

LOCAL
GOVERNMENT
COMMISSION
FOR ENGLAND

FINAL
RECOMMENDATIONS
ON THE FUTURE
ELECTORAL
ARRANGEMENTS FOR
SOUTH SOMERSET

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

November 1997

LOCAL GOVERNMENT COMMISSION FOR ENGLAND

This report sets out the Commission's final recommendations on the electoral arrangements for South Somerset.

Members of the Commission are:

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Helena Shovelton (Deputy Chairman)

Peter Brokenshire

Professor Michael Clarke

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Local Government Commission for England

4 November 1997

Dear Secretary of State

On 25 October 1996 the Commission commenced a periodic electoral review of the district of South Somerset under the Local Government Act 1992. We published our draft recommendations in June 1997 and undertook an 11-week period of consultation.

We have now prepared our final recommendations in the light of the consultation. We have for the most part confirmed our draft recommendations, with the exception of a boundary change between two wards in the rural area (see paragraph 84). This report sets out our final recommendations for changes to electoral arrangements in South Somerset.

We recommend that South Somerset District Council should continue to be served by 60 councillors, representing 39 instead of the existing 40 wards, and that some changes should be made to ward boundaries in order to improve electoral equality, having regard to the statutory criteria. We recommend that the Council should continue to be elected together every four years.

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

Yours sincerely

PROFESSOR MALCOLM GRANT
Chairman

SUMMARY

The Commission began a review of South Somerset on 25 October 1996. We published our draft recommendations for electoral arrangements on 10 June 1997, after which we undertook an 11-week period of consultation.

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

We found that the existing electoral arrangements provide unequal representation of electors in South Somerset because:

- **in 12 of the 40 wards, the number of electors represented by each councillor varies by more than 10 per cent from the average for the district; in three wards, the number varies by more than 20 per cent;**
- **this electoral imbalance is not expected to improve by 2001.**

Our main final recommendations for future electoral arrangements (Figure 1) are that:

- **South Somerset District Council should continue to be served by 60 councillors;**
- **there should be 39 wards, instead of the current 40;**
- **the boundaries of 28 wards should be modified, while 12 wards should retain their existing boundaries;**
- **elections should continue to take place every four years.**

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

- **In 32 of the 39 wards the number of electors per councillor would vary by no more than 10 per cent from the district average.**

- **By 2001 the number of electors per councillor is projected to vary by no more than 10 per cent from the average in 36 wards; none of the wards would have an electoral variance over 20 per cent.**

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

- **new warding arrangements for the parishes of East Coker, Huish Episcopi, Mudford, Stoke sub Hamdon and West Coker, and the towns of Chard and Yeovil.**

All further correspondence on these recommendations and the matters discussed in this report should be addressed to the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, who will not make an order implementing the Commission's recommendations before 16 December 1997:

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

*Figure 1:
The Commission's Final Recommendations: Summary*

Ward name	Number of councillors	Constituent areas	Map reference
1 Blackdown	1	<i>Unchanged</i> (the parishes of Buckland St Mary, Combe St Nicholas, Wambrook and Whitestaunton)	Map 2
2 Blackmoor Vale	2	Blackmoor Vale ward (the parishes of Abbas and Templecombe, Charlton Horethorne, Henstridge, Holton, Horsington, Maperton and North Cheriton); Camelot ward (part – Compton Pouncefoot parish); Mudford ward (part – Corton Denham parish)	Map 2
3 Bruton	1	Brue ward (part – Bruton parish)	Map 2
4 Brympton	2	Houndstone ward (part – Brympton parish)	Map 2
5 Burrow Hill	1	Burrow Hill ward (part – the parishes of Barrington, Kingsbury Episcopi, Muchelney, Puckington and Stocklinch)	Map 2
6 Camelot	1	Camelot ward (part – the parishes of Queen Camel, Sparkford and West Camel); Mudford ward (part – the parishes of Marston Magna and Rimpton)	Map 2
7 Cary	2	Cary ward (the parishes of Alford, Ansford, Castle Cary, Lovington, North Barrow, North Cadbury, South Barrow and Yarlington); Northstone ward (part – Babcary parish); Camelot ward (part – South Cadbury parish)	Map 2
8 Chard Avishayes	1	Avishayes ward; Combe ward (part)	Maps 2 and A2
9 Chard Combe	1	Combe ward (part); Crimchard ward (part)	Maps 2 and A2
10 Chard Crimchard	1	Crimchard ward (part)	Maps 2 and A2
11 Chard Holyrood	1	<i>Unchanged</i> (Holyrood ward)	Map 2
12 Chard Jocelyn	1	<i>Unchanged</i> (Jocelyn ward)	Map 2
13 Coker	2	Coker ward (part – the parishes of Barwick, Closworth, Hardington Mandeville, East Coker parish ward of East Coker parish and West Coker parish ward of West Coker parish); Houndstone ward (part – Odcombe parish)	Map 2
14 Crewkerne	3	<i>Unchanged</i> (the parishes of Crewkerne and Misterton)	Map 2

Figure 1 (continued):
The Commission's Final Recommendations: Summary

Ward name	Number of councillors	Constituent areas	Map reference
15 Curry Rivel	1	Burrow Hill ward (part – Drayton parish); Curry Rivel ward (part – Curry Rivel parish)	Map 2
16 Eggwood	1	<i>Unchanged</i> (the parishes of Dinnington, Hinton St George and Merriott)	Map 2
17 Hamdon	1	Hamdon ward (part – Norton sub Hamdon parish and Stoke sub Hamdon parish ward of Stoke sub Hamdon parish)	Map 2
18 Ilminster	2	Ilminster ward (part – the parishes of Ilminster and Whitelackington)	Map 2
19 Islemoor	1	Curry Rivel ward (part – Hambridge and Westport parish); Islemoor ward (the parishes of Beercrocombe, Curry Mallet, Fivehead, Ilton, Isle Abbots and Isle Brewers)	Map 2
20 Ivelchester	1	Ivelchester ward (the parishes of Ilchester, Limington and Yeovilton); Mudford ward (part – the parish of Chilton Cantelo and Mudford Rural parish ward of Mudford parish)	Map 2
21 Langport and Huish	1	Langport and Huish ward (part – the parish of Langport and Huish Episcopi parish ward of Huish Episcopi parish)	Map 2
22 Martock	2	<i>Unchanged</i> (the parishes of Ash, Long Load and Martock)	Map 2
23 Milborne Port	1	<i>Unchanged</i> (the parish of Milborne Port)	Map 2
24 Neroche	1	<i>Unchanged</i> (the parishes of Ashill, Broadway, Donyatt and Horton)	Map 2
25 Northstone	1	Northstone ward (part – the parishes of Barton St David, Charlton Mackrell, Keinton Mandeville, Kingsdon and Kingweston)	Map 2
26 Parrett	1	<i>Unchanged</i> (the parishes of Chiselborough, East Chinnock, Haselbury Plucknett, North Perrott and West Chinnock)	Map 2
27 St Michael's	1	Hamdon ward (part – Stanchester parish ward of Stoke sub Hamdon parish); St Michael's ward (the parishes of Chilthorne Domer, Montacute and Tintinhull)	Map 2

continued overleaf

Figure 1 (continued):
The Commission's Final Recommendations: Summary

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Constituent areas	Map reference
28	South Petherton	2	<i>Unchanged</i> (the parishes of Lopen, Seavington St Mary, Seavington St Michael, Shepton Beauchamp and South Petherton)	Map 2
29	Tatworth and Forton	1	<i>Unchanged</i> (the parish of Tatworth and Forton)	Map 2
30	Tower	1	Brue ward (part – the parishes of Bratton Seymour, Brewham, Charlton Musgrove, Pen Selwood, Pitcombe and Shepton Montague); Wincanton ward (part – the parishes of Cucklington and Stoke Trister)	Map 2
31	Turn Hill	1	Langport and Huish ward (part – Wearne and Combe parish ward of Huish Episcopi parish); Turn Hill ward (the parishes of Aller, High Ham, Long Sutton and Pitney)	Map 2
32	Wessex	2	<i>Unchanged</i> (the parishes of Compton Dundon and Somerton)	Map 2
33	Wincanton	2	Wincanton ward (part – Wincanton parish)	Map 2
34	Windwhistle	1	Ilminster ward (part – Kingstone parish); Windwhistle ward (the parishes of Chaffcombe, Chillington, Cricket St Thomas, Cudworth, Dowlish Wake, Knowle St Giles, Wayford, West Crewkerne and Winsham)	Map 2
35	Yeovil Central	3	Central ward (part)	Map 2 and large map
36	Yeovil East	3	East ward; Central ward (part)	Map 2 and large map
37	Yeovil South	3	Coker ward (part – Urban Wraxhill parish ward of East Coker parish and Sampson's Wood parish ward of West Coker parish); Preston ward (part); South ward	Map 2 and large map
38	Yeovil West	3	Preston ward; West ward	Map 2 and large map
39	Yeovil Without	3	Mudford ward (part – Mudford Urban parish ward of Mudford parish); Yeovil Without ward (Yeovil Without parish)	Map 2 and large map

1. INTRODUCTION

1 This report contains our final recommendations on the electoral arrangements for the district of South Somerset. We have now reviewed all the districts in Somerset as part of our programme of periodic electoral reviews of all principal local authority areas in England.

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

- the statutory criteria contained in section 13(5) of the Local Government Act 1992;
- the *Rules to be Observed in Considering Electoral Arrangements* contained in Schedule 11 to the Local Government Act 1972.

3 We have also had regard to our *Guidance and Procedural Advice for Local Authorities and Other Interested Parties* (published in March 1996 and supplemented in September 1996), which sets out our approach to the reviews.

4 This review was in four stages. Stage One began on 25 October 1996, when we wrote to South Somerset District Council inviting proposals for its future electoral arrangements. Our letter was copied to Somerset County Council, the Avon & Somerset Police Authority, the local authority associations, the Somerset Association of Local Councils, parish and town councils in the district, Members of Parliament and the Member of the European Parliament with constituency interests in the district, and the headquarters of the main political parties. At the start of the review and following publication of our draft recommendations, we published a notice in the local press, issued a press release and invited the District Council to publicise the review more widely. The closing date for receipt of representations was 20 January 1997. At Stage Two we considered all the representations received during Stage One and prepared our draft recommendations.

