

Final recommendations on the future electoral arrangements for Hartlepool

Report to The Electoral Commission

January 2003

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A large map illustrating the proposed ward boundaries for Hartlepool is inserted inside the back cover of this report.

What is The Boundary Committee for England?

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

Members of the Committee are:

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

Archie Gall (Director)

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

This report sets out our final recommendations on the electoral arrangements for the borough of Hartlepool.

Summary

The Local Government Commission for England (LGCE) began a review of Hartlepool's electoral arrangements on 16 October 2001. We took over the review following the transfer of functions on 1 April 2002. We published our draft recommendations for electoral arrangements on 14 May 2002, after which we undertook an eight-week period of consultation. We now submit final recommendations to The Electoral Commission.

- **This report summarises the representations received by the LGCE during consultation on its draft recommendations, and contains our final recommendations to The Electoral Commission.**

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

- **in nine of the 17 wards the number of electors represented by each councillor varies by more than 10% from the average for the borough and two wards vary by more than 20%;**
- **by 2006 this situation is expected to continue, with the number of electors per councillor forecast to vary by more than 10% from the average in eight wards and by more than 20% in two wards.**

Our main final recommendations for future electoral arrangements (see Tables 1 and 2 and paragraphs 159 -160) are that:

- **Hartlepool Borough Council should have 47 councillors, as at present;**
- **there should be 17 wards, as at present;**
- **the boundaries of 15 of the existing wards should be modified and two wards should retain their existing boundaries.**

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

- **In 15 of the proposed 17 wards the number of electors per councillor would vary by no more than 10% from the borough average.**
- **This improved level of electoral equality is forecast to marginally deteriorate, with the number of electors per councillor in three wards, Elwick, Greatham and Seaton expected to vary by more than 10% from the average for the borough in 2006.**

All further correspondence on these final recommendations and the matters discussed in this report should be addressed to The Electoral Commission, which will not make an Order implementing them before 4 March 2003:

**The Secretary
The Electoral Commission
Trevelyan House
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London SW1P 2HW**

**Fax: 020 7271 0505
Email: implementation@electoralcommission.org.uk
(This address should only be used for this purpose)**

Table 1: Final recommendations: Summary

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Constituent areas	Map reference
1	Brus	3	Brus ward; part of St Hilda ward	Large map and map 2
2	Burn Valley	3	part of Brinkburn ward; part of Grange ward	Large map and map 2
3	Dyke House	3	<i>unchanged</i> ; Dyke House ward	Large map and map 2
4	Elwick	1	the parishes of Brierton, Claxton, Dalton Piercy, Elwick, Hart and Newton Bewley	Map 2
5	Fens	3	part of Fens ward; part of Rossmere ward; part of Seaton ward	Large map and map 2
6	Foggy Furze	3	part of Rift House; part of Stranton ward	Large map and map 2
7	Grange	3	part of Grange ward; part of Jackson ward	Large map and map 2
8	Greatham	1	the parish of Greatham; part of Seaton ward	Map 2
9	Hart	3	<i>unchanged</i> ; Hart ward	Large map and map 2
10	Owton	3	part of Fens ward; Owton ward	Large map and map 2
11	Park	3	part of Grange ward; part of Park ward; part of Throston ward	Large map and map 2
12	Rift House	3	part of Brinkburn ward; part of Park ward; part of Rift House ward	Large map and map 2
13	Rossmere	3	part of Rift House ward; part of Rossmere ward; part of Seaton ward	Large map and map 2
14	St Hilda	3	part of St Hilda ward (the parish of Headland and part of the unparished area)	Large map and map 2
15	Seaton	3	part of Seaton ward; part of Stranton ward	Large map and map 2
16	Stranton	3	part of Jackson ward; part of Stranton ward	Large map and map 2
17	Throston	3	part of Throston ward	Large map and map 2

Notes: 1 Part of the borough is parished and comprises Elwick and Greatham wards as indicated above.

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

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

Table 2: Final recommendations for Hartlepool

Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2001)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2006)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
1 Brus	3	4,551	1,517	4	4,572	1,524	4
2 Burn Valley	3	4,523	1,508	4	4,365	1,455	-1
3 Dyke House	3	4,328	1,443	-1	4,169	1,390	-5
4 Elwick	1	1,386	1,386	-5	1,647	1,647	12
5 Fens	3	4,190	1,397	-4	4,037	1,346	-8
6 Foggy Furze	3	4,152	1,384	-5	4,000	1,333	-9
7 Grange	3	4,654	1,551	7	4,500	1,500	2
8 Greatham	1	1,711	1,711	18	1,648	1,648	12
9 Hart	3	4,137	1,379	-5	4,755	1,585	8
10 Owton	3	4,242	1,414	-3	4,087	1,362	-7
11 Park	3	4,276	1,425	-2	4,535	1,512	3
12 Rift House	3	4,670	1,557	7	4,531	1,510	3
13 Rossmere	3	4,382	1,461	1	4,469	1,490	2
14 St Hilda	3	4,283	1,428	-2	4,180	1,393	-5
15 Seaton	3	4,777	1,592	10	4,968	1,656	13
16 Stranton	3	3,806	1,269	-13	3,937	1,312	-10
17 Throston	3	4,184	1,395	-4	4,507	1,502	2
Totals	47	68,252	-	-	68,907	-	-
Averages	-	-	1,452	-	-	1,466	-

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

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

1 Introduction

1 This report contains our final recommendations on the electoral arrangements for the borough of Hartlepool. We are reviewing Hartlepool as part of the programme of periodic electoral reviews (PERs) of all 386 principal local authority areas in England started by the LGCE in 1996. We have inherited that programme, which we currently expect to complete in 2004.

2 The Cleveland (Structural Change) Order 1995, SI 1995, No. 187 created a unitary authority for Hartlepool which came into existence on 1 April 1996. Hartlepool's last electoral review was carried out by the Local Government Boundary Commission for England, which reported to the Secretary of State in 1975 (Report no. 42).

3 In making final recommendations to The Electoral Commission, we have had regard to:

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

4 Details of the legislation under which the review of Hartlepool was conducted are set out in a document entitled *Guidance and Procedural Advice for Periodic Electoral Reviews*. This *Guidance* sets out the approach to the review.

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

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

7 We are not prescriptive on council size. Insofar as Hartlepool is concerned, we started from the assumption that the size of the existing council already secures effective and convenient local government, but were willing to look carefully at arguments why this might not be so. However, we found it necessary to safeguard against upward drift in the number of councillors, and that any proposal for an increase in council size would need to be fully justified. In particular, we did not accept that an increase in electorate should automatically result in an increase in the number of councillors, nor that changes should be made to the size of a council simply to make it more consistent with the size of other similar councils.

8 This review was in four stages. Stage One began on 16 October 2001, when the LGCE wrote to Hartlepool Borough Council inviting proposals for future electoral arrangements. It also notified Cleveland Police Authority, the Local Government Association, National Association of Local Councils, parish and town councils in the borough, the Members of Parliament with constituencies in the borough, the Members of the European Parliament for the North East Region, and the headquarters of the main political parties. It placed a notice in the local press, issued a press release and invited Hartlepool Borough Council to publicise the review further. The closing date for receipt of representations, the end of Stage One, was 7 January 2002. At Stage Two we considered all the representations received during Stage One and prepared our draft recommendations.

9 Stage Three began on 14 May 2002 with the publication of our report, *Draft recommendations on the future electoral arrangements for Hartlepool*, and ended on 8 July 2002. During this period comments were sought from the public and any other interested parties on the preliminary conclusions. We undertook a further round of consultation, starting on 10 September 2002 and ending on 7 October 2002, on the issue of council size. Finally, during Stage Four the draft recommendations were reconsidered in the light of the Stage Three consultation and our further consultation, and we now publish our final recommendations.

2 Current electoral arrangements

10 With a population of some 92,000, Hartlepool Borough covers an area of approximately 9,390 hectares and lies on the north-east coast, bordering the borough of Stockton-on-Tees to the south, the County of Durham to the north and west, with the North Sea forming the eastern boundary. Hartlepool Borough covers the main urban settlement of Hartlepool town and a rural hinterland to the west of the town. In recent years the coastal town has seen a massive transformation, with the replacement of traditional heavy industries with modern hi-tech firms. The borough contains eight parishes but most of the town of Hartlepool is unparished.

11 The electorate of the borough is 68,252 (February 2001). The Council presently has 47 members who are elected from 17 wards, 15 of which are in the unparished town, the remainder being predominantly rural and parished. Fifteen of the wards are each represented by three councillors and the remaining two are single-member wards. The single-member wards serve the more rural, parished parts of the borough. The Council is elected by thirds.

12 To compare levels of electoral inequality between wards, we calculated, in percentage terms, 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'.

