

Draft recommendations on the
future electoral arrangements for
Braintree in Essex

May 2000

LOCAL GOVERNMENT COMMISSION FOR ENGLAND

The Local Government Commission for England is an independent body set up by Parliament. Our task is to review and make recommendations to the Government on whether there should be changes to local authorities' electoral arrangements.

Members of the Commission are:

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

Barbara Stephens (Chief Executive)

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

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

SUMMARY

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

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

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

- **in 23 of the 33 wards the number of electors represented by each councillor varies by more than 10 per cent from the average for the district and 13 wards vary by more than 20 per cent from the average;**
- **by 2004 this unequal representation is not expected to improve, with the number of electors per councillor forecast to vary by more than 10 per cent from the average in 23 wards and by more than 20 per cent in 15 wards.**

Our main draft recommendations for future electoral arrangements (Figures 1 and 2 and paragraphs 138-139) are that:

- **Braintree District Council should have 60 councillors, as at present;**
- **there should be 29 wards, instead of 33 as at present;**
- **the boundaries of 27 of the existing wards should be modified, resulting in a net reduction of four wards, and six wards should retain their existing boundaries;**
- **elections should continue to take place every four years.**

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

- **In 18 of the proposed 29 wards the number of electors per councillor would vary by no more than 10 per cent from the district average.**
- **This level of electoral equality is expected to improve significantly so that the number of electors per councillor in 28 of the 29 wards is expected to vary by no more than 10 per cent from the average for the district by 2004.**

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

- **revised warding arrangements and the redistribution of councillors for the parishes of Feering, Halstead, Kelvedon and Witham.**

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

- **We will consult on our draft recommendations for eight weeks from 16 May 2000. Because we take this consultation very seriously, we may move away from our draft recommendations in the light of Stage Three responses. It is therefore important that all interested parties let us have their views and evidence, *whether or not* they agree with our draft recommendations.**
- **After considering local views, we will decide whether to modify our draft recommendations and then make our final recommendations to the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions.**
- **It will then be for the Secretary of State to accept, modify or reject our final recommendations. He will also determine when any changes come into effect.**

You should express your views by writing directly to the Commission at the address below by 10 July 2000:

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Figure 1: The Commission's Draft Recommendations: Summary

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Constituent areas	Map reference
1	Black Notley & Terling	2	Black Notley ward (part – Black Notley Village parish); Braintree West ward (part); Terling ward (Fairstead, Faulkbourne, Terling and White Notley parishes)	Large map and Map 2
2	Bocking North	2	Bocking North ward (part)	Large map
3	Bocking South	2	Bocking North ward (part); Bocking South ward (part)	Large map
4	Braintree Blackwater	3	Braintree East ward (part); Bocking South ward (part)	Large map
5	Braintree Central	3	Bocking South ward (part); Braintree Central ward (part); Braintree West ward (part)	Large map
6	Braintree East	3	Braintree Central ward (part); Braintree East ward (part)	Large map
7	Braintree South	3	Black Notley ward (part – Black Notley parish (part)); Braintree Central ward (part); Braintree West ward (part)	Large map
8	Bumpstead	1	<i>Unchanged</i> (Helions Bumpstead, Steeple Bumpstead and Sturmer parishes)	Large map
9	Cressing & Coggeshall	3	Cressing ward (Cressing parish); Coggeshall ward (Bradwell, Coggeshall and Stisted parishes); Kelvedon ward (part – Feering North ward of Feering parish as proposed)	Map A4 and Map 2
10	Gosfield & Greenstead Green	1	Bocking North ward (part); Gosfield ward (Gosfield parish); Colne Engaine & Greenstead Green ward (part – Greenstead Green & Halstead Rural parish)	Map 2 and Large map
11	Great Notley	3	Black Notley ward (part – Great Notley parish); Braintree West ward (part)	Map 2 and Large Map
12	Halstead St Andrew's	3	Halstead St Andrew's ward (St Andrew's North and St Andrew's South wards of Halstead parish); Halstead Trinity ward (part – Holy Trinity North ward of Halstead parish (part))	Map A5 and Map 2
13	Halstead Trinity	2	Halstead Trinity ward (part – Holy Trinity North ward (part) and Holy Trinity South ward of Halstead parish)	Map A5 and Map 2
14	Hatfield Peverel	2	<i>Unchanged</i> (Hatfield Peverel parish)	Map 2

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Constituent areas	Map reference
15	Hedingham & Maplestead	3	Castle Hedingham ward (Castle Hedingham, Great Maplestead and Little Maplestead parishes); Sible Hedingham ward (Sible Hedingham parish); Stour Valley Central ward (part – Gestingthorpe and Wickham St Paul parishes)	Map 2
16	Kelvedon	2	Kelvedon ward (part – Kelvedon South ward of Kelvedon parish as proposed and Feering South ward of Feering parish as proposed)	Maps A3 and A4 and Map 2
17	Panfield	1	Panfield ward (Panfield and Shalford parishes); Rayne ward (part – Bardfield Saling and Great Saling parishes)	Map 2
18	Rayne	1	Rayne ward (part – Rayne parish)	Map 2
19	Silver End & Rivenhall	2	Kelvedon ward (part – Kelvedon North ward of Kelvedon parish as proposed); Witham Silver End & Rivenhall ward (Rivenhall and Silver End parishes)	Map A3 and Map 2
20	Stour Valley North	1	Stour Valley Central ward (part – Belchamp Walter, Borley and Bulmer parishes); Stour Valley North ward (part – Belchamp St Paul, Belchamp Otten, Foxearth, Liston, Ovington, Pentlow and Tilbury Juxta Clare parishes)	Map 2
21	Stour Valley South	1	<i>Unchanged</i> (Alphamstone, Bures Hamlet, Great Henny, Little Henny, Lamarsh, Middleton, Pebmarsh and Twinstead parishes)	Map 2
22	The Three Colnes	2	Earls Colne ward (White Colne and Earls Colne parishes); Colne Engaine & Greenstead Green ward (part – Colne Engaine parish)	Map 2
23	Three Fields	2	<i>Unchanged</i> (Finchingfield, Great Bardfield and Wethersfield parishes)	Map 2
24	Upper Colne	1	Upper Colne ward (Birdbrook, Ridgewell, Stambourne and Toppesfield parishes); Stour Valley North ward (part – Ashen parish)	Map 2
25	Witham Central	2	Witham Chipping Hill ward (part – Chipping Hill ward (part) of Witham town); Witham Central ward (part – Central ward (part) of Witham town)	Map A2 and Map 2
26	Witham North	2	<i>Unchanged</i> (North ward of Witham town)	Map 2
27	Witham South	3	Witham South ward (part – South ward (part) of Witham town)	Map A2 and Map 2

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Constituent areas	Map reference
28	Witham West	3	Witham Central ward (part – Central ward (part) of Witham town); Witham Chipping Hill ward (part – Chipping Hill ward (part) of Witham town); Witham South ward (part – South ward (part) of Witham town); Witham West ward (West ward of Witham town)	Map A2 and Map 2
29	Yeldham	1	<i>Unchanged</i> (Great Yeldham and Little Yeldham parishes)	Map 2

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

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

Figure 2: The Commission's Draft Recommendations for Braintree

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (1999)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average (%)	Electorate (2004)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average (%)
1	Black Notley & Terling	2	2,314	1,157	-30	3,115	1,558	-15
2	Bocking North	2	3,385	1,693	2	3,944	1,972	8
3	Bocking South	2	3,612	1,806	9	3,930	1,965	8
4	Braintree Blackwater	3	5,312	1,771	7	5,770	1,923	5
5	Braintree Central	3	4,348	1,449	-13	5,654	1,885	3
6	Braintree East	3	3,827	1,276	-23	5,288	1,763	-4
7	Braintree South	3	5,525	1,842	11	5,695	1,898	4
8	Bumpstead	1	1,898	1,898	14	1,936	1,936	6
9	Cressing & Coggeshall	3	5,847	1,949	18	5,976	1,992	9
10	Gosfield & Greenstead Green	1	1,997	1,997	20	2,013	2,013	10
11	Great Notley	3	3,198	1,066	-36	4,995	1,665	-9
12	Halstead St Andrew's	3	4,540	1,513	-9	5,614	1,871	2
13	Halstead Trinity	2	3,595	1,798	8	3,672	1,836	1
14	Hatfield Peverel	2	3,591	1,796	8	3,620	1,810	-1
15	Hedingham & Maplestead	3	4,945	1,648	-1	5,098	1,699	-7
16	Kelvedon	2	3,724	1,862	12	3,833	1,917	5
17	Panfield	1	1,673	1,673	1	1,707	1,707	-7
18	Rayne	1	1,671	1,671	1	1,711	1,711	-6
19	Silver End & Rivenhall	2	3,585	1,793	8	3,595	1,798	-2
20	Stour Valley North	1	1,739	1,739	5	1,772	1,772	-3
21	Stour Valley South	1	1,746	1,746	5	1,766	1,766	-3
22	The Three Colnes	2	3,770	1,885	14	3,899	1,950	7
23	Three Fields	2	3,021	1,511	-9	3,359	1,680	-8
24	Upper Colne	1	1,709	1,709	3	1,723	1,723	-6
25	Witham Central	2	3,600	1,800	9	3,634	1,817	-5
26	Witham North	2	3,677	1,839	11	3,681	1,841	1

Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (1999)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average (%)	Electorate (2004)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average (%)
27 Witham South	3	4,803	1,601	-3	5,669	1,890	3
28 Witham West	3	5,235	1,745	5	5,239	1,746	-4
29 Yeldham	1	1,585	1,585	-4	1,690	1,690	-7
Totals	60	99,472	-	-	109,598	-	-
Averages	-	-	1,658	-	-	1,827	-

Source: Electorate figures are based on Braintree District Council's submission.

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

1 INTRODUCTION

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

2 This is our first review of the electoral arrangements of Braintree. The last such review was undertaken by our predecessor, the Local Government Boundary Commission (LGBC), which reported to the Secretary of State in January 1976 (Report No. 132). The electoral arrangements of Essex County Council were last reviewed in November 1980 (Report No. 401). We completed a directed electoral review of Thurrock in 1996 and a periodic electoral review of Southend-on-Sea in 1999. We expect to undertake periodic electoral review of Thurrock in 2000 and a review of the County Council's electoral arrangements in 2002.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Figure 3: Stages of the Review

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

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

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

12 Stage One began on 30 November 1999, when we wrote to Braintree District Council inviting proposals for future electoral arrangements. We also notified Essex County Council, Essex Police Authority, the local authority associations, Essex Local Councils’ Association,

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

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

14 Stage Three began on 16 May 2000 and will end on 10 July 2000. This stage involves publishing the draft recommendations in this report and public consultation on them. **We take this consultation very seriously and it is therefore important that all those interested in the review should let us have their views and evidence, whether or not they agree with our draft recommendations.**

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

2 CURRENT ELECTORAL ARRANGEMENTS

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

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

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

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

20 At present, each councillor represents an average of 1,658 electors, which the District Council forecasts will increase to 1,827 by the year 2004 if the present number of councillors is maintained. However, due to demographic and other changes over the past two decades, the number of electors per councillor in 23 of the 33 wards varies by more than 10 per cent from the district average, 13 wards by more than 20 per cent and four wards by more than 30 per cent. The worst imbalance is in Black Notley ward where the councillor represents 132 per cent more electors than the district average.

