

Draft recommendations on the future electoral arrangements for Taunton Deane in Somerset

Further electoral review

November 2005

Translations and other formats

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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. It is responsible for conducting reviews as directed by The Electoral Commission or the Secretary of State.

Members of the Committee are:

Pamela Gordon (Chair)

Robin Gray

Joan Jones CBE

Ann M. Kelly

Professor Colin Mellors

Archie Gall (Director)

When conducting reviews 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.

Executive summary

The Boundary Committee for England is the body responsible for conducting electoral reviews of local authorities. A Further Electoral Review of Taunton Deane is being undertaken to provide improved levels of electoral equality across the borough. This review aims to ensure that the number of voters represented by each borough councillor is approximately the same. As a result of the poor levels of electoral inequality that existed in 2003, The Electoral Commission directed The Boundary Committee to undertake an electoral review of Taunton Deane on 12 February 2005.

Current electoral arrangements

Under the existing arrangements, 11 wards currently have electoral variances of more than 10% from the borough average. This is due to sustained development since the previous review.

Every review is conducted in four stages:

| Stage | Stage starts | Description |
|--------------|---------------------|---|
| One | 17 May 2005 | Submission of proposals to us |
| Two | 9 August 2005 | Our analysis and deliberation |
| Three | 29 November 2005 | Publication of draft recommendations and consultation on them |
| Four | 7 March 2006 | Analysis of submissions received and formulation of final recommendations |

Submissions received

The Borough Council submitted a borough-wide scheme. It proposed to increase the number of members from 54 to 56, serving 26 wards which broadly reflect the existing arrangements. Five parish councils expressed either their support or opposition to the Borough Council's proposals, while one parish council proposed an amendment to the Borough Council's proposals.

Analysis and draft recommendations

Electorate figures

The Borough Council projected an increase in the electorate of approximately 10% from 81,767 to 89,783 over the five-year period from 2004 to 2009. We are concerned that the assumptions underpinning this forecast may lead to an over-estimation. Nevertheless, we recognise that forecasting electorates is difficult and, having considered the Borough Council's figures, accept that they are the best estimates that can reasonably be made at this time.

Council size

The Borough Council proposed to increase the number of members from 54 to 56 to address the increased pressure on councillor workload generated by the need to exercise a greater representational role and undertake their community leadership responsibilities. We accept the Borough Council's argument and, although we are concerned that it has not considered in detail how an increase of two councillors will alleviate these pressures, we propose to adopt its proposed increase in council size.

General analysis

In general we are adopting the Borough Council's proposals subject to amendments to ensure a better level of electoral equality. However, in the north east and western areas of the borough we have proposed our own ward patterns.

What happens next?

There will now be a consultation period, during which we encourage comment on our draft recommendations on future electoral arrangements for Taunton Deane contained in this report. We welcome views from all parts of the community and believe that the more feedback we receive, based on clear evidence, the better informed we will be in forming our final recommendations. We will take into account all submissions received by 6 March 2006. Any received **after** this date may not be taken into account.

We have not finalised our conclusions on the electoral arrangements for Taunton Deane and welcome comments from interested parties. In particular, we found our decisions regarding our own proposed ward patterns in the north-east and western areas of the borough to be a difficult judgement between our statutory criteria. We would particularly welcome local views, backed up by demonstrable evidence, during Stage Three. We will consider all the evidence submitted to us during the consultation period before preparing our final recommendations.

Express your views by writing directly to us:

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The Boundary Committee for England
Trevelyan House
Great Peter Street
London SW1P 2HW**

reviews@boundarycommittee.org.uk

This report is available to download at www.boundarycommittee.org.uk.