13 At present, each councillor represents an average of 1,452 electors, which the Borough Council forecasts will increase to 1,466 by the year 2006 if the present number of councillors is maintained. However, due to demographic and other changes over the past two decades, the number of electors per councillor in nine of the 17 wards varies by more than 10% from the borough average and in two wards by more than 20%. The worst imbalance is in Throston ward where each of the three councillors represents 32% more electors than the borough average.

Map 1: Existing wards in Hartlepool

Table 3: Existing electoral arrangements

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2001)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2006)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
1	Brinkburn	3	3,812	1,271	-12	3,713	1,238	-16
2	Brus	3	3,818	1,273	-12	3,867	1,289	-12
3	Dyke House	3	4,328	1,443	-1	4,170	1,390	-5
4	Elwick	1	1,300	1,300	-10	1,564	1,564	7
5	Fens	3	4,836	1,612	11	4,659	1,553	6
6	Grange	3	4,670	1,557	7	4,500	1,500	2
7	Greatham	1	1,794	1,794	24	1,728	1,728	18
8	Hart	3	4,137	1,379	-5	4,756	1,585	8
9	Jackson	3	4,152	1,384	-5	4,274	1,425	-3
10	Owton	3	3,502	1,167	-20	3,374	1,125	-23
11	Park	3	4,417	1,472	1	4,671	1,557	6
12	Rift House	3	4,407	1,469	1	4,255	1,418	-3
13	Rossmere	3	3,747	1,249	-14	3,842	1,281	-13
14	St Hilda	3	5,016	1,672	15	4,887	1,629	11
15	Seaton	3	4,788	1,596	10	4,842	1,614	10
16	Stranton	3	3,792	1,264	-13	3,802	1,267	-14
17	Throston	3	5,736	1,912	32	6,003	2,001	36
	Totals	47	68,252	-	-	68,907	-	-
	Averages	-	-	1,452	-	-	1,466	-

Source: *Electorate figures are based on information provided by Hartlepool Borough Council.*

Note: *The 'variance from average' column shows by how far, in percentage terms, the number of electors per councillor varies from the average for the borough. The minus symbol (-) denotes a lower than average number of electors. For example, in 2001, electors in Owton ward were relatively over-represented by 20%, while electors in Throston ward were significantly under-represented by 32%. Figures have been rounded to the nearest whole number.*

3 Draft recommendations

14 During Stage One we received five representations, including a submission from Hartlepool Borough Council enclosing two borough-wide schemes from the Labour Group and Liberal Democrat/Conservative Alliance (Lib Dem/Cons Alliance), and three submissions from parish and town councils. In the light of these representations and evidence available, we reached preliminary conclusions which were set out in the report, *Draft recommendations on the future electoral arrangements for Hartlepool*.

15 Our draft recommendations in the urban area were broadly based on the Labour Group's scheme which achieved an improvement in electoral equality, and provided for three-member wards throughout the urban area. However, we moved away from the Labour Group's scheme in a number of areas, affecting the proposed Burn Valley, Furze, Grange, Park, Rift West and Rossmere wards, to improve electoral equality. We also noted that the Labour Group's scheme was broadly similar to the Lib Dem/Cons Alliance's scheme in the north of the town. In the rural area we proposed broadly basing our draft recommendations on the Lib Dem/Cons Alliance's proposals. We proposed that:

- Hartlepool Borough Council should be served by 47 councillors, as at present, representing 17 wards, as at present;
- the boundaries of 15 of the existing wards should be modified, while two wards should retain their existing boundaries.

Draft Recommendation

Hartlepool Borough Council should comprise 47 councillors, serving 17 wards.

16 Our proposals would have resulted in significant improvements in electoral equality, with the number of electors per councillor in 15 of the 17 wards varying by no more than 10% from the borough average. This level of electoral equality was forecast to decline slightly, with three wards, Elwick, Greatham and Seaton, varying by more than 10% from the average in 2006.

4 Responses to consultation

17 During the consultation on the draft recommendations report, 151 submissions were received. A list of all respondents is available from us on request. All representations may be inspected at our offices and those of Hartlepool Borough Council.

Hartlepool Borough Council

18 We received a submission from Hartlepool Borough Council putting forward the views of the full Council and the Cabinet. The Council reaffirmed the decision it took in January 2002 to propose the Stage One schemes from the Labour Group and the Lib Dem/Cons Alliance. The Cabinet of Hartlepool Borough Council proposed a reduction in council size from 47 to 32, arguing that the functions of the Council, under the new management structure of a mayor and cabinet, could operate with a significantly smaller number of members. The report gave consideration to the implication of such a significant change to the draft recommendations and offered a detailed account of how the Council would operate under a reduced council size. The Cabinet proposed that the three-member wards in the unparished urban area should become two-member wards. In the parished rural area it proposed combining the proposed Elwick and Greatham wards to form a two-member Villages ward. The Cabinet expressed support for the ward boundaries proposed in the draft recommendations, subject to one minor boundary amendment, arguing that the boundaries meet the relevant criteria regarding geographical and physical boundaries and communities. It also proposed that the proposed Furze and Rift West wards be renamed Foggy Furze and Rift House, respectively.

19 We received 98 submissions supporting the Cabinet's proposal for a reduction in council size from 47 to 32 members, as detailed earlier, 30 of which argued that a reduction would aid the town financially. We received 34 submissions proposing a general reduction in council size, including submissions from Councillors Allison and Lauderdale, 20 of which argued that a reduction would aid the town financially.

Political Groups

20 Hartlepool Liberal Democrats (Lib Dems) supported retaining the existing council size and proposed boundary amendments to Brus, Burn Valley, Fens, Hart, Greatham, Owton, Park and Seaton wards, arguing that the amendments would better reflect community identity and improve electoral equality. It also argued that a number of amendments would facilitate the retention of existing polling stations and school catchment areas. A number of amendments were reiterations of the Lib Dem/Cons Alliance's Stage One proposals.

21 Hartlepool Conservative Association (Conservative Association) agreed in principle with the proposals submitted by Lib Dem/Cons Alliance at Stage One. However, it argued that there should be minimal change, and that adjustments should be made between undersized and oversized wards. It recommended general boundary amendments to the existing Fens, Park, Seaton, St. Hilda and Throston wards, and proposed retaining the existing Brinkburn, Dyke House, Grange, Jackson and Rift House wards. It expressed support for the proposed Elwick and Greatham wards and for retaining the existing council size.

22 Hartlepool Labour Group expressed support for the draft recommendations.

23 Hartlepool Constituency Labour Party submitted proposals relating to the Council's electoral cycle and the implementation of our recommendations.

Parish Councils

24 Greatham Parish Council objected to the proposed Elwick and Greatham wards, proposing that the existing wards should be retained in the interest of community identity. It also proposed transferring the area around Marsh House Lane, including the Petroleum Works, from Seaton ward to Greatham ward in the interest of community identity and effective and convenient local government.

25 Newton Bewley Parish Meeting proposed that Newton Bewley parish should remain a part of Greatham ward in the interest of community identity. It proposed that the removal of an equal amount of electors from Greatham ward into Fens ward would compensate for the proposed amendment and thus provide for an acceptable level of electoral equality.

Members of Parliament

26 The Rt Hon Peter Mandelson MP supported the draft recommendations in full.

Other representations

27 A further eleven representations were received in response to the draft recommendations from local organisations, a councillor and residents.

28 A resident submitted a borough-wide scheme, proposing a reduction in council size from 47 to 33. The resident argued that a reduction in council size would improve the quality of representation in the borough. However, his scheme was not supported by any argumentation or electorate data and had incomplete mapping.

29 Councillor Hart and four residents expressed support for the draft recommendations (or part of them). Councillor Hart and two of the four residents also opposed the proposal to reduce the council size to 32, contending that the new political management structure demands more from elected members not less; that sufficient councillors are required to conduct daily functions within the council (such as the scrutiny role) and that a reduction in councillors would increase their workload.

30 A resident objected to the methods we used to reach our conclusions on council size for the borough. The resident argued that, due to the introduction of a new management structure in the borough, there has been a significant change in the way that the Council is run and, as a result, the submissions submitted during Stage One are now no longer valid. A reduction in council size was proposed, with each ward being represented by a single member. However, no evidence was provided in support of this proposal.

31 We received three submissions from residents objecting to the proposed Grange ward. A resident expressed support for retaining the existing Grange ward and another resident expressed support for the Grange ward proposed by the Lib Dem/Cons Alliance at Stage One.

32 Stranton Parochial Church Council proposed that Jackson ward be renamed Stranton ward to better reflect community identity.