5 Stage Three began on 10 June 1997 with the publication of our report, *Draft Recommendations on the Future Electoral Arrangements for South Somerset*, and ended on 26 August 1997. Comments were sought on our preliminary conclusions. Finally, during Stage Four we reconsidered our draft recommendations in the light of the Stage Three consultation and now publish our final recommendations.

2. CURRENT ELECTORAL ARRANGEMENTS

⁶ South Somerset district covers some 372 square miles (96,000 hectares) and contains 121 parishes. Its principal town is Yeovil, with around 24,000 electors, while it also contains the towns of Bruton, Castle Cary, Chard, Crewkerne, Ilminster, Somerton and Wincanton.

⁷ South Somerset District Council has 60 councillors elected from 40 wards (Map 1 and Figure 2). Four wards are each represented by three councillors, 12 wards elect two councillors each, while the other 24 wards elect a single councillor each. The whole Council is elected together every four years, with the next elections due in May 1999. The electorate of the district is 115,970 (February 1996) and each councillor represents an average of 1,933 electors. The District Council forecasts that the electorate will increase by over four per cent to 121,179 by the year 2001, which would increase the average number of electors per councillor to 2,020 (Figure 2).

⁸ To compare levels of electoral inequality between wards, the extent to which the number of electors per councillor in each ward (the councillor:elector ratio) varies from the average for the district in percentage terms, has been calculated. In the report, this calculation may also be described as 'electoral variance'.

⁹ Since the last electoral review was completed in 1988 by our predecessor, the Local Government Boundary Commission (LGBC), changes in population and electorate have been unevenly spread across the district. As a result, in 12 of the 40 wards the number of electors per councillor varies by more than 10 per cent from the average and in three wards it varies by more than 20 per cent. The most significant electoral imbalance is in Houndstone ward where the councillor represents 3,308 electors, 71 per cent more electors than the district average of 1,933.

Map 1:
Existing Wards in South Somerset



KEY	
EXISTING WARD BOUNDARY	—————
EXISTING PARISH BOUNDARY	- - - - -

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Map 1 (continued):
Existing Wards in South Somerset

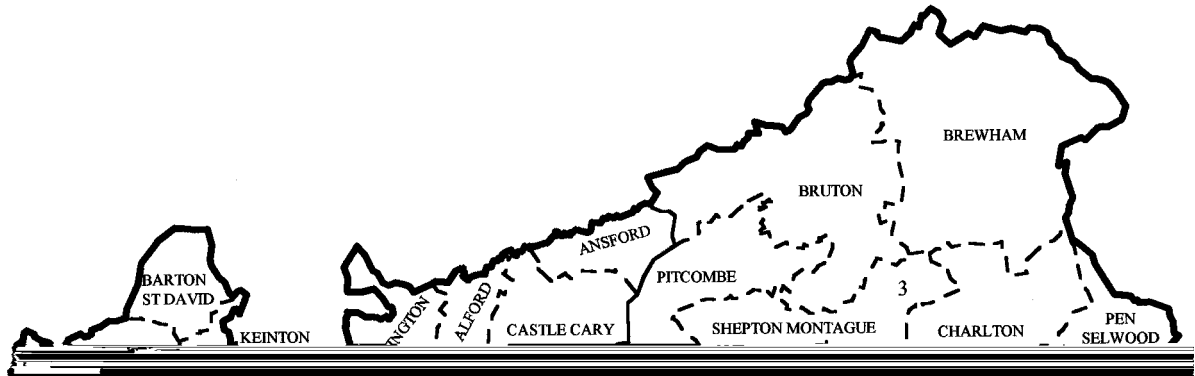


Figure 2:
Existing Electoral Arrangements

Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (1996)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2001)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
1 Blackdown	1	1,807	1,807	-7	1,836	1,836	-9
2 Blackmoor Vale	2	3,753	1,877	-3	3,917	1,959	-3
3 Brue	2	3,315	1,658	-14	3,466	1,733	-14
4 Burrow Hill	1	2,034	2,034	5	2,095	2,095	4
5 Camelot	1	1,842	1,842	-5	1,884	1,884	-7
6 Cary	2	3,653	1,827	-6	3,971	1,986	-2
7 Chard Avishayes	1	1,599	1,599	-17	1,617	1,617	-20
8 Chard Combe	1	1,679	1,679	-13	1,694	1,694	-16
9 Chard Crimchard	1	2,106	2,106	9	2,251	2,251	11
10 Chard Holyrood	1	1,916	1,916	-1	1,922	1,922	-5
11 Chard Jocelyn	1	1,928	1,928	0	1,932	1,932	-4
12 Coker	2	4,546	2,273	18	4,737	2,369	17
13 Crewkerne	3	6,026	2,009	4	6,407	2,136	6
14 Curry Rivel	1	2,176	2,176	13	2,198	2,198	9
15 Eggwood	1	2,008	2,008	4	2,041	2,041	1
16 Hamdon	1	2,094	2,094	8	2,107	2,107	4
17 Houndstone	1	3,308	3,308	71	4,629	4,629	129
18 Ilminster	2	3,761	1,881	-3	4,070	2,035	1
19 Islemoor	1	1,732	1,732	-10	1,781	1,781	-12
20 Ivelchester	1	1,728	1,728	-11	1,793	1,793	-11
21 Langport and Huish	1	2,282	2,282	18	2,372	2,372	17
22 Martock	2	4,161	2,081	8	4,308	2,154	7
23 Milborne Port	1	2,060	2,060	7	2,108	2,108	4
24 Mudford	1	1,395	1,395	-28	1,423	1,423	-30
25 Neroche	1	1,867	1,867	-3	1,970	1,970	-2

Figure 2 (continued):
Existing Electoral Arrangements

Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (1996)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2001)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
26 Northstone	1	2,409	2,409	25	2,461	2,461	22
27 Parrett	1	1,885	1,885	-2	1,907	1,907	-6
28 St Michael's	1	1,704	1,704	-12	1,760	1,760	-13
29 South Petherton	2	3,772	1,886	-2	3,938	1,969	-3
30 Tatworth and Forton	1	2,033	2,033	5	2,155	2,155	7
31 Turn Hill	1	1,908	1,908	-1	1,999	1,999	-1
32 Wessex	2	4,204	2,102	9	4,438	2,219	10
33 Wincanton	2	3,965	1,983	3	4,287	2,144	6
34 Windwhistle	1	1,671	1,671	-14	1,726	1,726	-15
35 Yeovil Central	3	5,550	1,850	-4	5,702	1,901	-6
36 Yeovil East	3	5,405	1,802	-7	5,421	1,807	-11
37 Yeovil Preston	2	3,571	1,786	-8	3,586	1,793	-11
38 Yeovil South	2	3,720	1,860	-4	3,757	1,879	-7
39 Yeovil West	2	3,700	1,850	-4	3,722	1,861	-8
40 Yeovil Without	3	5,697	1,899	-2	5,791	1,930	-4
Totals	60	115,970	—	—	121,179	—	—
Averages	—	—	1,933	—	—	2,020	—

Source: Electorate figures are based on South Somerset 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. For example, in 1996, electors in Mudford ward were relatively over-represented by 28 per cent, while electors in Houndstone ward were relatively under-represented by 71 per cent. Figures have been rounded to the nearest whole number.

3. DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS

¹⁰ During Stage One we received representations from South Somerset District Council, Chard Town Council and Mudford Parish Council. The District Council's submission contained the views of a number of parish and town councils. In the light of these representations and the evidence available to us, we reached preliminary conclusions which were set out in the report, *Draft Recommendations on the Future Electoral Arrangements for South Somerset*. We proposed:

- (a) that South Somerset District Council should continue to be served by 60 councillors but representing 39 wards, rather than 40 wards as at present;
- (b) that the boundaries of 28 wards should be modified;
- (c) new ward boundaries for the towns of Chard and Yeovil, with the towns continuing to be served by five and 12 district councillors respectively;
- (d) that the parishes of Aller, East Coker, Huish Episcopi, Mudford, Stoke sub Hamdon and West Coker should be warded to create two parish wards in each.

Draft Recommendation

South Somerset District Council should comprise 60 councillors, serving 39 wards. The whole Council should continue to be elected together every four years.

¹¹ Our proposals would have resulted in significant improvements in electoral equality, with the number of electors per councillor in 32 of the 39 wards varying by no more than 10 per cent from the district average. This level of electoral equality was expected to improve during the period to 2001, by which time only three wards were expected to vary by more than 10 per cent.

4. RESPONSES TO CONSULTATION

12 During the consultation on our draft recommendations report, 28 representations were received. A list of all respondents is available on request from the Commission.

South Somerset District Council

13 The Council agreed with all our draft recommendations, which reflected the majority of the Council's Stage One proposals. It supported our proposed wards in the towns of Chard and Yeovil and in two rural wards where we suggested modifying its initial proposals.

Yeovil Conservative Association

14 The Yeovil Conservative Association opposed our draft proposals on the principle that it would prefer for the district to be served by single-member wards, in particular the town of Yeovil and its "immediate urban surroundings". The Association included in its submission details of a single-member ward scheme for Yeovil, but stated that its proposals were "not meant to be a definitive solution".

Yeovil Constituency Labour Party

15 The Yeovil Constituency Labour Party supported our proposed retention of a 60-member council size but opposed the majority of our proposals for Yeovil. It proposed an alternative scheme for the town and part of its surrounding area based on 12 single-member wards with the parishes of East Coker and West Coker being warded as proposed in our draft recommendations. It also proposed that the Town Council should be reduced from 24 town councillors to 23. It made no comment on our draft proposals outside the Yeovil area.

Parish and Town Councils

16 During Stage Three, representations were received from two town councils and 20 parish

councils. Bruton Town Council supported our proposed single-member ward for the town, but argued that, between them, the towns of Chard and Yeovil were over-represented by one district councillor and that this should be addressed. Chard Town Council reiterated its preference for no change to be made to its existing electoral arrangements. However, it stated that if change were necessary, it would support our draft proposals for the town, which reflected for the most part its alternative Stage One proposal.