Table 1: Draft recommendations: Summary

| | Ward name | Number of councillors | Constituent areas |
|----|--|------------------------------|---|
| 1 | Bishop's Hull | 2 | Bishop's Hull ward and part of Taunton Manor & Wilton ward |
| 2 | Bishop's Lydeard | 3 | The parishes of Ash Priors, Bishop's Lydeard, Combe Florey, Cothelstone, Halse and West Bagborough |
| 3 | Blackdown | 1 | (unchanged) The parishes of Churchstanton, Otterford and Pitminster |
| 4 | Comeytrowe | 3 | Comeytrowe ward and part of Taunton Manor & Wilton ward |
| 5 | Creech, North Curry & Stoke St Gregory | 3 | The parishes of Burrowbridge, Creech St Michael, Durston, North Curry and Stoke St Gregory |
| 6 | Milverton, Bradford-on-Tone & West Deane | 2 | The parishes of Ashbrittle, Bathealton, Bradford-on-Tone, Langford Budville, Milverton, Nynehead, Oake and Stawley |
| 7 | Monument | 1 | (unchanged) The parishes of Sampford Arundel, Wellington Without and West Buckland |
| 8 | Norton Fitzwarren | 2 | (unchanged) Norton Fitzwarren parish |
| 9 | Ruishton & Neroche | 2 | The parishes of Bickenhall, Curland, Staple Fitzpaine, Corfe, Hatch Beauchamp, Orchard Portman, Stoke St Mary, West Hatch, Ruishton and Thornfalcon |
| 10 | Staplegrove | 2 | (unchanged) the parishes of Kingston St Mary, Staplegrove, Cheddon parish ward of Cheddon Fitzpaine parish and an unparished area |
| 11 | Taunton Blackbrook & Holway | 3 | Part of Taunton Blackbrook & Holway ward |
| 12 | Taunton Eastgate | 2 | Part of Taunton Eastgate ward |

Table 1: Draft recommendations: Summary (cont.)

| | Ward name | Number of councillors | Constituent areas |
|----|----------------------------------|------------------------------|--|
| 13 | Taunton Fairwater | 3 | (unchanged) Taunton Fairwater ward |
| 14 | Taunton Halcon | 3 | Taunton Halcon ward and part of Taunton Blackbrook & Holway ward |
| 15 | Taunton Killams & Mountfield | 2 | Taunton Killams & Mountfield ward (which includes Killams parish ward of Trull parish) and part of Taunton Eastgate ward |
| 16 | Taunton Lyngford | 3 | Part of Taunton Lyngford ward |
| 17 | Taunton Manor & Wilton | 3 | Part of Taunton Manor & Wilton and part of Taunton Eastgate ward |
| 18 | Taunton Pyrland & Rowbarton | 3 | Taunton Pyrland & Rowbarton ward and part of Taunton Lyngford ward |
| 19 | Trull | 1 | (unchanged) Trull parish ward of Trull parish |
| 20 | Wellington East | 2 | Part of Wellington East ward |
| 21 | Wellington North | 2 | Part of Wellington North ward |
| 22 | Wellington Rockwell Green & West | 3 | Wellington Rockwell Green & West ward, part of Wellington East ward and part of Wellington North ward |
| 23 | West Monkton | 3 | (unchanged) West Monkton parish and Maidenbrook parish ward of Cheddon Fitzpaine parish |
| 24 | Wiveliscombe & North Deane | 2 | The parishes of Chipstable, Fitzhead, Lydeard St Lawrence, Tolland, and Wiveliscombe |

Notes:

1. The whole of the borough is parished except for the town of Taunton.
2. The maps accompanying this 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: Draft recommendations for Taunton Deane

