

LOCAL  
GOVERNMENT  
COMMISSION  
FOR ENGLAND

FINAL  
RECOMMENDATIONS  
ON THE FUTURE  
ELECTORAL  
ARRANGEMENTS FOR  
NUNEATON &  
BEDWORTH IN  
WARWICKSHIRE

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

*November 1999*

# LOCAL GOVERNMENT COMMISSION FOR ENGLAND

This report sets out the Commission's final recommendations on the electoral arrangements for the borough of Nuneaton & Bedworth in Warwickshire.

Members of the Commission are:

Professor Malcolm Grant (Chairman)

Professor Michael Clarke (Deputy Chairman)

Peter Brokenshire

Kru Desai

Pamela Gordon

Robin Gray

Robert Hughes CBE

Barbara Stephens (Chief Executive)

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A large map illustrating the proposed ward boundaries for Nuneaton & Bedworth is inserted inside the back cover of the report.





## Local Government Commission for England

2 November 1999

Dear Secretary of State

On 3 November 1998 the Commission began a periodic electoral review of Nuneaton & Bedworth under the Local Government Act 1992. We published our draft recommendations in May 1999 and undertook an eight-week period of consultation.

We have now prepared our final recommendations in the light of the consultation. With the exception of the Council's electoral cycle, we have confirmed our draft recommendations in their entirety. This report sets out our final recommendations for changes to electoral arrangements in Nuneaton & Bedworth.

We recommend that Nuneaton & Bedworth Borough Council should be served by 34 councillors, elected from 17 two-member wards, and that changes should be made to ward boundaries in order to improve electoral equality, having regard to the statutory criteria.

We note that you have now set out in the White Paper *Modern Local Government – In Touch with the People* (Cm 4014, HMSO), legislative proposals for a number of changes to local authority electoral arrangements, including more frequent elections. Until such time as new legislation is in place, in the interests of effective and convenient local government we recommend that the Council should be elected together every four years, rather than the current system of elections by thirds.

I would like to thank members and officers of the Borough 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 Nuneaton & Bedworth on 3 November 1998. We published our draft recommendations for electoral arrangements on 25 May 1999, after which we undertook an eight-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 Nuneaton & Bedworth:

- **in six of the 15 wards the number of electors represented by each councillor varies by more than 10 per cent from the average for the borough and three wards vary by more than 20 per cent from the average;**
- **by 2003 electoral equality is not expected to improve, with the number of electors per councillor forecast to vary by more than 10 per cent from the average in 11 wards and by more than 20 per cent in two wards.**

Our main final recommendations for future electoral arrangements (Figures 1 and 2 and paragraphs 99-100) are that:

- **Nuneaton & Bedworth Borough Council should have 34 councillors, 11 fewer than at present;**
- **there should be 17 wards, instead of 15 as at present;**
- **the boundaries of 14 of the existing wards should be modified and one ward should retain its existing boundaries;**
- **the Council should hold whole-council elections every four years rather than elections by thirds.**

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

- **In 13 of the proposed 17 wards the number of electors per councillor would vary by less than 10 per cent from the borough average.**
- **This improved level of electoral equality is forecast to continue, with the number of electors per councillor in all wards expected to vary by no more than 4 per cent from the average for the borough in 2003.**

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 14 December 1999:

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

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

|    | <b>Ward name</b> | <b>Number of councillors</b> | <b>Constituent areas (existing wards)</b>   |
|----|------------------|------------------------------|---|
| 1  | Abbey            | 2                            | Abbey ward (part); Camp Hill ward (part)  |
| 2  | Arbury           | 2                            | Arbury ward (part); Chilvers Coton ward (part)                                    |
| 3  | Attleborough     | 2                            | Attleborough ward (part); Whitestone ward (part)                                  |
| 4  | Bar Pool         | 2                            | Arbury ward (part); Chilvers Coton ward (part); Stockingford ward (part)          |
| 5  | Bede             | 2                            | Bulkington ward (part); Mount Pleasant ward (part); Poplar ward (part)            |
| 6  | Bulkington       | 2                            | Bulkington ward (part)  |
| 7  | Camp Hill        | 2                            | Camp Hill ward (part); Stockingford ward (part)                                   |
| 8  | Exhall           | 2                            | <i>Unchanged</i> Exhall ward  |
| 9  | Galley Common    | 2                            | Galley Common ward (part); Stockingford ward (part)                               |
| 10 | Heath            | 2                            | Heath ward (part)   |
| 11 | Kingswood        | 2                            | Arbury ward (part); Galley Common ward (part); Stockingford ward (part)           |
| 12 | Poplar           | 2                            | Poplar ward (part)  |
| 13 | St Nicolas       | 2                            | St Nicolas ward (part)  |
| 14 | Slough           | 2                            | Attleborough ward (part); Heath ward (part); Mount Pleasant ward (part)           |
| 15 | Weddington       | 2                            | Abbey ward (part); Camp Hill ward (part); St Nicolas ward (part); Weddington ward |
| 16 | Wem Brook        | 2                            | Attleborough ward (part); Chilvers Coton ward (part)                              |
| 17 | Whitestone       | 2                            | Whitestone ward (part)  |

*Notes: 1 The borough is unparished.*

*2 The large map at the back of the report illustrates all of the proposed wards.*