17 Of the 20 parish councils which responded during Stage Three, those of Barrington, Brewham, Combe St Nicholas, Norton sub Hamdon, Pen Selwood, Queen Camel, Sparkford, Stoke Trister and Bayford, West Camel, West Coker and Yeovil Without supported our draft proposals for their own particular areas. Mudford Parish Council supported our proposed warding of the parish, but opposed our proposal to include the new Mudford Rural parish ward in a modified Ivelchester ward, instead preferring that the parish ward be included in a modified Camelot ward.

18 The parish councils of Babcary, Hambridge and Westport, Isle Abbots, Marston Magna and Pitcombe opposed our proposals for their areas. Isle Abbots Parish Council queried the District Council's electorate forecast for the existing Islemoor ward. Curry Rivel Parish Council opposed our proposal to change the present ward which encompasses the parishes of Curry Rivel and Hambridge and Westport. It also opposed the inclusion of the parish of Drayton and the new Oath parish ward (from Aller parish) in a revised Curry Rivel ward. Huish Episcopi Parish Council opposed our proposal to ward the parish, with a new Wearne and Combe parish ward becoming part of a revised Turn Hill ward and the remaining area, a new Huish Episcopi parish ward, being retained in Langport and Huish ward. Stoke sub Hamdon Parish Council opposed our proposal to split it into two parish wards, to be placed in separate district council wards.

Other Representations

19 We received a further three representations in response to our draft recommendations. Somerset

County Council and the Somerset Association of Local Councils both wrote in general terms and did not make specific comments regarding our draft proposals. Councillor Hughes, the district councillor for the present Islemoor ward, opposed our draft proposals for that area. He expressed some concern over the electorate forecast for the existing ward, stating that the projected electorate “is less than I would expect as the new Local Plan should allow for 68 new houses in the ward”.

5. ANALYSIS AND FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS

20 As indicated previously, our prime objective in considering the most appropriate electoral arrangements for South Somerset is to achieve electoral equality, having regard to the statutory criteria set out in the Local Government Act 1992 and Schedule 11 to the Local Government Act 1972, which refers to the ratio of electors to councillors being “as nearly as may be, the same in every ward of the district or borough”.

21 However, our function is not merely arithmetical. First, our recommendations are not intended to be based solely on existing electorate figures, but also on assumptions as to changes in the number and distribution of local government electors likely to take place within the ensuing five years. Second, we must have regard to the desirability of fixing identifiable boundaries, and to maintaining local ties which might otherwise be broken. Third, we must consider the need to secure effective and convenient local government, and reflect the interests and identities of local communities.

22 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.

23 In our March 1996 *Guidance*, we expressed the view that “proposals for changes in electoral arrangements should therefore be based on variations in each ward of no more than plus or minus 10 per cent from the average councillor:elector ratio for the authority, having regard to five-year forecasts of changes in electorates. Imbalances in excess of plus or minus 20 per cent may be acceptable, but only in highly exceptional circumstances ... and will have to be justified in full”. However, as emphasised in our September 1996 supplement to the *Guidance*, while we accept that absolute equality of representation is likely to be unattainable, we consider that, if electoral imbalances are to be kept

to the minimum, such equality should be the starting point in any electoral review.

Electorate Projections

24 During Stage One, the District Council submitted electorate forecasts for the period 1996 to 2001, projecting an increase in the electorate of more than four per cent over the five-year period, from 115,970 to 121,179. The Council estimated rates and locations of housing development with regard to structure and local plans, the expected rate of building over the five-year period and assumed occupancy rates. Advice has been obtained from the District Council on the likely effect on electorates of ward boundary changes. In our draft recommendations report we accepted that this is an inexact science and, having given consideration to projected electorates, were content that they represented the best estimates that could reasonably be made at the time.

25 During Stage Three we received two submissions regarding the Council's electorate projections. Councillor Hughes stated that the projections for the existing Islemoor ward were lower than he would have expected given the level of development which is planned for the ward. Isle Abbots Parish Council raised the same issue, stating that “South Somerset District Council have not allowed for the large increase in the electorate forecast for year 2001 in Ilton”. Despite the comments received from Councillor Hughes and the Parish Council, we remain satisfied that the original estimates are the best presently available.

Council Size

26 Our March 1996 *Guidance* indicated that we would normally expect the number of councillors serving a borough or district council to be in the range of 30 to 60.

27 South Somerset District Council is at present served by 60 councillors. The Council proposed no

change to the council size during Stage One. In our draft recommendations report we considered the size and distribution of the electorate, the geography and other characteristics of the area, together with the representations received. We concluded that the statutory criteria and the achievement of electoral equality would best be met by retaining a council size of 60 members. In its Stage Three submission the District Council reiterated its support for a 60-member council, and we have not received sufficient evidence to persuade us to move away from this view.

Electoral Arrangements

28 Having considered all representations received during Stage Three of the review, we have examined our draft recommendations. The following areas, based on existing wards, are considered in turn:

- (a) Chard (five wards);
- (b) Yeovil town (five wards) and the ward of Yeovil Without;
- (c) the wards of Blackdown, Crewkerne, Eggwood, Martock, Milborne Port, Neroche, Parrett, South Petherton, Tatworth and Forton and Wessex;
- (d) the wards of Ilminster and Windwhistle;
- (e) the wards of Burrow Hill, Curry Rivel, Islemoor, Langport and Huish and Turn Hill;
- (f) the wards of Cary and Northstone;
- (g) the wards of Camelot, Ivelchester and Mudford;
- (h) the wards of Blackmoor Vale, Brue and Wincanton;
- (i) the wards of Coker and Houndstone;
- (j) the wards of Hamdon and St Michael's.

Chard

29 Chard is currently served by five single-member wards: Avishayes, Combe, Crimchard, Holyrood and Jocelyn, with each ward varying by 17 per cent below, 13 per cent below, 9 per cent above, 1 per cent below and equal to the district average respectively (20 per cent, 16 per cent, 11 per cent, 5 per cent and 4 per cent by 2001). During Stage One, the District Council and Chard Town Council proposed no change to the existing wards in the town. However, Chard Town Council did suggest boundary modifications between three of the five wards in order to improve electoral equality, if changes were to be made. We received no other representations on Chard during Stage One.

30 Our draft proposals reflected the Town Council's suggested boundary modifications between Avishayes, Crimchard and Combe wards, although with one minor adjustment. Our draft recommendations involved 380 electors being transferred from Crimchard ward into Combe ward and 192 electors being transferred from Combe ward into Avishayes ward. Our modification to the Town Council's proposals retained 71 electors on Furnham Road and Campion Gardens in Crimchard ward, rather than transfer them into Avishayes ward. We proposed no change to Holyrood and Jocelyn wards.

31 Under these proposals, the revised wards of Avishayes, Combe and Crimchard would vary by 7 per cent below, 3 per cent below and 11 per cent below the district average respectively (10 per cent, 7 per cent and 7 per cent by 2001). Unchanged Holyrood and Jocelyn wards would continue to be 1 per cent below and equal to the district average respectively (5 per cent and 4 per cent below by 2001).

32 During Stage Three, the District Council supported our draft proposals, including our modifications to the Town Council's suggested boundaries. Chard Town Council reiterated its preference for no change to any of its existing wards. However, it stated that "if the Commission insists that boundary changes are made, then [it] would be prepared to accept the changes [put forward in the draft recommendations]".

33 We also received a submission from Bruton Town Council. It stated that the urban areas of the district (including Chard) were over-represented in comparison to the rural areas and that this issue should be addressed. It did concede, however, that to reduce the level of representation in Chard would not improve this situation, suggesting that instead we "realign" the boundaries of the Chard wards and the adjoining Tatworth and Forton ward. Although the town of Chard is marginally over-represented, it merits five councillors to a greater degree than it merits four. To combine a part of the town in a ward with the parish of Tatworth and Forton would not only result in worse electoral equality overall in the area but would also be likely to cut across community identities and interests.

34 Given the reasonable level of electoral equality which our proposals would provide, and the general degree of support which they receive, we confirm our draft proposals for Chard as final. Details of our proposed boundary changes in the town are illustrated on Map A2 at Appendix A.

Yeovil town and the ward of Yeovil Without

35 Currently, the town of Yeovil is served by 12 district councillors representing two three-member wards, Central and East, and three two-member wards, Preston, South and West. The five wards currently vary from the district average number of electors per councillor by 4 per cent below, 7 per cent below, 8 per cent below, 4 per cent below and 4 per cent below respectively (6 per cent, 11 per cent, 11 per cent, 7 per cent and 8 per cent by 2001). To the north of the town lies Yeovil Without ward which is 2 per cent below the district average (4 per cent by 2001).

36 During Stage One, the District Council proposed that the town should continue to be served by 12 district councillors, although it argued that they should be returned from four three-member wards. It did not, however, propose boundaries for any of the four wards. It also proposed that the parishes of East Coker and West Coker should be warded to facilitate the inclusion of a number of 'urban' properties in Yeovil South ward. It proposed that Mudford parish, which lies to the north of Yeovil Without parish, should also be warded to facilitate the inclusion of a number of 'urban' properties in Yeovil Without ward. We also received a representation from Mudford Parish Council which expressed its opposition to the District Council's original proposal to include the whole of the parish in a three-member Yeovil Without ward.

37 Our draft recommendations reflected the District Council's Stage One proposals for the Yeovil area with regard to the number of councillors being returned from each ward. Our proposals for the wards in Yeovil town were such that Preston ward would be disbanded and 121 electors on St Michael's Avenue would be transferred from Central ward to East ward. There are currently 3,571 electors in Preston ward and our proposals involved 1,709 being transferred into a modified South ward and the remaining 1,862 electors being transferred into a modified West ward. Under our proposals, the 280 electors in a new Urban Wraxhill parish ward of East Coker parish would be included in Yeovil South ward for district council elections, as would the 491 electors in a new Sampson's Wood parish ward of West Coker parish. Mudford parish would be split into Mudford Rural and Mudford Urban parish wards, with the 139 electors in a new Mudford Urban parish ward being included in Yeovil Without district council ward.

38 Our proposals provided arrangements such that the three-member Central, East, South, West and Without wards would vary by 6 per cent below, 5 per cent below,

7 per cent above, 4 per cent below and 1 per cent above the district average respectively (8 per cent, 9 per cent, 5 per cent, 8 per cent and 2 per cent by 2001).