Further consultation

33 We received 28 submissions in relation to our further consultation on the issue of council size. The Mayor reiterated his case for a council size of 32, providing detailed argumentation which considered the role of the Council in the new political management structure, including its accountability in decision making, the impact on the role of the councillor, and the allocation of members to outside bodies, in addition to the representational role of councillors. With regard to

the Mayor's proposed Villages ward, he reiterated his proposal for a single two-member ward in the rural parished area, despite the proposed Villages ward having 24% fewer electors per councillor than the borough average by 2006, stating that it was 'outside the general parameters of acceptable variance' but argued that 'it is nonetheless acceptable having regard to the rural nature of the ward in question.' The Mayor's proposals were supported by two Cabinet Members (Councillors Hill and Lauderdale), a 358-signature petition and two residents.

34 Hartlepool Borough Council's cross-party PER Committee expressed its support for retaining the existing council size of 47 and objected to a proposed council size of 32, arguing that 'a council of 32 members could not deliver the requisite number of councillors to fill positions of responsibility within the council.' It contended that 47 members were necessary to represent the council on many 'outside bodies'. It provided further argumentation which considered the representational role of councillors in the new management structure, their allocation to council bodies and councillor development. It also noted that a council size of 47 would achieve a satisfactory level of electoral equality in the rural wards of Elwick and Greatham.

35 The Labour Group expressed support for the Council's PER Committee's proposals, but made a number of further points. It argued that a council of 32 members 'will diminish the representational role of councillors' and 'would provide less effective and convenient [local government] than a council of 47 members'. It argued that it is premature to reduce the size of the council 'before the demands, opportunities and practical workings of the new systems and structures are fully understood'. It also contended that the 'drive' to reduce the number of councillors emanated from the local media who 'over the last two to three years have taken an aggressive anti-authority, anti-council and anti-councillor stance'.

36 The Leader of the Labour Group reiterated the views put forward by the Group and further re-emphasised the view that moving to a 32-member council would assume that elections would be in halves and that this would 'not provide for effective and convenient local government' and 'reduce democratic accountability'.

37 Hartlepool Conservative Association reiterated its proposal to retain a council size of 47 members, providing argumentation that considered the representative role of councillors in the new management structure.

38 The Rt Hon Peter Mandelson MP reiterated his support for retaining the existing council size of 47 members. He expressed support for the introduction of the new management structure in Hartlepool but provided argumentation contending that there is no advantage to be gained 'at the current time' from a reduction in council size and that reducing the number of councillors would undermine the ability to secure a democratically and demographically balanced council. He noted that a majority of the Cabinet did not support the Mayor's submission and that there is cross-party support for retaining the existing council size.

39 The Mayor of the London Borough of Lewisham submitted brief details of his Council's experience with implementing a new management structure in relation to a reduction in council size, stating that in his opinion '30 [members] is about the minimum requirement [for a borough the size of Hartlepool].'

40 We received 21 further submissions in relation to the further consultation on the issue of council size. Newton Bewley Parish Council expressed support for the proposed reduction in council size from 47 to 32 but did not feel qualified to comment on the effectiveness of the proposed reduction. It objected to combining the existing Elwick and Greatham wards to form a single two-member ward, arguing that it would be geographically too large and 'that there are very few ties between Greatham and Elwick'. It further reiterated its proposal that Newton Bewley parish should remain in Greatham ward.

41 The Hartlepool & District Branch of the National Council of Women and 17 residents expressed support for a reduction in council size, with a number arguing that a reduction in council size would allow for financial savings. A resident expressed support for retaining the existing council size.

42 A resident proposed combining the existing Greatham, Elwick and Hart wards, arguing that this would provide for a better level of electoral equality.

5 Analysis and final recommendations

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

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

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

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

Electorate forecasts

47 Since 1975 there has been a 1% increase in the electorate of Hartlepool borough. At Stage One the Borough Council submitted electorate forecasts for the year 2006, projecting an increase in the electorate of approximately 1% from 68,252 to 68,907 over the five-year period from 2001 to 2006. It expects most of the growth to be in Hart ward, although a number of wards would see a slight decline in electorate. In order to prepare these forecasts, the Council estimated rates and locations of housing development with regard to structure and local plans, the expected rate of building over the five-year period and assumed occupancy rates. Having accepted that this is an inexact science and, having considered the forecast electorates, we stated in our draft recommendations report that we were satisfied that they represented the best estimates that could reasonably be made at the time.

48 No comments on the Council’s electorate forecasts were received during Stage Three, and we remain satisfied that they represent the best estimates currently available.

Council size

49 Hartlepool Borough Council presently has 47 members. As detailed earlier, at Stage One consensus was reached between the Labour Group and the Lib Dem/Cons Alliance with both proposing to retain a council size of 47 members. The Lib Dem/Cons Alliance argued that ‘no convincing case has yet been put forward for a reduction or an increase in the overall size of the Council’.

50 The Labour Group stated that ‘the review comes at a time when the majority of the borough is undergoing great social and economic change’, further stating that ‘there are to be significant changes in the face of local politics, with a recent referendum supporting the introduction of directly elected mayors, the first election to which will take place in May 2002.’ The Labour Group also acknowledged that the current council size facilitated a balance of representation between the parished rural area in the west of the borough and the remainder of the urban, unparished area, contending that the more rural area should continue to be represented by two councillors.

51 We received no further representations in relation to council size at Stage One. In view of the cross-party consensus received for retaining the existing council size, and given the balance of representation that it facilitates between rural and urban parts of the borough, we were content to put this forward for consultation. We noted that all political groups on the Council argued that at the present time there was no persuasive evidence to move away from the current council size, particularly given the uncertainty surrounding the future executive structure of the Council with regards to the introduction of a directly elected mayor. We acknowledged that the introduction of a directly elected mayor would have implications for the operation of the Council in the future, but further recognised that at the current time it was difficult to predict in what way. Therefore, on balance, we were of the view that retaining the existing council size, at the current time, would be acceptable.

52 During Stage Three, by which time the mayoral system had come into being, the majority of submissions received proposed a significant reduction in council size. Ninety-eight submissions supported the recently elected Mayor’s and Cabinet’s proposal to reduce the council size from 47 members to 32. The Cabinet’s report provided in detail how the Council, under the new management structure, would operate under a reduced council size and gave serious considerations to the implications of such a significant reduction. The proposed reduction received a substantial amount of local support. However, we also noted that the Cabinet’s proposed Villages ward would have 24% fewer electors per councillor than the borough average. This is an unacceptably high level of electoral inequality and we considered the Cabinet provided insufficient justification for such a high variance.

53 A resident submitted a borough-wide scheme based on a council size of 33. We noted that this scheme is significantly different from the draft recommendations, including the proposed reduction in council size from 47 to 32 and, in addition, this scheme was not supported by any argumentation.

54 We received five further submissions regarding council size. Hartlepool Conservative Association, Hartlepool Liberal Democrats, Councillor Hart and two residents opposed the proposal to reduce the council size to 32. We also received a submission from a resident objecting to the methods we used to reach our conclusions on council size for the borough as part of our draft recommendations.

55 With regard to the proposals submitted by the Conservative Association, we note that the proposals supported retaining the existing council size.

56 Having considered the proposals from the Mayor and the Cabinet, which had received a significant amount of local support, and other submissions received, a number of which supported retaining the existing council size, we considered that we had insufficient information on which to reach a judgement on the most suitable council size. We therefore decided to consult further on this issue. We contacted the Group Leaders of the three main political parties on the Council, the Independent councillors and all those who submitted representations at Stage Three requesting further information, in particular, we wanted further information on how the two proposed council sizes of 47 and 32 could operate under the new management structure and provide for effective and convenient local government. We also wanted further information on the representative role that members would fulfil in the new structure and how a

council size of 32 would provide for more effective and convenient local government than the existing council size. We also sought views on how the 24% imbalance in the proposed Villages ward might be addressed should the reduced council size option be pursued. In conjunction with notifying interested parties, as stated earlier, a press release was issued to the local press in Hartlepool for general circulation, inviting local residents to also provide further evidence on the issue of council size.

57 We received 28 submissions in response to the further consultation, commenting on the issue of council size. The Mayor reiterated his case for a council size of 32, providing additional argumentation which considered the role of the Council in the new management structure, in particular, the role of the councillors, their accountability in decision making and allocation to council bodies. With regard to the rural area and the issue of the proposed Villages ward having 24% fewer electors per councillor than the borough average by 2006, the Mayor noted that it was 'outside the general parameters of acceptable variance' but suggested that 'it is nonetheless acceptable having regard to the rural nature of the ward in question'. The Mayor's proposals were supported by two Cabinet Members (Councillors Hill and Lauderdale), a 358-signature petition and two residents.

58 Hartlepool Borough Council's cross-party PER Committee expressed its support for retaining the existing council size of 47 and objected to a proposed council size of 32, arguing that 'a council of 32 members could not deliver the requisite number of councillors to fill positions of responsibility within the council.' It contended that 47 members were necessary to represent the council on many 'outside bodies'. It provided further argumentation which considered the representational role of councillors in the new management structure, their allocation to council bodies and councillor development. It also noted that a council size of 47 would achieve a satisfactory level of electoral equality in the rural wards of Elwick and Greatham.