Figure 2:  
The Commission's Final Recommendations for Nuneaton & Bedworth

| Ward name       | Number of councillors | Electorate (1998) | Number of electors per councillor | Variance from average % | Electorate (2003) | Number of electors per councillor | Variance from average % |
|-----------------|-----------------------|-------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------------|
| 1 Abbey         | 2                     | 5,768             | 2,884                             | 8                       | 5,934             | 2,967                             | 4                       |
| 2 Arbury        | 2                     | 4,239             | 2,120                             | -21                     | 5,849             | 2,925                             | 2                       |
| 3 Attleborough  | 2                     | 5,313             | 2,657                             | -1                      | 5,697             | 2,849                             | -1                      |
| 4 Bar Pool      | 2                     | 5,258             | 2,629                             | -2                      | 5,610             | 2,805                             | -2                      |
| 5 Bede          | 2                     | 5,604             | 2,802                             | 5                       | 5,798             | 2,899                             | 1                       |
| 6 Bulkington    | 2                     | 5,466             | 2,733                             | 2                       | 5,490             | 2,745                             | -4                      |
| 7 Camp Hill     | 2                     | 5,451             | 2,726                             | 2                       | 5,654             | 2,827                             | -1                      |
| 8 Exhall        | 2                     | 5,637             | 2,819                             | 5                       | 5,727             | 2,864                             | 0                       |
| 9 Galley Common | 2                     | 5,504             | 2,752                             | 3                       | 5,773             | 2,887                             | 1                       |
| 10 Heath        | 2                     | 4,899             | 2,450                             | -8                      | 5,761             | 2,881                             | 1                       |
| 11 Kingswood    | 2                     | 5,000             | 2,500                             | -6                      | 5,546             | 2,773                             | -3                      |
| 12 Poplar       | 2                     | 4,535             | 2,268                             | -15                     | 5,599             | 2,800                             | -2                      |
| 13 St Nicolas   | 2                     | 5,600             | 2,800                             | 5                       | 5,633             | 2,817                             | -2                      |
| 14 Slough       | 2                     | 5,265             | 2,633                             | -1                      | 5,982             | 2,991                             | 4                       |
| 15 Weddington   | 2                     | 5,953             | 2,977                             | 11                      | 5,959             | 2,980                             | 4                       |
| 16 Wem Brook    | 2                     | 5,424             | 2,712                             | 2                       | 5,491             | 2,746                             | -4                      |
| 17 Whitestone   | 2                     | 5,924             | 2,962                             | 11                      | 5,936             | 2,968                             | 4                       |
| <b>Totals</b>   | <b>34</b>             | <b>90,840</b>     | —                                 | —                       | <b>97,439</b>     | —                                 | —                       |
| <b>Averages</b> | —                     | —                 | <b>2,672</b>                      | —                       | —                 | <b>2,866</b>                      | —                       |

Source: Electorate figures are based on information provided by Nuneaton & Bedworth Borough Council.

Notes: 1 The 'variance from average' column shows by how far, in percentage terms, the number of electors per councillor varies from the average for the borough. The minus symbol (-) denotes a lower than average number of electors. Figures have been rounded to the nearest whole number.

2 The total electorate figures differ marginally from those in Figure 3, but this would have a negligible effect on the electoral variance.



# 1. INTRODUCTION

1 This report contains our final recommendations on the electoral arrangements for the borough of Nuneaton & Bedworth in Warwickshire. We have now reviewed the districts in Warwickshire as part of our programme of periodic electoral reviews (PERs) of all principal local authority areas in England.

2 This was our first review of the electoral arrangements of Nuneaton & Bedworth. The last such review was undertaken by our predecessor, the Local Government Boundary Commission (LGBC), which reported to the Secretary of State in December 1976 (Report No. 180). The electoral arrangements of Warwickshire County Council were last reviewed in December 1980 (Report No. 409). We intend reviewing the County Council's electoral arrangements in due course.

3 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.

4 We are required to make recommendations to the Secretary of State on the number of councillors who should serve on the Borough Council, and the number, boundaries and names of wards.

5 We have also had regard to our *Guidance and Procedural Advice for Local Authorities and Other Interested Parties* (updated in March 1998), which sets out our approach to the reviews.

6 First, 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 Second, the broad objective of PERs is then to

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

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

10 Following publication of the White Paper, we advised all authorities in our 1998/99 PER programme, including the Warwickshire districts, that until any direction is received from the Secretary of State, the Commission would continue

to maintain its current approach to PERs as set out in the March 1998 *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.

<sup>11</sup> This review was in four stages. Stage One began on 3 November 1998, when we wrote to Nuneaton & Bedworth Borough Council inviting proposals for future electoral arrangements. We also notified Warwickshire County Council, Warwickshire Police Authority, the local authority associations, the Members of Parliament and the Member of the European Parliament with constituency interests in the borough, and the headquarters of the main political parties. We placed a notice in the local press, issued a press release and invited the Borough Council to publicise the review further. The closing date for receipt of representations, the end of Stage One, was initially set as 8 February 1999; however, Stage One of the review of Nuneaton & Bedworth was extended by three weeks to 1 March 1999 at the request of the Borough Council, to enable it to finalise consultation. At Stage Two we considered all the representations received during Stage One and prepared our draft recommendations.

<sup>12</sup> Stage Three began on 25 May 1999 with the publication of our report, *Draft Recommendations on the Future Electoral Arrangements for Nuneaton & Bedworth in Warwickshire*, and ended on 19 July 1999. Comments were sought on our preliminary conclusions. Finally, during Stage Four we reconsidered our draft recommendations in the light of the Stage Three consultation and now publish our final recommendations.

## 2. CURRENT ELECTORAL ARRANGEMENTS

13 The borough of Nuneaton & Bedworth lies to the north of Coventry and comprises the two towns of Nuneaton and Bedworth. The towns have developed into thriving industrial and manufacturing market towns with extensive residential areas and are centres for shopping and leisure pursuits. Bedworth comprises 35 per cent of the borough's total electorate, Nuneaton comprises 65 per cent.

14 There are no civil parishes in the borough. The area has good communication links including direct access to the motorway network via the M1/M6 link in the south of the borough and the national rail network.

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

16 The electorate of the borough is 90,959 (February 1998). The Council presently has 45 members who are elected from 15 wards, 10 covering Nuneaton and five covering Bedworth. Each ward is represented by three councillors. The Council is elected by thirds.

17 Since the last electoral review there has been an increase in the electorate in Nuneaton & Bedworth borough, with around 15 per cent more electors than two decades ago as a result of new housing developments. The most notable increases have been in the wards of Galley Common, Mount Pleasant, St Nicolas and Whitestone.

18 At present, each councillor represents an average of 2,021 electors, which the Borough Council forecasts will increase to 2,164 by the year 2003 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 six of the 15 wards varies by more than 10 per cent from the

borough average and in three wards by more than 20 per cent. The worst imbalance is in Mount Pleasant ward, where each of the three councillors represents 29 per cent more electors than the borough average.