| | Ward name | Number of councillors | Electorate (2004) | Number of electors per councillor | Variance from average % | Electorate (2009) | Number of electors per councillor | Variance from average % |
|----|--|------------------------------|--------------------------|--|--------------------------------|--------------------------|--|--------------------------------|
| 1 | Bishop's Hull | 2 | 3,099 | 1,550 | 6 | 3,099 | 1,550 | -3 |
| 2 | Bishop's Lydeard | 3 | 4,450 | 1,483 | 2 | 5,010 | 1,670 | 4 |
| 3 | Blackdown | 1 | 1,704 | 1,704 | 17 | 1,704 | 1,704 | 6 |
| 4 | Comeytrowe | 3 | 4,521 | 1,507 | 3 | 4,521 | 1,507 | -6 |
| 5 | Creech, North Curry & Stoke St Gregory | 3 | 4,422 | 1,474 | 1 | 4,492 | 1,497 | -7 |
| 6 | Milverton, Bradford on Tone & West Deane | 2 | 3,427 | 1,714 | 17 | 3,427 | 1,714 | 7 |
| 7 | Monument | 1 | 1,702 | 1,702 | 17 | 1,702 | 1,702 | 6 |
| 8 | Norton Fitzwarren | 2 | 1,561 | 781 | -47 | 3,101 | 1,551 | -3 |
| 9 | Ruishton & Neroche | 2 | 3,056 | 1,528 | 5 | 3,056 | 1,528 | -5 |
| 10 | Staplegrove | 2 | 3,032 | 1,516 | 4 | 3,278 | 1,639 | 2 |
| 11 | Taunton Blackbrook & Holway | 3 | 5,017 | 1,672 | 15 | 5,017 | 1,672 | 4 |

Table 2: Draft recommendations for Taunton Deane (cont.)

| | Ward name | Number of councillors | Electorate (2004) | Number of electors per councillor | Variance from average % | Electorate (2009) | Number of electors per councillor | Variance from average % |
|----|------------------------------|------------------------------|--------------------------|--|--------------------------------|--------------------------|--|--------------------------------|
| 12 | Taunton Eastgate | 2 | 2,783 | 1,392 | -5 | 3,091 | 1,546 | -4 |
| 13 | Taunton Fairwater | 3 | 4,603 | 1,534 | 5 | 4,995 | 1,665 | 4 |
| 14 | Taunton Halcon | 3 | 4,793 | 1,598 | 9 | 4,893 | 1,631 | 2 |
| 15 | Taunton Killams & Mountfield | 2 | 3,018 | 1,509 | 3 | 3,044 | 1,522 | -5 |
| 16 | Taunton Lyngford | 3 | 3,938 | 1,313 | -10 | 5,028 | 1,676 | 5 |
| 17 | Taunton Manor & Wilton | 3 | 4,057 | 1,352 | -7 | 4,571 | 1,524 | -5 |
| 18 | Taunton Pyrland & Rowbarton | 3 | 4,794 | 1,598 | 9 | 4,794 | 1,598 | 0 |
| 19 | Trull | 1 | 1,513 | 1,513 | 4 | 1,613 | 1,613 | 1 |
| 20 | Wellington East | 2 | 2,574 | 1,287 | -12 | 3,074 | 1,537 | -4 |
| 21 | Wellington North | 2 | 2,956 | 1,478 | 1 | 3,298 | 1,649 | 3 |

Table 2: Draft recommendations for Taunton Deane (cont.)

| | Ward name | Number of councillors | Electorate (2004) | Number of electors per councillor | Variance from average % | Electorate (2009) | Number of electors per councillor | Variance from average % |
|----|----------------------------------|------------------------------|--------------------------|--|--------------------------------|--------------------------|--|--------------------------------|
| 22 | Wellington Rockwell Green & West | 3 | 4,573 | 1,524 | 4 | 4,601 | 1,534 | -4 |
| 23 | West Monkton | 3 | 3,183 | 1,061 | -27 | 5,183 | 1,728 | 8 |
| 24 | Wiveliscombe & North Deane | 2 | 2,991 | 1,496 | 2 | 3,191 | 1,596 | 0 |
| | Totals | 56 | 81,767 | - | - | 89,783 | - | - |
| | Averages | | - | 1,460 | - | - | 1,603 | - |

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

Note: The 'variance from average' column shows by how far, in percentage terms, the number of electors per councillor in each ward 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 draft proposals for the electoral arrangements for the borough of Taunton Deane, on which we are now consulting.