59 The Labour Group expressed support for the Council's PER Committee's proposals, but made a number of further points. It argued that a council of 32 members 'will diminish the representational role of councillors' and 'would provide less effective and convenient [local government] than a council of 47 members'. It argued that it would be premature to reduce the size of the council 'before the demands, opportunities and practical workings of the new systems and structures are fully understood'. It also contended that the 'drive' to reduce the number of councillors emanated from the local media who 'over the last two to three years have taken an aggressive anti-authority, anti-council and anti-councillor stance'.

60 The Leader of the Labour Group reiterated its views and further emphasised the view that moving to a 32-member council would assume that elections would be in halves and that this would 'not provide for effective and convenient local government' and would 'reduce democratic accountability'.

61 Hartlepool Conservative Association reiterated its proposal to retain a council size of 47 members, providing argumentation addressing the representative role of councillors in the new management structure and questioned the motives behind the Mayor's proposal.

62 The Rt Hon Peter Mandelson MP reiterated his support for retaining the existing council size of 47 members. He expressed support for the introduction of the new management structure in Hartlepool but contended that there is no advantage to be gained 'at the current time' from a reduction in council size and that reducing the number of councillors would undermine the ability to secure a democratically and demographically balanced council. He argued that a majority of the Cabinet did not support the Mayor's submission and that there was cross-party support for retaining the existing council size.

63 The Mayor of the London Borough of Lewisham submitted brief details of his Council's experience with implementing a new management structure in relation to a reduction in council

size, stating that in his opinion '30 [members] is about the minimum requirement [for a borough the size of Hartlepool]'.

64 Newton Bewley Parish Council and 19 residents expressed support for a reduction in council size, with a number arguing that a reduction in council size would allow for financial savings. A resident expressed support for retaining the existing council size.

65 Given the significance of the issue, we have considered very carefully all the representations received during Stage Three and in response to the further consultation, have been impressed by the quality of the additional argumentation and evidence provided. We note that the Mayor's submission, in response to the further consultation, was well argued and offered a persuasive argument for a reduction in council size. We note that it received a degree of local support although we are not able to take into consideration the possibility of financial savings which is outside our remit. However, we also note that support for retaining the existing council size of 47 was received from the three main political groups on the council and The Rt Hon Peter Mandelson MP.

66 With regard to the Mayor's proposed Villages ward, we are of the view that electoral inequality in the rural area under a council size of 32 has not been addressed, with no alternative proposals being submitted. The Mayor's proposed two-member Villages ward would not provide for an acceptable level of electoral equality, varying by 24%, and therefore not provide for an acceptable balance of representation between the parished area and the urban area. Accordingly, the proposed Villages ward would not provide for an acceptable balance between our statutory criteria. The Mayor's argument that the rural nature of the area could be seen as justifying over-representation of Villages ward does not conform with the statutory criteria. We also note that, in order to address the over-representation in the Mayor's proposed Villages ward, part of the urban town area would have to be combined with the proposed Villages ward. This would mean combining the rural area with part of the borough with which it has no natural affinity.

67 In the light of all the evidence received, we have decided to confirm our draft recommendations for a 47-member council. In arriving at this conclusion, we should stress that we have not dismissed the rationale for the Mayor's proposal. Rather, we note that the current management structure has only been operational since May 2002 and thus the timing of the proposal to reduce the council size, in the context of the periodic electoral review, may have been premature. It would have been helpful if, with more experience of operating within the new management structure, the Council, the Mayor and the Cabinet had been able to develop a greater degree of consensus on the role of councillors and, by implication, the issue of council size.

68 Unlike our predecessor, the Local Government Commission, we can undertake ad hoc electoral reviews, albeit on the direction of the Electoral Commission. We would value the opportunity to revisit the issue of council size in Hartlepool should a further review be requested once the current political management structure is well established, and there is a clearer appreciation locally of its implications for the role of councillors.

Electoral arrangements

69 Having considered all the representations received at Stage One, we noted that both borough-wide schemes secured improved electoral equality. However, we decided to base our draft recommendations on the Labour Group's proposals. We considered that the Labour Group's scheme provided a better balance between electoral equality and the other statutory criteria than the current arrangements or other schemes submitted at Stage One. In particular, having considered the two proposals for the Seaton area and, with officers from the Committee having visited the area, we were of the view that the Labour Group's proposal to retain all of the Seaton Carew community within one ward, albeit with a higher level of electoral imbalance,

provided for the best balance between reflecting local community identity, securing logical boundaries and electoral equality. Furthermore, we were not persuaded to ward Hart parish and include the southern part of the parish in a more urban town ward, as proposed by the Lib Dem/Cons Alliance, as this would not provide for effective and convenient local government as the proposed parish ward would initially only contain seven electors.

70 In response to the draft recommendations, the main issue to arise has been council size. The Mayor and Cabinet proposed a reduction in council size from 47 to 32, a minor boundary amendment and two ward name changes. The majority of the remaining submissions that we received also proposed a significant reduction in council size, of which a significant amount supported the Mayor's proposal to reduce the council size from 47 members to 32. As detailed earlier, we considered that insufficient evidence was provided to enable us to come to a decision on the most appropriate council size for Hartlepool. Subsequently we decided to consult further on this issue. In response to the further consultation, the Mayor reiterated his case for a council size of 32, which received some local support, and the Council, the Conservative Association, the Labour Group and the Rt Hon Peter Mandelson MP put forward proposals for retaining the existing council size, as detailed earlier. Having considered all the submissions received at Stage Three and in response to the further consultation, in relation to the issue of council size, we maintain the view that we are not minded to propose such a significant reduction in council size at this time, as detailed earlier.

71 Having considered the remaining submissions received at Stage Three and in light of our decision to base our recommendations on a council size of 47, we propose confirming the majority of our draft recommendations as final, with only two minor boundary amendments and three ward name changes. With regard to the Cabinet's proposed boundary amendment and ward name changes, we propose adopting them in the interest of community identity. We also propose adopting Greatham Parish Council's boundary amendment between Greatham and Seaton wards in the interests of community identity. We note that the Labour Group expressed support for our draft recommendations in full at Stage Three.

72 We have given consideration to the borough-wide scheme submitted by a resident. We note that this scheme is significantly different from the draft recommendations and, in addition, has not been supported by any argumentation, electorate data or mapping. We are therefore not minded to adopt any of these proposals.

73 With regard to the proposals submitted by the Conservative Association, we are not minded to amend the draft recommendations as the proposed boundary amendments sought by the Association are very general in nature and not supported by any detailed argumentation, electorate data or mapping.

74 With regard to the proposals submitted by Hartlepool Liberal Democrats, we are not minded to amend the draft recommendations as limited argumentation was provided and a number of the proposed amendments would have a negative effect on electoral equality. A number of their proposed amendments would require parish warding which, we believe, would not provide for effective and convenient local government given that the proposed parish wards would contain only a small number of electors. We also note that a number of amendments refer to the position of a polling station and school catchment areas, circumstances which, we consider, are not relevant to our proposals.

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

- a) Elwick and Greatham wards;
- b) Brus, Dyke House and St Hilda wards;
- c) Hart, Park and Throston wards;
- d) Grange, Jackson and Stranton wards;
- e) Brinkburn and Rift House wards;
- f) Rossmere and Seaton wards;
- g) Fens and Owton wards.

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

Elwick and Greatham wards

77 The existing wards of Elwick and Greatham are situated in the west of the borough and constitute the rural parished area. Elwick ward comprises the parishes of Brierton, Dalton Piercy, Elwick and Hart. Greatham ward comprises the parishes of Claxton, Greatham and Newton Bewley. Both wards are each represented by one councillor. Under existing arrangements, Elwick and Greatham wards have 10% fewer and 24% more electors per councillor than the borough average (7% and 18% more than the average by 2006).

78 At Stage One, the Labour Group proposed retaining the existing single-member Elwick and Greatham wards, arguing that 'at this stage to include them [the parishes] in the "urban wards" would create a number of wards which it is felt would be too large in land areas to be adequately served by councillors.'

79 The Lib Dem/Cons Alliance proposed including the parishes of Claxton and Newton Bewley from the existing Greatham ward, in a revised single-member Elwick ward. The remaining part of the existing Greatham ward, the parish of Greatham, would form a revised single-member Greatham ward. It also proposed warding Hart parish, from the existing Elwick ward, to include the eastern part of the parish, to the south of the A1049, in a revised three-member Throston ward. Under the Lib Dem/Cons Alliance's proposals, the proposed Elwick and Greatham wards would have 5% fewer and 18% more electors per councillor than the borough average (5% more and 12% more than the average by 2006).