39 During Stage Three, the District Council supported our draft proposals for the Yeovil area, as did Yeovil Town Council in a letter to the District Council. We also received submissions of support from Mudford Parish Council and West Coker Parish Council. Mudford Parish Council supported our proposed warding of the parish, to include 139 electors in Yeovil Without ward, although it opposed our proposal to include the new Mudford Rural parish ward in a revised Ivelchester ward, preferring instead to be included in the revised Camelot ward. West Coker Parish Council supported our proposal to ward that parish and include 491 electors in Yeovil South ward.

40 In addition, we received submissions from the Yeovil Conservative Association and the Yeovil Constituency Labour Party, both of which proposed single-member wards for Yeovil. The Yeovil Conservative Association stated that its proposed single-member wards scheme for the town should not be the "definitive solution", and did not comment on our proposed warding of the parishes of East Coker, Mudford and West Coker. The Yeovil Constituency Labour Party proposed detailed boundaries for 12 single-member wards for the town and supported our proposed warding of East Coker and West Coker parishes, without commenting on our proposed warding of Mudford parish. Both the Conservative Association and the Constituency Labour Party proposed retaining Yeovil's current representation of 12 district councillors.

41 The Yeovil Constituency Labour Party's proposals would provide a reasonable level of electoral equality and would also provide a warding system which, in its view, "would increase the public's knowledge of local politics and increase electoral participation". However, splitting the town into single-member wards would clearly be a movement away from the current well-established practice of multi-member wards in the town. Moreover, single-member wards are not prevalent in the majority of the other 'urban' areas of the district, Crewkerne, Ilminster, Somerton and Wincanton being examples.

42 Our draft proposals enjoy support from the District Council and Yeovil Town Council and we are concerned that we have not received any evidence of support for the Constituency Labour Party's proposals from local groups or residents in Yeovil. Given the support which our proposals enjoy, and since we do not regard the Constituency Party's proposals as providing

a better balance of our statutory criteria than our draft proposals, we have decided that we should not modify our draft recommendations for Yeovil.

43 Bruton Town Council argued that there was a degree of inequality between the number of district councillors serving the rural and the urban areas of South Somerset and that a method of redressing this imbalance would be to reduce the level of representation in Yeovil. It suggested that Yeovil East could become a two-member ward and that modifications should be made to the boundaries of the other wards to “maintain equality”, although it did not propose any specific boundaries. With the addition to the Yeovil South ward of the electors in the ‘urban’ parish wards of East and West Coker parishes, Yeovil is entitled to 12 councillors in a 60-member council on the 1996 electoral register. Additionally the District Council, the Yeovil Conservative Association, the Yeovil Constituency Labour Party and Yeovil Town Council all proposed retaining the current level of representation in the town. Overall, we are not persuaded that we should

recommend reducing the number of district councillors serving the town.

44 On balance, we have decided to confirm our draft proposals for the Yeovil area as final, including the warding of the parishes of East Coker, Mudford and West Coker. Although the Constituency Labour Party’s proposals have considerable merit, and would provide a reasonable degree of electoral equality, we conclude that the case for single-member wards in Yeovil is not strong enough to replace our own draft recommendations. Details of the proposed boundaries for the Yeovil area are illustrated on the large map inserted at the back of this report.

The wards of Blackdown, Crewkerne, Eggwood, Martock, Milborne Port, Neroche, Parrett, South Petherton, Tatworth & Forton and Wessex

45 The present configuration of these wards is detailed in Figure 3.

*Figure 3:
The wards of Blackdown, Crewkerne, Eggwood, Martock, Milborne Port, Neroche, Parrett, South Petherton, Tatworth and Forton and Wessex*

Present ward	Constituent parishes	Electoral variance (%)	
		1996	2001
Blackdown	Buckland St Mary, Combe St Nicholas, Wambrook and Whitestaunton	-7	-9
Crewkerne	Crewkerne and Misterton	4	6
Eggwood	Dinnington, Hinton St George and Meriott	4	1
Martock	Ash, Long Load and Martock	8	7
Milborne Port	Milborne Port	7	4
Neroche	Ashill, Broadway, Donyatt and Horton	-3	-2
Parrett	Chiselborough, East Chinnock, Haselbury Plucknett, North Perrott and West Chinnock	-2	-6
South Petherton	Lopen, Seavington St Mary, Seavington St Michael, Shepton Beauchamp and South Petherton	-2	-3
Tatworth and Forton	Tatworth and Forton	5	7
Wessex	Compton Dundon and Somerton	9	10

46 At Stage One, the District Council proposed no change to these 10 wards and we received no other direct representations. In our draft recommendations report, we concurred with the District Council and proposed no change to all 10 wards. During Stage Three, the District Council reiterated its support for no change to these wards and we also received a representation from Combe St Nicholas Parish Council expressing its support for our proposals.

47 Given the reasonable level of electoral equality which would be maintained in these wards should no change be proposed, and the support the proposals have received, we confirm our draft recommendations for these 10 wards as final.

The wards of Ilminster and Windwhistle

48 Currently, the two-member Ilminster ward comprises the parishes of Ilminster, Kingstone and Whitelackington and varies by 3 per cent below the district average (1 per cent above by 2001). The single-member Windwhistle ward comprises the parishes of Chaffcombe, Chillington, Cricket St Thomas, Cudworth, Dowlish Wake, Knowle St Giles, Wayford, West Crewkerne and Winsham and varies by 14 per cent below the district average (15 per cent by 2001).

49 At Stage One, the District Council proposed that Kingstone parish be transferred from Ilminster ward into Windwhistle ward, and we received no other direct representations from the constituent parishes of either ward. The transfer of Kingstone parish would redress the electoral imbalance currently in Windwhistle ward without, on our understanding, adversely affecting community ties,

and we therefore proposed it as part of our draft recommendations. Under our proposals, Ilminster and Windwhistle wards would vary by 5 per cent below and 9 per cent below the district average respectively (1 per cent and 10 per cent by 2001).

50 During Stage Three, the only submission we received regarding this area was from the District Council, which reiterated its support for the transfer of Kingstone parish into Windwhistle ward. Given the improved level of electoral equality that would result in this area, we confirm our draft proposals for both wards as final.

The wards of Burrow Hill, Curry Rivel, Isle Moor, Langport & Huish and Turn Hill

51 The present configuration of these wards is detailed in Figure 4.

52 As part of its Stage One submission, the District Council put forward two sets of proposals (Options A and B) for re-configuring the parishes comprising the five wards. Both proposals would provide similarly good levels of electoral equality and both involved the parishes of Aller and Huish Episcopi being warded into two parish wards each. Aller parish would be split into an Oath parish ward (with 29 electors) and an Aller parish ward (with 251 electors), while Huish Episcopi parish would be split into a Huish Episcopi parish ward (with 1,297 electors) and a Wearne and Combe parish ward (with 185 electors). We did not receive any other direct representations on the five wards during Stage One, although some parish councils wrote to the District Council with their views.

Figure 4:
The wards of Burrow Hill, Curry Rivel, Isle Moor, Langport and Huish and Turn Hill

Present ward	Constituent parishes	Electoral variance (%)	
Burrow Hill	Barrington, Drayton, Kingsbury Episcopi, Muchelney, Puckington and Stocklinch	5	4
Curry Rivel	Curry Rivel and Hambridge and Westport	13	9
Isle Moor	Beercombe, Curry Mallet, Fivehead, Ilton, Isle Abbots and Isle Brewers	-10	-12
Langport and Huish	Huish Episcopi and Langport	18	17
Turn Hill	Aller, High Ham, Long Sutton and Pitney	-1	-1

53 Our draft proposals reflected the District Council's "Option A", although with a modification to its proposed boundary between the parish wards in Huish Episcopi parish. Our proposed five single-member wards were as follows:

- a revised Burrow Hill ward comprising the parishes of Barrington, Kingsbury Episcopi, Muchelney, Puckington and Stocklinch, and varying by 9 per cent below the average (10 per cent by 2001);
- a revised Curry Rivel ward comprising the parishes of Curry Rivel, Drayton and a new Oath parish ward of Aller parish, and varying by 6 per cent above the average (3 per cent by 2001);
- a revised Islemoor ward comprising the parishes of Beercrocombe, Curry Mallet, Fivehead, Hambridge and Westport, Ilton, Isle Abbots and Isle Brewers, and varying by 12 per cent above the average (10 per cent by 2001);
- a revised Langport and Huish ward comprising Langport parish and a new Huish Episcopi parish ward of Huish Episcopi parish, and varying by 11 per cent above the average (10 per cent by 2001);
- a revised Turn Hill ward comprising the parishes of High Ham, Pitney, Long Load, a new Aller parish ward of Aller parish and a new Wearne and Combe parish ward of Huish Episcopi parish, and varying by 4 per cent above the average both on 1996 figures and by 2001.

54 At Stage Three, the District Council supported our proposed five wards, including our modification to its proposed boundary between the two parish wards in Huish Episcopi parish. We also received submissions directly from the parish councils of Barrington, Curry Rivel, Hambridge and Westport, Huish Episcopi and Isle Abbots. Barrington Parish Council supported our draft proposals as did Langport Town Council, which wrote to the District Council during Stage Three. Curry Rivel Parish Council opposed our proposed warding of Aller parish. The Parish Council, along with Hambridge and Westport Parish Council, also opposed our proposal to include Drayton parish in a revised Curry Rivel ward with Hambridge and Westport parish being transferred into a revised Islemoor ward.

55 Huish Episcopi Parish Council opposed our proposed warding of the parish and suggested an alternative of the parishes of Langport and Huish Episcopi forming two separate single-member wards. The Parish Council stated that the inclusion

of a new Wearne and Combe parish ward in a revised Turn Hill ward "was exceedingly difficult to justify". Isle Abbots Parish Council expressed its preference for no change to the existing warding arrangements, stating that the District Council had not sufficiently considered the proposed housing developments in Ilton.

56 We have carefully considered the views expressed to us during Stage Three. Our draft recommendations would provide an improved level of electoral equality for this area in comparison with the present arrangements. Despite the opposition of some of the parish councils in this area, we remain of the view that our draft proposals generally strike the best balance of the statutory criteria guiding our work.

57 Although we accept that, for example, the parishes of Curry Rivel and Hambridge and Westport share close links, there are also good links between Curry Rivel and Drayton, while the parish of Langport and the 'urban' part of Huish Episcopi parish appear to be closely linked.