Map 1:  
*Existing Wards in Nuneaton & Bedworth*

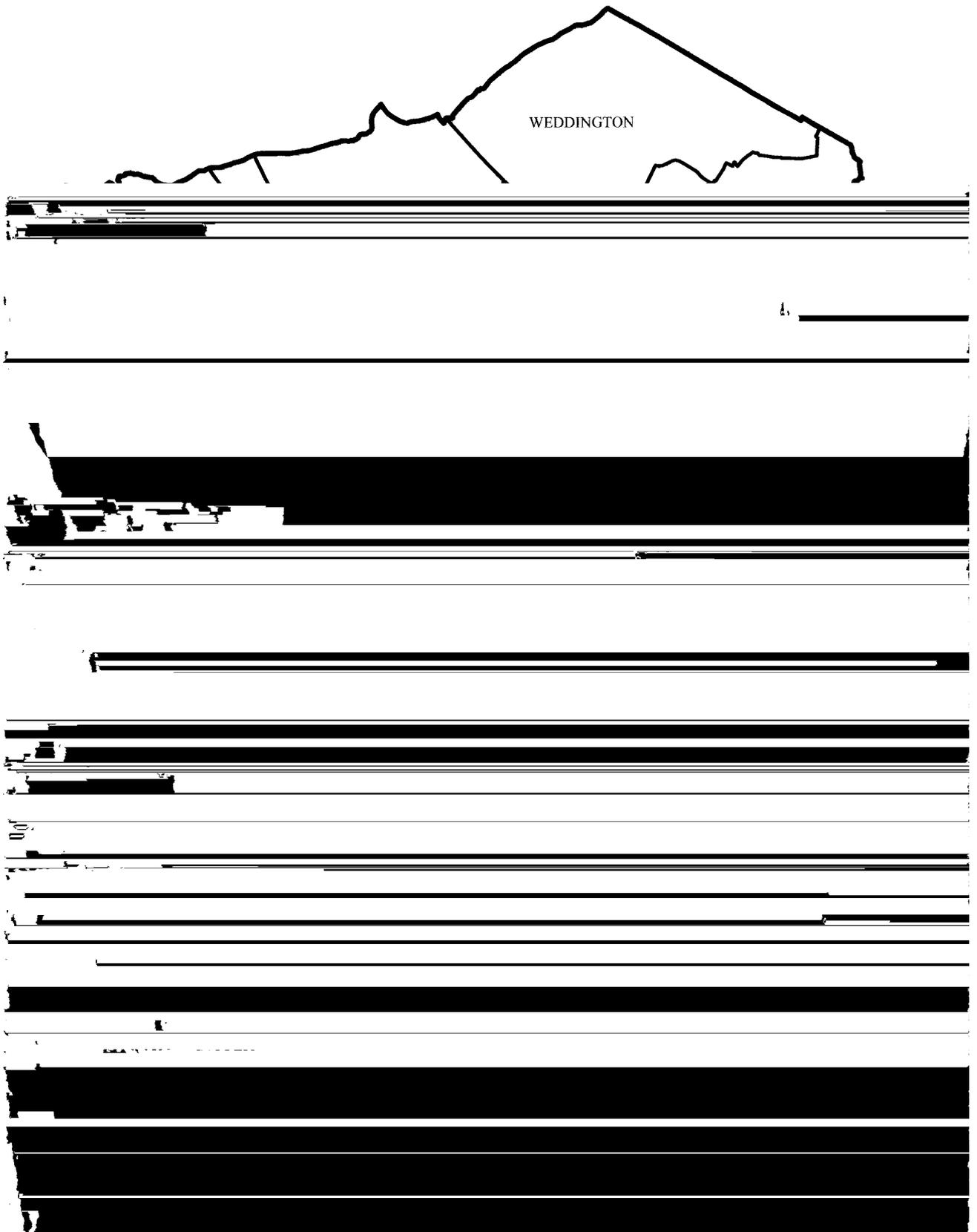


Figure 3:  
Existing Electoral Arrangements

| Ward name         | Number of councillors | Electorate (1998) | Number of electors per councillor | Variance from average % | Electorate (2003) | Number of electors per councillor | Variance from average % |
|-------------------|-----------------------|-------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------------|
| 1 Abbey           | 3                     | 5,762             | 1,921                             | -5                      | 5,928             | 1,976                             | -9                      |
| 2 Arbury          | 3                     | 7,339             | 2,446                             | 21                      | 7,972             | 2,657                             | 23                      |
| 3 Attleborough    | 3                     | 6,493             | 2,164                             | 7                       | 6,919             | 2,306                             | 7                       |
| 4 Bulkington      | 3                     | 6,520             | 2,173                             | 8                       | 6,580             | 2,193                             | 1                       |
| 5 Camp Hill       | 3                     | 5,099             | 1,700                             | -16                     | 5,308             | 1,769                             | -18                     |
| 6 Chilvers Coton  | 3                     | 4,673             | 1,558                             | -23                     | 5,658             | 1,886                             | -13                     |
| 7 Exhall          | 3                     | 5,637             | 1,879                             | -7                      | 5,727             | 1,909                             | -12                     |
| 8 Galley Common   | 3                     | 6,556             | 2,185                             | 8                       | 7,174             | 2,391                             | 11                      |
| 9 Heath           | 3                     | 6,007             | 2,002                             | -1                      | 7,468             | 2,489                             | 15                      |
| 10 Mount Pleasant | 3                     | 7,815             | 2,605                             | 29                      | 7,995             | 2,665                             | 23                      |
| 11 Poplar         | 3                     | 5,488             | 1,829                             | -10                     | 6,574             | 2,191                             | 1                       |
| 12 St Nicolas     | 3                     | 5,721             | 1,907                             | -6                      | 5,807             | 1,936                             | -11                     |
| 13 Stockingford   | 3                     | 4,880             | 1,627                             | -20                     | 5,272             | 1,757                             | -19                     |
| 14 Weddington     | 3                     | 5,779             | 1,926                             | -5                      | 5,785             | 1,928                             | -11                     |
| 15 Whitestone     | 3                     | 7,190             | 2,397                             | 19                      | 7,202             | 2,401                             | 11                      |
| <b>Totals</b>     | <b>45</b>             | <b>90,959</b>     | —                                 | —                       | <b>97,369</b>     | —                                 | —                       |
| <b>Averages</b>   | —                     | —                 | <b>2,021</b>                      | —                       | —                 | <b>2,164</b>                      | —                       |

Source: Electorate figures are based on information provided by Nuneaton & Bedworth Borough Council.