Map 1: Existing Wards in Braintree

Figure 4: Existing Electoral Arrangements

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (1999)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2004)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
1	Black Notley	1	3,849	3,849	132	6,406	6,406	251
2	Bocking North	3	4,399	1,466	-12	5,024	1,675	-8
3	Bocking South	3	4,597	1,532	-8	5,064	1,688	-8
4	Braintree Central	3	5,444	1,815	9	6,603	2,201	20
5	Braintree East	3	6,849	2,283	38	8,568	2,856	56
6	Braintree West	3	5,436	1,812	9	5,747	1,916	5
7	Bumpstead	1	1,898	1,898	14	1,936	1,936	6
8	Castle Hedingham	1	1,457	1,457	-12	1,475	1,475	-19
9	Coggeshall	3	4,348	1,449	-13	4,423	1,474	-19
10	Colne Engaine & Greenstead Green	1	1,271	1,271	-23	1,291	1,291	-29
11	Cressing	1	1,285	1,285	-22	1,339	1,339	-27
12	Earls Colne	2	3,017	1,509	-9	3,128	1,564	-14
13	Gosfield	1	1,178	1,178	-29	1,192	1,192	-35
14	Halstead St Andrew's	2	4,087	2,044	23	5,151	2,576	41
15	Halstead Trinity	3	4,048	1,349	-19	4,136	1,379	-25
16	Hatfield Peverel	2	3,591	1,796	8	3,620	1,810	-1
17	Kelvedon	3	4,212	1,404	-15	4,321	1,440	-21
18	Panfield	1	1,334	1,334	-20	1,352	1,352	-26
19	Rayne	1	2,010	2,010	21	2,066	2,066	13
20	Sible Hedingham	2	2,920	1,460	-12	3,037	1,519	-17
21	Stour Valley Central	1	1,303	1,303	-21	1,332	1,332	-27
22	Stour Valley North	1	1,269	1,269	-23	1,291	1,291	-29
23	Stour Valley South	1	1,746	1,746	5	1,766	1,766	-3
24	Terling	1	1,248	1,248	-25	1,279	1,279	-30
25	Three Fields	2	3,021	1,511	-9	3,359	1,680	-8
26	Upper Colne	1	1,444	1,444	-13	1,458	1,458	-20
27	Witham Central	1	2,342	2,342	41	2,376	2,376	30
28	Witham Chipping Hill	2	3,411	1,706	3	3,413	1,707	-7

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (1999)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2004)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
29	Witham North	3	3,677	1,226	-26	3,681	1,227	-33
30	Witham Silver End & Rivenhall	2	3,311	1,656	0	3,321	1,661	-9
31	Witham South	2	4,979	2,490	50	5,845	2,923	60
32	Witham West	2	2,906	1,453	-12	2,908	1,454	-20
33	Yeldham	1	1,585	1,585	-4	1,690	1,690	-7
	Totals	60	99,472	-	-	109,598	-	-
	Averages	-	-	1,658	-	-	1,827	-

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

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

3 REPRESENTATIONS RECEIVED

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

22 During this initial stage of the review, officers from the Commission visited the area and met officers and members from the District Council. We are grateful to all concerned for their co-operation and assistance. We received representations from 54 respondents during Stage One, including district-wide schemes from the District Council and the Green Group, all of which may be inspected at the offices of the District Council and the Commission.

Braintree District Council

23 The District Council conducted an extensive consultation locally on two options, A and B, based on council sizes of 59 and 60 respectively. At a Council meeting on 16 February 2000, the Council approved a third option, based on a council size of 52 and a mixed pattern of wards (seven single-member, nine two-member and nine three-member wards). In its submitted proposals, the Council argued that the adoption of a new decision-making structure in April 1999 and the introduction of Area Committees meant that fewer councillors were necessary to attend meetings, working groups and panels. It also noted that the Local Government Bill contains provisions limiting the size of the executive and argued that the Council's executive will contain up to 10 members, leaving approximately 42 backbench members to provide for all committees in the new decision-making structure, under its proposed new council size of 52.

24 The District Council's proposals would result in a significant re-drawing of warding arrangements throughout the district. In particular, it proposed revised single-member Stour Valley North and Stour Valley South wards, each containing 11 parishes. It proposed creating a two-member Hatfield Peverel & Terling ward and a three-member Coggeshall & Earls Colne ward, and combining Panfield parish with part of Bocking North ward. Under the Council's proposals, Braintree and Witham would each contain three three-member wards.

25 The District Council's proposals would result in eight of the proposed 25 wards having electoral variances of more than 10 per cent currently. By 2004, no ward would have an electoral variance of more than 10 per cent from the average. The Council's proposals are summarised at Appendix B.

Braintree District Council Green Group

26 The Green Group proposed retaining the existing council size of 60 and reducing the number of wards from 33 to 26 (4 single-member, 10 two-member and 12 three-member wards). They stated that they had considered alternative council sizes, including a significant reduction to 40 councillors but that, in their view, these alternative council sizes did not facilitate the achievement of electoral equality or the preservation of community identities in the rural areas of the district. The Green Group strongly opposed the District Council's 52-member proposal, arguing that any

reduction in council size would adversely impact on community identities in the district, and stressed that there had been little or no consultation on the proposals locally.

27 The Green Group proposed retaining the five wards of Bumpstead, Stour Valley South, Three Fields, Witham North (represented by two councillors, rather than three) and Witham, Silver End & Rivenhall. They proposed revised Black Notley, Earls Colne, Kelvedon, Stour Valley Central and Stour Valley North wards and put forward several ward boundary changes in the towns of Witham and Braintree. The Green Group proposed creating new three-member Terling & Hatfield Peverel and Sible Hedingham & Upper Colne wards and a two-member Rayne & Panfield ward. Under their proposals, Cressing ward would form part of a revised three-member Coggeshall ward, together with the rural area of Kelvedon ward. The Green Group also proposed revised warding arrangements in Halstead, as per Option B of the Council's consultation exercise.

28 Under the Green Group's proposals, 25 of 26 wards would have electoral variances of no more than 10 per cent from the average by 2004, and no ward would vary by more than 11 per cent. The Green Group's proposals are summarised at Appendix B.

Parish and Town Councils

29 We received representations from 27 parish and town councils. Foxearth & Liston, Great Maplestead, Great Yeldham, Little Maplestead, Panfield, Stambourne and White Colne parish councils favoured both Options A and B under the Council's consultation exercise, while Black Notley and Coggeshall parish councils expressed support for Option A. Each of the parish councils opposed the District Council's submitted proposals for their respective areas. Little Yeldham, Tilbury Juxta Clare & Ovington Parish Council requested no change, while Gestingthorpe and Sturmer parish councils expressed concern that district councillors would be required to represent a larger number of parishes. Cressing, Earls Colne, Finchingfield, Great Bardfield, Hatfield Peverel, Rivenhall and Wethersfield parish councils specifically opposed the Council's proposals for a reduction in council size from 60 to 52.

30 Bradwell and Stisted parish councils favoured the retention of the existing Coggeshall ward, while Stisted Parish Council also opposed being joined with the Kelvedon or Feering areas. Witham Town Council opposed any proposals which would combine parts of the town council area with its surrounding rural parishes. Colne Engaine Parish Council opposed being combined in the same ward as Earls Colne parish, arguing that their interests were distinct, while Castle Hedingham Parish Council favoured being joined in the same ward as Sible Hedingham parish. Rayne Parish Council favoured retaining the existing council size of 60 and proposed creating a single-member Rayne ward.

Other Representations

31 We received a further 25 representations from local political parties and local residents, most of which made reference to Options A and B of the Council's consultation exercise. Braintree Constituency Liberal Democrats ("the Liberal Democrats") expressed support for the Council's Option A, based on a council size of 59, but proposed several boundary changes and new ward names which they argued would better reflect community ties, particularly in the south-eastern and northern parts of the district. In particular, they proposed that Terling and Fairstead parishes

should be combined with Hatfield Peverel and proposed separate wards for Bocking Village and Kelvedon and Feering. The Conservative Group opposed the District Council's proposals, arguing that they had not been subject to adequate consultation, and noted that all but the Labour Group had opposed the proposals.

32 Councillors Broyd (Gosfield ward) and Watkins (Panfield ward), parish councillors Watkins (Tilbury Juxta Clare parish) and Cooper (Gestingthorpe parish) and seven local residents opposed the District Council's 52-member proposal, arguing that it had not been consulted upon locally and would result in excessively large rural wards. Councillors Bigden (Hatfield Peverel ward), Boyce (Earls Colne ward) and Galione (Terling ward) also opposed the District Council's proposals for their respective areas. A local resident proposed changing the name of Witham Silver End & Rivenhall ward to Rivenhall & Silver End ward. Another local resident favoured uniting Colne Engaine, Earls Colne and White Colne in the same ward, and opposed the District Council's submitted proposal.

4 ANALYSIS AND DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS

33 As described earlier, our prime objective in considering the most appropriate electoral arrangements for Braintree is, so far as reasonably practicable and consistent with the statutory criteria, to ensure that the number of electors represented by each councillor is as nearly as possible the same. In doing so we have regard to section 13(5) of the Local Government Act 1992 – the need to secure effective and convenient local government, and reflect the identities and interests of local communities – and Schedule 11 to the Local Government Act 1972.

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

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

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

Electorate Forecasts

37 The District Council submitted electorate forecasts for the year 2004, projecting an increase in the electorate of some 10 per cent from 99,472 to 109,598 over the five-year period from 1999 to 2004. It expects most of the growth to occur in the urban areas of Braintree and Bocking, Witham and Halstead, mostly due to large housing developments at Kings Park Village (Braintree East ward), Great Notley Garden Village (Black Notley ward) and Maltings Lane (Witham South ward), as well as a number of smaller developments in Halstead. The Council has estimated rates and locations of housing development with regard to structure and local plans, the expected rate of building over the five-year period and assumed occupancy rates. Advice from the District Council on the likely effect on electorates of changes to ward boundaries has been obtained.

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

Council Size

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

40 Braintree District Council currently has 60 members. During Stage One we received two district-wide schemes based on different council sizes. The Council proposed a reduction in council size to 52, while the Green Group proposed retaining the existing council size of 60.

41 The District Council proposed a reduction in council size to 52. It argued that its scheme had been formulated bearing in mind the Council's commitment in 1998 to "enhance the efficiency, effectiveness, openness and accountability of Council decision making in line with the objectives of the Government's White Paper, *Modern Local Government – In Touch with the People*" and the adoption of a new decision-making structure in April 1999. The Council argued that the introduction of Area committees had resulted in a reduction of the total number of committees, from seven functional and six Area committees to three district-wide policy committees and three generic Area committees, and that fewer councillors were necessary to attend meetings, working groups and panels. The Council also noted that the Local Government Bill contains provisions limiting the size of the executive and argued that the Council's executive will contain up to 10 members, leaving approximately 42 backbench members to provide for "the reduced committee and member panel/working party structure, including scrutiny panels", under its proposed council size of 52. Finally, the Council argued that since its creation in 1974 the Council "has had 60 councillors which is more than any other council in Essex apart from Colchester and Tendring both of which have larger populations".