58 We also remain satisfied that the District Council's electorate projections for the present Islemoor ward remain the best that are presently available. However, we are persuaded by the submission of Curry Rivel Parish Council that to ward the parish of Aller and place the southern (Oath) parish ward with a revised Curry Rivel district council ward may not best reflect local community identities in the area. Given this, and since only 29 electors would be affected, we are now proposing that Aller parish should remain unwarded, and that the whole parish should form part of the revised Turn Hill ward. Curry Rivel ward would consist of the parishes of Curry Rivel and Drayton.

59 Subject to this minor modification, we are therefore confirming as final our draft recommendations for this area. Details of the proposed parish ward boundary in Huish Episcopi parish are shown in Map A3 at Appendix A.

The wards of Cary and Northstone

60 Presently, the two-member Cary ward comprises the parishes of Alford, Ansford, Castle Cary, Lovington, North Barrow, North Cadbury, South Barrow and Yarlinton and varies by 6 per cent below the district average (2 per cent by 2001). The single-member Northstone ward comprises the

parishes of Babcary, Barton St David, Charlton Mackrell, Keinton Mandeville, Kingsdon and Kingweston and is considerably under-represented, varying by 25 per cent above the district average (22 per cent by 2001).

61 In order to redress the under-representation in Northstone ward, the District Council proposed transferring Babcary parish from Northstone ward into Cary ward. It also proposed that the parish of South Cadbury be transferred from Camelot ward into Cary ward (see below). We did not receive any other direct representations on these wards during Stage One. In our draft recommendations we reflected the District Council's proposals, which provided the revised Cary and Northstone wards with electoral variances of 5 per cent and 16 per cent from the average respectively (8 per cent and 14 per cent by 2001). We acknowledged in our report that the level of electoral equality in Northstone ward was not ideal, but we were of the view that the proposal was necessary in order to ensure that a reasonable level of equality was secured in the neighbouring wards.

62 During Stage Three, the District Council reiterated its support for the transfer of Babcary and South Cadbury parishes into Cary ward. We also received a submission from Babcary Parish Council, which opposed our proposal to transfer the parish from its existing Northstone ward into Cary ward on community identity grounds, stating that "the included parishes [in the present Northstone ward] have similar problems associated with agriculture, planning and the retention of village atmosphere". While we appreciate such concerns, we must also have regard to the degree of electoral inequality that would result if we recommended no change to Northstone ward.

63 Accordingly, we confirm our draft proposals for this area as final as we regard them as being an improved balance of the statutory criteria, without being at the expense of community identities. Although Northstone ward would have a relatively high degree of electoral imbalance under our proposals, we consider such an imbalance to be unavoidable if good levels of equality are to be secured in neighbouring wards and reflect local identities.

The wards of Camelot, Ivelchester and Mudford

64 Presently, the single-member Camelot ward comprises the parishes of Compton Pauncefoot,

Queen Camel, South Cadbury, Sparkford and West Camel. Ivelchester also returns a single member and comprises the parishes of Ilchester, Limington and Yeovilton, with the single-member ward of Mudford comprising the parishes of Chilton Cantelo, Corton Denham, Marston Magna, Mudford and Rimpleton. The number of electors per councillor in Camelot and Ivelchester wards are 5 per cent below and 11 per cent below the district average respectively (7 per cent and 11 per cent by 2001). However, Mudford ward is substantially over-represented varying by 28 per cent below the district average, projected to worsen to 30 per cent by 2001.

65 During Stage One, the District Council proposed that the parishes of Compton Pauncefoot and Corton Denham be transferred into Blackmoor Vale ward (see sections below) and that South Cadbury parish be transferred into Cary ward (as described above). The remaining parishes comprising the three wards, namely Chilton Cantelo, Ilchester, Limington, Marston Magna, Queen Camel, Rimpleton, Sparkford, West Camel and Yeovilton, plus a part of Mudford parish would form a new two-member Camelot/Ivelchester ward. Under the Council's proposals a number of 'urban' properties in Mudford parish would be included in Yeovil Without ward.

66 In our draft recommendations report, we supported the Council's proposed warding of Mudford parish but proposed that the Council's two-member Camelot/Ivelchester ward instead be split into two single-member wards. Camelot ward would comprise the parishes of Marston Magna, Queen Camel, Rimpleton, Sparkford and West Camel, and Ivelchester ward would comprise the parishes of Chilton Cantelo, Ilchester, Limington and Yeovilton and Mudford Rural parish ward of Mudford parish. The two wards would vary by 9 per cent above and 13 per cent above the district average respectively (6 per cent and 12 per cent by 2001). We acknowledged that Ivelchester ward would not have optimum electoral equality, and that the District Council's proposal for this area would provide better electoral equality, but we regarded our proposals as better reflecting local community identities and more in keeping with the pattern of single-member wards which exist in the majority of the district's 'rural' area.

67 During Stage Three, the District Council supported our draft proposals for this area. We also received submissions from the parish councils of Marston Magna, Mudford, Queen Camel, Sparkford and West Camel. The latter three parish councils supported our draft proposals while Mudford Parish

Council supported our proposed warding of the parish. However, the Parish Council opposed our proposal to include the new Mudford Rural parish ward in Ivelchester ward, preferring that it be included in the new Camelot ward. Marston Magna Parish Council also opposed our proposal to include the Mudford Rural parish ward in Ivelchester ward. Both parish councils stated that our proposal might conflict with community ties and that the rural area of Mudford shares closer links with the constituent parishes of the proposed Camelot ward.

68 Although Mudford and Marston Magna parish councils would prefer for the new Mudford Rural parish ward to be included in a modified Camelot ward, we do not regard this as being in the interests of all the parishes comprising the two wards. To satisfy the concerns of the two parish councils, it would be necessary either to create a two-member ward (as initially proposed by the District Council) or to create single-member wards with considerable electoral imbalances. Neither option, we believe, would improve matters sufficiently to persuade us to change our draft recommendations.

69 Although the degree of electoral imbalance in the proposed Ivelchester ward is not ideal, we regard our proposals as being a good balance of the statutory criteria and receiving a degree of local support. We have therefore decided to confirm our draft proposals for the two wards as final. Details of our proposed boundaries between the two Mudford parish wards are illustrated on the large map inserted at the back of this report.

The wards of Blackmoor Vale, Brue and Wincanton

70 Currently, the two-member Blackmoor Vale ward comprises the parishes of Abbas and Templecombe, Charlton Horethorne, Henstridge, Holton, Horsington, Maperton and North Cheriton. The two-member Brue ward comprises the parishes of Bratton Seymour, Brewham, Bruton, Charlton Musgrove, Pen Selwood, Pitcombe and Shepton Montague. The two-member Wincanton ward comprises the parishes of Cucklington, Stoke Trister and Wincanton. The number of electors per councillor in each of the three wards is 3 per cent below, 14 per cent below and 3 per cent above the district average respectively (3 per cent below, 14 per cent below and 6 per cent by 2001).

71 At Stage One, the District Council proposed that the parishes of Compton Pauncefoot (currently

in Camelot ward) and Corton Denham (currently in Mudford ward) be combined with the existing Blackmoor Vale ward to create a new two-member ward. The parishes of Bruton and Wincanton would each become wards on their own, with the new Bruton ward returning one councillor and the new Wincanton ward returning two councillors. The remaining parishes of the current Brue and Wincanton wards would form a new single-member Tower ward. We did not receive any other direct representations during Stage One, although some parish councils did respond to the District Council as part of its own consultation exercise.

72 Our draft recommendations for the area were as proposed by the District Council. Under the draft proposals, the Blackmoor Vale, Bruton, Tower and Wincanton wards would vary from the district average by 5 per cent above, 4 per cent below, 4 per cent below and 8 per cent below respectively (5 per cent, 2 per cent, 5 per cent and 4 per cent by 2001).

73 During Stage Three, the District Council reiterated its support for our draft proposals. We also received submissions from Bruton Town Council and the parish councils of Pen Selwood, Pitcombe and Stoke Trister and Bayford. Four of the councils supported our draft proposals for their particular ward, the exception being Pitcombe Parish Council which argued that it should remain in the same district ward as Bruton. It proposed an alternative scheme involving the parishes of Holton, Mapperton and North Cheriton (from the present Blackmoor Vale ward) becoming part of the new Tower ward, and the parishes of Pitcombe and Shepton Montague remaining in the same ward as Bruton. However, the Parish Council's proposed Bruton ward would not have as good a level of electoral equality as our draft proposals (it would be under-represented by 20 per cent) and its proposed Tower ward, in our view, may not reflect local identities.

74 Although we acknowledge the closeness of the current ties between Pitcombe and Bruton, the general support for our proposals and the improvement in electoral equality that would result from them lead us to confirm our draft recommendations for the wards of Blackmoor Vale, Bruton, Tower and Wincanton as final.

The wards of Coker and Houndstone

75 Presently, the two-member Coker ward varies by 18 per cent above the average (17 per cent by 2001) and comprises the parishes of Barwick, Closworth,

East Coker, Hardington Mandeville and West Coker. Houndstone ward is served by one district councillor and comprises the parishes of Brympton and Odcombe and has the worst electoral variance in the district, varying by 71 per cent above the average. By 2001 this is projected to worsen to 129 per cent, which equates to the ward having more than double the average number of electors per councillor for the district, due to the growth (1,315 electors) projected for Brympton parish by 2001.

⁷⁶ During Stage One, the District Council proposed that Brympton parish form a ward on its own and that Odcombe parish be transferred into Coker ward. Additionally, the District Council proposed that the parishes of East Coker and West Coker be divided into two parish wards each. A new 'Urban Wraxhill' parish ward of East Coker parish and a 'Sampson's Wood' parish ward of West Coker parish would include a number of 'urban' properties in a revised Yeovil South ward (as detailed earlier). The residual rural parish wards of East Coker and West Coker would be retained in a revised Coker ward. We did not receive any other direct representations during Stage One, and we adopted the District Council's proposals as our draft recommendations.

⁷⁷ During Stage Three, the District Council supported our draft proposals, while we also received a submission from West Coker Parish Council, which supported our proposal to create parish wards and include a number of 'urban' properties in Yeovil South ward. The Yeovil Constituency Labour Party also supported our proposal to ward the parishes of East and West Coker.