2 At its meeting on 12 February 2004 The Electoral Commission agreed that The Boundary Committee should make on-going assessments of electoral variances in all local authorities where the five-year forecast period following a Periodic Electoral Review (PER) has elapsed. More specifically, it was agreed that there should be a closer scrutiny where either:

- 30% of wards in an authority had electoral variances of over 10% from the average; or
- any single ward had a variance of more than 30% from the average.

3 The intention of such scrutiny was to establish the reasons behind the continuing imbalances, to consider likely future trends, and to assess what action, if any, was appropriate to rectify the situation.

4 This is our first review of the electoral arrangements of Taunton Deane. Taunton Deane's last review was carried out by the Local Government Commission for England (LGCE), which reported to the Secretary of State in November 1997. An electoral change Order implementing the new electoral arrangements was made on 5 October 1998 and the first elections on the new arrangements took place in May 1999.

5 In carrying out our work, The Boundary Committee has to work within a statutory framework¹. This refers to the need to:

- reflect the identities and interests of local communities;
- secure effective and convenient local government; and
- achieve equality of representation.

In addition we are required to work within Schedule 11 to the Local Government Act 1972.

6 Details of the legislation under which the review of Taunton Deane is being conducted are set out in a document entitled *Guidance and procedural advice for periodic electoral reviews* (published by The Electoral Commission in July 2002). This *Guidance* sets out the approach to the review and will be helpful in both understanding the approach taken by The Boundary Committee for England and in informing comments interested groups and individuals may wish to make about our recommendations.

7 Our task is to make recommendations to The Electoral Commission 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 any parish and town councils in the borough. We do not in these reviews consider changes to the external boundaries of areas.

¹ As set out in section 13(5) of the Local Government Act 1992 (as amended by SI 2001 No. 3962).

8 The broad objective of an electoral review is to achieve, as far as possible, equal representation across the borough as a whole, i.e. that all councillors in the local authority represent similar numbers of electors. 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.

9 Electoral equality, in the sense of each elector in a local authority having a 'vote of equal weight' when it comes to the election of councillors, is a fundamental democratic principle. Accordingly, the objective of an electoral review is to ensure that the number of electors represented by each councillor is, as near as is possible, the same across a district. In practice, each councillor cannot represent exactly the same number of electors given geographic and other constraints, including the make-up and distribution of communities. However, our aim in any review is to recommend wards that are as close to the district average as possible in terms of the number of electors per councillor, while also taking account of evidence in relation to community identity and effective and convenient local government.

10 We are not prescriptive about council size and acknowledge that there are valid reasons for variations between local authorities. However, we believe that any proposals relating to council size, whether these are for an increase, a reduction, or the retention of the existing size, should be supported by strong evidence and arguments. Indeed, we believe that consideration of the appropriate council size is the starting point for our reviews and whatever size of council is proposed to us should be developed and argued in the context of the authority's internal political management structures, put in place following the Local Government Act 2000. It should also reflect the changing role of councillors in the new structure.

11 As indicated in its *Guidance*, The Electoral Commission requires the decision on council size to be based on an overall view about what is right for the particular authority and not just by addressing any imbalances in small areas of the authority by simply adding or removing councillors from these areas. While we will consider ways of achieving the correct allocation of councillors between, say, a number of towns in an authority or between rural and urban areas, our starting point must always be that the recommended council size reflects the authority's optimum political management arrangements and best provides for convenient and effective local government and that there is evidence for this.

12 In addition, we do not accept that an increase or decrease in the electorate of the authority should automatically result in a consequent increase or decrease in the number of councillors. Similarly, we do not accept that changes should be made to the size of a council simply to make it more consistent with the size of neighbouring or similarly sized authorities; the circumstances of one authority may be very different from that of another. We will seek to ensure that our recommended council size recognises all the factors and achieves a good allocation of councillors across the district.