Note: The 'variance from average' column shows by how far, in percentage terms, the number of electors per councillor varies from the average for the borough. The minus symbol (-) denotes a lower than average number of electors. For example, in 1998, electors in Chilvers Coton ward were relatively over-represented by 23 per cent, while electors in Mount Pleasant ward were relatively under-represented by 29 per cent. Figures have been rounded to the nearest whole number.



### 3. DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS

19 During Stage One we received three representations, including a borough-wide scheme from Nuneaton & Bedworth Borough Council, and representations from the Nuneaton Conservative Association and Warwickshire County Council. In the light of these representations and evidence available to us, we reached preliminary conclusions which were set out in our report, *Draft Recommendations on the Future Electoral Arrangements for Nuneaton & Bedworth in Warwickshire*.

20 Our draft recommendations were based on the Borough Council's proposals, which achieved some improvement in electoral equality, provided a pattern of two-member wards in the borough and were supported by the Conservative Association. However, we moved away from the Borough Council's scheme in a number of areas, affecting eight wards, in order to achieve better electoral equality. We proposed that:

- (a) Nuneaton & Bedworth Borough Council should be served by 34 councillors, compared with the current 45, representing 17 wards, two more than at present;
- (b) the boundaries of 14 of the existing wards should be modified, resulting in an increase of two, while one ward, Exhall, should retain its existing boundaries.

#### **Draft Recommendation**

Nuneaton & Bedworth Borough Council should comprise 34 councillors, serving 17 wards. The Council should continue to hold elections by thirds.

21 Our proposals would have resulted in significant improvements in electoral equality, with the number of electors per councillor in 13 of the 17 wards varying by no more than 10 per cent from the borough average. This level of electoral equality was forecast to improve further, with no ward varying by more than 4 per cent from the average in 2003.



## 4. RESPONSES TO CONSULTATION

22 During the consultation on our draft recommendations report, four representations were received. A list of all respondents is available on request from the Commission. All representations may be inspected at the offices of Nuneaton & Bedworth Borough Council and the Commission.

### **Nuneaton & Bedworth Borough Council**

23 The Borough Council stated that it was “pleased to note the Commission’s draft recommendations were substantially based on the scheme put forward by the Council”.

24 However, it expressed concern over the proposals to retain the current electoral cycle of elections by thirds. It stated that its Stage One proposal was developed in cognisance of the Government’s White Paper proposals for “elections by halves for district and county councils in alternate years”.

25 The Council recognised that current legislation did not allow for biennial elections, but considered that elections by thirds in a pattern of two-member wards, while possible, would have significant administrative implications and cause confusion amongst the electorate, and urged the Commission to modify its draft recommendation to provide for whole-council elections “as an interim measure until a change in legislation is in place which permits elections by halves”.

### **Warwickshire County Council**

26 The County Council urged the Commission to reconsider its draft recommendations “to take the opportunity to enable coterminosity to be achieved and to consider making any changes effective simultaneously with changes to county division boundaries”.

27 It stated that it objected to the draft recommendations for all five Warwickshire districts on the basis that “the importance of coterminosity

between the boundaries of divisions and wards in achieving the statutory objectives of the electoral reviews has not been given adequate weight” and considered that “undue weight has been given to the objective of achieving equality of representation largely within the existing framework at district level at the expense of wider considerations”. It considered that this situation would cause “either significant inequality of representation or inadequate coterminosity between divisions and wards to emerge in the subsequent review of county council electoral divisions”.

28 The County Council also opposed the use of the centre of roads as ward boundaries which it considered to be “problematical and not conducive to the objective to reflect the identities and interests of local communities”. It stated that “where changes to existing ward boundaries are to take effect, we believe that matching changes to county divisional boundaries should take place simultaneously” and recognised that “to achieve this it may be necessary to delay district changes or to bring the county electoral review forward”.

29 It stated that such problems “will become even more difficult if the government moves to implement district and county elections in alternate years as set out in its recent White Paper”.

### **Other Representations**

30 A further two representations were received in response to our draft recommendations from a local councillor and a local resident. Councillor Hicks, member for Chilvers Coton, broadly supported the draft recommendations but opposed the use of Wem Brook as a ward name and suggested Shepperton as an alternative, while a resident of Whitestone ward supported a reduction in council size.



## 5. ANALYSIS AND FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS

31 As described earlier, our prime objective in considering the most appropriate electoral arrangements for Nuneaton & Bedworth is to achieve electoral equality. In doing so we have regard to the statutory criteria set out in the Local Government Act 1992 – the need to secure effective and convenient local government, and reflect the interests and identities of local communities – and Schedule 11 to the Local Government Act 1972, which refers to the number of electors per councillor being “as nearly as may be, the same in every ward of the district or borough”.

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

33 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.

34 Our *Guidance* states that, while we accept that the achievement of absolute electoral equality for the authority as a whole is likely to be unattainable, we consider that, if electoral imbalances are to be kept to the minimum, such an objective should be the starting point in any review. We therefore strongly recommend that, in formulating electoral schemes, local authorities and other interested parties should start from the standpoint of absolute electoral equality and only then make adjustments to reflect relevant factors, such as community identity. Regard must also be had to five-year forecasts of change in electorates. We will require particular justification for schemes which result in, or retain, an electoral imbalance of over 10 per cent in any ward. Any imbalances of 20 per cent and

over should arise only in the most exceptional of circumstances, and will require the strongest justification.