80 We received two further representations in relation to this area. Elwick Parish Council stated that 'Elwick Parish Council would wish to be assured that the Parish Council will not lose its identity by being absorbed into another area at the conclusion of the review.'

81 Greatham Parish Council stated that in 1967 Greatham Parish was divided into two parts as a result of the creation of West Hartlepool County Borough. It proposed restoring the two divided parts of the parish to the pre-1967 area.

82 Having carefully considered the representations received, we decided to adopt the Lib Dem/Cons Alliance's proposals as part of our draft recommendations as they offered the best balance between electoral equality and reflecting local communities (the Labour Group's proposed Greatham ward would have 18% more electors per councillor than the average by 2006). However, we proposed one amendment to the proposed Elwick ward. We proposed that part of Hart parish should not be included in Throston ward as we did not believe this would provide for effective and convenient local government given that the proposed parish ward would only contain seven electors. Both the proposed wards would have 12% more electors per councillor than the borough average by 2006 and we therefore considered ways of reducing

these imbalances. We noted that Greatham parish contains an area of urban overspill from the existing Fens ward. We considered dividing the parish of Greatham in order that the urban part could be included in the urban-based Fens ward. However, transferring the urban part of Greatham parish into Fens ward would result in the rural area being entitled to 1.6 councillors. Including this part of Greatham ward in Fens ward would also result in the urban area being entitled to 46 councillors, when the urban area's present entitlement is 45 councillors. This allocation of councillors would not facilitate a good balance between electoral equality and the other statutory criteria, creating a notable imbalance of representation between the town area and the rural area. We therefore decided to retain the Greatham parish boundary as a ward boundary, as detailed earlier, and were of the view that the resulting level of electoral imbalance is justified given the better balance of representation that is secured.

83 Under our draft recommendations, the proposed Elwick and Greatham wards would have 5% fewer and 18% more electors per councillor than the borough average (12% more than the average for both wards by 2006).

84 At Stage Three, the Labour Group, the Conservative Association, the Rt Hon Peter Mandelson MP, Councillor Hart and two residents expressed support for our draft recommendations in this area.

85 The Cabinet expressed support for our proposed boundaries in this area but proposed that the two wards be combined to create a new two-member Villages ward under a proposed council size of 32.

86 The Lib Dems proposed that Caistor Drive, from our proposed Greatham ward, be included in a revised Fens ward arguing that its 'identification with Greatham ward is least as great as with Fens ward'.

87 Greatham Parish Council objected to the proposed Elwick and Greatham wards, proposing that the existing wards should be retained in the interest of community identity. It also proposed transferring the area around Marsh House Lane, including the Petroleum Works, from Seaton ward to Greatham ward in the interest of community identity and convenient and effective local government.

88 Newton Bewley Parish Meeting proposed that Newton Bewley parish should remain a part of Greatham ward in the interest of community identity. It proposed that the removal of an equal number of electors from Greatham ward into Fens ward would compensate for the proposed amendment and thus provide for an acceptable level of electoral equality.

89 In response to the further consultation, the Mayor reiterated the Cabinet's proposal for a two-member Villages ward. Newton Bewley Parish Meeting objected to the Mayor's proposed two-member Villages ward, arguing that 'the area is too geographically large and that there are very few ties between Greatham and Elwick.' It reiterated its proposal that the existing Elwick and Greatham wards should be retained. A resident proposed combining the existing Greatham, Elwick and Hart wards, arguing that this would provide for a better level of electoral equality.

90 Having carefully considered all the representations received for this area, we have decided to confirm our draft recommendations as final, subject to a boundary amendment. We propose adopting Greatham Parish Council's boundary amendment between Greatham and Seaton wards in the interest of community identity. We do not propose adopting the Mayor's and the Cabinet's proposed two-member Villages ward as it was proposed as part of a borough-wide scheme based on a council size of 32, as detailed earlier. It would also provide for an unacceptable level of electoral inequality (the proposed Villages ward would have 24% fewer electors per councillor than the borough average by 2006). We also note that the Member of

Parliament for Hartlepool and two political groups on the Council endorsed our draft recommendations.

91 With regard to the boundary amendment being proposed by the Lib Dems, we are of the view that there is a lack of argumentation to support this proposal and that it would require the parish warding of Greatham parish. We are of the view that to create a parish ward of 54 electors in this area would not provide for effective and convenient local government and thus not meet our statutory criteria. With regard to this proposal (and the proposals submitted by Newton Bewley Parish Meeting), when formulating our draft recommendations we considered dividing the parish of Greatham, but concluded that it would have a negative effect on our statutory criteria, as detailed earlier. We therefore decided to retain the Greatham parish boundary as a ward boundary. We are of the view that the resulting level of electoral imbalance is justified given the better balance of representation that is secured. We do not propose to adopt the resident's proposal to combine Elwick, Greatham and Hart wards as this would necessitate creating a five-member ward and the Committee is of the view that a ward that returns in excess of three members could result in an unacceptable dilution of accountability to the electorate.

92 Under our final recommendations, the proposed Elwick and Greatham wards would have 5% fewer and 18% more electors per councillor than the borough average (12% more than the average for both wards by 2006). Our final recommendations are illustrated on Map 2.

Brus, Dyke House and St Hilda wards

93 The existing wards of Brus, Dyke House and St Hilda are situated in the north-east of the borough, with Brus and St Hilda wards bordering the North Sea. The three wards are currently each represented by three councillors. Under existing arrangements, Brus, Dyke House and St Hilda wards contain 12% fewer, 1% fewer and 15% more electors per councillor than the borough average respectively (12% fewer, 5% fewer and 11% more than the average by 2006).

94 At Stage One, the Labour Group proposed combining the existing Brus ward with the area to the west of Stonethwaite Close, Rosthwaite Close, Wasdale Close and the railway line, from the existing St Hilda ward, to form a revised three-member Brus ward. The remaining part of St Hilda ward would form a revised three-member St Hilda ward. The Labour Group also proposed that the existing Dyke House ward be retained, stating that 'This is a compact urban ward with clear community identity and with little if any housing changes planned.' Under the Labour Group's proposals, the proposed Brus, Dyke House and St Hilda wards would have 4% more, 1% fewer and 2% fewer electors per councillor than the borough average respectively (4% more, 5% fewer and 5% fewer than the average by 2006).

95 The Lib Dem/Cons Alliance proposed broadly similar warding arrangements to those proposed by the Labour Group. However, it proposed including Dorchester Drive, from the existing Brus ward, in a revised three-member Hart ward. As a result, its proposed Brus and Dyke House wards would have 3% and 14% more electors per councillor than the borough average (3% and 8% more than the average by 2006), with St Hilda ward's variance being the same as under the Labour Group's proposal.

96 We received one further representation in relation to this area. Hartlepool Headland Town Council proposed reducing the current under-representation in St Hilda ward by transferring an area to the north of Warren Road in the western part of the ward (polling district MD) to Brus ward, 'thus confirming its traditional closer links with that area, and bringing it closer to the target ratio'.

97 Having carefully considered the representations received for this area, we decided to adopt the Labour Group's proposals as part of our draft recommendations, without amendment. We considered that the Labour Group's proposals provided for acceptable levels of electoral

equality, would reflect community identities and were broadly based on the existing warding arrangements. While we noted the Lib Dem/Cons Alliance's alternative boundaries between Hart and Brus wards, we were not persuaded that they offered a more clearly identifiable and convenient boundary, nor a better reflection of community identity and interests, particularly as we did not propose warding Hart parish, as detailed earlier. We note that this arrangement broadly reflected the proposals made by Hartlepool Headland Town Council.

98 Under our draft recommendations, the number of electors per councillor for the proposed wards would be the same as under the Labour Group's proposals.

99 At Stage Three, the Labour Group, the Rt Hon Peter Mandelson MP, Councillor Hart and three residents expressed support for our draft recommendations in this area.

100 The Lib Dems reiterated the Lib Dem/Cons Alliance's proposals for Dorchester Drive, as detailed earlier. The Conservative Association proposed that 'St Hilda ward can be reduced and the surplus allocated to Brus ward.'

101 Having carefully considered all the representations received for this area, we have decided to confirm our draft recommendations as final, without amendment. With regard to the boundary amendment proposed by the Lib Dems, we maintain that the draft recommendations offer a better balance of the statutory criteria, as detailed earlier. As to the Conservative Association's proposal, we were not able to adopt this amendment as it is very general in nature and is not supported by any detailed argumentation.

102 Under our final recommendations, the proposed Brus, Dyke House and St Hilda wards would have the same number of electors per councillor as under our draft recommendations. Our final recommendations are illustrated on Map 2 and on the large map at the back of the report.

Hart, Park and Throston wards

103 The existing wards of Hart, Park and Throston are situated in the west and north of the town area. The three wards are each represented by three councillors. Under existing arrangements, Hart, Park and Throston wards contain 5% fewer, 1% more and 32% more electors per councillor than the borough average respectively (8%, 6% and 36% more than the average by 2006).