42 The Green Group proposed retaining the existing council size of 60. They stated that while they had considered alternative council sizes, including a significant reduction to 40 councillors, in their view, these alternative council sizes did not facilitate the achievement of electoral equality or the preservation of community ties in the rural areas of the district. The Green Group strongly opposed the District Council's 52-member proposal, arguing that the proposed reduction in council size would adversely impact on community identities in the district and that its proposals had been subject to little or no consultation locally. Furthermore, they argued that "substantially decreasing the size of the Council appears to fly in the face of the population trend [towards rapid growth]" and that the Council's proposal "is not only divisive but it has considerable political implications".

43 The Conservative Group on the Council also opposed the District Council's proposed reduction in council size to 52, arguing that the proposal had neither been circulated to local parishes nor been adequately consulted upon or discussed in the council committee. They stated that their concerns centred on the lack of consultation on the Council's proposal, which in their view indicated "an unwillingness to accept an all-party proposition". The Liberal Democrats also opposed the Council's proposed reduction in council size, arguing that it had not been properly consulted upon locally, and Option A of the Council's consultation exercise, which proposed a council size of 59.

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

45 As previously explained, the Commission's starting point in its PER work is to assume that the current council size facilitates effective and convenient local government. We will not generally seek a substantial increase or decrease in council size, but as our *Guidance* makes clear we will be prepared to consider the case for change where there are both persuasive arguments and supporting evidence, particularly of a degree of local consensus in favour of change.

46 Having considered the representations received at Stage One regarding council size, a number of considerations have arisen. We state in our *Guidance* and in discussions with councils and other interested parties that changes to council size need to be justified. We are prepared to consider evidence as to the effect which a new political management structure may have on council size. However, it is insufficient for interested parties to simply assert that the implementation of a particular structure will require a particular council size.

47 Notwithstanding the reasonable levels of electoral equality achieved by the District Council's scheme, we consider that there is insufficient evidence to warrant their proposed reduction in council size. In particular, it is difficult to ascertain from its submission whether as a result of a reduction to 52 members, the effectiveness of the council would be improved and community ties better reflected than under the current council size. The evidence we have received from other interested parties suggests that it would not. With regard to the Government's modernisation agenda, we note that there is no implicit or explicit assumption in either the White Paper or in the Local Government Bill that the implementation of a new structure of internal political management would necessarily require a greater or smaller number of councillors. We note that the District Council's submission draws comparisons between the size of Braintree District Council relative to its population, and the levels of representation which exist in neighbouring Essex authorities at present. However, as our *Guidance* makes clear, these are not factors which we can take into account.

48 In reaching our recommendations on council size, we look to build on local consensus. In the case of Braintree, it is clear that no such consensus exists. Indeed, with the exception of the District Council's proposal, virtually every other representation received at Stage One opposed a reduction in council size to 52. Furthermore, we have found no evidence that there has been significant local consultation on a reduction in council size to 52. We are aware, however, that the Council consulted on two alternative schemes, Options A and B, based on council sizes of 59 and 60 respectively and that these options enjoyed a degree of support from parish councils in the district. Indeed, many of the submissions received at Stage One expressed support for retaining the existing council size of 60 or supported one of the options put forward during the Council's consultation exercise.

49 Having considered the size and distribution of the electorate, the geography and other characteristics of the area, together with the representations received, we have concluded that the statutory criteria and the achievement of electoral equality would best be met by a council of 60 members.

Electoral Arrangements

50 We have carefully considered all the representations received, including the district-wide schemes from the Council and the Green Group. From these representations, some considerations have emerged which have informed our draft recommendations.

51 As outlined above, our proposals for Braintree are based on a council size of 60, which we consider to be the most appropriate council size for the district having regard to the evidence received at Stage One and to the size and distribution of the electorate, the geography and other characteristics of the area. Given this preliminary conclusion on the most appropriate council size, we are unable to adopt the District Council's proposal, which was based on a council size of 52, although we consider that certain aspects of its proposals have some merit. We note that the Green Group's proposals, based on a council size of 60, would provide for improved levels of electoral equality throughout the district. While we consider that their proposals have some merit, we have not been persuaded that their proposals would adequately reflect community ties in several areas, most notably in the Black Notley area and the north of the district.

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

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

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

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

Black Notley, Hatfield Peverel and Terling wards

55 The three wards of Black Notley, Hatfield Peverel and Terling are located in the south-west of the district. Black Notley is a single-member ward containing the two parishes of Black Notley and Great Notley (created on 1 April 2000), while Hatfield Peverel ward is a two-member ward containing the parish of the same name. Terling is a predominantly rural single-member ward comprising the parishes Fairstead, Faulkbourne, Terling and White Notley. Under existing arrangements, Black Notley ward has the highest level of electoral inequality in the district, with 132 per cent more electors per councillor than the district average, due to housing developments in the Great Notley area since the last electoral review. This level of electoral inequality is expected to increase to 251 per cent by 2004, due to additional housing developments planned for Great Notley and the redevelopment of the hospital site in Black Notley Village. Terling ward is relatively over-represented, with 25 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the district average (30 per cent fewer by 2004), while Hatfield Peverel ward has 8 per cent more electors per councillor than the district average (1 per cent fewer by 2004).

56 The District Council proposed creating a two-member Hatfield Peverel & Terling ward, comprising Hatfield Peverel and Terling parishes, currently in Terling ward. It proposed combining the remaining part of Terling ward (Fairstead, Faulkbourne and White Notley parishes) with Cressing ward, Black Notley parish (currently in Black Notley ward) and an area containing around 400 electors to the south of the A120 Braintree Bypass (currently in Braintree West ward) to create a new two member ward The Notleys & Cressing ward. It proposed that the parish of Great Notley should form a new two-member Great Notley ward. The District Council argued that its proposals would provide for improved electoral equality, would not divide parishes and would “go some way to ensuring that their essential characteristics and identities are preserved”. Under a council size of 52, Hatfield Peverel & Terling and The Notleys & Cressing wards would have 9 per cent more and 11 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the district average respectively (equal to the average and 1 per cent more by 2004). Great Notley ward would initially have 26 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the average, improving to 10 per cent more than the average by 2004.

57 The Green Group proposed creating a new three-member Terling & Hatfield Peverel ward comprising the existing wards of Terling and Hatfield Peverel, together with the part of Black Notley ward containing the hospital site, which is projected to contain around 400 electors by 2004. The remainder of the current Black Notley ward would form a revised three-member Black Notley ward. Under their proposed council size of 60, Black Notley and Terling & Hatfield Peverel wards would have 10 per cent more and 4 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the district average by 2004.

58 Braintree Liberal Democrats proposed combining Fairstead and Terling parishes with Hatfield Peverel ward, arguing that “although this would result in a slight under-representation for the new ward, that is preferable to a ‘forced marriage’ with Witham”, as proposed under the Council’s Option B. They also proposed including Faulkbourne parish in a ward with White Notley and Cressing parishes. They also favoured creating a two-member Great Notley ward and a single-member Black Notley ward comprising Black Notley village. Hatfield Peverel Parish Council favoured retaining the existing Hatfield Peverel ward and opposed combining it with the small rural village of Terling, as proposed by the Council. Black Notley Parish Council and a

local resident opposed the Council's proposed The Notleys & Cressing ward, arguing that it would cover an extremely large rural area containing very distinct settlements, including two large villages, three small villages and an area of Braintree that is unparished. Black Notley Parish Council also expressed support for a single-member Black Notley Village ward and a two-member Great Notley ward (the Council's Option B).

59 Councillor Galione (Terling ward) opposed the District Council's proposals for this area and argued that while the existing arrangements were very satisfactory, the parishes in Terling ward "would be happy to include part of Black Notley in the ward, a village geographically and socially compatible". In particular, she objected to the Council's proposal to combine Terling parish with Hatfield Peverel ward, arguing that Hatfield Peverel is a larger village with many residents commuting to London, whereas Terling is a rural farming area which would be divided from Fairstead parish with which it shares a joint parish council. Councillor Bigden (Hatfield Peverel ward) objected to the Council's proposals for the area and favoured retaining the existing two-member Hatfield Peverel ward, arguing that this would allow for a small amount of growth and the best possible local representation for the area.

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

61 We also note that there was a degree of support for creating a separate ward for the newly established Great Notley parish, as proposed by the District Council, the Liberal Democrats and Options A and B of the Council's consultation exercise. We consider that this proposal has some merit, as Great Notley is a significant new "garden village" development on the edge of Braintree and shares relatively few ties with the older, more established village of Black Notley. This has been reflected in the formation of a separate parish council for the area. We are therefore content to put forward a separate ward for the area as part of our draft recommendations. We propose, however, that Great Notley ward should be represented by three councillors, in order to take into account the projected growth in electorate in this area over the next five years. In order to improve electoral equality, we propose that the new ward should include the whole of Great Notley parish together with the Queenborough Lane area and the area to the south of the River Brain which currently form part of Braintree West ward. We recognise that this is a well-established area, distinct from the Great Notley development. However, uniting them for district warding purposes with Great Notley will not affect parish boundaries in this area.

62 We consider that that the Green Group's proposal to combine part of Black Notley Village with Terling ward has some merit. We consider that this proposal would have the advantage of retaining rural parishes with similar interests within one ward. We also note Councillor Galione's view that the four parishes in Terling ward would be content to include part of Black Notley in

the ward, though this was opposed by Black Notley Parish Council. However, we consider that the Black Notley village should not be divided and propose including all of Black Notley parish in a new two-member Black Notley & Terling ward. In our view, the hospital site, while newer than most parts of the village, will form an integral part of the Black Notley community once developed. This ward would unite all the small villages to the south of Braintree, north of Witham and west of the Braintree to Witham railway line. By combining Terling ward with the whole of Black Notley we are also able to retain separate wards for the urban and rural parts of the district in this area. The alternative, combining part or all of Terling ward with either Witham or Hatfield Peverel would, in our view, fail to adequately reflect community identities and interests.

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

64 Under our draft recommendations, Black Notley & Terling, Great Notley and Hatfield Peverel wards would have 30 per cent fewer, 36 per cent fewer and 8 per cent more electors per councillor than the district average, improving to 15 per cent fewer, 9 per cent fewer and 1 per cent fewer by 2004 respectively. Our proposals are outlined in Map 2 and the large map at the back of the report.

