

Draft recommendations on the
future electoral arrangements for
the Forest of Dean in Gloucestershire

January 2001

LOCAL GOVERNMENT COMMISSION FOR ENGLAND

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

Members of the Commission are:

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

Barbara Stephens (Chief Executive)

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

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A large map illustrating the existing and proposed ward boundaries for Coleford, West Dean and Lydney is inserted inside the back cover of the report.

SUMMARY

The Commission began a review of the electoral arrangements for the Forest of Dean on 27 June 2000.

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

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

- **in 20 of the 28 wards the number of electors represented by each councillor varies by more than 10 per cent from the average for the district and five wards vary by more than 20 per cent from the average;**
- **by 2005 this unequal representation is forecast to continue, with the number of electors per councillor forecast to vary by more than 10 per cent from the average in 17 wards and by more than 20 per cent in four wards.**

Our main draft recommendations for future electoral arrangements (Figures 1 and 2 and paragraphs 81-82) are that:

- **Forest of Dean District Council should have 48 councillors, three fewer than at present;**
- **there should be 27 wards, instead of 28 as at present;**
- **the boundaries of 22 of the existing wards should be modified, resulting in a net reduction of one, and six wards should retain their existing boundaries;**
- **elections should continue to take place every four years.**

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

- **In 24 of the proposed 27 wards the number of electors per councillor would vary by no more than 10 per cent from the district average.**
- **This improved level of electoral equality is forecast to continue with the number of electors per councillor in 24 wards expected to vary by no more than 10 per cent from the average for the district in 2005.**

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

- **new warding arrangements and the redistribution of councillors for the parishes of Cinderford, Coleford, Lydney and Drybrook;**
- **revised warding arrangements and the redistribution of councillors for the parishes of West Dean and Newent.**

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

- **We will consult on our draft recommendations for eight weeks from 9 January 2001. Because we take this consultation very seriously, we may move away from our draft recommendations in the light of Stage Three responses. It is therefore important that all interested parties let us have their views and evidence, *whether or not* they agree with our draft recommendations.**
- **After considering local views, we will decide whether to modify our draft recommendations and then make our final recommendations to the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions.**
- **It will then be for the Secretary of State to accept, modify or reject our final recommendations. He will also determine when any changes come into effect.**

You should express your views by writing directly to the Commission at the address below by 5 March 2001:

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Figure 1: The Commission's Draft Recommendations: Summary

Ward name	Number of councillors	Constituent areas	Map reference
1 Alvington, Aylburton & West Lydney	2	Alvington & Aylburton ward (the parishes of Alvington and Aylburton); Lydney ward (part – the proposed Lydney West parish ward of Lydney parish)	Map 2 and Large map
2 Awre	1	<i>Unchanged</i> (the parish of Awre)	Map 2
3 Berry Hill	1	Broadwell ward (part – the proposed parish ward of Berry Hill of West Dean parish)	Map 2 and Large map
4 Blaisdon & Longhope	1	<i>Unchanged</i> (the parishes of Blaisdon and Longhope)	Map 2
5 Bream	2	Bream ward (part – the proposed Bream parish ward of West Dean parish)	Map 2 and Large map
6 Bromesberrow & Dymock	1	Dymock & Kempsey ward (the parishes of Dymock and Kempsey); Redmarley ward (part – the parish of Bromesberrow)	Map 2
7 Christchurch & English Bicknor	1	Newland ward (part – the parishes of English Bicknor and Staunton Coleford); Broadwell ward (part – the proposed parish ward of Christchurch of West Dean parish)	Map 2 and Large map
8 Churcham & Huntley	1	<i>Unchanged</i> (the parishes of Churcham and Huntley)	Map 2
9 Cinderford East	2	Cinderford ward (part – the proposed Cinderford East parish ward of Cinderford parish)	Maps 2 and A2
10 Cinderford West	3	Cinderford ward (part – the proposed Cinderford West parish ward of Cinderford parish)	Maps 2 and A2
11 Coleford Central	2	Coleford ward (part – the proposed Coleford Central parish ward of Coleford parish)	Map 2 and Large map
12 Coleford East	3	Coleford ward (part – the proposed Coleford East parish ward of Coleford parish)	Map 2 and Large map
13 Hartpury	1	<i>Unchanged</i> (the parishes of Corse, Hartpury and Upleadon)	Map 2
14 Hewelsfield & Woolaston	1	Hewelsfield & St Briavels ward (part – the parish of Hewelsfield & Brockweir); Woolaston ward (the parish of Woolaston)	Map 2
15 Littledean & Ruspidge	2	Littledean ward (the parish of Littledean); Ruspidge ward (the parish of Ruspidge & Soudley)	Map 2

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Constituent areas	Map reference
16	Lydbrook & Ruardean	3	Drybrook ward (part – the proposed Ruardean Hill parish ward of Drybrook parish); Lydbrook ward (the parish of Lydbrook); Ruardean ward (the parish of Ruardean)	Maps 2 and A3
17	Lydney East	3	Lydney ward (part – the proposed Lydney East parish ward of Lydney parish)	Map 2 and Large map
18	Lydney North	1	Lydney ward (part – the proposed Lydney North parish ward of Lydney parish)	Map 2 and Large map
19	Mitcheldean & Drybrook	3	Drybrook ward (part – the proposed Drybrook Village parish ward of Drybrook parish); Mitcheldean ward (the parish of Mitcheldean)	Maps 2 and A3
20	Newent Central	2	Newent Central ward (part – the proposed Newent Central parish ward of Newent parish)	Maps 2, A4 and A5
21	Newland & St Briavels	2	Bream ward (part – the proposed Ellwood & Sling parish ward of West Dean parish); Hewelsfield & St Briavels ward (part – the parish of St Briavels); Newland ward (part – the parish of Newland)	Map 2 and Large map
22	Newnham & Westbury	2	Newnham ward (the parish of Newnham); Westbury-on-Severn ward (the parish of Westbury-on-Severn)	Map 2
23	Oxenhall & Newent Northeast	1	Newent & Oxenhall ward (part – the parishes of Gorsley & Kilcote and Oxenhall, and the proposed Newent North East parish ward of Newent parish)	Maps 2, A4 and A5
24	Pillowell	2	<i>Unchanged</i> (the Pillowell parish ward of West Dean parish)	Map 2
25	Redmarley	1	Redmarley ward (part – the parishes of Pauntley, Redmarley D’Abitot and Staunton)	Map 2
26	Tibberton	1	Oxenhall & Newent ward (part – the proposed Newent South West parish ward of Newent parish); Tibberton ward (the parishes of Rudford & Highleadon, Taynton and Tibberton)	Maps 2 and A5
27	Tidenham	3	<i>Unchanged</i> (the parish of Tidenham)	Map 2

Notes: 1 The whole district is parished.