104 At Stage One, the Labour Group proposed including the area to the south of Hart Lane, from the existing Throston ward, in a revised three-member Park ward. The remaining part of the existing Throston ward would form a revised three-member Throston ward. The Labour Group proposed including the area to the west of Weldeck, The Oval and Glendale Avenue (from the existing Grange ward) in a revised three-member Park ward. It further proposed including the area to the south of Southbrook Livery, from the existing Park ward, in a new three-member Rift West ward, as detailed below. The southern boundary of the revised Park ward would follow along the north of Catcote School and the Allotment Gardens to its west before continuing westwards, along field edges to the existing boundary with Elwick ward. It proposed that the existing Hart ward be retained. The Labour Group expressed concern that there are a number of new developments taking place in Hart ward that will require the creation of a new ward, stating that 'This being the case it is likely that before the next formal round of boundary reviews this ward [Hart ward] may need to be reduced in geographical size and that the emerging polling districts be incorporated into a new ward.' As a result, it proposed that the revised Hart ward 'be renamed Clavering or something similar, thus releasing the name "Hart" to be reintroduced at some future date'. Under the Labour Group's proposals, the proposed Hart, Park and Throston wards would have 5% fewer, 9% more and 4% fewer electors per councillor than the borough average respectively (8%, 13% and 2% more than the average by 2006).

105 The Lib Dem/Cons Alliance proposed modifying the southern boundary of Hart ward so that it followed the centre of Hart Road, stating that 'Hart Road is a main access route to the town [which] forms a logical southern boundary for the Hart ward.' It also proposed including Dorchester Drive, from Brus ward, in the revised three-member Hart ward, as detailed earlier. It proposed warding Hart parish, from the existing Elwick ward, to include the eastern part of the parish (to the east of the A179 and to the south of the A1049) in a revised three-member Throston ward. It further proposed including the properties to the south of Chester Road and to the east of Thornhill Gardens, from the existing Throston ward, in a revised three-member Dyke House ward, as detailed earlier. In relation to Park ward, it proposed modifying the ward's northern boundary to follow the centre of Hart Lane, including the area to the south of Hart Lane, from Throston ward, in the revised ward, and the southern boundary so that it follows the back of the properties on Kipling Road and Thackery Road and continues westwards, being tied to field edges, to the existing boundary with Elwick ward. Under the Lib Dem/Cons Alliance's proposals, the proposed Hart, Park, and Throston wards would have 4% fewer, 19% fewer and 18% fewer electors per councillor than the borough average respectively (8% fewer, 12% fewer and 8% more than the average by 2006).

106 Having carefully considered the representations received for this area, we decided to adopt the Labour Group's proposals as part of our draft recommendations, subject to one amendment. We proposed moving away from the Labour Group's proposals in order to achieve a better level of electoral equality. We proposed amending the boundary between the proposed Park and Grange wards to include all of Weldeck Road, Granville Avenue, Grange Avenue, The Oval and Glendale Avenue in a revised three-member Grange ward. The consequence of this modification also facilitated the achievement of good electoral equality in the central part of the town, as discussed below. With regard to the Lib Dem/Cons Alliance's proposals, we were not persuaded that their proposals offered more clearly identifiable and convenient boundaries, nor a better reflection of community identity and interests. We also considered that part of Hart parish should not be included in Throston ward as we did not believe this would provide for effective and convenient local government given that the proposed parish ward would initially only contain seven electors.

107 Under our draft recommendations, the proposed Hart, Park and Throston wards would have 5%, 1% and 4% fewer electors per councillor than the borough average respectively (8%, 4% and 2% more than the average by 2006).

108 At Stage Three, the Labour Group, the Rt Hon Peter Mandelson MP, Councillor Hart and two residents expressed support for our draft recommendations in this area. Officers from the Borough Council also addressed an anomaly with regards to the proposed 2001 and 2006 electorate figures for our proposed Park ward. The change in electorate figures for this ward had a minimal effect on electoral equality.

109 The Lib Dems reiterated the Lib Dem/Cons Alliances proposals for Dorchester Drive, the warding of Hart parish and the proposal to include the area to the north of the Rift House Estate and west of Catcote Road, from the proposed Rift West ward, in the proposed Park ward, as detailed earlier.

110 The Conservative Association proposed that 'Park ward should lose the southern part of the ward to Owton or Rossmere and receive from Throston ward the housing between Hart Lane and Elwick Road.'

111 The Cabinet proposed that the proposed Rift West ward be renamed Rift House ward, arguing that the existing ward name would better reflect community identity.

112 Having carefully considered all the representations received for this area, we have decided to confirm our draft recommendations as final. With regard to the boundary amendment

proposed by the Lib Dems, we maintain that the draft recommendations offer a better balance between the statutory criteria, as detailed earlier. With regard to the Conservative Association's proposal, we were not able to adopt these amendments as they were very general in nature and were not supported by any detailed argumentation. We note that the Conservatives proposals for this area are broadly similar to the draft recommendations.

113 Under our final recommendations, the electors per councillor for the proposed Hart and Throston wards would be the same as under our draft recommendations. The proposed Park ward would have 2% fewer electors per councillor than the borough average (3% more than the average by 2006). Our final recommendations are illustrated on Map 2 and on the large map at the back of the report.

Grange, Jackson and Stranton ward

114 The existing wards of Grange, Jackson and Stranton are situated in the centre and east of the town area, with Stranton ward bordering the North Sea. The three wards are each represented by three councillors. Under existing arrangements, Grange, Jackson and Stranton wards contain 7% more, 5% fewer and 13% fewer electors per councillor than the borough average respectively (2% more, 3% fewer and 14% fewer than the average by 2006).

115 At Stage One, the Labour Group proposed including the area in the west of the existing Grange ward in a revised Park ward, as detailed earlier. It further proposed including the area to the south of Park Road, from the existing Grange ward, in a new three-member Burn Valley ward, as detailed below. The remaining part of Grange ward would be combined with the area to the west of Murray Street, from the existing Jackson ward, to form a revised three-member Grange ward. The remaining part of Jackson ward would be combined with the area to the north of Stockton Road, Burn Road and Newburn Bridge Industrial Estate, from the existing Stranton ward, to form a revised three-member Jackson ward. The remaining part of Stranton ward (less the area to the east of the railway line) would become part of a new three-member Furze ward together with that part of the current Rift House ward to the south of Oxford Road, to the east of Ventnor Avenue, to the south of Southbrooke Avenue and to the east of the Allotment Gardens. Under the Labour Group's proposals, the proposed Furze, Grange and Jackson wards would have 11% more, 2% more and 13% fewer electors per councillor than the borough average respectively (6% more, 2% fewer and 10% fewer than the average by 2006).

116 The Lib Dem/Cons Alliance proposed retaining the existing Grange ward, subject to one amendment to improve electoral equality. It proposed modifying the boundary between Grange and Jackson wards to include all the properties on Cobden Street and Bright Street, plus properties on Mulgarve Road (from Cobden Street to Bright Street) and Rosemary Road (from Welldeck Gardens to Bright Street), in a revised three-member Grange ward. The Alliance also proposed combining Chandlers Close, Ensign Court and Schooner Court, from the existing Stranton ward, with the remaining part of Jackson ward to form a revised three-member Jackson ward. It proposed combining the remaining part of Stranton ward with the area to the north of Warrior Drive and Queen Street, and to the west of the properties on Saffron Walk and Lithgo Close (part of the Warrior Park Estate), from the existing Seaton ward, to form a revised three-member Stranton ward. It argued that 'the Warrior Park Estate is a new community. Its residents are drawn from the town as a whole and most do not have long-standing connections with Seaton Carew.' Under the Lib Dem/Cons Alliance's proposals, the proposed Grange, Jackson and Stranton wards would have 5% more, 1% more and 8% fewer electors per councillor than the borough average respectively (1% more, 3% more and 3% fewer than the average by 2006).

117 Having carefully considered the representations received for this area, we decided to adopt the Labour Group's proposals as part of our draft recommendations, subject to a number of amendments to improve electoral equality and to facilitate a good scheme in the central part of the town. We proposed amending the boundary between the proposed Grange and Burn

Valley wards to include all of Grantham Avenue, Eltringham Road, Stanhope Avenue and Park Road (the properties in the proposed Grange ward) in a new three-member Burn Valley ward. We proposed amending the boundary between the proposed Rossmere, Furze and Rift West wards to facilitate the provision of better electoral equality in the proposed Rossmere ward. We proposed including all of the Allotment Gardens, Stranton Cemetery, the area to the south of Stockton Road (from Westbrooke Avenue to Haswell Gardens) and to the west of the back of the properties on Haswell Avenue in a revised three-member Rossmere ward. With regard to the Lib Dem/Cons Alliance's proposals, we were not persuaded that the proposals would provide for more identifiable and convenient boundaries. We also noted that the proposals would divide the community of Seaton Carew, which is a defined community isolated from the rest of the borough by the railway line to the west and open land to the north.