Witham (five wards)

65 The five urban wards of Witham Central, Witham Chipping Hill, Witham North, Witham South and Witham West are coterminous with the Witham town council area in the south of the district. Witham Chipping Hill, Witham South and Witham West wards are each represented by two councillors, while Witham North ward is represented by three councillors and witham Central ward is represented by one councillor. Under existing arrangements, Witham Central and Witham South wards are significantly under-represented, with 41 per cent and 50 per cent more electors per councillor than the district average respectively (30 per cent and 60 per cent more by 2004). Witham North and Witham West wards are currently over-represented, with 26 per cent and 12 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the district average respectively (33 per cent and 20 per cent fewer by 2004). Witham Chipping Hill ward has 3 per cent more electors per councillor than the district average (7 per cent fewer by 2004).

66 The District Council proposed reducing the number of councillors representing Witham from 10 to nine. It proposed combining the existing Witham North and Witham Central Wards, together with Albert Road from Witham Chipping Hill ward (containing 62 electors), to create a new three-member Witham North & East ward. The Council proposed combining the rest of Witham Chipping Hill ward with Witham West ward to create a new three-member Witham West & Chipping Hill ward. Finally, it proposed retaining the existing Witham South ward, but increasing its representation from two to three councillors. Under the Council's proposed council size of 52, Witham North & East, Witham West & Chipping Hill and Witham South wards would

have electoral variances of no more than 13 per cent from the district average, improving to no more than 8 per cent from the average by 2004.

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

68 We received three further representations regarding this area at Stage One. The Liberal Democrats generally supported the Council's Option A. This option would combine Witham Central and Witham Chipping Hill wards, would retain the existing Witham North and Witham South wards, but with two and three councillors respectively, and would combine Witham West ward with most of Terling ward. However, they opposed combining the rural parishes of Terling and Fairstead with the urban area of Witham, arguing these areas should be combined with Hatfield Peverel. Witham Town Council expressed support for electoral arrangements for district wards "that respect the integrity of the parish boundaries and are coterminous with them". It strongly opposed combining any part of Witham with adjoining rural parishes, arguing that "such arrangement will threaten the unique characteristic and identities of the local parishes". As outlined above, Councillor Galione also opposed combining part of Terling ward with Witham.

69 We have carefully considered the representations received at Stage One. We note that there was a degree of consensus in favour of retaining separate representation for the Witham town council area and against combining it with the adjoining rural parishes. As discussed previously, we concur with this assessment and consider that the urban community of Witham has identities and interests distinct from the largely rural parishes which neighbour the town.

70 We note that while the District Council's proposals for this area would provide for reasonable levels of electoral equality under a council size of 52, our proposed council size of 60 limits the extent to which we are able to put forward their proposals for their area. Nevertheless, we consider that their proposal to combine part of Witham Chipping Hill ward with Witham West ward has some merit, particularly with regard to the communities located to the west of the River Brain, and are content to put it forward as part of our draft recommendations, with some modifications in order to provide for improved electoral equality. To further improve electoral equality in our proposed three-member Witham West ward, we propose including an area containing 350 electors (Guithavon Road, Highfields Road, Millbridge Road, Blunts Hall Road, Cuppers Close and Stevens Road), currently located in Witham Central and Witham South wards, as broadly proposed by the Green Group. We propose combining the remaining part of Witham Chipping Hill ward with Witham Central ward, excluding the area transferred to our proposed Witham West ward. We consider that our proposed ward would unite within one ward the areas

around the town centre, bounded by the River Brain, the Witham to Braintree railway lined and the parish boundary.

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

72 Under our draft recommendations, Witham Central and Witham North would have 9 per cent and 11 per cent more electors per councillor than the district average respectively, improving to 1 per cent fewer and 1 per cent more by 2004. Witham South and Witham West wards would have 3 per cent fewer and 5 per cent more electors per councillor than the district average respectively (3 per cent more and 4 per cent fewer by 2004). Our proposals are outlined in Map A2 in Appendix A.

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

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

74 The District Council proposed combining the existing Cressing ward with Black Notley, Fairstead, Faulkbourne and White Notley parishes and part of Braintree West ward in a new two-member The Notleys & Cressing ward, as outlined above. It proposed creating a new three-member Coggeshall & Earls Colne ward, comprising the two parishes of the same name, and combining the remaining part of Coggeshall ward (Bradwell and Stisted parishes) with Witham Silver End & Rivenhall ward to create a two-member Silver End, Rivenhall, Bradwell & Stisted ward. The District Council argued that its proposals would provide for improved electoral equality, would not divide parishes and would "go some way to ensuring that their essential

characteristics and identities are preserved”. Under the Council’s proposals, Coggeshall & Earls Colne and Silver End, Rivenhall, Bradwell & Stisted wards would have 7 per cent and 9 per cent more electors per councillor than the district average respectively (equal to the district average in both wards by 2004). The Notleys & Cressing ward would have 11 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the district average, improving to 1 per cent more by 2004.

75 The Green Group proposed retaining the existing Witham Silver End & Rivenhall ward and a revised two-member Kelvedon ward comprising the existing ward, less an area containing around 300 electors in the northern rural part of Kelvedon ward, which they proposed combining with the existing Cressing and Coggeshall wards to form a revised three-member Cressing & Coggeshall ward. Under their proposed council size of 60, Cressing & Coggeshall, Kelvedon and Witham Silver End & Rivenhall wards would have 11 per cent more, 10 per cent more and 9 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the district average by 2004.

76 The Liberal Democrats proposed combining Stisted and Bradwell parishes with Gosfield ward and Greenstead Green & Halstead Rural parish (currently located in Colne Engaine & Greenstead Green ward) to form a revised Gosfield ward. They opposed linking Bradwell and Stisted parish with Kelvedon or Feering parishes, arguing that these parishes share “no historical or community identities” and considered that they would “fit better” in their proposed Gosfield ward. They proposed that Kelvedon and Feering should, instead, form a ward on their own. They supported Option A in the remainder of the area. Black Notley Parish Council and a local resident opposed the District Council’s proposed The Notleys & Cressing ward, arguing that it would cover a large geographical area and combine distinct communities with few common links. Cressing Parish Council opposed the District Council’s proposal for Cressing parish, arguing that it was “a purely political proposal” that had not been consulted upon locally. Although its first preference was to retain the existing Cressing ward, Cressing Parish Council agreed to the initial proposals by the District Council to combine Cressing and White Notley parishes in a new ward.

77 Rivenhall and Stisted parish councils strongly objected to the District Council’s proposed Silver End, Rivenhall, Bradwell & Stisted ward, arguing that it would cover a large geographical area and would unite four distinct parishes with few direct community ties or communication links. Bradwell and Stisted parish councils both favoured retaining the existing Coggeshall ward. As their second preference, Bradwell Parish Council favoured the District Council’s proposal for the area, while Stisted Parish Council favoured the Liberal Democrats’ proposed Gosfield ward. Coggeshall Parish Council expressed support for Option A of the District Council’s consultation exercise, which would retain the existing Coggeshall ward. It argued that the three parishes of Bradwell, Coggeshall and Stisted have a close affinity, as they are linked by the A120 and share common interests.

78 Two local residents opposed the District Council’s proposals for this area, arguing that Kelvedon and Feering have little in common with the largely rural villages of Bradwell and Stisted, and that the A120 acts as a barrier between them. They argued that it would be more logical to retain the existing Kelvedon ward and to reduce its representation from three to two councillors. One resident opposed the District Council’s proposal to join Coggeshall and Earls Colne parishes in one large ward, while another resident noted that the existing Witham Silver End & Rivenhall ward does not contain any part of Witham and favoured renaming it Silver End

& Rivenhall ward or Rivenhall & Silver End ward to more adequately reflect its constituent communities.

79 Having carefully considered the representations received at Stage One, we note that there is a lack of consensus regarding the most appropriate warding arrangements for this area. We note, however, that the majority of submissions received from parish councils and local residents opposed the District Council's submitted proposals, arguing that they would unite communities with distinct interests and identities. In particular, a number of submissions commented on the differences between communities neighbouring the A12 trunk road, such as Rivenhall, Kelvedon and Feering, and those neighbouring the A120 Braintree Bypass, such as Coggeshall, Bradwell and Stisted. We are also persuaded that the village of Earls Colne shares stronger ties with the other parishes in the Colne Valley than with Coggeshall. We recognise that there is some merit in retaining the current Kelvedon ward, but reducing its representation to two councillors as proposed by the District Council and the Liberal Democrats. However, under a council size of 52, such a ward would have 27 per cent more electors per councillor now and 18 per cent more by 2004.

80 We consider that the Green Group's proposals for this area have some merit. Their proposals would have the advantage of retaining Bradwell, Stisted and Coggeshall parishes within the same ward, as at present. Their proposed Kelvedon ward would retain the urban core of Kelvedon and Feering parishes within one ward. The more sparsely populated parts of each parish would be combined with adjoining parishes to the north. In addition, in light of our proposed Black Notley & Terling ward, as described above, we consider that their proposal to create a three-member Cressing & Coggeshall ward would provide a reasonable balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria guiding this review. We recognise the preference of Cressing Parish Council to retain a single-member Cressing ward, but note that with an electorate of some 1,300 such an arrangement would result in an unacceptably high level of electoral inequality under a council size of 60. We are therefore unable to put it forward as part of our draft recommendations.

81 In the light of these considerations, we propose putting forward the Green Group's proposals for this area, with some modifications. We consider that the London Liverpool Street to Colchester railway line constitutes significant boundary in this area and propose that it should form the boundary between Kelvedon ward and Cressing & Coggeshall and Silver End & Rivenhall wards. We also propose to include the northern part of Kelvedon parish in a new Silver End & Rivenhall ward. We note that the northern parts of Kelvedon and Feering parishes share no direct communication links with each other and that, while the northern part of Feering parish is directly linked to Coggeshall by the B1024 Coggeshall Road, the northern part of Kelvedon parish is also linked by Hollow Road to Silver End & Rivenhall ward. Furthermore, we note that the inclusion of part of Kelvedon parish in Silver End & Rivenhall ward would result in improved levels of electoral equality in both of our proposed wards. Under our draft recommendations, Cressing & Coggeshall, Kelvedon and Silver End & Rivenhall wards would have 18 per cent, 12 per cent and 8 per cent more electors per councillor than the district average respectively. However, electoral equality is projected to improve significantly to 9 per cent more, 5 per cent more and 2 per cent fewer by 2004. We recognise that our proposals for this area differ, to an extent, from the proposals put to us at Stage One, and would therefore particularly welcome further local views regarding this area at Stage Three. Our proposals are illustrated in Map 2 and Maps A3 and A4 at Appendix A.

Braintree town (five wards)

82 The five wards of Braintree Central, Braintree East, Braintree West, Bocking North and Bocking South cover the Braintree and Bocking urban area, the only unparished area of the district. Each ward is represented by three councillors. Under existing arrangements, Bocking North and Bocking South wards are over-represented, with 12 per cent and 8 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the district average respectively (8 per cent fewer in both wards by 2004). Braintree Central, Braintree East and Braintree North are all under-represented, with 9 per cent, 38 per cent and 9 per cent more electors per councillor than the district average. The level of electoral inequality in Braintree Central and Braintree East wards is expected to increase to 20 per cent and 56 per cent above the average over the next five years due to new housing developments, while Braintree West ward is projected to have 5 per cent more than average by 2004.