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

Figure 2: The Commission's Draft Recommendations for the Forest of Dean

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2000)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2005)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
1	Alvington, Aylburton & West Lydney	2	2,384	1,192	-9	2,528	1,264	-8
2	Awre	1	1,372	1,372	5	1,419	1,419	4
3	Berry Hill	1	1,309	1,309	0	1,382	1,382	1
4	Blaisdon & Longhope	1	1,404	1,404	7	1,435	1,435	5
5	Bream	2	2,382	1,191	-9	2,463	1,232	-10
6	Bromesberrow & Dymock	1	1,493	1,493	14	1,532	1,532	12
7	Christchurch & English Bicknor	1	1,232	1,232	-6	1,267	1,267	-7
8	Churcham & Huntley	1	1,389	1,389	6	1,397	1,397	2
9	Cinderford East	2	2,614	1,307	0	2,679	1,340	-2
10	Cinderford West	3	3,523	1,174	-10	3,934	1,311	-4
11	Coleford Central	2	2,489	1,245	-5	2,703	1,352	-1
12	Coleford East	3	4,053	1,351	3	4,121	1,374	0
13	Hartpury	1	1,301	1,301	-1	1,325	1,325	-3
14	Hewelsfield & Woolaston	1	1,430	1,430	9	1,456	1,456	6
15	Littledean & Ruspidge	2	2,932	1,466	12	3,072	1,536	12
16	Lydbrook & Ruardean	3	3,927	1,309	0	4,198	1,399	2
17	Lydney East	3	3,861	1,287	-2	4,135	1,378	1
18	Lydney North	1	1,420	1,420	9	1,440	1,440	5
19	Mitcheldean & Drybrook	3	3,426	1,142	-13	3,669	1,223	-11
20	Newent Central	2	2,744	1,372	5	2,843	1,422	4
21	Newland & St Briavels	2	2,807	1,404	7	2,890	1,445	6

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2000)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2005)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
22	Newnham & Westbury	2	2,519	1,260	-4	2,587	1,294	-5
23	Oxenhall & Newent Northeast	1	1,336	1,336	2	1,433	1,433	5
24	Pillowell	2	2,704	1,352	3	2,785	1,393	2
25	Redmarley	1	1,378	1,378	5	1,401	1,401	2
26	Tibberton	1	1,425	1,425	9	1,460	1,460	7
27	Tidenham	3	3,917	1,306	0	4,147	1,382	1
	Totals	48	62,771	-	-	65,701	-	-
	Averages	-	-	1,308	-	-	1,369	-

Source: *Electorate figures are based on the Forest of Dean District Council's submission.*

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

1 INTRODUCTION

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

2 This is our first review of the electoral arrangements of the Forest of Dean. The last such review was undertaken by our predecessor, the Local Government Boundary Commission (LGBC), which reported to the Secretary of State in July 1979 (Report No. 360). As a consequence of a parish review, modifications were proposed to the Forest of Dean District Council's electoral arrangements which were put in place as part of the Forest of Dean (Parishes and Electoral Changes) Order 1997. The electoral arrangements of Gloucestershire County Council were last reviewed in May 1982 (Report No. 424). We expect to review the County Council's electoral arrangements in 2002.

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

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

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

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

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

7 The broad objective of PERs is to achieve, as far as possible, equality of representation across the district as a whole. Having regard to the statutory criteria, our aim is to achieve as low a level

of electoral imbalance as is practicable. We will require particular justification for schemes which would result in, or retain, an electoral imbalance of over 10 per cent in any ward. Any imbalances of 20 per cent or more should only arise in the most exceptional circumstances, and will require the strongest justification.

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

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

Figure 3: Stages of the Review

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

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

11 Following publication of the White Paper, we advised all authorities in our 1999/2000 PER programme, including the Gloucestershire districts, that the Commission would continue to maintain its current approach to PERs as set out in the October 1999 *Guidance*. Nevertheless, we considered that local authorities and other interested parties might wish to have regard to the Secretary of State’s intentions and legislative proposals in formulating electoral schemes as part of PERs of their areas. The proposals have been taken forward in the Local Government Act 2000 which, among other matters, provides that the Secretary of State may make Orders to change authorities’ electoral cycles. However, until such time as the Secretary of State makes any Order

under the 2000 Act, we will continue to operate on the basis of existing legislation, which provides for elections by thirds or whole-council elections in two-tier areas, and our present *Guidance*.

12 Stage One began on 27 June 2000, when we wrote to the Forest of Dean District Council inviting proposals for future electoral arrangements. We also notified Gloucestershire County Council, Gloucestershire Police Authority, the local authority associations, Gloucestershire Association of Parish and Town Councils, parish and town councils in the district, the Members of Parliament with constituency interests in the district, the Members of the European Parliament for the South West Region, and the headquarters of the main political parties. We placed a notice in the local press, issued a press release and invited the District Council to publicise the review further. The closing date for receipt of representations, the end of Stage One, was 2 October 2000.

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

14 Stage Three began on 9 January 2001 and will end on 5 March 2001. This stage involves publishing the draft recommendations in this report and public consultation on them. **We take this consultation very seriously and it is therefore important that all those interested in the review should let us have their views and evidence, whether or not they agree with our draft recommendations.**

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

2 CURRENT ELECTORAL ARRANGEMENTS

16 The district of the Forest of Dean is situated in western Gloucestershire and is bounded by the River Severn to the south and south-east, the district of Tewkesbury to the east, Worcestershire and Herefordshire to the north-east and north-west respectively and by the River Wye and Wales to the west. The Forest of Dean includes part of the Wye Valley to the west, the Malvern Hills to the north and the Forest of Dean National Forest Park in the centre.

17 The district contains 41 parishes and is entirely parished. Around 30 per cent of the district's electorate is resident in the three principal settlements of Coleford, Cinderford and Lydney, with the remainder dispersed amongst a number of smaller, more rural towns and villages. The Forest of Dean's main transport links include the A40 and A48 trunk roads, with the M50 passing through the northern edge of the district.

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

19 The electorate of the district is 62,711 (February 2000). The Council currently has 51 members who are elected from 28 wards, three of which are relatively urban in Coleford, Cinderford and Lydney, with the remainder being predominantly rural. Three of the wards are each represented by five councillors, two are each represented by three councillors, seven are each represented by two councillors and 16 are single-member wards. The Council is elected as a whole every four years.

20 Since the last electoral review there has been an increase in the electorate in Forest of Dean District, with around 15 per cent more electors than two decades ago as a result of new housing developments. The most notable increases have been in Coleford, Newent Central and Redmarley wards.

21 At present, each councillor represents an average of 1,230 electors, which the District Council forecasts will increase to 1,288 by the year 2005 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 20 of the 28 wards varies by more than 10 per cent from the district average, in five wards by more than 20 per cent and in two wards by more than 30 per cent. The worst imbalance is in Redmarley ward where the councillor represents 40 per cent more electors than the district average.

Figure 4: Existing Electoral Arrangements

Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2000)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2005)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
1 Alvington & Aylburton	1	1,007	1,007	-18	1,035	1,035	-20
2 Awre	1	1,372	1,372	12	1,419	1,419	10
3 Blaisdon & Longhope	1	1,404	1,404	14	1,435	1,435	11
4 Bream	3	3,260	1,087	-12	3,360	1,120	-13
5 Broadwell	2	1,968	984	-20	2,058	1,029	-20
6 Churcham & Huntley	1	1,389	1,389	13	1,397	1,397	8
7 Cinderford	5	6,077	1,215	-1	6,613	1,323	3
8 Coleford	5	6,542	1,308	6	6,824	1,365	6
9 Drybrook	2	2,320	1,160	-6	2,480	1,240	-4
10 Dymock & Kempley	1	1,154	1,154	-6	1,176	1,176	-9
11 Hartpury	1	1,301	1,301	6	1,325	1,325	3
12 Hewelsfield & St Briavels	1	1,495	1,495	22	1,519	1,519	18
13 Littledean	1	993	993	-19	1,026	1,026	-20
14 Lydbrook	2	1,828	914	-26	1,998	999	-22
15 Lydney	5	6,658	1,332	8	7,068	1,414	10
16 Mitcheldean	2	2,111	1,056	-14	2,233	1,117	-13
17 Newent & Oxenhall	1	1,058	1,058	-14	1,091	1,091	-15
18 Newent Central	2	3,353	1,677	36	3,531	1,766	37
19 Newland	1	1,424	1,424	16	1,494	1,494	16
20 Newnham	1	1,077	1,077	-12	1,101	1,101	-15
21 Pillowell	2	2,704	1,352	10	2,785	1,393	8
22 Redmarley	1	1,717	1,717	40	1,757	1,757	36
23 Ruardean	1	1,094	1,094	-11	1,156	1,156	-10
24 Ruspidge	2	1,939	970	-21	2,046	1,023	-21
25 Tibberton	1	1,094	1,094	-11	1,114	1,114	-14

Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2000)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2005)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
26 Tidenham	3	3,917	1,306	6	4,147	1,382	7
27 Westbury-on-Severn	1	1,442	1,442	17	1,486	1,486	15
28 Woolaston	1	1,013	1,013	-18	1,027	1,027	-20
Totals	51	62,711	–	–	65,701	–	–
Averages	–	–	1,230	–	–	1,288	–

Source: Electorate figures are based on information provided by the Forest of Dean District Council.