13 Where multi-member wards are proposed, we believe that the number of councillors to be returned from each ward should not exceed three, other than in very exceptional circumstances. Numbers in excess of three could result in an

unacceptable dilution of accountability to the electorate and we have not, to date, prescribed any wards with more than three councillors.

14 The review is in four stages (see Table 3).

Table 3: Stages of the review

| Stage | Stage starts | Description |
|-------|------------------|---|
| One | 17 May 2005 | Submission of proposals to us |
| Two | 9 August 2005 | Our analysis and deliberation |
| Three | 29 November 2005 | Publication of draft recommendations and consultation on them |
| Four | 7 March 2006 | Analysis of submissions received and formulation of final recommendations |

15 Stage One began on 17 May 2005, when we wrote to Taunton Deane Borough Council inviting proposals for future electoral arrangements. We also notified Somerset Police Authority, the Local Government Association, Somerset Local Councils' Association, parish and town councils in the borough, Members of Parliament with constituency interests in the borough, 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 Taunton Deane Borough Council to publicise the review further. The closing date for receipt of representations, the end of Stage One, was 8 August 2005.

16 During Stage Two we considered all the submissions received during Stage One and prepared our draft recommendations.

17 We are currently at Stage Three. This stage, which began on 29 November 2005 and will end on 6 March 2006, involves publishing the draft proposals in this report and public consultation about 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 these draft proposals.**

18 During Stage Four we will reconsider the draft recommendations in the light of the Stage Three consultation, decide whether to modify them, and submit final recommendations to The Electoral Commission. It will then be for the Commission to accept, modify or reject our final recommendations. If The Electoral Commission accepts the recommendations, with or without modification, it will make an electoral changes Order. The Electoral Commission will determine when any changes come into effect.

Equal opportunities

19 In preparing this report The Boundary Committee has had regard to:

- The general duty set out in section 71(1) of the Race Relations Act 1976 and the statutory Code of Practice on the Duty to Promote Race Equality (Commission for Racial Equality, May 2002), i.e. to have due regard to:
 - eliminate unlawful racial discrimination;
 - promote equality of opportunity; and
 - promote good relations between people of different racial groups.

National Parks, Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and the Broads

20 The Boundary Committee has also had regard to:

- Section 11A(2) of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949 (as inserted by section 62 of the Environment Act 1995). This states that, in exercising or performing any functions in relation to, or so as to affect, land in a National Park, any relevant authority shall have regard to the Park's purposes. If there is a conflict between those purposes, a relevant authority shall attach greater weight to the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage of the Park.
- Section 85 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000. This states that, in exercising or performing any functions in relation to, or so as to affect, land in an AONB, a relevant authority shall have regard to the purpose of the AONB.
- Section 17A of the Norfolk and Suffolk Broads Act (as inserted by section 97 Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000). This states that, in exercising or performing any functions in relation to, or so as to affect, land in the Broads, a relevant authority shall have regard to the purposes of the Broads.

2 Current electoral arrangements

21 The borough of Taunton Deane comprises both rural and urban areas. Its largest town is the county town of Taunton and its other principle towns are Wellington and Wiveliscombe. The borough encompasses parts of the Quantock Hills and the Blackdown Hills. The borough is well served by mainline train services and the M5 motorway connecting it with the rest of the county.

22 We identified Taunton Deane as an authority where more than 30% of its ward had electoral variances of more than 10%. This prompted further research, which indicated that this level of electoral inequality would not improve. As a result of further research, The Electoral Commission directed The Boundary Committee to undertake a review of the electoral arrangements of Taunton Deane Borough Council on 6 January 2005.

23 The electorate of the borough is 81,767 (December 2004). The Council presently has 54 members who are elected from 27 wards, eight of which are relatively urban in Taunton, with the remainder being predominantly rural. There are eight single-member wards, 11 two-member wards and eight three-member wards.