### Electorate Forecasts

35 At Stage One the Borough Council submitted electorate forecasts for the year 2003, projecting an increase in the electorate of some 7 per cent from 90,959 to 97,369 over the five-year period from 1998 to 2003. It expects most of the growth to be in the wards of Chilvers Coton, Heath and Poplar due to housing development. During Stage One the Council revisited its original projections for Heath ward (the area covered by its proposed Slough ward), and given the level of uncertainty over development in the area, reduced it by 400 electors. We utilised the revised figures in our draft recommendations report. 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. In our draft recommendations report we accepted that this is an inexact science and, having given consideration to the forecast electorates, we were satisfied that they represented the best estimates that could reasonably be made at the time.

36 We received no comments on the Council's electorate forecasts during Stage Three, and remain satisfied that they represent the best estimates presently available.

### Council Size

37 As already explained, the Commission's starting point is to assume that the current council size facilitates effective and convenient local government.

38 Nuneaton & Bedworth Borough Council is at present served by 45 councillors. At Stage One the Borough Council proposed a significant reduction in council size from 45 to 34 councillors serving 17 two-member wards. It indicated that the implications of a 34-member scheme for member and officer

organisational structures had been considered and that the proposal enjoyed cross-party support from the Nuneaton Conservative Association.

39 At Stage One the Council stated that it was taking the opportunity provided by the Government's White Paper, *Modern Local Government – In Touch with the People*, to review its system of internal political management. It intended reviewing its structure and its committee system in order to be more responsive to local communities. It envisaged a change in its political management structure to provide for a cabinet and a revised role for a reduced number of members. It also stated that the Council would seek to empower communities by setting up Area Partnership Groups which would include other statutory bodies, commercial interests, community organisations and voluntary bodies.

40 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. Following the publication of the Government's White Paper, *Modern Local Government – In Touch with the People*, the Commission stated that it would continue with its current approach to PERs until such time as any new legislation may be in place. However, we also noted that councils themselves may wish to bear in mind the proposals when developing schemes. We therefore considered the Council's proposals against our objective of securing electoral equality while having regard to the statutory criteria. Having done so, we were satisfied that the new council size would provide convenient and effective local government in Nuneaton & Bedworth. We concluded that the statutory criteria and the achievement of electoral equality would best be met by a council of 34 members, serving 17 two-member wards, as proposed by the Borough Council and supported by the Nuneaton Conservative Association.

41 During Stage Three the Borough Council welcomed the draft recommendations, while a resident of Whitestone ward supported a reduction in the number of members, but did not propose an exact council size. The only alternative to our proposed council size of 34 came from Warwickshire County Council, which urged the Commission to reconsider its draft recommendations in order to achieve more coterminosity with county divisions (discussed later). However, in view of the

lack of other opposition to a council of 34 members, we are confirming our draft recommendation for a council size of 34 as final.

## Electoral Arrangements

42 As set out in our draft recommendations report, we carefully considered all the representations received at Stage One, including the borough-wide scheme from the Borough Council. From these representations, some considerations emerged which helped to inform us when preparing our draft recommendations.

43 The Council proposed a reduction in council size from 45 to 34, with a pattern of two-member wards across the borough. Its proposals would significantly improve electoral equality, with the number of wards with an electoral variance of more than 10 per cent being reduced from six to four initially, but improving further by 2003, when all wards would have an electoral variance of less than 10 per cent from the average.

44 In view of the degree of consensus behind the Council's proposals, and the improved level of electoral equality which would result, we concluded that we should base our draft recommendations on the Borough Council's scheme, which we considered would provide a better balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria than the current arrangements. However, to improve electoral equality further we decided to move away from the Borough Council's proposals for the proposed wards of Attleborough, Bar Pool, Bede, Camp Hill, Galley Common, Poplar, Slough and Wem Brook.

45 At Stage Three the Borough Council welcomed our draft recommendations, noting that they were based on its own Stage One proposals.

46 As stated earlier, Warwickshire County Council opposed the draft recommendations. It noted that due to the high degree of change and the proposed ward sizes under the draft recommendations, "it is highly unlikely that a high level of coterminosity could be achieved at the time of the county review as the largest of the proposed wards is below 6,000 electors in size". It urged us to reconsider our draft recommendations "to take the opportunity to enable coterminosity to be achieved and to consider making any changes effective simultaneously with changes to county division boundaries".

47 This is an issue which has arisen in a number of review areas. It is indicative of the tensions which can arise between the achievement of electoral equality within the individual districts of a county, each of whose electoral arrangements can vary significantly in terms of councillor:elector ratios and ward sizes, and across county council electoral divisions, while also seeking some measure of coterminosity between the two. These tensions are not readily reconciled.

48 In certain cases, it has been put to us that in reviewing district electoral arrangements we should prescribe that ward patterns and sizes should be such that they would be compatible with county council divisions. We do not believe this to be an approach the Commission should take. As a Commission, we rely heavily on local authorities and others to put proposals to us on how the electoral arrangements within their individual areas might be improved. We believe that the interests of local democracy are best served by basing our recommendations on schemes which are generated locally, address the statutory criteria, and achieve a high level of electoral equality. In the case of Nuneaton & Bedworth, we believe that basing our recommendations on the Borough Council's scheme remains the most appropriate option.

49 Nevertheless, we recognise that coterminosity between county divisions and district wards is capable of being conducive to effective and convenient local government, and we place a high value on its achievement as part of our reviews of county council electoral arrangements.

50 We have reviewed our draft recommendations in the light of further evidence and the representations received during Stage Three. For borough warding purposes, the following areas, based on existing wards, are considered in turn:

- (a) Nuneaton
  - Camp Hill, Galley Common and Stockingford wards;
  - Abbey, Arbury, Attleborough and Chilvers Coton wards;
  - St Nicolas, Weddington and Whitestone wards.
- (b) Bedworth
  - Exhall, Heath, Mount Pleasant and Poplar wards;
  - Bulkington ward.

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

## **Nuneaton**

52 Nuneaton town comprises 65 per cent of the borough's total electorate, lies in the north of the borough and comprises 10 three-member wards, six of which are currently over-represented. Based on a council of 34 members, the Nuneaton area should be represented by 22 councillors.