Note: The 'variance from average' column shows by how far, in percentage terms, the number of electors per councillor varies from the average for the district. The minus symbol (-) denotes a lower than average number of electors. For example, in 2000, electors in Lydbrook ward were relatively over-represented by 26 per cent, while electors in Redmarley ward were relatively under-represented by 40 per cent. Figures have been rounded to the nearest whole number.

Map 1: Existing Wards in the Forest of Dean

3 REPRESENTATIONS RECEIVED

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

23 During this initial stage of the review, officers from the Commission visited the area and met officers and members from the District Council. We are grateful to all concerned for their co-operation and assistance. We received five representations during Stage One, including district-wide schemes from the District Council and a group of four County Councillors, all of which may be inspected at the offices of the District Council and the Commission.

Forest of Dean District Council

24 The District Council proposed a council of 48 members, three less than at present, serving 29 wards, compared to the existing 28. The Council argued that “a council size of 48 appears to deliver the greatest electoral equality, and prevents the necessity for dividing many parishes into wards”. Its scheme, which received cross-party support, was based on a mix of single, two and three-member wards and put forward changes to all but eight of the existing wards. The Council proposed new warding arrangements for the towns of Coleford, Cinderford and Lydney (which are each currently represented by five-member wards), which would result in the consequential warding of those three parishes. Its proposals would also result in the consequential warding of Drybrook parish and the re-warding of West Dean and Newent parishes. It put forward seventeen new ward names to reflect the revised groupings of parishes in its proposed wards and the new warding in the three towns. Overall the scheme would improve the present level of electoral equality, although five wards would vary by more than 10 per cent from the district average both initially and by 2005. One ward, Alvington & Aylburton, would be over-represented by 23 per cent initially (24 per cent by 2005). The Council’s proposal is summarised at Appendix B.

Parish Councils

25 We received representations from two parish councils. Hewelsfield & Brockweir Parish Council opposed the Council’s proposal to split the current Hewelsfield & St Briavels ward (thus dividing the parish of Hewelsfield & Brockweir from St Briavels parish). It argued that this would “break the historic link” between the two parishes, contending that the two parishes “have many long standing cultural and social ties”. It wished to retain the current Hewelsfield & St Briavels ward and did not want to be linked with Woolaston parish. Hartpury Parish Council wished to retain the current arrangements affecting its parish.

Other Representations

26 We received a further two representations. County Councillors Boait, Dalziel, Henchley and Smallwood submitted a district-wide scheme based on 44 members (a reduction of seven), representing a mix of 1, 2 and 3-member wards. Ten of their proposed wards were the same as those put forward by the District Council. The County Councillors stated that they had formulated

their scheme “from the start point of the optimum size for wards being that of the average for the natural groupings of parishes that have been traditionally linked by existing structures, or geography”, contending that “this submission is an attempt to convey the feelings of those more rural locations”. They further stated that their scheme “not only offers a smaller set of variances ... but more importantly, it maintains fairness with the political mix of seats, and maintains more of the rural boundaries than the Council’s preferred solution”. Their scheme would secure improved electoral equality, although, by 2005, three wards would vary by more than 10 per cent from the district average, with one ward, Newnham, varying by 26 per cent.

27 The Labour Group supported the Council’s scheme, but submitted alternative proposals for four wards in the south-western part of the district. It argued that its modifications would provide for a better reflection of local communities, while also securing better electoral equality in two of the proposed wards. It stated that it felt that its proposed amendments “represent improvements [to the Council’s scheme] whilst maintaining the general strategy of that submission”.

4 ANALYSIS AND DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS

28 As described earlier, our prime objective in considering the most appropriate electoral arrangements for the Forest of Dean is, so far as reasonably practicable and consistent with the statutory criteria, to achieve electoral equality. In doing so we have regard to section 13(5) of the Local Government Act 1992 – the need to secure effective and convenient local government, and reflect the identities and interests of local communities – and Schedule 11 to the Local Government Act 1972, which refers to the number of electors per councillor being “as nearly as may be, the same in every ward of the district or borough”.

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

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

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

Electorate Forecasts

32 The District Council submitted electorate forecasts for the year 2005, projecting an increase in the electorate of around 5 per cent from 62,711 to 65,701 over the five-year period from 2000 to 2005. It expects most of the growth to be in Coleford and Cinderford, although a significant amount is also expected in Newent Central and Tidenham wards. The Council has estimated rates and locations of housing development with regard to structure and local plans, the expected rate of building over the five-year period and assumed occupancy rates. Advice from the District Council on the likely effect on electorates of changes to ward boundaries has been obtained.

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

Council Size

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

35 Forest of Dean District Council currently has 51 members. During Stage One we received proposals based on two different council sizes. The District Council proposed reducing council size by three, from 51 to 48 members. It stated that “although it is believed that the existing number of councillors ... secures effective and convenient local government, it is recognised that this number may need to change in order to secure electoral equality”. The Council stated that it had therefore considered the effects of a number of council sizes and had concluded that “a council size of 48 appears to deliver the greatest electoral equality, and prevents the necessity for dividing many parishes into wards”. It further noted that prior to 1997 the Council had operated on a council size of 49, before two additional councillors were allocated to the district as a consequence of the Forest of Dean (Parishes and Electoral Changes) Order 1997 (see paragraph 2 above). It also contended that “[a council size of 48] also means that for the main settlements there is little necessity to change significantly the ward boundaries”. The Council therefore proposed basing its scheme on a council size of 48 members.

36 County Councillors Boait, Dalziel, Henchley and Smallwood submitted a district-wide scheme based on 44 members, a reduction of seven, representing a mix of 1, 2 and 3-member wards. Ten of their proposed wards were the same as those put forward by the District Council. They stated that they had formulated their scheme “from the start point of the optimum size for wards being that of the average for the natural groupings of parishes that have been traditionally linked by existing structures, or geography”, contending that “this submission is an attempt to convey the feelings of those more rural locations”. They further stated that their scheme “not only offers a smaller set of variances ... but more importantly, it maintains fairness with the political mix of seats, and maintains more of the rural boundaries than the Council’s preferred solution”.

37 Having considered both the district-wide schemes received at Stage One we have noted that there is cross-party support for the Council’s 48-member scheme. The Council undertook local consultation during Stage One (and included copies of the responses received as an appendix to its main submission). The final scheme submitted to the Commission also includes a number of locally derived proposals.

38 In contrast, while we acknowledge that a reasonable level of electoral equality would be secured under the County Councillors’ 44-member scheme, we have noted that there is little evidence to suggest that the scheme has been consulted on or that it has received much support locally. We have also noted that no analysis or evidence has been submitted to demonstrate how such a reduced council size would impact on the operation of the District Council. Furthermore, we have noted that their scheme would result in an imbalance of representation between some of the town areas and the more rural areas of the district, most notably in Cinderford, where all three of the County Councillors’ proposed wards would be under-represented.

39 Having considered the size and distribution of the electorate, the geography and other characteristics of the area, together with the representations received, we have concluded that the achievement of electoral equality and the statutory criteria would best be met by a council of 48 members.