118 Under our draft recommendations, the proposed Furze, Grange and Jackson wards would have 3% fewer, 7% more and 13% fewer electors per councillor than the borough average respectively (7% fewer, 2% more and 10% fewer than the average by 2006).

119 At Stage Three, the Labour Group, the Rt Hon Peter Mandelson MP, Councillor Hart and two residents expressed support for our draft recommendations in this area. Officers from the Borough Council also addressed an anomaly with regards to the proposed 2001 and 2006 electorate figures for our proposed Grange ward. The change in electorate figures for this ward had a minimal effect on electoral equality.

120 The Lib Dems reiterated the Lib Dem/Cons Alliances proposal to include the area to the north of Park Road, from the proposed Burn Valley ward, in the proposed Grange ward.

121 The Conservative Association proposed that 'Seaton ward can be reduced and the northern new build area taken into Stranton ward.'

122 Three residents objected to our proposed Grange ward. A resident expressed support for retaining the existing Grange ward and another resident expressed support for the Grange ward proposed by the Lib Dem/Cons Alliance at Stage One.

123 The Cabinet proposed that the proposed Furze ward be renamed Foggy Furze ward, arguing that the ward name would better reflect community identity.

124 Stranton Parochial Church Council proposed that Jackson ward be renamed Stranton ward to better reflect community identity.

125 Having carefully considered the representations received in relation to this area, we have decided to confirm our draft recommendations as final, subject to two ward name changes. We propose adopting the Cabinet and Stranton Parochial Church Council's proposed ward name changes in the interest of community identity. With regard to the Lib Dems and residents proposed amendments to Grange ward, we are not minded to amend our draft recommendations as they would all result in having a markedly negative effect on electoral equality and would not facilitate a good scheme across the borough as a whole. We therefore maintain that our draft recommendations for this area provide for the best balance between the statutory criteria, as detailed earlier. In relation to the Conservative Association's proposal, we were not able to adopt this amendment as it was very general in nature and not supported by any detailed argumentation.

126 Under our final recommendations, the proposed Foggy Furze, Grange and Stranton wards would have 5% fewer, 7% more and 13% fewer electors per councillor than the borough average respectively (9% fewer, 2% more and 10% fewer by 2006). Our final recommendations are illustrated on Map 2 and on the large map at the back of the report.

Brinkburn and Rift House wards

127 The existing wards of Brinkburn and Rift House are situated in the east and the centre of the town area. Both wards are each represented by three councillors. Under existing arrangements, Brinkburn and Rift House wards have 12% fewer and 1% more electors per councillor than the borough average (16% and 3% fewer than the average by 2006).

128 At Stage One, the Labour Group proposed combining the area to the south of Park Road, from the existing Grange ward, with the area to the north of Oxford Road, east of Shakespeare Avenue and north of Burn Valley Gardens and the Bowling Green (the boundary would follow along the rear of Hartlepool Sixth Form College and the playing fields to meet Catcote Road), from the existing Brinkburn ward, to form a new three-member Burn Valley ward. It proposed combining the remaining part of Brinkburn ward with the area to the south of Southbrook Livery from the existing Park ward (the boundary would follow along the north of Catcote School and the Allotment Gardens to the west, continuing westwards, being tied to field edges, to the existing boundary with Elwick ward). This would be further combined with the area to the west of the back of the properties on Ventnor Road (adjoining Rift House Recreation Ground) and to the north of the back of the properties on the southern side of Southbrooke Avenue up to the break between the Allotment Gardens and Stranton Cemetery, from the existing Rift House ward, to form a new three-member Rift West ward. The remaining part of Rift House ward would be included in the revised three-member Furze ward, as detailed earlier. Under the Labour Group's proposals, the proposed Burn Valley and Rift West wards would have 2% fewer and 7% more electors per councillor than the borough average (7% fewer and 3% more than the average by 2006).

129 The Lib Dem/Cons Alliance proposed combining the area to the south of Oxford Road, from the existing Brinkburn ward, with the existing Rift House ward to form a revised three-member Rift House ward. The remaining part of Brinkburn ward would be combined with the area to the north of Marlowe Road and to the south of the back of the properties on Thackery Road and Kipling Road, from the existing Park ward, to form a revised three-member Brinkburn ward. Under the Lib Dem/Cons Alliance's proposals, the proposed Brinkburn and Rift House wards would have 2% and 8% more electors per councillor than the borough average (2% fewer and 3% more than the average by 2006).

130 Having carefully considered the representations received for this area, we decided to adopt the Labour Group's proposals as part of our draft recommendations, subject to one amendment to improve electoral equality. We proposed amending the boundary between the proposed Rossmere, Furze and Rift West wards, as detailed earlier. With regard to the Lib Dem/Cons Alliance's proposals, while we considered that the proposed wards had some merit, we took into consideration that we broadly adopted the Labour Group's proposals in the borough and therefore the proposed wards would be incompatible with the warding arrangements being proposed as part of our draft recommendations. Furthermore, we did not believe that they provided for a better reflection of local communities as the boundary between the proposed Brinkburn and Owton wards would divide the housing estate centred on Masefield Road. We were of the view that the Labour Group's proposal to retain the existing boundary along the centre of Brierton Lane provided for a more identifiable boundary in this area.

131 Under our draft recommendations, the proposed Burn Valley and Rift West wards would have 4% more and 7% more electors per councillor than the borough average (1% fewer and 3% more than the average by 2006).

132 At Stage Three, the Labour Group, the Rt Hon Peter Mandelson MP, Councillor Hart and two residents expressed support for our draft recommendations in this area. Officers from the Borough Council also addressed an anomaly with regards to the 2001 and 2006 electorate figures for our proposed Rift West ward. The change in electorate figures for this ward had a minimal effect on electoral equality.

133 The Lib Dems reiterated the Lib Dem/Cons Alliance's proposal to include the area to the north of Park Road in the proposed Grange ward, as detailed earlier.

134 The Cabinet proposed that the proposed Rift West ward be renamed Rift House ward, arguing that the existing ward name would better reflect community identity.

135 Having carefully considered the representations received in relation to this area, we have decided to confirm our draft recommendations as final, subject to a ward name change. We have decided to adopt the Cabinet's proposed ward name change in the interest of community identity. With regard to the Lib Dems proposal, we maintain that our proposed Grange ward provides for the best balance between the statutory criteria, as detailed earlier.

136 Under our final recommendations, the proposed Burn Valley and Rift House wards would have 4% and 7% more electors per councillor than the borough average (1% fewer and 3% more than the average by 2006). Our final recommendations are illustrated on Map 2 and on the large map at the back of the report.

Rossmere and Seaton wards

137 The existing wards of Rossmere and Seaton are situated in the south-east of the borough and town area, with Seaton ward bordering the North Sea. Both wards are represented by three councillors. Under the existing arrangements, Rossmere and Seaton wards have 14% fewer and 10% more electors per councillor than the borough average (13% fewer and 10% more than the average by 2006).

138 At Stage One, the Labour Group proposed combining the area to the east of the railway line (up to Newburn Bridge), from the existing Stranton ward, with the area to the east of the railway line, from the existing Seaton ward, to form a revised three-member Seaton ward. Under the proposals the revised Seaton ward would have 13% more electors per councillor than the borough average by 2006. The Labour Group provided justification for this level of under-representation, stating that 'This area is also undergoing some considerable expansion and, in so doing is beginning to forge a wider Seaton Carew identity', further contending that 'Seaton is not yet big enough to justify the creation of two wards with two councillors per ward', and arguing that a slightly larger three-member ward should be retained to facilitate elections by thirds until such time that the area 'requires re-forming into two borough wards'. The Labour Group proposed combining the remaining part of Seaton ward, less the area to the south of the properties on Seaton Lane, with the existing Rossmere ward, less the area broadly to the south of Golden Flatts County Primary School, the properties on Seaton Lane, Raefield and Inglefield, to form a revised three-member Rossmere ward. The remaining parts of Rossmere and Seaton wards would be combined with the existing Fens ward to form a revised three-member Fens ward, as detailed below. Under the Labour Group's proposals, the proposed Rossmere and Seaton wards would have 15% fewer and 10% more electors per councillor than the borough average (14% fewer and 13% more than the average by 2006).

139 The Lib Dem/Cons Alliance proposed a revised three-member Rossmere ward, combining the area to the east of the properties on Duncan Road, Dunoon Road and Hamilton Road, from the existing Owton ward, with properties on Torquay Avenue and on Catcote Road (from Torquay Avenue to Truro Drive), from the existing Fens ward, with the existing Rossmere ward. It also proposed retaining the existing Seaton ward, less the area in the north of the ward which would be transferred to a revised Stranton ward, as detailed earlier. Under the Lib Dem/Cons Alliance's proposals, the proposed Rossmere and Seaton wards would have 2% more and equal to the borough average number of electors per councillor (3% more and 4% fewer than the average by 2006).