83 The District Council proposed significant changes in this area. It proposed creating a new three-member Braintree South ward comprising the part of Braintree West ward to the south of the River Brain and north of the A120 Braintree Bypass and the part of Braintree Central ward to the south of Manor Street. It proposed a revised three-member Braintree Central ward comprising the remaining part of the existing ward, the part of Braintree West ward to the north of the River Brain and the part of Braintree East ward to the west of Bartram Avenue and Clockhouse Way. The part of Braintree West ward to the south of the A120 would form part of its proposed The Notleys & Cressing ward, as discussed previously. The District Council proposed a revised three-member Braintree East ward comprising the remaining part of the existing ward to the south of Coggeshall Road and the Kings Park Development area. It proposed transferring the remaining part of Braintree East ward to a revised Bocking South ward, and transferring around 600 electors in the north of the existing Bocking South ward to a new three-member Bocking North & Panfield ward, which would also include Panfield parish (currently in Panfield ward). Under the District Council's proposed council size of 52, Braintree Central, Braintree East, Braintree West, Bocking North & Panfield and Bocking South wards would have electoral variances of no more than 11 per cent from the district average currently (no more than 4 per cent from the average by 2004).

84 The Green Group proposed retaining the existing three-member Bocking North and Braintree West wards. They proposed a revised three-member Bocking South, which would include the Edinburgh Gardens area (currently in Braintree East ward) and a new two-member Braintree North East ward comprising the remaining part of Braintree East ward to the north of Coggeshall Road. They proposed a new three-member Braintree South East ward comprising the part of Braintree East ward to the south of Coggeshall Road, as well as an area containing around 900 electors in the north-east of the existing Braintree Central ward, and a revised Braintree Central ward comprising the remaining part of the existing ward. Under the Green Group's proposal, Bocking North, Bocking South, Braintree Central, Braintree North East and Braintree South East wards would have electoral variances of no more than 8 per cent from the district average by 2004, based on a council size of 60.

85 The Liberal Democrats generally supported Option A of the District Council's consultation exercise, but proposed several changes which they argued would better reflect community

identities. They proposed creating a new single-member Bocking Village ward, comprising around 2300 electors for the northern part of the existing Bocking North ward. They also considered that Braintree North ward and Bocking West ward would be more appropriate names for Bocking East ward and Bocking South wards, as proposed under Option A. Councillor Broyd (Gosfield ward) generally opposed the District Council's proposals and argued that "a boundary line incorporating White Ash Green, Southey Green, Blackmore and Beazley End and the part of High Garrett within the Foley Corner junction [in a revised Gosfield ward] would have been more acceptable than that proposed". Panfield Parish Council opposed the District Council's proposal to combine their area with Bocking North ward, arguing that the rural village of Panfield has more in common with the parishes of Bardfield Saling, Great Saling and Shalford than with the largely urban Bocking area. Councillor Walsh also opposed the District Council's proposed Bocking North & Panfield ward, arguing that its proposals had not been consulted upon locally and that they "are geographically flawed, with the urban/rural boundaries compromised" and would not be conducive to effective representation.

86 We have carefully considered the representations received at Stage One. We note that there was a lack of consensus with regard to the most appropriate warding arrangements for this area, largely due to the different council sizes proposed by the District Council and the Green Group. As stated previously, our proposed council size of 60 limits the extent to which we are able to put forward the District Council's proposals. We consider, however, that there is some merit in their proposal to combine the area to the south of the River Brain (currently in Braintree West ward) with the southern part of the existing Braintree South ward. We note that the communities in this area are largely self-contained and can only be accessed from Notley Road or Tortoiseshell Way, and do not consider that the Green Group's proposal to retain the existing Braintree West ward would best reflect community ties in this area.

87 We propose putting forward the District Council's proposed Braintree South ward as part of our draft recommendations, with some amendments to provide for improved electoral equality as a three-member ward under a council size of 60. We consider that Flich Way constitutes a significant barrier in this area, separating communities on either side of it, and propose that it should form the northern boundary of Braintree South ward. To improve electoral equality further, we propose including Godlings Way and all the roads leading from it (Clairmont Close, Giffins Close, River View, Strudwick Close and The Kentings) in Braintree South ward. We propose that the southern boundary for the ward should be the A120 Braintree Bypass. We also propose a revised three-member Braintree Central ward, which would broadly unite Braintree town centre within one ward, similar to that proposed by the District Council. Our proposed ward would contain the part of Braintree West ward to the north of the River Brain (excluding the Godlings Way area) and the part of Braintree Central ward to the north of Flich Way. We also propose including Peel Crescent and the north side of Rayne Road, currently located in Bocking South ward, in the revised ward as we consider these areas are relatively isolated from the remainder of Bocking South ward. In order to further improve electoral equality in our proposed Braintree Central ward, we propose transferring the area to the east of and including Cressing Road, Trotters Field and Bishops Avenue (currently in Braintree Central ward) to a revised Braintree East ward, as discussed below. We note that the Green Group also proposed combining this area with the adjoining area of Braintree East ward, albeit with different boundaries.

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

89 In the Bocking area, we note that the District Council's proposed Bocking North & Panfield ward was opposed by Panfield Parish Council and Councillor Walsh, who opposed combining the rural Panfield parish with the largely urban Bocking area. We concur with their assessment and do not consider that the Council's proposals would adequately reflect community ties in this part of the district. We also note that the Liberal Democrats' proposed Bocking Village ward would result in unacceptably high levels of electoral inequality in this area, based on our proposed council size of 60, and have not been persuaded to put it forward as part of our draft recommendations.

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

91 Under our draft recommendations, Braintree Blackwater, Braintree Central and Braintree East wards would have 7 per cent more, 13 per cent fewer and 23 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the district average respectively, improving to 5 per cent more, 3 per cent more and 4 per cent fewer by 2004. Bocking North and Bocking South wards would have 2 per cent and 9 per cent more electors per councillor than the district average respectively (8 per cent more in both wards by 2004). We recognise that our proposals for this area depart to an extent from the schemes put to us at Stage One. We consider, however, that our draft proposals would provide a better balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria than the existing arrangements and the proposals received at Stage One. However, we would welcome further local views regarding the most appropriate warding arrangements for this area at Stage Three. Our proposals are illustrated on the large map inserted at the back of this report.

Panfield, Rayne and Three Fields wards

92 The three wards of Panfield, Rayne and Three Fields are located in the western part of the district to the north-west of Braintree town. Panfield ward (returning one councillor) comprises the two parishes of Panfield and Shalford, while Rayne ward (returning one councillor) contains the three parishes of Bardfield Saling, Great Saling and Rayne. Three Fields ward is represented by two councillors and contains Finchingfield, Great Bardfield and Wethersfield parishes. Under existing arrangements, Panfield, Rayne and Three Fields wards have 20 per cent fewer, 21 per cent more and 9 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the district average respectively. The level of electoral equality in each ward is not projected to change significantly over the next five years.

93 At Stage One, the District Council proposed retaining the existing single-member Rayne ward, and combining Shalford parish (currently in Panfield ward) with the existing Three Fields ward to create a new two-member Three Fields with Shalford ward. It proposed combining Panfield parish with Bocking North ward in a new Bocking North & Panfield ward, as detailed above. The District Council argued that its proposals would provide for improved electoral equality, would not divide parishes and would “go some way to ensuring that their essential characteristics and identities are preserved”. Under its proposed council size of 52, Rayne and Three Fields with Shalford wards would have 5 per cent more and 5 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the district average respectively (2 per cent and 5 per cent fewer by 2004).

94 The Green Group proposed creating a new two-member Panfield & Rayne ward, comprising the existing single-member Panfield and Rayne wards, and retaining the existing Three Fields ward. Under their proposals, Panfield & Rayne and Three Fields wards would have 6 per cent and 8 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the district average respectively by 2004.

95 The Liberal Democrats expressed general support for Option A of the District Council’s consultation exercise, which proposed retaining Three Fields ward, a revised single-member Rayne ward comprising the parish of the same name and a revised single-member Panfield ward comprising the existing ward together with Bardfield Saling and Great Saling parishes (currently in Rayne ward). Finchingfield, Great Bardfield and Wethersfield parish councils opposed the District Council’s proposed Three Fields with Shalford ward, arguing that its proposals had not been consulted upon locally, and expressed support for either Options A and B of the Council’s

initial consultation exercise, as outlined above. Rayne Parish Council expressed support for the formation of a Rayne ward. Panfield Parish Council and Councillor Walsh opposed the District Council's proposed Bocking North & Panfield ward, arguing that its proposals had not been consulted upon locally and that they would combine distinct rural and urban areas.

96 Having considered the representations received at Stage One, we note that there was significant support for retaining the existing Three Fields wards. We consider that the existing ward represents community ties well and note that, under a council size of 60, it would provide reasonable levels of electoral equality currently and in five years' time. In light of these considerations, we are content to retain the existing two-member Three Fields ward as part of our draft recommendations. We also note that there was some support from local parishes and the Liberal Democrats for revised single-member Panfield and Rayne wards, as proposed under Options A and B of the Council's consultation exercise. We consider that this proposal has some merit, as it would unite communities of a similar size and rural character and would create a separate ward for the significantly larger community of Rayne parish which is relatively self-contained. We therefore propose creating a single-member Panfield ward, comprising the four parishes of Bardfield Saling, Great Saling, Panfield and Shalford, and a single-member Rayne ward, comprising the parish of the same name. We recognise that the Green Group's proposed two-member Panfield & Rayne ward would also achieve a reasonable level of electoral equality, but we consider that our proposals would better reflect community ties in this area. Under our draft recommendations, Panfield, Rayne and Three Fields wards would have 1 per cent more, 1 per cent more and 9 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the district average respectively (7 per cent, 6 per cent and 8 per cent fewer by 2004).

Colne Engaine & Greenstead Green, Earls Colne and Gosfield wards

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

98 The District Council proposed combining Gosfield and Greenstead Green & Halstead Rural parishes with Great Maplestead parish (currently in Castle Hedingham ward) to create a single-member Gosfield & Halstead Rural ward. It proposed creating a single-member Pebmarsh, Bures & The Colnes ward, comprising Bures Hamlet and Pebmarsh parishes (currently in Stour Valley South ward), Colne Engaine parish (currently in Colne Engaine & Greenstead Green ward) and White Colne parish (currently in Earls Colne ward). The Council proposed combining Earls Colne and Coggeshall parishes in a new Coggeshall & Earls Colne ward, as detailed above. The District Council argued that its proposals would provide for improved electoral equality without dividing parishes and would "go some way to ensuring that their essential characteristics and identities are preserved." Under the Council's proposed council size of 52, Gosfield & Halstead

Rural and Pebmarsh, Bures & The Colnes wards would have 4 per cent and 13 per cent more electors per councillor than the district average respectively (5 per cent fewer and 5 per cent more by 2004).