Electoral Arrangements

40 In view of the degree of consensus behind large elements of the District Council's proposals, and the consultation exercise which it undertook with interested parties, we have concluded that we should base our recommendations on the Council's scheme. We consider that this scheme would provide a better balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria than the current arrangements or other schemes submitted at Stage One. However, in order to improve electoral equality further and having regard to local community identities and interests, we have decided to move away from the District Council's proposals in two areas. We are also proposing four other minor boundary modifications, in order to secure more identifiable boundaries and a better reflection of local communities. For district warding purposes, the following areas, based on existing wards, are considered in turn:

- (a) Tidenham, Woolaston, Alvington & Aylburton, Hewelsfield & St Briavels and Lydney wards;
- (b) Newland, Broadwell, Pillowell, Bream and Coleford wards;
- (c) Cinderford, Lydbrook, Ruardean, Drybrook and Mitcheldean wards;
- (d) Awre, Ruspidge, Littledean, Newnham, Westbury-on-Severn, Blaisdon & Longhope and Churcham & Huntley wards;
- (e) Newent & Oxenhall, Newent Central, Tibberton, Hartpury, Redmarley and Dymock & Kempley wards.

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

Tidenham, Woolaston, Alvington & Aylburton, Hewelsfield & St Briavels and Lydney wards

42 These five wards are situated in the southern part of the district. The three-member Tidenham ward comprises solely the parish of the same name. The number of electors per councillor is currently 6 per cent above the district average (7 per cent above by 2005). The single-member wards of Woolaston (comprising the parish of Woolaston) and Alvington & Aylburton (comprising the parishes of Alvington & Aylburton) are both currently over-represented by 18 per cent (both by 20 per cent by 2005). The single-member Hewelsfield & St Briavels ward (comprising the parishes of Hewelsfield & Brockweir and St Briavels) is currently under-represented by 22 per cent (18 per cent by 2005). The existing Lydney ward (comprising the parish of Lydney) is currently represented by five councillors and is under-represented by 8 per cent (10 per cent by 2005).

43 In its Stage One submission, the District Council proposed retaining the existing three-member Tidenham ward unchanged, stating that this proposal had been supported by Tidenham Parish Council. Under the Council's 48-member scheme, the number of electors per councillor in the three-member Tidenham ward would be equal to the district average initially (1 per cent above by 2005).

44 The Council noted the electoral imbalances that exist in the current Woolaston and Alvington & Aylburton wards. It stated that "there has been considerable debate on the possibility of linking Alvington & Aylburton with neighbouring rural parishes of Woolaston [and] Hewelsfield & Brockweir" but contended that there were "very strong geographical arguments for retaining a separate ward with Alvington and Aylburton looking to the River Severn". It argued that "there are strong cultural differences between Alvington and Aylburton and Hewelsfield and the communities have no links", proposing instead that the single-member Woolaston ward should be enlarged to include Hewelsfield & Brockweir parish (and as a consequence renamed Hewelsfield & Woolaston ward), with St Briavels parish being included in a new Newland & St Briavels ward (to be discussed later). It also proposed that the existing Alvington & Aylburton ward should be retained unchanged. The number of electors per councillor in the Council's revised single-member Hewelsfield & Woolaston ward would be 9 per cent above the district average initially (6 per cent above by 2005). However, under a council size of 48, the single-member Alvington & Aylburton ward would be over-represented by 23 per cent initially (24 per cent by 2005).

45 The Council also proposed that the current five-member Lydney ward should be divided into three new wards, as put forward by Lydney Town Council and Lydney Labour Group during its local consultation exercise. It proposed that the current OO polling district should form a new single-member Lydney West ward covering the western and southern part of Lydney parish (an area to the west and south of the railway line). It further proposed a three-member Lydney East ward comprising the area to the north and east of the railway line, the northern boundary of which would run behind the properties on the northern side of Spring Meadow Road, the north-eastern side of Albert Street and the south-eastern side of Woodland Rise until Centurion Road, at which point it would run behind the properties on the western side of Livia Way and the northern side of Juno Drive before running eastwards along the centre of Highfield Lane, the eastern end of Highfield Road and the A48 until the parish boundary. The Council proposed that the remainder of Lydney parish (to the east of the railway line and to the north of the above boundary) should form a new single-member Lydney North ward. The number of electors per councillor in the Council's proposed single-member Lydney West, three-member Lydney East and single-member Lydney North wards would be 5 per cent above, 2 per cent below and 9 per cent above the district average initially (9 per cent, 1 per cent and 5 per cent above by 2005).

46 The Labour Group proposed combining the current single-member Alvington & Aylburton ward with the Council's proposed single-member Lydney West ward to create a new two-member Alvington, Aylburton & Lydney West ward. It argued that "the villages of Aylburton and Alvington ... are linked to the town of Lydney by the A48 and naturally look to Lydney as their nearest town and service provider". It further stated that "the linking of Aylburton and Alvington with Lydney West could give rise to a conflict between rural and urban interests" but was of the view that its proposal "was a better solution than the one proposed in the Council's submission".

The number of electors per councillor in the Labour Group's proposed Alvington, Aylburton & Lydney West ward would be 9 per cent below the district average initially (8 per cent below by 2005).

47 Hewelsfield & Brockweir Parish Council opposed the Council's proposal to divide the current Hewelsfield & St Briavels ward, arguing that this would "break the historic link" between the two parishes of Hewelsfield & Brockweir and St Briavels which have "many long standing cultural and social ties". It contended that Hewelsfield & Brockweir parish did not have such close ties with the parish of Woolaston (with which it would be linked under the Council's proposal), stating that it wished to retain the status quo.

48 We have carefully considered all the representations received regarding this area. We have noted that the Council's proposed Alvington & Aylburton ward would be significantly over-represented by 23 per cent initially (24 per cent by 2005). We are of the view that this level of electoral imbalance is unacceptable and have therefore considered alternative ward configurations in this area. We have noted that in its Stage One submission the Council stated that there are "very strong geographical arguments" against linking Alvington & Aylburton ward with either Woolaston or Hewelsfield & Brockweir parishes, and therefore we have considered the Labour Group's proposal to link Alvington & Aylburton ward with West Lydney.

49 While we acknowledge that this would combine two slightly more rural parishes with part of the more urban town of Lydney, we agree with the Labour Group's argument that Alvington and Aylburton are linked to Lydney by the A48 and naturally look towards it as their nearest town and service provider. We are of the view that this revised ward would provide for the best balance between securing electoral equality and reflecting local communities. We are therefore putting forward for consultation a two-member Alvington, Aylburton & West Lydney ward, as shown on the large map inserted at the back of this report. The number of electors per councillor in the proposed ward would be 9 per cent below the district average initially (8 per cent below by 2005). Given the good level of electoral equality and reflection of local communities that would be secured under the Council's proposed Lydney East and Lydney North wards we also propose adopting them as part of our draft recommendations, as shown on the large map inserted at the back of this report.

50 We have noted that there is some local opposition to the Council's proposal to link the parishes of Hewelsfield & Brockweir and Woolaston in a new ward. However, we have considered alternative configurations of parishes in this area. If, for example, the existing arrangements were retained under a 48-member council, the current single-member Hewelsfield & St Briavels ward would be under-represented by 14 per cent initially (11 per cent by 2005), while the single-member Woolaston ward would be over-represented by 23 per cent initially (25 per cent by 2005). We are of the view that this level of electoral inequality is unacceptable and, given that we cannot view any area in isolation and must have a view to the electoral arrangements in the area as a whole, and in the absence of any viable alternative being submitted, we remain of the view that the Council's proposals provide for the best balance currently available between securing electoral equality, reflecting the identities and interests of local communities and providing identifiable boundaries. We therefore propose adopting the Council's proposed Hewelsfield & Woolaston ward, as shown on Map 2, as part of our draft

recommendations. Furthermore, given the excellent electoral equality and reflection of local community identity that would be secured under the Council's proposed three-member Tidenham ward, as shown on Map 2, we propose adopting it as part of our draft recommendations. We would welcome all views on our proposals for this area during Stage Three, in particular any alternative scheme for the area as a whole which would give improved reflection of community identity together with similar levels of electoral equality.