24 At present, each councillor represents an average of 1,514 electors, which the Borough Council forecasts will increase to 1,663 by the year 2009 if the present number of councillors is maintained. However, due to the fact that there has been sustained development since the previous review was undertaken, the number of electors per councillor in 11 of the 27 wards varies by more than 10% from the borough average and in two wards by more than 20%. The worst imbalance is in Stoke St Gregory ward, where the councillors represent 26% fewer electors than the borough average.

25 To compare levels of electoral inequality between wards, we calculated the extent to which the number of electors per councillor in each ward varies from the borough average in percentage terms. The borough average is calculated by dividing the total electorate of the borough (81,767) by the total number of councillors representing them on the council, currently 54. Therefore, the average number of electors per councillor is currently 1,514. In Bishop's Lydeard ward, currently represented by two councillors, there are 3,587 electors, therefore, each councillor represents, on average, 1,794 electors, 18% more than the current borough average.

Table 4: Existing electoral arrangements in Taunton Deane

| | Ward name | Number of councillors | Electorate (2004) | Number of electors per councillor | Variance from average % | Electorate (2009) | Number of electors per councillor | Variance from average % |
|----|-------------------------|------------------------------|--------------------------|--|--------------------------------|--------------------------|--|--------------------------------|
| 1 | Bishop's Hull | 2 | 2,880 | 1,440 | -5 | 2,880 | 1,440 | -13 |
| 2 | Bishop's Lydeard | 2 | 3,587 | 1,794 | 18 | 4,147 | 2,074 | 25 |
| 3 | Blackdown | 1 | 1,704 | 1,704 | 13 | 1,704 | 1,704 | 2 |
| 4 | Bradford-on-Tone | 1 | 1,832 | 1,832 | 21 | 1,832 | 1,832 | 10 |
| 5 | Comeytrove | 3 | 4,264 | 1,421 | -6 | 4,264 | 1,421 | -15 |
| 6 | Milverton & North Deane | 2 | 2,549 | 1,275 | -16 | 2,549 | 1,275 | -23 |
| 7 | Monument | 1 | 1,702 | 1,702 | 12 | 1,702 | 1,702 | 2 |
| 8 | Neroche | 1 | 1,794 | 1,794 | 18 | 1,794 | 1,794 | 8 |
| 9 | North Curry | 1 | 1,396 | 1,396 | -8 | 1,396 | 1,396 | -16 |
| 10 | Norton Fitzwarren | 1 | 1,561 | 1,561 | 3 | 3,101 | 3,101 | 87 |
| 11 | Ruishton & Creech | 2 | 3,169 | 1,585 | 5 | 3,239 | 1,620 | -3 |
| 12 | Staplegrove | 2 | 3,032 | 1,516 | 0 | 3,278 | 1,639 | -1 |

Table 4: Existing electoral arrangements in Taunton Deane (cont.)

| | Ward name | Number of councillors | Electorate (2004) | Number of electors per councillor | Variance from average % | Electorate (2009) | Number of electors per councillor | Variance from average % |
|----|------------------------------|------------------------------|--------------------------|--|--------------------------------|--------------------------|--|--------------------------------|
| 13 | Stoke St Gregory | 1 | 1,119 | 1,119 | -26 | 1,119 | 1,119 | -33 |
| 14 | Taunton Blackbrook & Holway | 3 | 5,087 | 1,696 | 12 | 5,087 | 1,696 | 2 |
| 15 | Taunton Eastgate | 2 | 3,429 | 1,715 | 13 | 3,857 | 1,929 | 16 |
| 16 | Taunton Fairwater | 3 | 4,603 | 1,534 | 1 | 4,995 | 1,665 | 0 |
| 17 | Taunton Halcon | 3 | 4,723 | 1,574 | 4 | 4,823 | 1,608 | -3 |
| 18 | Taunton Killams & Mountfield | 2 | 2,544 | 1,272 | -16 | 2,570 | 1,285 | -23 |
| 19 | Taunton Lyngford | 3 | 4,222 | 1,407 | -7 | 5,312 | 1,771 | 6 |
| 20 | Taunton Manor & Wilton | 3 | 4,361 | 1,454 | -4 | 4,755 | 1,585 | -5 |
| 21 | Taunton Pyrland & Rowbarton | 3 | 4,510 | 1,503 | -1 | 4,510 | 1,503 | -10 |
| 22 | Trull | 1 | 1,513 | 1,513 | 0 | 1,613 | 1,613 | -3 |
| 23 | Wellington East | 2 | 2,641 | 1,321 | -13 | 3,141 | 1,571 | -6 |