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

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

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

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

103 We note that there was a lack of consensus among the submissions received at Stage One. We note, however, that the majority of the submissions received opposed the District Council’s

submitted proposals, on the basis that they would disrupt historic community ties, particularly in the Colne Valley area, and that its proposed Coggeshall & Earls Colne ward would combine communities with different interests and identities. We concur with their assessment and do not consider that the District Council's proposals would provide the most reasonable balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria in this area. We note that Green Group, Councillor Boyce, White Colne and Earls Colne parish councils and Options A and B of the Council's consultation exercise proposed creating a single-member ward comprising Colne Engaine, Earls Colne and White Colne parishes. We consider this proposal has some merit, as we consider it would reflect community interests and identities well, in addition to providing for a reasonable level of electoral equality, and we are content to put it forward as part of our draft recommendations. In order to reflect the totality of the area covered by this ward, we propose naming it The Three Colnes.

104 Our draft recommendations for Coggeshall ward, as described above, limit the extent to which we are able to put forward the Liberal Democrats' proposals for this area. We have, however, noted their view that Gosfield and Greenstead Green & Halstead Rural parishes have more in common with each other than with Bocking North ward or the parishes of Castle Hedingham ward. We consider that this view has some merit and note that under a council size of 60, a single-member ward comprising these two parishes of Gosfield and Greenstead Green & Halstead Rural would have a reasonable level of electoral equality. We also considered Councillor Broyd's proposal to unite a number of small settlements with Gosfield in a new ward. However, by not transferring whole parishes, it would require a significant amount of parish warding. We do, however, consider there is merit in his proposal to link Gosfield with part of the High Garrett area of Bocking North ward. In the light of these considerations, we propose creating a single-member Gosfield & Greenstead Green ward, comprising Gosfield and Greenstead Green & Halstead Rural parishes. We also propose including the High Garrett area with the adjoining area of Gosfield than retaining its current links with the more urbanised area in the south of Bocking North ward. Our proposals for this area are illustrated on Map 2 and the large map at the back of this report.

105 Under our draft recommendations, Gosfield & Greenstead Green and The Three Colnes wards would initially have 20 per cent and 14 per cent more electors per councillor than the district average respectively, improving to 10 per cent and 7 per cent more by 2004. We recognise that our proposals for this area differ to an extent from the views put to us at Stage One and would particularly welcome further local views at Stage Three.

Halstead St Andrew's and Halstead Trinity wards

106 The town of Halstead is currently divided into two wards, Halstead St Andrew's and Halstead Trinity, returning two councillors and three councillors respectively. Halstead St Andrew's ward, comprising the two parish wards of St Andrew's North and St Andrew's South, currently has 23 per cent more electors per councillors than the district average, while Halstead Trinity ward, comprising the two parish wards of Holy Trinity North and Holy Trinity South, has 19 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the district average. The level of electoral equality in each ward is expected to worsen further over the next five years.

107 The District Council proposed amending the boundary between Halstead St Andrew's and Halstead Trinity ward to transfer the area to the south of the dismantled railway line, currently in Halstead St Andrew's ward, to a revised Halstead Trinity ward. It also proposed reducing the number of councillors representing Halstead St Andrew's ward from three to two councillors. The District Council argued that although its proposals would result in electoral variances of 10 per cent by 2004, they would preserve existing town boundaries and would provide for clearly defined ward boundaries. Under its proposed council size of 52, Halstead St Andrew's and Halstead Trinity wards would have 6 per cent fewer and 19 per cent more electors per councillor than the district average respectively (10 per cent more in both wards by 2004).

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

109 We received no further representations regarding this area at Stage One. We note that while the District Council, the Green Group and the Liberal Democrats proposed different boundary amendments, their proposals would broadly retain the existing warding structure in Halstead town. We also note that the Liberal Democrats' and Green Group's proposals, based on options A and B, would result in a significant improvement in the level of electoral equality in both wards under a council size of 60, and propose therefore to put them forward as part of our draft recommendations. Our proposed Halstead St Andrew's and Halstead Trinity wards would have 9 per cent fewer and 8 per cent more electors per councillor than the district average respectively, improving to 2 per cent and 1 per cent above the average by 2004. Our proposals are illustrated on Map 2 and Map A5 at Appendix A.

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

110 The three wards of Stour Valley Central, Stour Valley North and Stour Valley South cover the rural north-eastern part of the district and are each represented by one councillor. Stour Valley Central ward comprises the five parishes of Belchamp Walter, Borley, Bulmer, Gestingthorpe and Wickham St Paul, while Stour Valley North ward covers the eight parishes of Ashen, Belchamp Otten, Belchamp St Paul, Foxearth, Liston, Ovington, Pentlow and Tilbury Juxta Clare. Stour Valley South ward also contains eight parishes: Alphamstone, Bures Hamlet, Great Henny, Lamarsh, Little Henny, Middleton, Pebmarsh and Twinstead. Under existing arrangements, Stour Valley Central and Stour Valley North wards have 21 per cent and 23 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the district average respectively (27 per cent and 29 per cent fewer by 2004), while Stour Valley South ward has 5 per cent more electors per councillor than the district average (3 per cent fewer by 2004).

111 The District Council put forward revised single-member Stour Valley North and Stour Valley South wards. Under its proposals, Stour Valley North ward would comprise the existing

ward together with Ridgewell and Stambourne parishes, which currently form part of Upper Colne ward, and Borley parish from Stour Valley Central ward. Its proposed Stour Valley South ward would contain the remainder of Stour Valley Central ward, the whole of Stour Valley South ward, except Pebmarsh and Bures Hamlet parishes, and Little Maplestead parish from Castle Hedingham ward. Under the District Council's proposals, Pebmarsh and Bures Hamlet parishes would be combined with Colne Engaine and White Colne parishes in a new Pebmarsh, Bures & The Colnes ward, as outlined above. The District Council argued that its proposals would provide for improved electoral equality, would not divide parishes and would "go some way to ensuring that their essential characteristics and identities are preserved". Its proposed Stour Valley North and Stour Valley South wards would have 9 per cent and 11 per cent more electors per councillor than the district average respectively (equal to the average and 3 per cent more by 2004), based on a council size of 52.

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

113 The Liberal Democrats proposed retaining the existing Stour Valley South ward, but proposed several changes to Stour Valley Central and Stour Valley North wards in order to better reflect the identities of local communities and improve electoral equality. They proposed creating a new ward comprising the nine parishes of Belchamp Otten, Belchamp St Paul, Belchamp Walter, Borley, Bulmer, Foxearth, Liston, Pentlow and Wickham St Paul, which in their view would "represent an established geographical and social community with an appropriate electorate." The Liberal Democrats also proposed combining Ashen and Ovington parishes (currently in Stour Valley North ward) with Upper Colne ward to create a new ward, which they argued would "have a better geographical and social cohesion". Tilbury Juxta Clare parish would be combined with the currently Yeldham ward.

114 Gestingthorpe Parish Council stated that their prime concern was that district councillors should not be required to cover a larger number of parishes, which in their view would impose a heavier workload on councillors. Councillor Cooper (Gestingthorpe parish) strongly objected to the District Council's proposals for the area, arguing that they would result in the creation of geographically large rural wards containing a large number of parishes, which would "make genuine representation almost impossible". Great Maplestead and Little Maplestead parish councils opposed the District Council's proposals to place their parishes in different wards, arguing that they share strong social community links and common interests.

115 Little Yeldham, Tilbury Juxta Clare & Ovington Parish Council opposed the District Council's proposals for their area, arguing that Tilbury Juxta Clare should remain in the same ward as Ovington and other rural villages, rather than forming part of Yeldham ward. Councillor Watkins (Tilbury Juxta Clare parish) also opposed combining the village community of Tilbury Juxta Clare parish with Yeldham ward and requested no change. Foxearth & Liston Parish

Council argued that their traditional links have been with other parishes in Stour Valley North ward, particularly with Pentlow parish.

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

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

118 We have noted the Liberal Democrats' proposals to create a single-member ward comprising Stour Valley North ward (excluding Ashen and Ovington parishes) and Stour Valley Central ward (excluding Gestingthorpe parish). We concur with their assessment that these parishes share some common geographical and community ties and are content to put forward their proposals as part of our draft recommendations, subject to some modifications. We have noted Little Yeldham, Tilbury Juxta Clare & Ovington Parish Council's preference to retain Tilbury Juxta Clare and Ovington parishes together with the other small village communities of Stour Valley North ward, rather than combining them with Yeldham ward. We therefore propose that Ovington and Tilbury Juxta Clare parishes form part of a revised single-member Stour Valley North ward. To provide for improved electoral equality in Stour Valley North ward, we propose transferring Wickham St Paul parish, currently located in the southern part of the existing Stour Valley Central ward, together with Gestingthorpe parish in a new Hedingham & Maplestead ward, as detailed below.

119 Under our draft recommendations, Stour Valley North and Stour Valley South wards both would have 5 per cent more electors per councillor than the district average (3 per cent fewer by 2004).

Castle Hedingham and Sible Hedingham wards

120 Castle Hedingham and Sible Hedingham wards are located in the north-central part of the district and are represented by one and two councillors respectively. Castle Hedingham comprises

the three parishes of Castle Hedingham, Great Maplestead and Little Maplestead, and currently has 12 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the district average. Sible Hedingham contains the parish of the same name and also has 12 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the district average. The level of electoral equality in each ward is expected to worsen over the next five years.

121 The District Council proposed creating a new two-member The Hedinghams ward, comprising Sible Hedingham and Castle Hedingham parishes. The Council proposed that Great Maplestead parish should form part of a new Gosfield & Halstead Rural ward, as discussed previously. It proposed that Little Maplestead parish should be combined with parts of Stour Valley South and Stour Valley Central wards in a revised Stour Valley South ward as also outlined above. The District Council argued that its proposals would provide for improved electoral equality, would not divide parishes and would “go some way to ensuring that their essential characteristics and identities are preserved”. The District Council’s proposed The Hedinghams ward would have 1 per cent more electors per councillor than the district average (5 per cent fewer by 2004), based on a council size of 52.

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

123 The Liberal Democrats favoured retaining the existing Castle Hedingham and Sible Hedingham wards. They opposed including Toppesfield parish (currently in Upper Colne ward) in the same ward as Sible Hedingham parish, arguing that they do not have any community interests. They recognised that retaining the existing Sible Hedingham ward would result in a degree of over-representation but considered this preferable to forcing links with communities with which it has nothing in common. Castle Hedingham Parish Council & Burial Board argued that the interests and concerns of Castle Hedingham would be more effectively met if it were linked with Sible Hedingham parish. Great Maplestead and Little Maplestead parish councils opposed the District Council’s proposals to separate their parishes into different wards, arguing that they have very strong social links and community interests. They favoured retaining Great Maplestead, Little Maplestead and Castle Hedingham parishes in the same ward, as proposed under Options A and B of the District Council’s consultation exercise. Gestingthorpe Parish Council opposed larger wards in rural area, while Councillor Cooper (Gestingthorpe parish) opposed the District council’s proposal.