53 At Stage One the Borough Council proposed that the whole borough should be covered by a pattern of two-member wards. It proposed that Nuneaton be covered by 11 wards returning 22 councillors, that the wards of Chilvers Coton and Stockingford be abolished and that three new wards be created; Bar Pool, Kingswood and Wem Brook. Under the Council's proposals eight of the 11 wards in Nuneaton would have an electoral variance of no more than 10 per cent from the borough average, with the numbers of electors per councillor in Arbury ward varying from the average by 21 per cent and Weddington and Whitestone wards by 11 per cent. However, by 2003, the number of electors per councillor in all of these wards would vary by less than 10 per cent from the average.

54 The Nuneaton Conservative Association supported the Borough Council's proposals for the area.

55 Our broad objective is that the councillor:elector ratio of each ward should be as near as possible to the borough average, having regard to local circumstances. In putting forward draft recommendations for consultation, we sought to build on the proposals received. However, as stated earlier, we concluded that the electoral inequality which would remain under these proposals could be improved by several boundary modifications which we put forward as part of our draft recommendations.

56 At Stage Three we did not receive any representations commenting on specific boundaries in this area. Our conclusions on the proposed warding arrangements for the whole Nuneaton area are detailed below and our proposals for the whole borough are illustrated on the large map inside the back cover of the report.

### **Camp Hill, Galley Common and Stockingford wards**

57 These three wards cover the north-west of Nuneaton. The number of electors per councillor is 16 per cent below the average in Camp Hill ward, 8 per cent above in Galley Common ward and 20 per cent below in Stockingford ward (18 per cent below, 11 per cent above and 19 per cent below respectively in 2003).

58 At Stage One the Borough Council proposed modifications to all three wards, including the abolition of Stockingford ward. It proposed creating a new Kingswood ward, comprising the area south of the railway line in Galley Common ward, south of Haunchwood Road in Stockingford ward and the area to the west of Westbury Road and north of Arbury Road in Arbury ward. It also proposed that the area in the north-west of Stockingford ward, including Kingfisher Avenue, Mallard Avenue and Trafford Drive should form part of a modified Galley Common ward. The remainder of Stockingford ward should form part of a new Bar Pool ward, discussed below. Finally in this area, the Council proposed modifying the boundary between Camp Hill ward and the wards of Abbey and Weddington, to follow the Coventry Canal: this proposal would not affect any electors.

59 Under its proposals the number of electors per councillor would be 5 per cent below the average in Camp Hill ward (8 per cent below in 2003), 1 per cent above in Galley Common ward (1 per cent below in 2003) and 6 per cent below in Kingswood ward (3 per cent below in 2003).

60 In our draft recommendations report, we carefully considered the proposals for this area. While we acknowledged the improved level of electoral equality which would result in these wards, the clear boundaries which would be utilised, and the level of consensus which exists, we proposed modifying the Borough Council's proposals for the wards of Camp Hill and Galley Common in order to further improve electoral equality in the area.

61 We proposed modifying the boundary between the wards of Camp Hill and Galley Common to run along Bucks Hill, so that the Trafford Drive, Mallard Avenue and Kingfisher Avenue area would form part of Camp Hill ward. We also proposed that the area to the south of Kingfisher Avenue and east of Bucks Hill, including Woodford Close,

should form part of Galley Common ward rather than Bar Pool ward (detailed below). We did not consider that such boundary realignments would have a detrimental effect on communities in the area or on the provision of effective and convenient local government.

62 Under our proposals the number of electors per councillor would be 2 per cent above the average in Camp Hill ward (1 per cent below in 2003) and 3 per cent above in Galley Common ward (1 per cent above in 2003). We endorsed the Borough Council's proposals for Kingswood ward as part of our draft recommendations.

63 At Stage Three the Borough Council supported our draft recommendations. Having carefully considered the representations received, and noting the lack of opposition to our draft recommendations, we remain of the view that they would achieve the best levels of electoral equality, having regard to the statutory criteria. We therefore confirm our draft recommendations for Camp Hill, Galley Common and Kingswood wards as final. These proposals are shown on the large map at the back of the report.

### **Abbey, Arbury, Attleborough and Chilvers Coton wards**

64 These four wards cover the central area of Nuneaton. The number of electors per councillor is 5 per cent below the average in Abbey ward, 21 per cent above in Arbury ward, 7 per cent above in Attleborough ward and 23 per cent below in Chilvers Coton ward (9 per cent below, 23 per cent above, 7 per cent above and 13 per cent below respectively in 2003).

65 To address the electoral imbalances, at Stage One the Borough Council proposed modifying all four wards and abolishing Chilvers Coton ward. As stated earlier, it proposed modifying the boundary between Camp Hill ward and Abbey ward to follow the Coventry Canal. It also proposed realigning the boundary between the wards of Abbey and Weddington. It proposed that a new Bar Pool ward be created, comprising the eastern part of Stockingford ward, the area in the north-east of Arbury ward, north of Arbury Road and Croft Road, and the Greenmoor Road area in the north-west of Chilvers Coton ward, west of the Coventry Canal.

66 The Council also proposed the creation of a new Wem Brook ward, comprising that part of

Chilvers Coton ward east of the A444 and College Street, plus that part of Attleborough ward west of Marston Lane and Wem Brook. The remainder of Attleborough ward, together with that part of Whitestone ward west of Lutterworth Road, Gipsy Lane and Bulkington Lane, would form a modified Attleborough ward, except for the area west of the railway line in the south-west of Attleborough ward, which it proposed should form part of a new Slough ward (detailed below).

67 Under its proposals the number of electors per councillor would be 8 per cent above the average in Abbey ward (4 per cent above in 2003), 21 per cent below in Arbury ward (2 per cent above in 2003), 4 per cent above in Attleborough ward (3 per cent above in 2003), 7 per cent above in Bar Pool ward (6 per cent above in 2003), and 3 per cent below in Wem Brook ward (8 per cent below in 2003).

68 As stated earlier, after due consideration of the evidence received, we proposed modifying the Borough Council's proposed boundary so that the area to the south of Kingfisher Avenue and east of Bucks Hill, including Woodford Close, should form part of Galley Common ward rather than Bar Pool ward. We also proposed modifying the Borough Council's proposed boundary between the wards of Attleborough and Wem Brook to follow the existing polling district boundary to the east of Marston Lane, as far as Abbotsford Road.