⁷⁸ Under our proposals, the number of electors per councillor in the revised Coker ward and the new Brympton ward would be 14 per cent above and 31 per cent below the district average respectively, becoming 12 per cent and 1 per cent by 2001. The initial imbalance in Brympton ward would be all but eradicated by 2001, due to the projected increase in electors in the ward during that period. While the number of electors per councillor in the revised Coker ward would not be optimal, we regard the degree of imbalance as being acceptable if good levels of electoral equality are to be secured in the neighbouring wards. Given the degree of local support, we are content to confirm our draft proposals for both wards as final. Details of the boundaries between the parish wards in East Coker and West Coker are illustrated on the large map inserted at the back of this report.

The wards of Hamdon and St Michael's

⁷⁹ Currently, the single-member Hamdon ward comprises the parishes of Norton sub Hamdon and Stoke sub Hamdon and varies by 8 per cent above the district average (4 per cent by 2001). The single-member St Michael's ward comprises the parishes of Chilthorne Domer, Montacute and Tintinhull and varies by 12 per cent below the district average (13 per cent by 2001).

⁸⁰ During Stage One, the District Council proposed that the parish of Stoke sub Hamdon be warded to include in St Michael's ward a new Stancheester parish ward (with 67 electors), with the remaining Stoke sub Hamdon parish ward (with 1,485 electors) being retained in a revised Hamdon ward. We did not receive any other direct representations on our proposals for the two wards, and we adopted the District Council's proposals as our draft recommendations. Under these proposals, the wards of Hamdon and St Michael's would vary by 5 per cent above and 8 per cent below the district average respectively (1 per cent above and 10 per cent below by 2001).

⁸¹ During Stage Three, the District Council supported our draft proposals for these wards. We also received submissions from Norton sub Hamdon Parish Council and Stoke sub Hamdon Parish Council; the former supported our draft recommendations, but the latter opposed them on community identity grounds. Stoke sub Hamdon Parish Council stated that, rather than being warded, it would prefer the present wards of Hamdon and Parrett to be combined to form a new two-member ward, and the wards of Martock and St Michael's to be combined to form a new three-member ward. Although this proposal would provide good electoral equality, it would create multi-member wards from three 'rural' areas which currently return a single councillor. We do not regard the creation of a two-member ward and a three-member ward in this area as being in the interest of local communities.

⁸² While we have carefully considered the views of Stoke sub Hamdon Parish Council, we have concluded on balance to confirm our draft proposals for the two wards of Hamdon and St Michael's, including the warding of Stoke sub Hamdon parish, as final. Details of the proposed boundary between the two parish wards in Stoke sub Hamdon parish are illustrated in Map A4 at Appendix A.

Electoral Cycle

83 In our draft recommendations report, we proposed that the present system of whole-council elections in South Somerset be retained. At Stage Three the District Council expressed its support for this proposal. No other representations were received on this issue, and we have therefore decided to confirm our draft recommendation as final.

Conclusions

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

- (a) The parish of Aller should not be warded, the whole parish instead being retained in the revised Turn Hill ward.
- (b) Curry Rivel ward should consist of Curry Rivel and Drayton parishes.

85 We have concluded that the present council size of 60 members should be retained; that there should be 39 wards, one fewer than at present; that the boundaries of 28 of the existing wards should be modified; and that whole-council elections should continue to be held every four years.

86 Figure 5 shows the impact of our final recommendations on electoral equality, comparing

them with the current arrangements, based on 1996 and 2001 electorate figures.

87 As Figure 5 shows, our recommendations would result in a reduction in the number of wards with electoral variances of more than 10 per cent from the district average from 12 to seven, and a further reduction to three in 2001. Under these proposals, the average number of electors per councillor would remain at 1,933 initially and 2,020 by 2001. We conclude that our recommendations would best meet the need for electoral equality, having regard to the statutory criteria.

Final Recommendation

South Somerset District Council should comprise 60 councillors serving 39 wards, as detailed and named in Figures 1 and 7 and illustrated in Map 2, Appendix A and the large map at the back of this report. The Council should continue to be elected together every four years.

Parish and Town Council Electoral Arrangements

88 In undertaking reviews of electoral arrangements, we are required to comply as far as is reasonably practicable with the provisions set out in Schedule 11 to the 1972 Act. The Schedule provides that if a parish is to be divided between different district wards, it must also be divided into parish wards, so that each parish ward lies wholly

*Figure 5:
Comparison of Current and Recommended Electoral Arrangements*

	1996 electorate		2001 projected electorate	
	Current arrangements	Final recommendations	Current arrangements	Final recommendations
Number of councillors	60	60	60	60
Number of wards	40	39	40	39
Average number of electors per councillor	1,933	1,933	2,020	2,020
Number of wards with a variance more than 10 per cent from the average	12	7	15	3
Number of wards with a variance more than 20 per cent from the average	3	1	3	0

within a single ward of the district. Accordingly, we propose a number of consequential parish ward changes.

89 At draft stage we proposed modifications to three of the five wards in Chard and that each ward should continue to return three town councillors. The District Council and Chard Town Council (who initially preferred no change) supported this proposal, and we have decided to confirm our draft proposals as final.

Final Recommendation

Chard Town Council should continue to comprise 15 town councillors, with each of the five wards returning three town councillors. The town council ward boundaries should be modified to reflect the proposed District Council wards, as illustrated in Map A2 at Appendix A.

90 At draft stage we proposed that the town of Yeovil should continue to be served by 24 town councillors. The four proposed wards should return six town councillors each. The District Council supported this proposal, as did the Town Council in a letter to the District Council. Yeovil Constituency Labour Party proposed that the town instead be served by 23 town councillors, based on 12 single-member district wards. The Constituency Party did not, however, specify the number of town councillors to be returned from each of the 12 wards.

91 Given that we do not regard the evidence available to us as being sufficient to persuade us to modify our draft proposals in the town, we have concluded to recommend as final our draft proposals for Yeovil Town Council.

Final Recommendation

Yeovil Town Council should continue to be served by 24 town councillors, representing four new wards each returning six town councillors. With the exception of Yeovil South ward, each ward should be coterminous with the respective proposed district council wards (of Yeovil Central, Yeovil East and Yeovil West), as illustrated on the large map inserted at the back of this report. Yeovil South town council ward should be coterminous with that part of the proposed Yeovil South district council ward that lies within the parish of Yeovil.

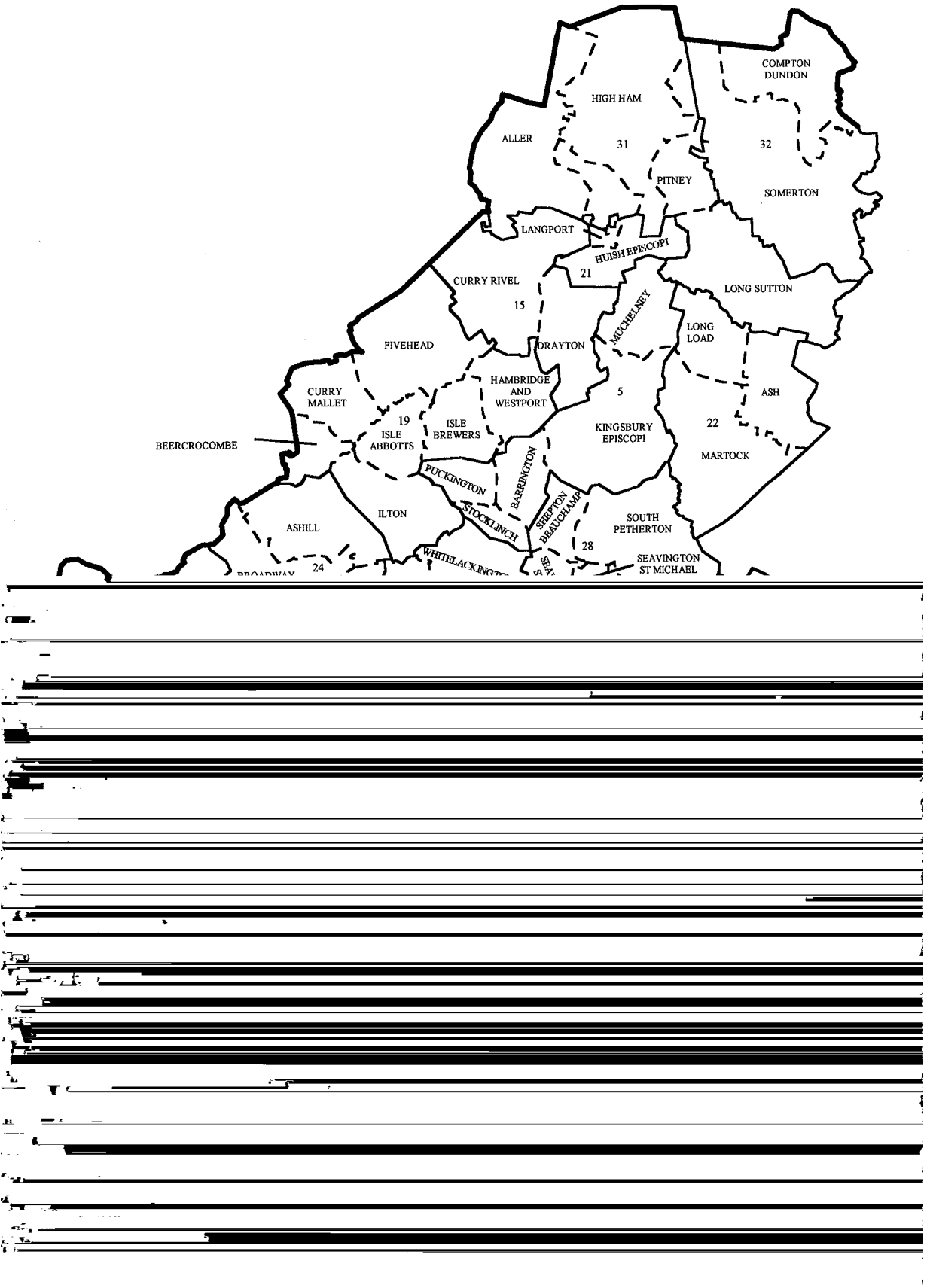
92 At draft stage we proposed that each of the parishes of Aller, East Coker, Huish Episcopi, Mudford, Stoke sub Hamdon and West Coker be split into two parish wards each. The number of parish councillors serving each of the parishes would remain unchanged, and the representation on each parish ward should be weighted (approximately) by electorate. We received eight representations on the warding of these parishes, and having re-examined our draft proposals, we have concluded to confirm them with the exception of warding Aller parish. The number of parish councillors to be returned from each parish ward is detailed in Figure 6.

