may not be taken into account. All responses may be inspected at our offices and those of the Borough Council. A list of respondents will be available from us on request after the end of the consultation period.

140 Express your views by writing directly to us:

Team Leader  
St Helens Review  
The Boundary Committee for England  
Trevelyan House  
Great Peter Street  
London SW1P 2HW

141 In the light of representations received, we will review our draft recommendations to consider whether they should be altered. As indicated earlier, it is therefore important that all interested parties let us have their views and evidence, ***whether or not*** they agree with our draft recommendations. We will then submit our final recommendations to The Electoral Commission. After the publication of our final recommendations, all further correspondence should be sent to The Electoral Commission, which cannot make the Order giving effect to our recommendations until six weeks after it receives them.



## APPENDIX A

### **Draft recommendations for St Helens: detailed mapping**

The following maps illustrate our proposed ward boundaries for the St Helens area.

**Map A1** illustrates, in outline form, the proposed ward boundaries within the borough and indicates the areas which are shown in more detail on the large maps.

The **large maps** illustrate the existing and proposed warding arrangements for St Helens.

*Map A1: Draft recommendations for St Helens: key map*

## APPENDIX B

### Code of Practice on Written Consultation

The Cabinet Office's November 2000 *Code of Practice on Written Consultation*, [www.cabinet-office.gov.uk/servicefirst/index/consultation.htm](http://www.cabinet-office.gov.uk/servicefirst/index/consultation.htm), requires all Government Departments and Agencies to adhere to certain criteria, set out below, on the conduct of public consultations. Public bodies, such as The Boundary Committee for England, are encouraged to follow the Code.

The Code of Practice applies to consultation documents published after 1 January 2001, which should reproduce the criteria, give explanations of any departures, and confirm that the criteria have otherwise been followed.

*Table B1: Boundary Committee for England's compliance with Code criteria*

<b>Criteria</b>	<b>Compliance/departure</b>
Timing of consultation should be built into the planning process for a policy (including legislation) or service from the start, so that it has the best prospect of improving the proposals concerned, and so that sufficient time is left for it at each stage.	We comply with this requirement.
It should be clear who is being consulted, about what questions, in what timescale and for what purpose.	We comply with this requirement.
A consultation document should be as simple and concise as possible. It should include a summary, in two pages at most, of the main questions it seeks views on. It should make it as easy as possible for readers to respond, make contact or complain.	We comply with this requirement.
Documents should be made widely available, with the fullest use of electronic means (though not to the exclusion of others), and effectively drawn to the attention of all interested groups and individuals.	We comply with this requirement.
Sufficient time should be allowed for considered responses from all groups with an interest. Twelve weeks should be the standard minimum period for a consultation.	We consult on draft recommendations for a minimum of eight weeks, but may extend the period if consultations take place over holiday periods.
Responses should be carefully and open-mindedly analysed, and the results made widely available, with an account of the views expressed, and reasons for decisions finally taken.	We comply with this requirement.
Departments should monitor and evaluate consultations, designating a consultation coordinator who will ensure the lessons are disseminated.	We comply with this requirement.