Newland, Broadwell, Pillowell, Bream and Coleford wards

51 These five wards are situated in western part of the district, with a large part of the area comprising the parish of West Dean. The single-member Newland ward (comprising the parishes of Newland, Staunton Coleford and English Bicknor) is currently under-represented by 16 per cent (unchanged by 2005). The parish of West Dean is currently served by seven district councillors overall, representing three wards. The three-member Bream ward (comprising the Bream parish ward of West Dean parish) is currently over-represented by 12 per cent (13 per cent by 2005). The number of electors per councillor in two-member Pillowell ward (comprising the Pillowell parish ward of West Dean parish) is currently 10 per cent above the district average (8 per cent above by 2005). The two-member Broadwell ward (comprising the Berry Hill parish ward of West Dean parish) is currently over-represented by 20 per cent (unchanged by 2005). The existing Coleford ward (comprising the parish of Coleford) is currently represented by five councillors and is slightly under-represented by 6 per cent (unchanged by 2005).

52 In its Stage One submission, the Council proposed a new two-member Newland & St Briavels ward comprising the parishes of St Briavels and Newland, together with the settlements of Ellwood and Sling (in West Dean parish) from the northern part of the current Bream ward. It stated that it had considered a number of alternative options to create wards in this area, but that its final proposal for a two-member ward would avoid the need to ward Newland parish. The number of electors per councillor in the Council's proposed Newland & St Briavels ward would be 7 per cent above the district average initially (6 per cent above by 2005).

53 As a consequence of its proposed Newland & St Briavels ward, the Council proposed that the remainder of the current Bream ward should form a revised two-member Bream ward. It further proposed retaining the existing two-member Pillowell ward unchanged. The number of electors per councillor in the Council's proposed two-member Bream and Pillowell wards would be 9 per cent below and 3 per cent above the district average initially (10 per cent below and 2 per cent above by 2005).

54 To the north of Coleford, the Council proposed dividing the current Broadwell ward between two new single-member wards, Berry Hill (comprising the Berry Hill area of Broadwell ward) and Christchurch & English Bicknor (comprising the Christchurch area of Broadwell ward and the parishes of English Bicknor and Staunton Coleford). The northern boundary of the Council's proposed Berry Hill ward would follow the centre of the majority of Grove Road and the majority of Park Road, before running behind the properties on the western side of Belmont Lane and along the centre of The Lonk and Joyford Hill. It would then run eastwards behind the properties on the northern side of Park Road, northwards along the western edge of the playing fields and then eastwards along the centre of Nine Wells Road to Monmouth Road and the parish boundary.

The number of electors per councillor in the Council's proposed Berry Hill and Christchurch & English Bicknor wards would be 3 per cent below the district average in both wards initially (2 per cent below and 5 per cent below by 2005).

55 In Coleford itself, the Council proposed creating two new wards; a three-member Coleford East ward and a two-member Coleford Central ward. Its proposed Coleford East ward would comprise the residential areas in the east of Coleford parish centred along Woodgate Road/North Road/South Road/New Road, together with the areas to the south of the golf course, to the south-west of the dismantled railway and from around Cinder Hill and High Nash. The remainder of Coleford parish would form the new Coleford Central ward. The number of electors per councillor in the Council's proposed Coleford East and Coleford Central wards would be 3 per cent above and 5 per cent below the district average initially (equal to and 1 per cent below by 2005).

56 The Labour Group opposed the Council's proposed two-member Newland & St Briavels ward, stating that it was "concerned that the new two-member ward lacks a community of interest". It proposed that the Council's proposed two-member Newland & St Briavels ward should be divided into two single-member wards in order to better reflect local community identity. It proposed that Newland parish should be warded and that the eastern area containing Clearwell and Newland villages should be linked with Sling and Ellwood (from the northern part of the current Bream ward) to form a new Newland & Sling ward, as they are "geographically close" and "similarly small villages". It further proposed that the remainder of Newland parish should be linked with St Briavels parish to form a new St Briavels & Redbrook ward, arguing that "St Briavels and Redbrook are settlements that although several miles apart, share a common interest in the Wye Valley and the associated AONB [Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty]". The number of electors per councillor in the Labour Group's proposed Newland & Sling and St Briavels & Redbrook wards would be 6 per cent above and 8 per cent above the district average initially (5 per cent above and 7 per cent above by 2005).

57 Having carefully considered all the representations received, we have been persuaded that the Council's proposals would provide for the most appropriate warding arrangements for this part of the district. We have noted that the Labour Group's proposed St Briavels & Redbrook and Newland & Sling wards would secure reasonable electoral equality; however, we are of the view that the division of Newland parish between two wards would not provide for a better reflection of the identities and interests of local communities, nor would it receive support locally. Therefore we propose adopting the Council's proposals in this area as part of our draft recommendations, albeit with two minor modifications to secure more identifiable boundaries.

58 We propose modifying the boundary between the Council's proposed Berry Hill and Christchurch & English Bicknor wards so that Marians Walk/Marians Lane are included in Berry Hill ward and that the remainder of the boundary follows the centre of Grove Road and Park Road. The number of electors per councillor in our revised single-member Berry Hill and Christchurch & English Bicknor wards, as shown on the large map inserted at the back of this report, would be equal to and 6 per cent below the district average initially (1 per cent above and 7 per cent below by 2005). We also propose modifying the boundary between the Council's proposed Newland & St Briavels and Bream wards (as shown on the large map inserted at the

back of this report) so that it is tied to more identifiable ground detail to the west of Ellwood, however, this would not affect any electors. We would welcome views from all interested parties during Stage Three.

Cinderford, Lydbrook, Ruardean, Drybrook and Mitcheldean wards

59 These five wards are situated in the west of the district to the north-east of Coleford. The existing Cinderford ward (comprising the parish of Cinderford) is currently represented by five councillors and is slightly over-represented by 6 per cent. However, by 2005 it will be slightly under-represented by 3 per cent as a result of housing development. The two-member wards of Drybrook and Lydbrook (comprising the parishes of Drybrook and Lydbrook respectively), and the single-member Ruardean ward (comprising the parish of Ruardean) are all currently over-represented, by 6 per cent, 26 per cent and 11 per cent respectively (4 per cent, 22 per cent and 10 per cent respectively by 2005).

60 The Council proposed dividing the current five-member Cinderford ward into two new wards, as proposed by Cinderford Town Council during its local consultation exercise. It proposed a new two-member Cinderford East ward comprising the current polling districts of NIZ, NIXB and NIY. It further proposed that the remainder of the Cinderford parish (the current polling districts of NIX, NIXA and NIXC) should form a new three-member Cinderford West ward. The number of electors per councillor in the Council's proposed Cinderford East and Cinderford West wards would be 12 per cent below and 2 per cent below the district average initially (12 per cent below and 3 per cent above by 2005).

61 To the north of Cinderford, the Council proposed a new three-member Lydbrook & Ruardean ward, comprising the parishes of Lydbrook and Ruardean and the eastern part of Drybrook parish (containing the settlements of Ruardean Woodside, Ruardean Hill and Brierley). The Council further proposed that the remainder of Drybrook parish, containing the village of Drybrook, should form a new single-member Drybrook ward. The number of electors per councillor in the Council's proposed Lydbrook & Ruardean and Drybrook wards would be equal to and 1 per cent above the district average initially (2 per cent above and 5 per cent above by 2005).

62 The Council also proposed retaining the current two-member Mitcheldean ward unchanged, arguing that "Mitcheldean is a strong community" and "is surrounded by geographical features that make it difficult to either increase the size of the ward or transfer part of it to another ward". Under a council size of 48 the two-member Mitcheldean ward would be over-represented by 19 per cent initially (18 per cent by 2005). We received no other representations related to this area.