Figure 6:

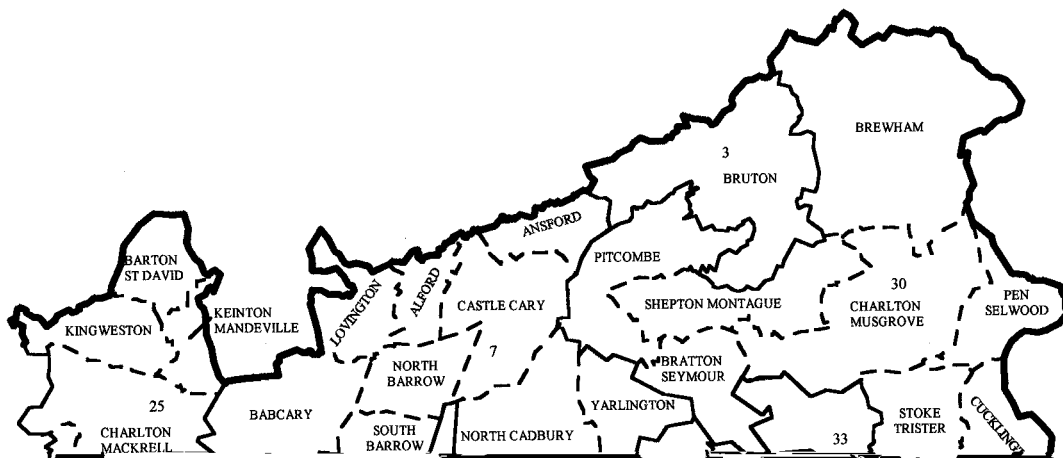
Proposed Distribution of Parish Councillors in the New Recommended Parish Wards

Parish area	Current number of parish councillors	Proposed parish ward names	Proposed number of ward parish councillors
East Coker	10	East Coker Urban Wraxhill	8 2
Huish Episcopi	9	Huish Episcopi Wearne and Combe	8 1
Mudford	7	Mudford Rural Mudford Urban	5 2
Stoke sub Hamdon	11	Stanchester Stoke sub Hamdon	1 10
West Coker	10	Sampson's Wood West Coker	3 7

Map 2
The Commission's Final Recommendations for South Somerset



Map 2 (continued):
The Commission's Final Recommendations for South Somerset



93 In our draft recommendations report we also proposed that there should be no change to the electoral cycle of parish and town councils in the district. We have not received any evidence to consider moving away from this proposal, and therefore confirm it as final.

Final Recommendation

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

Figure 7:
The Commission's Final Recommendations for South Somerset

Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (1996)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2001)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
1 Blackdown	1	1,807	1,807	-7	1,836	1,836	-9
2 Blackmoor Vale	2	4,064	2,032	5	4,238	2,119	5
3 Bruton	1	1,865	1,865	-4	1,971	1,971	-2
4 Brympton	2	2,666	1,333	-31	3,981	1,991	-1
5 Burrow Hill	1	1,760	1,760	-9	1,808	1,808	-10
6 Camelot	1	2,098	2,098	9	2,135	2,135	6
7 Cary	2	4,045	2,023	5	4,370	2,185	8
8 Chard Avishayes	1	1,791	1,791	-7	1,809	1,809	-10
9 Chard Combe	1	1,867	1,867	-3	1,882	1,882	-7
10 Chard Crimchard	1	1,726	1,726	-11	1,871	1,871	-7
11 Chard Holyrood	1	1,916	1,916	-1	1,922	1,922	-5
12 Chard Jocelyn	1	1,928	1,928	0	1,932	1,932	-4
13 Coker	2	4,417	2,209	14	4,504	2,252	12
14 Crewkerne	3	6,026	2,009	4	6,407	2,136	6
15 Curry Rivel	1	2,019	2,019	4	2,045	2,045	1
16 Eggwood	1	2,008	2,008	4	2,041	2,041	1
17 Hamdon	1	2,027	2,027	5	2,040	2,040	1
18 Ilminster	2	3,671	1,836	-5	3,980	1,990	-1
19 Islemoor	1	2,163	2,163	12	2,221	2,221	10
20 Ivelchester	1	2,187	2,187	13	2,266	2,266	12
21 Langport and Huish	1	2,147	2,147	11	2,231	2,231	10
22 Martock	2	4,161	2,081	8	4,308	2,154	7
23 Milborne Port	1	2,060	2,060	7	2,108	2,108	4
24 Neroche	1	1,867	1,867	-3	1,970	1,970	-2
25 Northstone	1	2,247	2,247	16	2,296	2,296	14

continued overleaf

Figure 7 (continued):
The Commission's Final Recommendations for South Somerset.

Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (1996)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2001)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
26 Parrett	1	1,885	1,885	-2	1,907	1,907	-6
27 St Michael's	1	1,771	1,771	-8	1,827	1,827	-10
28 South Petherton	2	3,772	1,886	-2	3,938	1,969	-3
29 Tatworth and Forton	1	2,033	2,033	5	2,155	2,155	7
30 Tower	1	1,859	1,859	-4	1,914	1,914	-5
31 Turn Hill	1	2,043	2,043	6	2,140	2,140	6
32 Wessex	2	4,204	2,102	9	4,438	2,219	10
33 Wincanton	2	3,556	1,778	-8	3,868	1,934	-4
34 Windwhistle	1	1,761	1,761	-9	1,816	1,816	-10
35 Yeovil Central	3	5,429	1,810	-6	5,581	1,860	-8
36 Yeovil East	3	5,526	1,842	-5	5,542	1,847	-9
37 Yeovil South	3	6,200	2,067	7	6,355	2,118	5
38 Yeovil West	3	5,562	1,854	-4	5,591	1,864	-8
39 Yeovil Without	3	5,836	1,945	1	5,935	1,978	-2
Totals	60	115,970	—	—	121,179	—	—
Averages	—	—	1,933	—	—	2,020	—

Source: Electorate figures are based on South Somerset 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.

6. NEXT STEPS

⁹⁴ Having completed our review of electoral arrangements in South Somerset and submitted our final recommendations to the Secretary of State, we have fulfilled our statutory obligation under the Local Government Act 1992.

⁹⁵ It now falls to the Secretary of State to decide whether to give effect to our recommendations, with or without modification, and to implement them by means of an order. Such an order will not be made earlier than six weeks from the date that our recommendations are submitted to the Secretary of State.

⁹⁶ All further correspondence concerning our recommendations and the matters discussed in this report should be addressed to:

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

APPENDIX A

Final Recommendations for South Somerset: Detailed Mapping

The following maps illustrate the Commission's proposed ward boundaries for the South Somerset 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 to A4 and the large map inserted in the back of the report.

Map A2 illustrates the proposed boundaries in Chard town.

Map A3 illustrates the proposed parish ward boundary in Huish Episcopi parish.

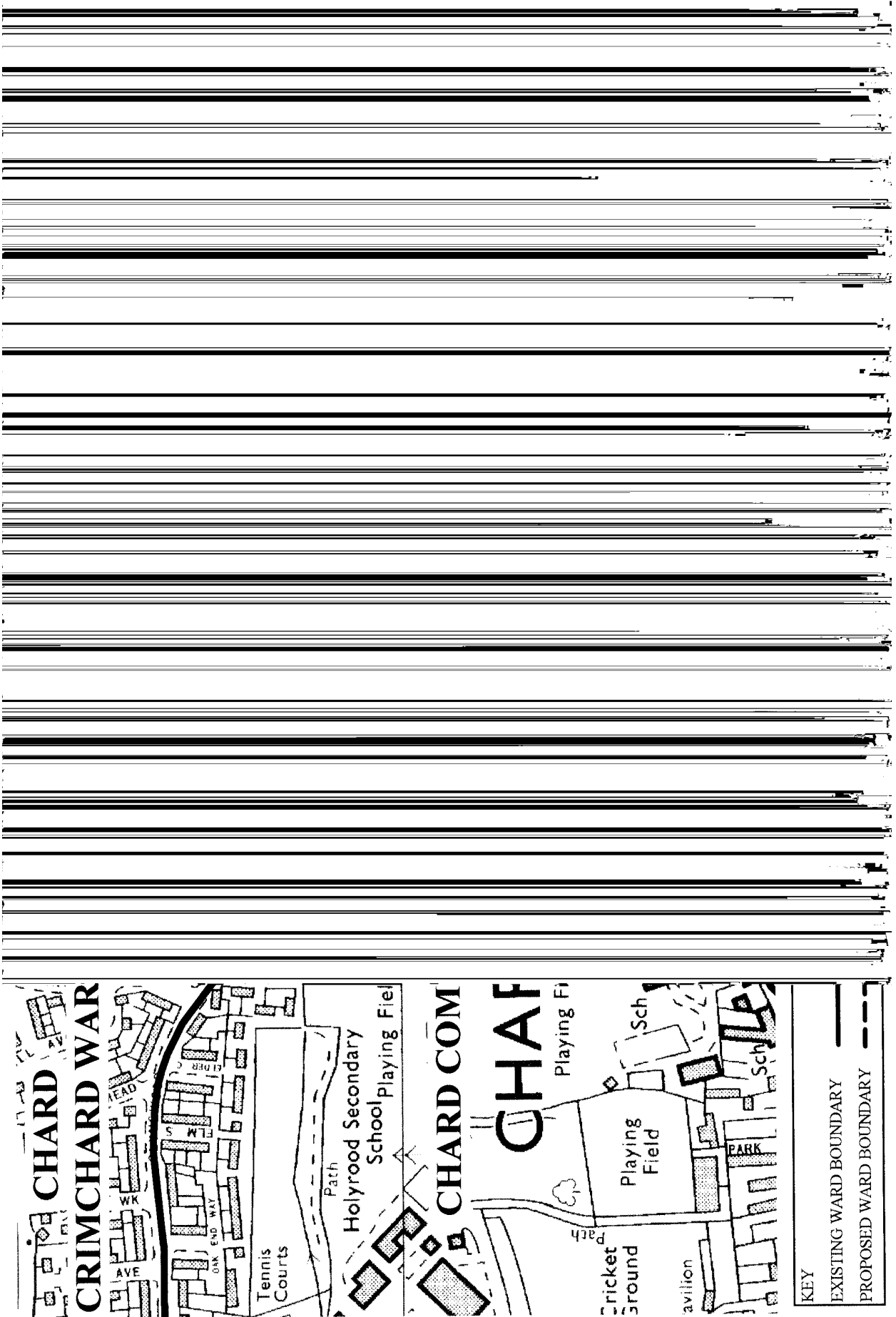
Map A4 illustrates the proposed parish ward boundary in Stoke sub Hamdon parish.