124 Having considered the representations received, we note that there was some support for retaining the parishes of the existing Castle Hedingham ward within the same ward, in particular Great Maplestead and Little Maplestead parishes. We consider that there is a natural affinity between the two parishes of Great Maplestead and Little Maplestead and are not persuaded that the District Council’s proposals would adequately reflect community interests and identities in this area. We note that the Liberal Democrats proposed retaining the existing Sible Hedingham

ward. While we recognise their concern about limited links with parishes to its north, we are not persuaded that to put forward this proposal as we consider that the level of electoral inequality in this area should be addressed.

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

126 In light of these considerations, we propose creating a new three-member Hedingham & Maplestead ward, comprising the existing Castle Hedingham and Sible Hedingham wards, which we consider would reflect the balance of the views expressed at Stage One. To further improve electoral equality in our proposed ward, we propose also including Gestingthorpe and Wickham St Paul parishes, currently located in the south of Stour Valley Central ward. Under our draft recommendations, Hedingham & Maplestead ward would have 1 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the district average (7 per cent fewer by 2004).

Bumpstead, Upper Colne and Yeldham wards

127 The three wards of Bumpstead, Upper Colne and Yeldham are located in the north-western part of the district and are each represented by one councillor. Bumpstead ward contains Helions Bumpstead, Steeple Bumpstead and Sturmer parishes, while Upper Colne ward contains Birdbrook, Ridgewell, Stambourne and Toppesfield parishes. Yeldham ward comprises the two parishes of Great Yeldham and Little Yeldham. Under existing arrangements, Bumpstead, Upper Colne and Yeldham wards have 14 per cent more, 13 per cent fewer and 4 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the district average respectively (6 per cent more, 20 per cent fewer and 7 per cent fewer by 2004).

128 The District Council proposed a revised Bumpstead ward comprising the existing ward and Birdbrook parish (currently located in Upper Colne ward), and a new Great Yeldham ward, comprising the current Yeldham ward together with Toppesfield parish (currently located in Upper Colne ward). As described previously, the Council proposed including Stambourne and Ridgewell parishes in a revised Stour Valley North ward. It argued that its proposals would provide for improved electoral equality, would not divide parishes and would “go some way to ensuring that their essential characteristics and identities are preserved”. The District Council’s proposed Bumpstead and Great Yeldham wards would, on the basis of a council size of 52, have 15 per cent and 4 per cent more electors per councillor than the district average respectively (6 per cent more and equal to the average by 2004).

129 The Green Group proposed retaining the existing Bumpstead ward and creating a new Sible Hedingham & Upper Colne ward, comprising the existing Sible Hedingham and Castle Hedingham parishes and Upper Colne ward, less Ridgewell parish, as described above. They proposed including Yeldham ward and Ridgewell parish of Upper Colne ward in a revised two-

member Stour Valley North ward, also as described previously. Under the Green Group's proposed council size of 60, Bumpstead ward would have 6 per cent more electors per councillor than the district average by 2004.

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

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

132 We have carefully considered the representations received at Stage One. As stated previously, we do not consider that the District Council's proposals for this area would adequately reflect the statutory criteria under our proposed council size of 60, and are not persuaded to put them forward as part of our draft recommendations. We have also not been persuaded to put forward the Green Group's proposed Sible Hedingham & Upper Colne ward, which we consider would result in the creation of a large, disparate ward comprising several distinct communities.

133 We note that the Green Group and the Liberal Democrats both supported retaining the existing Bumpstead ward. We recognise that Bumpstead is a relatively isolated ward containing well-defined communities and note that, under a council size of 60, the existing ward would have a reasonable level of electoral equality both now and in five years' time. We are content therefore to put forward the existing Bumpstead ward as part of our draft recommendations.

134 As also stated previously, we consider that the Liberal Democrats' proposals for the Upper Colne and Stour Valley areas reflect community ties well. In particular, we consider that Ashen parish has strong communication and geographical links with the parishes to the south, and propose including it in a revised single-member Upper Colne ward. We received several proposals for the existing Yeldham ward at Stage One, but note that our proposals in the adjoining areas of Upper Colne and the Stour Valley limit the extent to which we were able to

consider alternative proposals. We also note that the existing Yeldham ward comprises two parishes with strong communications and community links and that, under a council size of 60, it would have reasonable levels of electoral equality both now and in five years' time. In light of these considerations, we propose retaining the existing Yeldham ward.

135 Under our draft recommendations, Upper Colne and Yeldham wards would have 3 per cent more and 4 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the district average (6 per cent and 7 per cent fewer by 2004). Bumpstead ward would initially have 14 per cent more electors per councillor than the district average, improving to 6 per cent more by 2004.

Electoral Cycle

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

137 We have considered carefully all representations. At present, there appears to be a majority view that the present electoral cycle should be retained and we therefore propose no change to the current electoral cycle of whole-council elections for the District Council.

Conclusions

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

- a council of 60 members should be retained;
- there should be 29 wards;
- the boundaries of 27 of the existing wards should be modified, resulting in a net reduction of four wards;
- elections should continue to be held for the whole council every four years.

139 Our draft recommendations would involve modifications to all but six of the existing wards in Braintree district, as summarised below:

- In the south west of the district, we propose two new Great Notley and Black Notley & Terling wards, based on a combination of the proposals received at Stage One and our own proposals;

- In the south east of the district, we propose a new three-member Cressing & Coggeshall ward, a two-member Silver End & Rivenhall and a revised two-member Kelvedon ward, largely based on the Green Group's proposal for this area;
- We proposed revised warding arrangements in Witham town and the unparished area of Braintree and Bocking, based on a combination of the proposals received at Stage One and our own proposals;
- We propose revised warding arrangements in Panfield and Rayne wards and Halstead town, as proposed under Options A and B of the District Council's consultation exercise;
- We propose a new Gosfield & Greenstead Green ward and The Three Colnes ward, based on a combination of the proposals received at Stage One and our own proposals;
- In the north of the district, we propose revised Stour Valley North and Upper Colne wards, largely based on the Liberal Democrats' proposals, and a new Hedingham & Maplestead ward, based on a combination of the proposals received at Stage One and our own proposals;
- There should be no change to the wards of Bumpstead, Hatfield Peverel, Stour Valley South, Three Fields, Witham North and Yeldham.

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

Figure 5: Comparison of Current and Recommended Electoral Arrangements

	1999 electorate		2004 forecast electorate	
	Current arrangements	Draft recommendations	Current arrangements	Draft recommendations
Number of councillors	60	60	60	60
Number of wards	33	29	33	29
Average number of electors per councillor	1,658	1,658	1,827	1,827
Number of wards with a variance more than 10 per cent from the average	23	11	23	1
Number of wards with a variance more than 20 per cent from the average	13	3	15	0

141 As shown in Figure 5, our draft recommendations for Braintree District Council would result in a reduction in the number of wards varying by more than 10 per cent from the district average from 21 to 11. By 2004 only one ward is forecast to vary by more than 10 per cent from the average for the district.

Draft Recommendation
Braintree District Council should comprise 60 councillors serving 29 wards, as detailed and named in Figures 1 and 2, and illustrated on Map 2 and in Appendix A, including the large map inside the back cover. Elections should continue to be held for the whole council every four years.

Parish and Town Council Electoral Arrangements

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

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

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

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

145 The parish of Kelvedon is currently served by 11 councillors and is not warded. In our draft recommendations we proposed that the parish should be divided between the two district wards of Kelvedon and Silver End & Rivenhall. As a consequence of our draft recommendations we propose that Kelvedon parish should also be divided into two parish wards, Kelvedon North and

Kelvedon South, reflecting the proposed district ward boundary. As a result, we also propose that each ward should have separate representation on the parish council.

Draft Recommendation
Kelvedon Parish Council should comprise 11 parish councillors, as at present, representing two wards: Kelvedon North (returning one councillor) and Kelvedon South (10 councillors). The boundary between the two parish wards should reflect the proposed district ward boundary, as illustrated and named on Map A3 in Appendix A.

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

Draft Recommendation
Feering Parish Council should comprise nine councillors, as at present, representing two wards: Feering North (returning one councillor) and Feering South (eight councillors). The boundary between the two parish wards should reflect the proposed district ward boundary, as illustrated and named on Map A4 in Appendix A.

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

Draft Recommendation
Halstead Town Council should comprise 12 councillors, as at present, representing four wards: Holy Trinity North (returning two councillors), Holy Trinity South (three councillors), St Andrew’s North (four councillors) and St Andrew’s South (three councillors). The boundary between the two parish wards should reflect the proposed district ward boundary, as illustrated and named on Map A5 in Appendix A.

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

Draft Recommendation

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

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

Map 2: The Commission's Draft Recommendations for Braintree

5 NEXT STEPS

150 We are putting forward draft recommendations on future electoral arrangements for consultation. We will take fully into account all representations received by 10 July 2000. Representations received after this date may not be taken into account. All representations will be available for public inspection by appointment at the offices of the Commission and the District Council, and a list of respondents will be available on request from the Commission after the end of the consultation period.

151 Views may be expressed by writing directly to us:

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

Fax: 020 7430 8433
E-mail: reviews@lgce.gov.uk
www.lgce.gov.uk

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

APPENDIX A

Draft Recommendations for Braintree: Detailed Mapping

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

Map A1 illustrates, in outline form, the proposed ward boundaries within the district and indicates the areas which are shown in more detail in Maps A2, A3, A4 and A5 and the large map at the back of the report.

Map A2 illustrates the proposed warding of Witham town.

Map A3 illustrates the proposed ward boundary between Kelvedon and Silver End & Rivenhall wards.

Map A4 illustrates the proposed ward boundary between Kelvedon and Cressing & Coggeshall wards.

Map A5 illustrates the proposed ward boundary between Halstead St Andrew's and Halstead Trinity wards.