63 We have carefully considered the Council's scheme and propose basing our draft recommendations on it, albeit with two modifications. We have noted that the Council's proposed Mitcheldean ward would be significantly over-represented by 19 per cent initially (18 per cent by 2005). We are of the view that this level of electoral imbalance is unacceptable and have therefore considered alternative ward configurations in this area. We have noted that in its Stage One submission the Council stated that there is a "strong community and geographical argument" against linking Mitcheldean ward with Blaisdon & Longhope ward. Therefore, in order to secure improved electoral equality we propose linking the Council's proposed two-member Mitcheldean

ward with its proposed single-member Drybrook ward, to form a new three-member Mitcheldean & Drybrook ward. The number of electors per councillor in our proposed ward would be 13 per cent below the district average initially (11 per cent below by 2005). While we acknowledge that this would result in a slightly higher level of electoral imbalance than we would ideally seek, we are of the view that this proposal, as shown on Map A3 in Appendix A, would secure the best balance currently available between electoral equality and the statutory criteria.

64 We have also considered the Council's proposed three-member Lydbrook & Ruardean ward and are of the view that it would secure the best balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria in this area. We therefore propose adopting it as part of our draft recommendations, as shown on Map 2 and Map A3 in Appendix A.

65 We have noted that the Council's proposed Cinderford East ward would be over-represented. We are therefore proposing to modify the Council's proposals for Cinderford in order to secure better electoral equality and a more identifiable boundary, while also having regard to local communities. We propose that all of polling district NIY should be transferred into Cinderford West ward, and that the remainder of the boundary between the two wards should be modified so that it follows southwards from Trinity Way behind the properties on the western side of Mountjoys Lane End until Woodgate Road, along the centre of the High Street before following southwards behind the properties on the eastern side of Commercial Street, eastwards behind the properties on the southern side of Flaxley Street and southwards behind the properties on the eastern side of Woodside Avenue. The number of electors per councillor in our revised two-member Cinderford East and three-member Cinderford West wards (as shown on Map A2 in Appendix A) would be equal to and 10 per cent below the district average initially (2 per cent below and 4 per cent below by 2005). We would welcome all views on our draft recommendations during Stage Three.

Awre, Ruspidge, Littledean, Newnham, Westbury-on-Severn, Blaisdon & Longhope and Churcham & Huntley wards

66 These seven wards cover the central and eastern parts of the district. The single-member Awre ward (comprising the parish of Awre) is currently under-represented by 12 per cent (10 per cent by 2005). The single-member Newnham ward (comprising the parish of Newnham) is currently over-represented by 12 per cent (15 per cent by 2005). The single-member Westbury-on-Severn ward (comprising the parish of Westbury-on-Severn) is currently under-represented by 17 per cent (15 per cent by 2005). The two-member Ruspidge ward (comprising the parish of Ruspidge & Soudley) and the single-member Littledean ward (comprising the parish of Littledean) are both currently over-represented by 21 per cent and 19 per cent respectively (21 per cent and 20 per cent by 2005). The single-member wards of Blaisdon & Longhope (comprising the parishes of Blaisdon and Longhope) and Churcham & Huntley (comprising the parishes of Churcham and Huntley) are currently under-represented by 14 per cent and 13 per cent respectively (11 per cent and 8 per cent by 2005).

67 At Stage One the Council proposed retaining the current single-member Awre ward unchanged. Under a council size of 48 the number of electors per councillor in the single-member Awre ward would be 5 per cent above the district average initially (4 per cent above by 2005).

The Council further proposed that, in order to secure improved electoral equality, the existing single-member Newnham and Westbury-on-Severn wards should be joined to form a new two-member Newnham & Westbury ward. The number of electors per councillor in this new ward would be 4 per cent below the district average initially (5 per cent below by 2005).

68 The Council further proposed a new two-member Littledean & Ruspidge ward (comprising the current single-member wards of Littledean and Ruspidge), which would be under-represented by 12 per cent both initially and by 2005. It argued that while this proposal would result in a higher than ideal level of electoral imbalance, it would mean that neither Littledean or Ruspidge & Soudley parish would need to be warded, therefore providing for more identifiable boundaries and a better reflection of the identities and interests of local communities.

69 The Council proposed retaining the current single-member Blaisdon & Longhope and Churcham & Huntley wards unchanged. It argued that “there is a strong community and geographical argument to retain ... Blaisdon & Longhope as a single-member ward”. Under a council size of 48, the number of electors per councillor in each of the wards would be 7 per cent above and 6 per cent above the district average respectively (5 per cent above and 2 per cent above by 2005). We received no further representations for this area.

70 We have considered the proposals put forward by the Council in this area and we have been persuaded that they would provide for the most appropriate warding arrangements in this part of the district. We agree with the Council’s proposal to combine the current Littledean and Ruspidge wards to form a new two-member ward, as this would reduce the over-representation that currently exists in both wards. While we acknowledge that this would result in a slightly higher level of electoral imbalance than we would ideally seek, we are of the view that this proposal would secure the best balance currently available between electoral equality and the statutory criteria. Given the good level of electoral equality, identifiable boundaries and reflection of local communities that would be secured, we also propose adopting the Council’s proposed Awre, Newnham & Westbury, Blaisdon & Longhope and Churcham & Huntley wards as part of our draft recommendations. We would welcome all views on these proposals, as shown on Map 2, during Stage Three.

Newent & Oxenhall, Newent Central, Tibberton, Hartpury, Redmarley and Dymock & Kempley wards

71 These six wards are situated in the north of the district. The two-member Newent Central ward (comprising the Newent Central parish ward of Newent parish) is currently under-represented by 36 per cent (37 per cent by 2005). The single-member Newent & Oxenhall ward (comprising the Newent North East and Newent South West parish wards of Newent parish and the parishes of Oxenhall and Gorsley & Kilcott) is currently over-represented by 14 per cent (15 per cent by 2005). The single-member Tibberton ward (comprising the parishes of Tibberton, Taynton and Rudford & Highleadon) is currently over-represented by 11 per cent (14 per cent by 2005).

72 The number of electors per councillor in the single-member Hartpury ward (comprising the parishes of Hartpury, Corse and Upleadon) is 6 per cent above the district average (3 per cent

above by 2005). The single-member Redmarley ward (comprising the parishes of Redmarley D’Abitot, Staunton, Pauntley and Bromesberrow) is currently the most under-represented ward in the district with an electoral imbalance of 40 per cent (36 per cent by 2005). The number of electors per councillor in the single-member Dymock & Kempley ward is currently 6 per cent below the district average (9 per cent below by 2005).

73 In its Stage One submission the Council outlined the detailed consideration it had given to the creation of wards in the Newent area. It acknowledged that the current Newent Central ward was significantly under-represented and that modifications to the existing arrangements would therefore need to be made. It discussed a number of alternative options, putting forward as part of its final scheme a modified two-member Newent Central ward and a modified single-member Oxenhall & Newent ward. It proposed transferring an area from the north of Newent town (including Lakeside, the area to the north of the Newent by-pass, Ross Road and some properties around the southern end of Glebe Road) from the current Newent Central ward into a revised Oxenhall & Newent ward, further proposing that the current Newent South West parish ward of Newent parish should be transferred from the Oxenhall & Newent ward into a revised Tibberton ward. The number of electors per councillor in the Council’s proposed Newent Central ward (comprising the majority of the current Newent Central parish ward) and Oxenhall & Newent ward (comprising the parishes of Oxenhall and Gorsley & Kilcott, the Newent North East parish ward and part of the Newent Central parish ward from Newent parish) would be 6 per cent above and 3 per cent above the district average respectively (both 5 per cent above by 2005).

74 As a consequence of its proposals for Newent, the Council proposed a revised single-member Tibberton ward, comprising the current ward together with the Newent South West parish ward from Newent parish. It further proposed retaining the current single-member Hartpury ward unchanged, which was supported by Hartpury Parish Council. Under the Council’s proposals the number of electors per councillor in the revised Tibberton ward and the existing Hartpury ward would be 7 per cent above and 1 per cent below the district average initially (5 per cent above and 3 per cent below by 2005).