Table 4: Existing electoral arrangements in Taunton Deane (cont.)

| | Ward name | Number of councillors | Electorate (2004) | Number of electors per councillor | Variance from average % | Electorate (2009) | Number of electors per councillor | Variance from average % |
|----|----------------------------------|------------------------------|--------------------------|--|--------------------------------|--------------------------|--|--------------------------------|
| 24 | Wellington North | 2 | 3,112 | 1,556 | 3 | 3,454 | 1,727 | 4 |
| 25 | Wellington Rockwell Green & West | 3 | 4,350 | 1,450 | -4 | 4,378 | 1,459 | -12 |
| 26 | West Monkton | 2 | 3,183 | 1,592 | 5 | 5,183 | 2,592 | 56 |
| 27 | Wiveliscombe & West Deane | 2 | 2,900 | 1,450 | -4 | 3,100 | 1,550 | -7 |
| | Totals | 54 | 81,767 | - | - | 89,783 | - | - |
| | Averages | | - | 1,514 | - | - | 1,663 | - |

Source: Electorate figures are based on information provided by Taunton Deane 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 2004, Wellington East ward had 13% fewer electors per councillor than the borough average, while Neroche ward had 18% more electors per councillor than borough average. Figures have been rounded to the nearest whole number.

3 Submissions received

26 At the start of the review members of the public and other interested parties were invited to write to us giving their views on the future electoral arrangements for Taunton Deane Borough Council and its constituent parish and town councils.

27 During this initial stage of the review, officers from the Committee visited the area and met with officers and members from the Borough Council. We are grateful to all concerned for their co-operation and assistance. We received six representations during Stage One, including a borough-wide scheme from the Borough Council, all of which may be inspected both at our offices and those of the Borough Council. Representations may also be viewed on our website at www.boundarycommittee.org.uk.

Taunton Deane Borough Council

28 The Borough Council proposed a council of 56 members, two more than at present, serving 26 wards, one less than at present.

29 The Council proposed to broadly retain the existing ward pattern across the borough. However, in two rural areas it proposed four new borough wards, while within the unparished area of Taunton it proposed two boundary amendments affecting four borough wards.

Parish councils

30 Representations were received from five parish councils. Stoke St Gregory, West Hatch and Corfe parish councils opposed the Borough Council's proposals in the north east of the borough. Stoke St Mary Parish Council submitted an amendment to the Borough Council's proposals in this area. Bishops Lydeard & Cothelstone Parish Council supported the Borough Council's proposal for its respective area.

4 Analysis and draft recommendations

31 Before finalising our recommendations on the electoral arrangements for Taunton Deane we invite views on our initial thoughts as expressed in these draft recommendations. We welcome comments from all those interested relating to the number of councillors, proposed ward boundaries, ward names, and parish and town council electoral arrangements. In particular, we found our decisions regarding the rural areas in the north-east and the west of the borough to be a difficult judgement between our statutory criteria. This was due to high levels of electoral inequality and the lack of evidence received from local interested parties during Stage One. In these cases, we sought to achieve the best levels of electoral equality in the absence of any evidence reflecting the other two criteria, and would particularly welcome local views, backed up by demonstrable evidence, during Stage Three. We will consider all the evidence submitted to us during the consultation period before preparing our final recommendations.