69 We noted the high degree of electoral inequality which would persist in Arbury ward under the Borough Council's proposals (21 per cent below the average), and therefore considered alternative warding arrangements in the area. Although there were alternative arrangements available which would reduce this initial level of electoral inequality, such warding would result in higher levels of electoral inequality by 2003. Given the significant growth in this area and the borough as a whole, we decided to endorse the Borough Council's proposals for Arbury ward as part of our draft recommendations. In view of the good level of electoral equality which would be achieved by 2003, we also proposed adopting the Borough's Council's proposed Abbey ward as part of our draft recommendations.

70 Under our draft recommendations the number of electors per councillor would be 8 per cent above the average in Abbey ward (4 per cent above in 2003), 21 per cent below in Arbury ward (2 per

cent above in 2003), 1 per cent below in Attleborough ward (unchanged in 2003), 2 per cent below in Bar Pool ward (unchanged in 2003) and 2 per cent above in Wem Brook ward (4 per cent below in 2003).

71 At Stage Three the Borough Council welcomed our draft recommendations. Councillor Hicks, member for Chilvers Coton ward, stated that while he supported most of the draft recommendations, he was "very dissatisfied" with the proposed ward name of Wem Brook. He stated that whilst the brook itself does flow through the eastern edge of the proposed ward, "it is quite irrelevant in areas currently in Chilvers Coton ward". He considered that "if you wish to have a name that is inclusive for most of the area proposed for the new ward, Shepperton will be much more recognisable to electors throughout the division".

72 While we note Councillor Hicks' comments regarding the proposed ward name of Wem Brook, this name was suggested by the Borough Council in its Stage One submission, and enjoyed cross-party support. Furthermore, we have not been made aware of any groundswell of opposition to this or any other ward name, and therefore do not propose modifying our draft recommendations for this ward name.

73 We have carefully considered the representations received during the consultation period. We remain of the view that they would provide the best level of electoral equality, while having regard, as far as possible, to well-defined boundaries and communities and reflecting the warding pattern which we propose for the remainder of the borough. In recognition of this and in the absence of any opposition expressed during Stage Three, we confirm our draft recommendations for the wards of Abbey, Attleborough, Bar Pool and Wem Brook as final. These proposals are shown on the large map at the back of the report.

### **St Nicolas, Weddington and Whitestone wards**

74 These three wards cover the eastern area of Nuneaton. The number of electors per councillor is 6 per cent below the average in St Nicolas ward, 5 per cent below in Weddington ward and 19 per cent above in Whitestone ward (11 per cent below, 11 per cent below and 11 per cent above respectively in 2003).

75 In its Stage One submission the Borough Council proposed modifying the boundary between the wards of St Nicolas and Weddington to run along St Nicholas Park Drive and then north-east, to the rear of properties on Calendar Close and Chelsea Close, until it rejoins the existing boundary. As stated earlier, the Council proposed modifying the boundary between Attleborough and Whitestone wards to run along Lutterworth Road, Gipsy Lane and Bulkington Lane.

76 Under its proposals the number of electors per councillor would be 5 per cent above the average in St Nicolas ward (2 per cent below in 2003), 11 per cent above in Weddington ward (4 per cent above in 2003) and 11 per cent above in Whitestone ward (4 per cent above in 2003).

77 Following consideration of the representations received, we concluded that the Borough Council's proposals for these wards would broadly reflect community identities in the area while providing improved levels of electoral equality, particularly on 2003 figures, reflecting growth in the borough as a whole, and adopted them as part of our draft recommendations.

78 At Stage Three the Borough Council welcomed the draft recommendations for these wards. We did not receive any other comments relating specifically to these wards.

79 In the absence of any evidence to the contrary, we are satisfied that our draft recommendations for the St Nicolas, Weddington and Whitestone wards would achieve the best level of electoral equality, reflect community identities in the area and utilise clear boundaries, and we therefore confirm them as final.

## **Bedworth**

80 Bedworth town comprises 28 per cent of the borough's total electorate, lies in the south of the borough, and comprises four three-member wards. The smaller settlement of Bulkington accounts for 7 per cent of the electorate, lies in the south-eastern corner of the borough, and is covered, along with part of Bedworth town, by a three-member ward. Based on a council of 34 members, the electorate in this area should be represented by 12 councillors. At Stage One, the Council proposed the abolition of Mount Pleasant ward and the creation of two new wards, Bede and Slough. As stated earlier, the Nuneaton Conservative

Association supported the Borough Council's proposals for the area.

81 Under the Council's proposals five of the six wards in this area would have an electoral variance of no more than 10 per cent, with the number of electors per councillor in Poplar ward initially varying from the borough average by 20 per cent. However, by 2003, no ward would vary by more than 10 per cent from the average. We received no other representations at Stage One concerning the Bedworth area.

82 We concluded that further improvements could be made to the level of electoral equality without adversely affecting community identities. This would involve modifying the boundaries between the wards of Bede and Poplar to address the relative electoral inequality which would remain in the area, and between Bede and Slough to utilise a more coherent boundary.

83 At Stage Three, although the Borough Council welcomed the draft recommendations, we did not receive any representations which referred directly to these wards.

84 Our conclusions on the proposed warding arrangement for Bedworth are detailed below.

### **Exhall, Heath, Mount Pleasant and Poplar wards**

85 These four wards cover Bedworth town. The number of electors per councillor is 7 per cent below the average in Exhall ward, 1 per cent below in Heath ward, 29 per cent above in Mount Pleasant ward and 10 per cent below in Poplar ward (12 per cent below, 15 per cent above, 23 per cent above and 1 per cent above respectively in 2003).