75 In the very northern part of this area the council proposed a revised single-member Redmarley ward (comprising the parishes of Redmarley D’Abitot, Pauntley and Staunton) and a revised single-member Bromesberrow & Dymock ward (comprising the parishes of Bromesberrow, Dymock and Kempley). The number of electors per councillor in the Council’s proposed Redmarley and Bromesberrow & Dymock wards would be 5 per cent above and 14 per cent above the district average initially (2 per cent above and 12 per cent above by 2005). The Council argued that the higher electoral variance in its proposed Bromesberrow & Dymock ward could be justified “in these special circumstances” as “the options for this community on the northern edge of the district, divided by the M50 are limited”. We received no further representations relating to this area.

76 We have carefully considered the scheme received. We have noted that in its Stage One submission the Council stated that it had considered a number of options for the Newent area. We have also considered alternative options for this area and have noted that if all of Newent parish were to form a three-member ward it would secure good electoral equality with the number of electors per councillor being 2 per cent above the district average initially (3 per cent above by

2005). However, we consider that such a proposal would have a detrimental effect on the reflection of local communities as the proposed ward would combine the town of Newent with its more rural hinterland, while also meaning that the parishes of Oxenhall and Gorsley & Kilcott, which look towards Newent as their main commercial centre and service provider, would have to be linked northwards with the parish of Dymock, with which they share limited links. Therefore, in order to secure the best balance of the criteria governing our work, we propose basing our draft recommendations on the Council's proposals in this area.

77 We propose adopting the Council's two-member Newent Central ward; however, we are proposing a minor modification in order to secure a more identifiable boundary. We propose that the area around the southern end of Glebe Road/Vauxhall should be retained within Newent Central ward and propose that an area to the south of Newent Lake, to the east of Church Way and to the north of Gloucester Street should be included in a revised single-member Oxenhall & Newent ward. We are of the view that this area has better road links with the remainder of Oxenhall & Newent ward via Cleeve Mill Lane and Gloucester Street. The number of electors per councillor in our proposed two-member Newent Central ward would be 5 per cent above the district average initially (4 per cent above by 2005).

78 We are also proposing a minor modification to the boundary between the proposed Oxenhall & Newent and Tibberton wards. We are proposing that the eastern boundary of the current Newent South West parish ward (which the Council proposed including in a revised Tibberton ward) should be moved further eastwards in order to facilitate easier road access between the Anthony's Cross and Kent's Green areas. We further propose that the Council's proposed Oxenhall & Newent ward should be named Oxenhall & Newent North East ward in order to better reflect the area that the ward covers. The number of electors per councillor in our revised single-member Oxenhall & Newent North East and Tibberton wards, as shown on Map 2 and Maps A4 and A5 in Appendix A, would be 2 per cent above and 9 per cent above the district average initially (5 per cent above and 7 per cent above by 2005).

79 Given the good electoral equality, identifiable boundaries and reflection of local communities that would be secured we also propose adopting the Council's proposed Hartpury, Redmarley and Bromesberrow & Dymock wards as part of our draft recommendations, as shown on Map 2. We acknowledge that electoral equality in the proposed Bromesberrow & Dymock ward would be 14 per cent initially (12 per cent by 2005). However, we have concluded that this is acceptable, given that the area is constrained by the district boundary to the north and west, and as it would also facilitate a good electoral scheme elsewhere in the northern part of the district. We would welcome views from all interested parties during Stage Three.

Electoral Cycle

80 We received one representation regarding the District Council's electoral cycle, from the District Council itself which stated that it supported the retention of the existing electoral cycle of whole council elections. We have noted that, at present, there appears to be a majority view that the present electoral cycle should be retained. We therefore propose no change to the current electoral cycle of whole-council elections for the District Council.

Conclusions

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

- there should be a reduction in council size from 51 to 48;
- there should be 27 wards;
- the boundaries of 22 of the existing wards should be modified, resulting in a net reduction of one ward;
- elections should continue to be held for the whole council.

82 As already indicated, we have based our draft recommendations on the District Council's proposals, but propose departing from them in the following areas:

- in the southern part of the district we are proposing a new two-member Alvington, Aylburton & West Lydney ward;
- in the West Dean area, we are proposing minor boundary modifications between the wards of Newland & St Briavels and Bream, and the wards of Berry Hill and Christchurch & English Bicknor;
- in Cinderford, we are proposing modifications to the boundary between the proposed Cinderford West and Cinderford East wards;
- in the western part of the district, we are proposing a new three-member Mitcheldean & Drybrook ward;
- in the northern part of the district we are proposing modified Newent Central and Tibberton wards and a new Oxenhall & Newent North East ward.

83 Figure 5 shows the impact of our draft recommendations on electoral equality, comparing them with the current arrangements, based on 2000 electorate figures and with forecast electorates for the year 2005.

Figure 5: Comparison of Current and Recommended Electoral Arrangements

	2000 electorate		2005 forecast electorate	
	Current arrangements	Draft recommendations	Current arrangements	Draft recommendations
Number of councillors	51	48	51	48
Number of wards	28	27	28	27
Average number of electors per councillor	1,230	1,308	1,288	1,369
Number of wards with a variance more than 10 per cent from the average	20	3	17	3
Number of wards with a variance more than 20 per cent from the average	5	0	4	0

84 As shown in Figure 5, our draft recommendations for the Forest of Dean District Council would result in a reduction in the number of wards varying by more than 10 per cent from the district average from 20 to three. By 2005 only three wards are forecast to vary by more than 10 per cent from the average for the district.

Draft Recommendation
 Forest of Dean District Council should comprise 48 councillors serving 27 wards, as detailed and named in Figures 1 and 2, and illustrated on Map 2 and in Appendix A, including the large map inside the back cover. The Council should continue to hold whole-council elections every four years.

Parish and Town Council Electoral Arrangements

85 In undertaking reviews of electoral arrangements, we are required to comply as far as possible with the provisions set out in Schedule 11 to the 1972 Act. The Schedule provides that if a parish is to be divided between different district wards it must also be divided into parish wards, so that each parish ward lies wholly within a single ward of the district. Accordingly, we propose consequential warding arrangements for the parishes of Lydney, Coleford, West Dean, Cinderford, Drybrook and Newent.

86 The parish of Lydney is currently served by 15 councillors and is not warded. As outlined above, if a parish is divided between separate district wards, it should also be divided into wards. In our draft recommendations we proposed that Lydney Town should be divided between the three district wards of Alvington, Aylburton & West Lydney, Lydney North and Lydney East, as suggested by the Labour Group and the District Council respectively. As a consequence of our

draft recommendations we propose that Lydney Town should be divided into three town wards, Lydney West, Lydney North and Lydney East, reflecting the proposed district wards, to be represented by three, three and nine councillors respectively.

Draft Recommendation
Lydney Town Council should comprise 15 councillors, as at present, representing three wards: Lydney West (returning three councillors), Lydney North (returning three councillors) and Lydney East (returning nine councillors). The parish ward boundaries should reflect the proposed district ward boundaries in the area, as illustrated and named on the large map inserted at the back of this report.

87 The parish of Coleford is currently served by 13 councillors and is not warded. As outlined above, if a parish is divided between separate district wards, it should also be divided into wards. In our draft recommendations we proposed that Coleford Town should be divided between the two district wards of Coleford East and Coleford Central, as suggested by the District Council. As a consequence of our draft recommendations we propose that Coleford Town should be divided into two town wards, Coleford East and Coleford Central, reflecting the proposed district wards, represented by eight and five councillors respectively.

Draft Recommendation
Coleford Town Council should comprise 13 councillors, as at present, representing two wards: Coleford East (returning eight councillors) and Coleford Central (returning five councillors). The parish ward boundaries should reflect the proposed district ward boundaries in the area, as illustrated and named on the large map inserted at the back of this report.