The **large map** inserted in the back of this report illustrates the Commission's proposed ward boundaries in the Yeovil area, including the proposed parish ward boundaries in the parishes of East Coker, Mudford and West Coker.

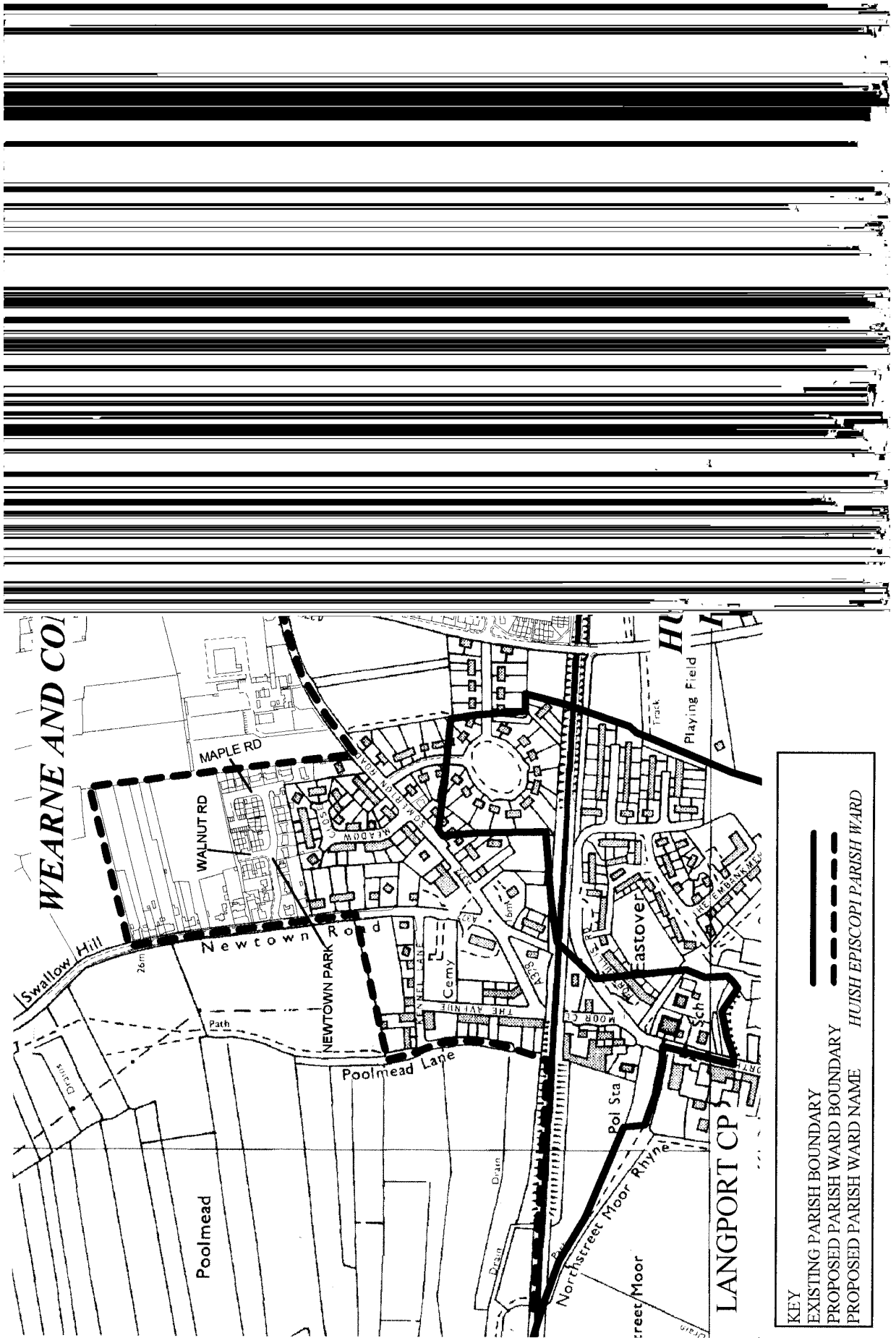
Map A1:
Final Recommendations for South Somerset: Key Map



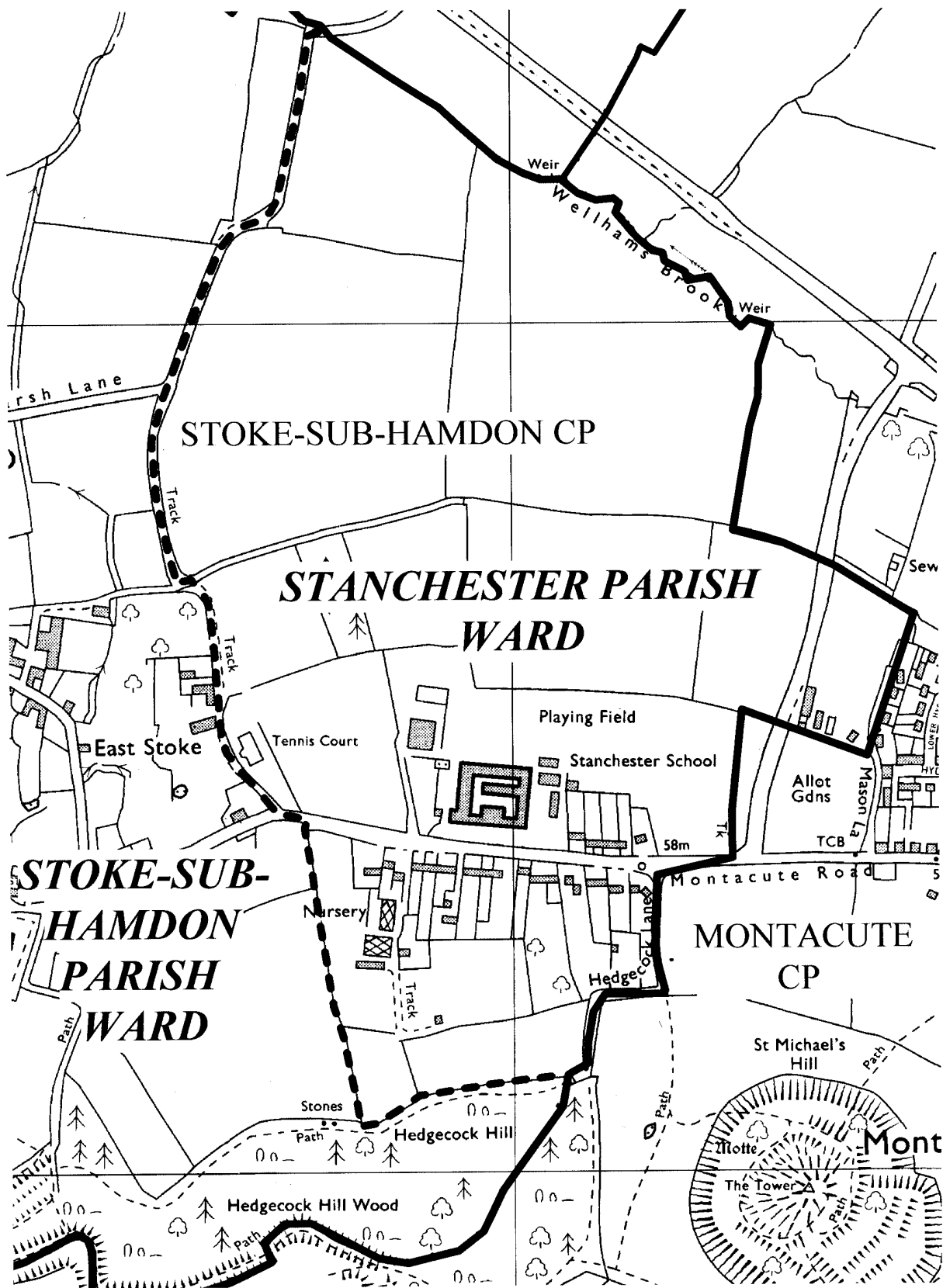
Map A2:
Proposed Boundaries in Chard Town



Map A3:
Proposed Parish Ward Boundary in Huish Episcopi Parish



Map A4:
Proposed Parish Ward Boundary in Stoke sub Hamdon Parish



KEY	
EXISTING PARISH BOUNDARY	—————
PROPOSED PARISH WARD BOUNDARY	—————
PROPOSED PARISH WARD NAME	—————
	STANCHESTER PARISH WARD

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APPENDIX B

Draft Recommendations for South Somerset

Our main final recommendations, detailed in Figures 1 and 7, differ from those we put forward as draft recommendations only in respect of Curry Rivel and Turn Hill wards, where our draft proposals were as follows:

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

Ward name	Number of councillors	Constituent areas
Curry Rivel	1	Burrow Hill ward (part – Drayton parish); Curry Rivel ward (part – Curry Rivel parish); Turn Hill ward (part – Oath parish ward of Aller parish)
Turn Hill	1	Langport and Huish ward (part – Wearne and Combe parish ward of Huish Episcopi parish); Turn Hill ward (part – the parishes of High Ham, Long Sutton and Pitney and Aller parish ward of Aller parish)

*Figure B2:
The Commission's Draft Recommendations: The Number of Electors per Councillor*

Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (1996)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2001)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
Curry Rivel	1	2,048	2,048	6	2,075	2,075	3
Turn Hill	1	2,014	2,014	4	2,110	2,110	4

Source: Electorate figures were based on South Somerset District Council's submission.