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

Map A1: Draft Recommendations for Braintree: Key Map

Map A2: Proposed Warding of Witham Town

Map A3: Proposed Ward Boundary between Kelvedon and Silver End & Rivenhall Wards

Map A4: Proposed Ward Boundary between Kelvedon and Cressing & Coggeshall Wards

Map A5: Proposed Ward Boundary between Halstead St Andrew's and Halstead Trinity Wards

APPENDIX B

Braintree District Council's Proposed Electoral Arrangements

Figure B1: Braintree District Council's Proposal: Constituent Areas

Ward name	Constituent areas
Bocking North & Panfield	Bocking North ward (part); Bocking South ward (part); Panfield ward (part – Panfield Parish)
Bocking South	Bocking South ward (part)
Braintree Central	Braintree Central ward (part); Braintree East ward (part); Braintree West ward (part)
Braintree East	Braintree East ward (part)
Braintree South	Braintree Central ward (part); Braintree West ward (part)
Bumpstead	Bumpstead ward; Upper Colne ward (part – Birdbrook parish)
Coggeshall & Earls Colne	Coggeshall ward (part – Coggeshall parish); Earls Colne ward (part – Earls Colne parish)
Great Notley	Black Notley ward (part – Great Notley parish)
Great Yeldham	Upper Colne ward (part – Toppesfield parish); Yeldham ward (Great Yeldham and Little Yeldham parishes)
Gosfield & Halstead Rural	Castle Hedingham ward (part – Great Maplestead parish); Colne Engaine & Greenstead Green ward (part – Greenstead Green & Halstead Rural parish) ; Gosfield ward (Gosfield parish)
Halstead St Andrew's	Halstead St Andrew's ward (part – St Andrew's North ward and St Andrew's South ward (part) of Halstead parish)
Halstead Trinity	Halstead St Andrew's ward (part – St Andrew's South ward of Halstead parish (part); Halstead Trinity ward (Holy Trinity North and Holy Trinity South wards of Halstead parish)
Hatfield Peverel & Terling	Hatfield Peverel ward (Hatfield Peverel parish); Terling ward (part – Terling parish)
Kelvedon & Feering	Kelvedon ward (Kelvedon and Feering parishes)
Pebmarsh, Bures & The Colnes	Colne Engaine & Greenstead Green ward (part – Colne Engaine parish); Earls Colne ward (part – White Colne parish); Stour Valley South ward (part – Bures Hamlet and Pebmarsh parishes)
Rayne	Rayne ward (Bardfield Saling, Great Saling and Rayne parishes)
Silver End, Rivenhall, Bradwell & Stisted	Coggeshall ward (part – Bradwell and Stisted parishes); Witham Silver End & Rivenhall ward (Rivenhall and Silver End parishes)

Ward name	Constituent areas
Stour Valley North	Stour Valley Central ward (part – Borley parish); Stour Valley North ward (Ashen, Belchamp Otten, Belchamp St Paul, Foxearth, Liston, Ovington, Pentlow and Tilbury Juxta Clare parishes); Upper Colne ward (part – Ridgewell and Stambourne parishes)
Stour Valley South	Castle Hedingham ward (part – Little Maplestead parish); Stour Valley Central ward (part – Belchamp Walter, Bulmer, Gestingthorpe and Wickham St Paul parishes); Stour Valley South ward (part – Alphamstone, Great Henny, Little Henny, Lamarsh, Middleton and Twinstead parishes)
The Hedinghams	Castle Hedingham ward (part – Castle Hedingham parish); Sible Hedingham ward (Sible Hedingham parish)
The Notleys & Cressing	Black Notley ward (part – Black Notley parish); Braintree West ward (part); Cressing ward (Cressing parish); Terling ward (part – Fairstead, Faulkbourne and White Notley parishes)
Three Fields with Shalford	Three Fields ward (Finchingfield, Great Bardfield and Wethersfield parishes); Panfield parish (part – Shalford parish)
Witham North & East	Witham North ward (North ward of Witham parish); Witham Central ward (part – Central ward of Witham town (part)); Witham Chipping Hill ward (part – Chipping Hill ward of Witham town (part))
Witham South	Witham South ward (South ward of Witham town)
Witham West & Chipping Hill	Witham West ward (West ward of Witham town); Witham Chipping Hill ward (Chipping Hill ward of Witham town (part))

Figure B2: Braintree District Council's Proposals: Number of Councillors and Electors by Ward

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (1999)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average (%)	Electorate (2004)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average (%)
1	Bocking North & Panfield	3	5,483	1,828	-4	6,120	2,040	-3
2	Bocking South	3	5,372	1,791	-6	6,098	2,033	-4
3	Braintree Central	3	5,786	1,929	1	6,180	2,060	-2
4	Braintree East	3	5,118	1,706	-11	6,579	2,193	4
5	Braintree South	3	5,228	1,743	-9	6,304	2,101	0
6	Bumpstead	1	2,200	2,200	15	2,240	2,240	6
7	Coggeshall & Earls Colne	3	6,139	2,046	7	6,295	2,098	0
8	Great Notley	2	2,842	1,421	-26	4,631	2,316	10
9	Great Yeldham	1	1,991	1,991	4	2,100	2,100	0
10	Gosfield & Halstead Rural	1	1,984	1,984	4	2,000	2,000	-5
11	Halstead St Andrew's	2	3,588	1,794	-6	4,652	2,326	10
12	Halstead Trinity	2	4,547	2,274	19	4,636	2,318	10
13	Hatfield Peverel & Terling	2	4,173	2,087	9	4,206	2,103	0
14	Kelvedon & Feering	2	4,212	2,106	10	4,321	2,161	3
15	Pebmarsh, Bures & The Colnes	1	2,160	2,160	13	2,205	2,205	5
16	Rayne	1	2,010	2,010	5	2,066	2,066	-2
17	Silver End, Rivenhall, Bradwell & Stisted	2	4,184	2,092	9	4,210	2,105	0
18	Stour Valley North	1	2,084	2,084	9	2,113	2,113	0
19	Stour Valley South	1	2,132	2,132	11	2,172	2,172	3
20	The Hedinghams	2	3,873	1,937	1	4,006	2,003	-5
21	The Notleys & Cressing	2	3,400	1,700	-11	4,250	2,125	1
22	Three Fields with Shalford	2	3,651	1,826	-5	3,995	1,998	-5

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (1999)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average (%)	Electorate (2004)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average (%)
23	Witham North & East	3	6,081	2,027	6	6,119	2,040	-3
24	Witham South	3	4,979	1,660	-13	5,845	1,948	-8
25	Witham West & Chipping Hill	3	6,255	2,085	9	6,259	2,086	-1
	Totals	52	99,472	-	-	109,602	-	-
	Averages	-	-	1,913	-	-	2,108	-

Source: Electorate figures are based on Braintree District Council's submission.

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

Braintree District Council Green Group's Proposed Electoral Arrangements

Figure B3: The Green Group's Proposal: Constituent Areas

Ward name	Constituent areas
Black Notley	Black Notley ward (part – Great Notley parish and Black Notley parish (part))
Bocking North	<i>Unchanged</i>
Bocking South	Bocking South ward; Braintree East ward (part)
Braintree Central	Braintree Central ward (part)
Braintree East (North)	Braintree East ward (part)
Braintree East (South)	Braintree Central ward (part); Braintree East ward (part)
Braintree West	<i>Unchanged</i>
Bumpstead	<i>Unchanged</i> (Helions Bumpstead, Steeple Bumpstead and Sturmer parishes)
Cressing & Coggeshall	Cressing ward (Cressing parish); Coggeshall ward (Bradwell, Coggeshall and Stisted parishes); Kelvedon ward (part – Kelvedon parish (part) and Feering parish (part))
Earls Colne	Colne Engaine & Greenstead Green ward (part – Colne Engaine parish); Earls Colne ward (Earls Colne and White Colne parishes)
Gosfield	Gosfield ward (Gosfield parish); Colne Engaine & Greenstead Green ward (part – Greenstead Green & Halstead Rural parish)
Halstead St Andrew's	Halstead St Andrew's ward (St Andrew's North and St Andrew's South wards of Halstead parish); Halstead Trinity ward (part – Holy Trinity North ward of Halstead parish (part))
Halstead Trinity	Halstead Trinity ward (part – Holy Trinity North ward (part) and Holy Trinity South ward of Halstead parish)
Kelvedon	Kelvedon ward (part – Kelvedon parish (part) and Feering parish (part))
Panfield & Rayne	Panfield ward (Panfield and Saling parishes); Rayne ward (Barfield Saling, Great Saling and Rayne parishes)
Sible Hedingham & Upper Colne	Castle Hedingham ward (part – Castle Hedingham parish); Sible Hedingham ward (Sible Hedingham parish); Upper Colne ward (part – Birdbrook, Stambourne and Toppesfield parishes)
Stour Valley Central	Castle Hedingham ward (part – Great Maplestead and Little Maplestead parishes); Stour Valley Central ward (Belchamp Walter, Borley, Bulmer, Gestingthorpe and Wickham St Paul parishes)
Stour Valley North	Stour Valley North ward (Ashen, Belchamp Otten, Belchamp St Paul, Foxearth, Liston, Ovington, Pentlow and Tilbury Juxta Clare parishes); Upper Colne ward (part – Ridgewell parish); Yeldham ward (Great Yeldham and Little Yeldham parishes)

Ward name	Constituent areas
Stour Valley South	<i>Unchanged</i> (Alphamstone, Bures Hamlet, Great Henny, Lamarsh, Little Henny, Middleton, Pebmarsh and Twinstead parishes)
Terling & Hatfield Peverel	Hatfield Peverel ward (Hatfield Peverel parish); Terling ward (Fairstead, Faulkbourne, Terling and White Notley parishes)
Three Fields	<i>Unchanged</i> (Finchingfield, Great Bardfield and Wethersfield parishes)
Witham Central & Chipping Hill	witham Central ward (part – Central ward of Witham town (part)); Witham Chipping Hill ward (Chipping Hill ward of Witham town)
Witham North	<i>Unchanged</i> (North ward of Witham town)
Witham South	Witham South ward (part – South ward of Witham town (part))
Witham West	Witham Central ward (part – Central ward of Witham town (part)); Witham South ward (part – South ward of Witham town (part)); Witham West ward (part – West ward of Witham town (part))
Witham, Silver End & Rivenhall	<i>Unchanged</i> (Rivenhall and Silver End parishes)

Figure B4: The Green Group's Proposals: Number of Councillors and Electors by Ward

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2004)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average (%)
1	Black Notley	3	6,032	2,011	10
2	Bocking North	3	5,015	1,672	-8
3	Bocking South	3	5,770	1,923	5
4	Braintree Central	3	5,818	1,939	6
5	Braintree East (North)	2	3,374	1,687	-8
6	Braintree East (South)	3	5,376	1,792	-2
7	Braintree West	3	5,745	1,915	5
8	Bumpstead	1	1,934	1,934	6
9	Cressing & Coggeshall	3	6,063	2,021	11
10	Earls Colne	2	3,899	1,950	7
11	Gosfield	1	1,712	1,712	-6
12	Halstead St Andrew's	3	5,614	1,871	3
13	Halstead Trinity	2	3,681	1,841	1
14	Kelvedon	2	4,024	2,012	10
15	Panfield & Rayne	2	3,419	1,710	-6
16	Sible Hedingham & Upper Colne	3	5,042	1,681	-8
17	Stour Valley Central	1	1,838	1,838	1
18	Stour Valley North	2	3,405	1,703	-7
19	Stour Valley South	1	1,766	1,766	-3
20	Terling & Hatfield Peverel	3	5,273	1,758	-4
21	Three Fields	2	3,361	1,681	-8
22	Witham Central & Chipping Hill	3	5,335	1,778	-2
23	Witham North	2	3,681	1,841	1
24	Witham South	3	5,662	1,887	3
25	Witham West	2	3,270	1,635	-10

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2004)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average (%)
26	Witham Silver End & Rivenhall	2	3,321	1,661	-9
	Totals	60	109,430	-	-
	Averages	-	-	1,824	-

Source: Electorate figures are based on the Green Group's submission.

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

APPENDIX C

The Statutory Provisions

Local Government Act 1992: the Commission's Role

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

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

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

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

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

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

4 Unlike the LGBC, the Commission may also make recommendations for changes in respect of electoral arrangements within parish and town council areas. Accordingly, in relation to parish or town councils within a principal authority's area, the Commission may make recommendations relating to:

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

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

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

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

7 In relation to shire districts:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