88 The parish of West Dean is currently served by 15 councillors, representing three wards: Bream (returning six councillors), Berry Hill (returning four councillors) and Pillowell (returning five councillors). In order to reflect our proposed district wards in this area, we are proposing that the parish should be divided into five parish wards and that the existing number of parish councillors should be reallocated: Ellwood & Sling (returning two councillors), Bream (returning five councillors), Pillowell (returning five councillors), Christchurch (returning one councillor) and Berry Hill (returning two councillors).

Draft Recommendation

West Dean Parish Council should comprise 15 councillors, as at present, representing five wards. That part of West Dean parish which lies within the proposed Newland & St Briavels district ward should be named Ellwood & Sling parish ward and be represented by two councillors. That part of West Dean parish which lies within the proposed Bream district ward should be named Bream parish ward and be represented by five councillors. The existing Pillowell parish ward (which lies within the Pillowell district ward) should be retained and should be represented by five councillors. That part of West Dean parish which lies within the proposed Christchurch & English Bicknor district ward should be named Christchurch parish ward and be represented one councillor. That part of West Dean parish which lies within the proposed Berry Hill district ward should be named Berry Hill parish ward and be represented by two councillors. The boundaries between the five parish wards should reflect the proposed district ward boundaries, as illustrated and named on the large map inserted at the back of this report.

89 The parish of Cinderford is currently served by 15 councillors and is not warded. In our draft recommendations we proposed that Cinderford Town should be divided between the two district wards of Cinderford East and Cinderford West. As a consequence of our draft recommendations we propose that Cinderford Town should be divided into two town wards, Cinderford East and Cinderford West, reflecting the proposed district wards, to be represented by six and nine councillors respectively.

Draft Recommendation

Cinderford Town Council should comprise 15 councillors, as at present, representing two wards: Cinderford East (returning six councillors) and Cinderford West (returning nine councillors). The parish ward boundaries should reflect the proposed district ward boundaries in the area, as illustrated and named on Map A2 in Appendix A.

90 The parish of Drybrook is currently served by 10 councillors and is not warded. In our draft recommendations we proposed that Drybrook parish should be divided between the two district wards of Lydbrook & Ruardean and Mitcheldean & Drybrook. As a consequence of our draft recommendations we propose that Drybrook parish should be divided into two parish wards, Ruardean Hill and Drybrook Village, reflecting the proposed district wards, to be represented by four and six councillors respectively.

Draft Recommendation

Drybrook Parish Council should comprise 10 councillors, as at present, representing two wards. That part of Drybrook parish which lies within the proposed Lydbrook & Ruardean ward should be named Ruardean Hill parish ward and be represented by four councillors. That part of Drybrook parish which lies within the proposed Mitcheldean & Drybrook ward should be named Drybrook Village parish ward and be represented by six councillors. The parish ward boundaries should reflect the proposed district ward boundaries in the area, as illustrated and named on Map A3 in Appendix A.

91 The parish of Newent is currently served by 13 councillors, representing three wards: Newent Central (returning nine councillors), Newent North East (returning two councillors) and Newent South West (returning two councillors). In order to reflect our proposed district wards in this area, we are proposing that the parish should be divided into three town wards and that the existing number of parish councillors should be reallocated: Newent Central (returning nine councillors), Newent North East (returning three councillors) and Newent South West (returning one councillor).

Draft Recommendation

Newent Town Council should comprise 13 councillors, as at present, representing three wards. That part of Newent parish which lies within the proposed Newent Central district ward should be named Newent Central town ward and be represented by nine councillors. That part of Newent parish which lies within the proposed Oxenhall & Newent North East district ward should be named Newent North East town ward and be represented by three councillors. That part of Newent parish which lies within the proposed Tibberton district ward should be named Newent South West town ward and be represented by one councillor. The boundaries between the three town wards should reflect the proposed district ward boundaries, as illustrated and named on Maps A4 and A5 in Appendix A.

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

Draft Recommendation

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

93 We have not finalised our conclusions on the electoral arrangements for the Forest of Dean and welcome comments from the District Council and others relating to the proposed ward boundaries, number of councillors, electoral cycle, ward names, and parish and town

council electoral arrangements. We will consider all the evidence submitted to us during the consultation period before preparing our final recommendations.

Map 2: The Commission's Draft Recommendations for the Forest of Dean

5 NEXT STEPS

94 We are putting forward draft recommendations on future electoral arrangements for consultation. We will take fully into account all representations received by 5 March 2001. Representations received after this date may not be taken into account. All representations will be available for public inspection by appointment at the offices of the Commission and the District Council, and a list of respondents will be available on request from the Commission after the end of the consultation period.

95 Views may be expressed by writing directly to us:

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

Fax: 020 7404 6142

E-mail: reviews@lgce.gov.uk

www.lgce.gov.uk

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

APPENDIX A

Draft Recommendations for the Forest of Dean: Detailed Mapping

The following maps illustrate the Commission's proposed ward boundaries for the Forest of Dean area.

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

Map A2 illustrates the proposed district and parish warding of Cinderford.

Map A3 illustrates the proposed district and parish warding of Drybrook parish.

Map A4 illustrates the proposed district and parish warding of Newent.

Map A5 illustrates the proposed district and parish warding of Newent.

The **large map** inserted in the back of the report illustrates the existing and proposed warding arrangements for Coleford, West Dean and Lydney.

Map A1: Draft Recommendations for the Forest of Dean: Key Map

Map A2: Proposed district and parish warding of Cinderford

Map A3: Proposed district and parish warding of Drybrook parish

Map A4: Proposed district and parish warding of Newent

Map A5: Proposed district and parish warding of Newent

APPENDIX B

Forest of Dean District Council's Proposed Electoral Arrangements

Our draft recommendations detailed in Figures 1 and 2 differ from those put forward by the District Council only in 11 wards, where the Council's proposals were as follows:

Figure B1: Forest of Dean District Council's Proposal: Constituent Areas

Ward name	Constituent areas
Alvington & Aylburton	<i>Unchanged</i> (the parishes of Alvington and Aylburton)
Berry Hill	Broadwell ward (part)
Christchurch & English Bicknor	Broadwell ward (part); Newland ward (part – the parishes of English Bicknor and Staunton Coleford)
Cinderford East	Cinderford ward (part)
Cinderford West	Cinderford ward (part)
Drybrook	Drybrook ward (part)
Lydney West	Lydney ward (part)
Mitcheldean	<i>Unchanged</i> (the parish of Mitcheldean)
Newent Central	Newent Central ward (part)
Oxenhall & Newent North East	Newent & Oxenhall ward (part); Newent Central ward (part);
Tibberton	Newent & Oxenhall ward (part); Tibberton ward

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

Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2000)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2005)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
Alvington & Aylburton	1	1,007	1,007	-23	1,035	1,035	-24
Berry Hill	1	1,272	1,272	-3	1,342	1,342	-2
Christchurch & English Bicknor	1	1,269	1,269	-3	1,307	1,307	-5
Cinderford East	2	2,291	1,146	-12	2,400	1,200	-12

Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2000)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2005)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
Cinderford West	3	3,846	1,282	-2	4,213	1,404	3
Drybrook	1	1,315	1,315	1	1,436	1,436	5
Lydney West	1	1,377	1,377	5	1,493	1,493	9
Mitcheldean	2	2,111	1,056	-19	2,233	1,117	-18
Newent Central	2	2,762	1,381	6	2,861	1,431	5
Oxenhall & Newent North East	1	1,344	1,344	3	1,441	1,441	5
Tibberton	1	1,399	1,399	7	1,434	1,434	5

Source: Electorate figures are based on the Forest of Dean District Council's submission.

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

APPENDIX C

The Statutory Provisions

Local Government Act 1992: the Commission's Role

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

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

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

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

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

4 Unlike the LGBC, the Commission may also make recommendations for changes in respect of electoral arrangements within parish and town council areas. Accordingly, in relation to parish

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

or town councils within a principal authority's area, the Commission may make recommendations relating to:

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

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

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

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

7 In relation to shire districts:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