140 Having carefully considered the representations received for this area, we decided to adopt the Labour Group's proposals as part of our draft recommendations, subject to one amendment to improve electoral equality in Rossmere ward. We proposed amending the boundary between Rossmere, Furze and Rift West wards, as detailed earlier. In proposing Seaton ward we took into account the restrictive nature of the area as it is bounded on one side by the North Sea, on the other side by the railway line, and is the subject of significant redevelopment. Our ability to improve electoral equality was therefore limited due to the fact that it is isolated from the rest of the borough. With regard to the Lib Dem/Cons Alliance's proposals, we were not persuaded that their proposals offered more clearly identifiable and convenient boundaries, nor a better reflection of community identity and interests. As detailed earlier, we were of the view that a higher electoral variance is acceptable in this case.

141 Under our draft recommendations, the proposed Rossmere and Seaton wards would have 1% fewer and 10% more electors per councillor than the borough average (equal to and 13% more than the average by 2006).

142 At Stage Three, the Labour Group, the Rt Hon Peter Mandelson MP, Councillor Hart and two residents expressed support for our draft recommendations in this area. Officers from the Borough Council also addressed an anomaly with regards to the proposed 2001 and 2006 electorate figures for our proposed Rossmere ward. The change in electorate figures for this ward had a minimal effect on electoral equality.

143 The Lib Dems objected to our proposed Seaton ward, arguing that 'Your recommendations will create a more outsized ward, much larger than average. We find this hard to justify.' The Lib Dems offered no alternative proposals. They also objected to our proposed Rossmere ward, arguing that residents of houses on the eastern side of Stockton Road ... will now have to cross the busy A689 dual carriageway to reach the nearest polling station.' The Lib Dems offered no alternative proposals.

144 The Conservative Association proposed that part of Seaton ward be included in Stranton ward, as detailed earlier. It also proposed that part of Park ward be included in either Owton or Rossmere ward, as detailed earlier.

145 The Cabinet proposed amending the boundary between the proposed Fens and Rossmere wards in order that the eastern boundary between the wards runs south along Brenda Road (as existing between Rossmere and Seaton wards). This amendment would not affect any electors.

146 Having carefully considered the representations received in relation to this area, we have decided to confirm our draft recommendations as final, subject to a boundary amendment. We propose adopting the Cabinet's proposed amendment in the interest of community identity. In relation to the Lib Dem's proposals, we maintain that our final recommendations will offer the best balance between the statutory criteria in this area and note that we were not provided with alternatives to our draft recommendations. With regard to the Conservative Association's proposal, we were not able to adopt this amendment as it was very general in nature and is not supported by any detailed argumentation.

147 Under our final recommendations, the proposed Rossmere and Seaton wards would have 1% more and 10% more electors per councillor than the borough average (2% and 13% more than the average by 2006 respectively). Our final recommendations are illustrated on Map 2 and on the large map at the back of the report.

Fens and Owton wards

148 The existing wards of Fens and Owton are situated in the south of the borough and the town area. Both wards are each represented by three councillors. Under existing arrangements, Fens and Owton wards have 11% more and 20% fewer electors per councillor than the borough average (6% more and 23% fewer than the average by 2006).

149 At Stage One, the Labour Group proposed combining the area to the west of Ivanhoe Crescent and to the north of the properties on Kesteven Road and Fenton Road, from the existing Fens ward, with the existing Owton ward to form a revised three-member Owton ward. The remaining part of Fens ward would be combined with parts of the existing Rossmere and Seaton wards, as detailed earlier, to form a revised three-member Fens ward. Under the Labour Group's proposals, the proposed Fens and Owton wards would have 4% and 3% fewer electors per councillor than the borough average (8% and 7% fewer than the average by 2006).

150 The Lib Dem/Cons Alliance proposed including the area to the west of Monkton Road and part of Macrae Road (properties numbered 27-39), from the existing Fens ward, in a revised three-member Owton ward. It also proposed including parts of the existing Fens ward in a revised three-member Rossmere ward, as detailed earlier. It also proposed including part of Owton ward in a revised Rossmere ward, as detailed earlier. It further proposed including part of the existing Park ward in a revised three-member Owton ward, as detailed earlier. Under the Lib Dem/Cons Alliance's proposals, the proposed Fens and Owton wards would have 7% more and 3% more electors per councillor than the borough average (2% more and 1% fewer than the average by 2006).

151 Having carefully considered the representations received for this area, we decided to adopt the Labour Group's proposals as part of our draft recommendations, without amendment, as they offered the best balance between electoral equality and reflecting local communities. With regard to the Lib Dem/Cons Alliance's proposals, we were not persuaded that their proposals offered more clearly identifiable and convenient boundaries, nor a better reflection of community identity and interests.

152 Under our draft recommendations, the number of electors per councillor in each ward would be the same as under the Labour Group's proposals.

153 At Stage Three, the Labour Group, the Rt Hon Peter Mandelson MP, Councillor Hart and two residents expressed support for our draft recommendations in this area.

154 The Lib Dems proposed transferring part of Greatham ward to Fens ward, as detailed earlier. They also proposed including the area to the south of Owton Manor Lane and to the east of Maxwell Road, from the proposed Owton ward, in the proposed Fens ward (as existing). They stated that the schools in this area have a long established link with Fens ward and that 'Owton Manor Lane is the boundary between the catchment area of Manor College and Grange School and those of Brierton School and Owton Manor Primary School to the north.'

155 The Conservative Association proposed including part of Fens ward in either Owton or Rossmere ward, as detailed earlier.

156 Having carefully considered the representations received in relation to this area, we have decided to confirm our draft recommendations as final, without amendment. We are not minded to adopt the Lib Dems' proposal, as we are of the view that our draft recommendations offer the best balance between the statutory criteria and the argumentation is based on school catchment areas, which we do not take into account as evidence for proposals. In relation to the Conservative Association's proposal, we were not able to adopt this amendment as it was very general in nature and was not supported by any detailed argumentation.

157 Under our final recommendations, the number of electors per councillor would be the same as under the draft recommendations. Our final recommendations are illustrated on Map 2 and on the large map at the back of the report.

Electoral cycle

158 By virtue of the amendments made to the Local Government Act 1992 by the Local Government Commission for England (Transfer of Functions) Order 2001, we have no powers to make recommendations concerning electoral cycle.

Conclusions

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

- we propose amending the boundary between the revised Greatham and Seaton wards in order that the electors on Marsh Lane are included in the revised Greatham ward;
- we propose amending the boundary between the revised Fens and Rossmere wards in order that the eastern boundary between the wards runs south along Brenda Road (as existing between Rossmere and Seaton wards);
- we propose amending the name of the proposed Furze ward to Foggy Furze ward;
- we propose amending the name of the revised Jackson ward to Stranton ward;
- we propose amending the name of the proposed Rift West ward to Rift House ward.

160 We conclude that, in Hartlepool:

- A council size of 47 should be retained;
- there should be 17 wards, as at present;
- the boundaries of 15 of the existing wards should be modified.

161 Table 4 shows the impact of our final recommendations on electoral equality, comparing them with the current arrangements, based on 2001 and 2006 electorate figures.

Table 4: Comparison of current and recommended electoral arrangements

	2001 electorate		2006 electorate	
	Current arrangements	Final recommendations	Current arrangements	Final recommendations
Number of councillors	47	47	47	47
Number of wards	17	17	17	17
Average number of electors per councillor	1,452	1,452	1,466	1,466
Number of wards with a variance more than 10 per cent from the average	9	2	8	3
Number of wards with a variance more than 20 per cent from the average	2	0	2	0

162 As Table 4 shows, our recommendations would result in a reduction in the number of wards with an electoral variance of more than 10% from nine to two, with no wards varying by more than 20% from the borough average. By 2006 only three wards are forecast to have an electoral variance of more than 10%. We conclude that our recommendations would best meet the statutory criteria.

Final recommendation

Hartlepool Borough Council should comprise 47 councillors serving 17 wards, as detailed and named in Tables 1 and 2, and illustrated on Map 2 and the large map inside the back cover.

Map 2: Final recommendations for Hartlepool

6 What happens next?

163 Having completed our review of electoral arrangements in Hartlepool and submitted our final recommendations to The Electoral Commission, we have fulfilled our statutory obligation under the Local Government Act 1992 (as amended by SI 2001 No. 3692).

164 It is now up to The Electoral Commission to decide whether to endorse our recommendations, with or without modification, and to implement them by means of an Order. Such an Order will not be made before 4 March 2003.

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

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