86 At Stage One the Borough Council proposed that Exhall ward should be unchanged. To address the electoral imbalances in the remaining wards, it proposed modifying Heath and Poplar wards, abolishing Mount Pleasant ward and creating two new wards, Bede and Slough. It proposed that the area west of the Coventry Canal in Bulkington ward and the area to the west of the B4113 Coventry Road in Poplar ward, should form part of the proposed Bede ward, together with that part of Mount Pleasant ward east of Nuneaton Road, Leicester Road and Leicester Street, and the area south of Newton Road. The remainder of Mount Pleasant ward would form part of a proposed

Slough ward, together with that part of Heath ward north of Smorrall Lane, and the south-west part of Attleborough ward west of the railway line.

87 Under its proposals the number of electors per councillor would be 10 per cent above the average in Bede ward (6 per cent above in 2003), 5 per cent above in Exhall ward (equal to the average in 2003), 8 per cent below in Heath ward (1 per cent above in 2003), 20 per cent below in Poplar ward (7 per cent below in 2003) and 1 per cent below in Slough ward (4 per cent above in 2003).

88 In our consultation report we recognised the Council's attempts to address the imbalances in this area. However, we expressed concern at the level of inequality which would remain in Bede and Poplar wards. In order to achieve an improved balance of representation across the wider area, we made a number of modifications to the Council's proposals. While we adopted the Borough Council's proposals for the wards of Exhall and Heath as part of our draft recommendations, we proposed modifying the boundary between the wards of Bede and Poplar to follow Rye Piece Ringway, King Street, the rear of the properties on the west side of Edward Road, and Chapel Street in order to improve electoral equality in the area. In order to secure a more coherent boundary, we also proposed modifying the boundary between the wards of Bede and Slough to follow George Street Ringway. Under our proposals the number of electors per councillor would be 5 per cent above the average in Bede ward (1 per cent above in 2003), 15 per cent below in Poplar ward (2 per cent below in 2003), and 1 per cent below the average in Slough ward (4 per cent above in 2003).

89 At Stage Three the Borough Council supported the draft recommendations for these wards. We did not receive any other comments on these wards.

90 Given all the evidence received during the review, we remain satisfied that our draft recommendations would provide a high level of electoral equality, reflect community identities and utilise coherent boundaries. In the absence of any opposition, we therefore propose confirming our draft recommendations as final for the wards of Bede, Exhall, Heath, Poplar and Slough.

### **Bulkington ward**

91 Located in the south-east of the borough, Bulkington is separated from Bedworth town by open land and the West Coast mainline railway

line. The number of electors represented by each of the three councillors is 8 per cent above the borough average (1 per cent above in 2003).

92 The Borough Council's Stage One submission proposed modifying the boundary between Bulkington ward and the proposed Bede ward to follow the Coventry Canal, thereby including those electors to the west of the canal in Bede ward, along with the rest of Bedworth town. Under this proposal the number of electors per councillor in Bulkington ward would be 2 per cent above the average (4 per cent below in 2003).

93 We carefully considered the Borough Council's proposal for this area, and in view of the level of electoral equality which would result in this ward and the clear boundaries which would be utilised, we endorsed the Borough Council's proposals for Bulkington as part of our draft recommendations.

94 At Stage Three the Borough Council supported our draft recommendations. We did not receive any other representations for this area.

95 We have given careful consideration to the evidence received during the review. We remain of the opinion that our draft recommendation for Bulkington ward would achieve good electoral equality, while utilising coherent boundaries and reflecting local community identity. In the absence of any opposition to our proposals for Bulkington, we therefore confirm them as final.

## **Electoral Cycle**

96 In the initial stage of the review we did not receive any representations for change to the Borough Council's electoral cycle and therefore proposed retaining the current system of elections by thirds.

97 At Stage Three the Borough Council stated that in proposing a uniform pattern of two-member wards it had intended that one half of the Council should retire every other year, anticipating that legislation would be enacted to bring into force the Government's plans, outlined in the White Paper. In the absence of such legislation, the Council proposed that in order to minimise confusion, a system of whole-council elections should be adopted until new legislation is brought forward.

98 We have considered the Borough Council's request that it should move to whole-council

elections, a proposal which enjoys cross-party support. We are content to endorse the Council's request and propose that Nuneaton & Bedworth Borough Council should be elected together every four years.

## Conclusions

99 Having considered carefully all the representations and evidence received in response to our consultation report, we have decided to endorse our draft recommendations for warding arrangements in their entirety. However, we propose that the whole Council should be elected together every four years following the Borough Council's request.

100 We conclude that, in Nuneaton & Bedworth:

- (a) there should be a reduction in council size from 45 to 34;
- (b) there should be 17 wards, two more than at present;
- (c) the boundaries of 14 of the existing wards should be modified;
- (d) the Council should move from elections by thirds to whole-council elections.

101 Figure 4 shows the impact of our final recommendations on electoral equality, comparing them with the current arrangements, based on 1998 and 2003 electorate figures.

102 As Figure 4 shows, our recommendations would result in a reduction in the number of wards with an electoral variance of more than 10 per cent from six to four, with one ward varying by more than 20 per cent from the borough average. However, electoral equality is forecast to improve further by 2003, when all wards would vary by less than 10 per cent from the average. We conclude that our recommendations would best meet the need for electoral equality, having regard to the statutory criteria.

### Final Recommendation

Nuneaton & Bedworth Borough Council should comprise 34 councillors serving 17 wards, as detailed and named in Figures 1 and 2, and illustrated on Map 2 and on the large map in the back of the report. The Council should no longer hold elections by thirds but should be elected together every four years.

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

|  | 1998 electorate      |                       | 2003 forecast electorate |                       |
|--|----------------------|-----------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------|
|  | Current arrangements | Final recommendations | Current arrangements     | Final recommendations |
| Number of councillors  | 45                   | 34                    | 45                       | 34                    |
| Number of wards  | 15                   | 17                    | 15                       | 17                    |
| Average number of electors per councillor                              | 2,021                | 2,672                 | 2,164                    | 2,866                 |
| Number of wards with a variance more than 10 per cent from the average | 6                    | 4                     | 11                       | 0                     |
| Number of wards with a variance more than 20 per cent from the average | 3                    | 1                     | 2                        | 0                     |

Map 2:  
*The Commission's Final Recommendations for Nuneaton & Bedworth*



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## 6. NEXT STEPS

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

104 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.

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

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