32 As described earlier, the prime aim in considering the most appropriate electoral arrangements for Taunton Deane 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 in respect of equality of representation referred to in paragraph 3(2)(a) of Schedule 11 to the Local Government Act 1972.

33 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'. 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 over the next five years. We must also have regard to the desirability of fixing clearly identifiable boundaries and to maintaining local ties.

34 In reality, the achievement of absolute electoral equality is unlikely to be attainable. There must be a degree of flexibility. However, our approach, in the context of the statutory criteria, is to keep variances to a minimum.

35 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 should also be taken into account and we aim to recommend a scheme which provides improved electoral equality over this period.

36 The recommendations do not affect county, district or parish external boundaries, local taxes, or result in changes to postcodes. Nor is there any evidence that these recommendations will have an adverse effect on house prices, or car and house insurance premiums. Our proposals do not take account of parliamentary boundaries, and we are not, therefore, able to take into account any representations which are based on these issues.

Electorate figures

37 As part of the previous review of Taunton Deane, the Borough Council forecast an increase in the electorate of 5% between 1996 and 2001. However, between 1996 and the start of this review the electorate has increased by 7%. There has been growth at Cotford St Luke, within the existing Bishop's Lydeard ward, and within the towns of Wellington and Taunton. The Borough Council submitted electorate forecasts for the year 2009, projecting an increase in the electorate of approximately 10% from 81,767 to 89,783 over the five-year period from 2004 to 2009. It expects most of the growth to be in North Fitzwarren ward and in West Monkton ward, although a significant amount is also expected in the town of Taunton.

38 However, we are concerned that the assumptions underpinning the Borough Council's electoral forecasts may lead to an over-estimation of the development in Taunton Deane by 2009. We note that the majority of development is based on allocations assigned to areas within the Local Plan, rather than sites either under construction or at a particular stage of the planning process. In addition we were concerned with the Borough Council's assumption of allocating two electors to each new dwelling and that, overall, the forecast would represent new electors moving into the borough.

39 Nevertheless, we recognise that forecasting electorates is difficult and, having considered the Borough Council's figures, accept that they are the best estimates that can reasonably be made at this time. We welcome further evidence on electorate forecasts during Stage Three.

Council size

40 Taunton Deane Borough Council presently has 54 members, but proposed a small increase to a council of 56 members to reflect 'the increased pressures placed upon members when new governance requirements and commitments were implemented'. It argued that 'in practice there has been little trade-off between, on the one hand, the replacement of the previous committee system by new executive/scrutiny arrangements and, on the other, the time available to councillors to fulfil and develop a greater representational role'.

41 The Borough Council highlighted that 'the Government's modernisation agenda for local government flows from a vision of councils taking a leadership role in local communities through the formation of effective partnerships with other service providers'. It argued that the development of partnership working and a local representational and leadership role put 'new pressures on member[s]'. It stressed members' commitment to 'engage effectively' with local partnerships, such as those focusing on crime and disorder reduction or economic and social regeneration. It considered that a key aspect of members' role was their capacity to 'contribute effectively to the work of local strategic partnerships and other service-based local partnerships through which [members] inevitably will have to work to a greater extent than hitherto to meet locally driven service demands'.

42 The Borough Council explained that it is conscious of the 'need to address [its] relationships with town and parish councils in light of the "quality parish and town councils" agenda' and 'to ensure that [it] at a strategic as well as local level works effectively with this very local tier of local government'.

43 In the light of these demands, the Borough Council contended that 'with an increasing number of working members it was considered that to provide effective representation on committees, panels and partnerships [an] increase was justified'.

44 We have carefully considered the Borough Council's proposal to increase its council size by two members. We accept the Borough Council's argument that its members are experiencing increased pressures to exercise a greater representational and community leadership role, and to ensure effective and ever-greater partnership working. However, we are concerned that the Borough Council has not considered in detail how an increase of two councillors will alleviate these pressures. Nevertheless, at this time we are persuaded that to ensure effective and convenient local government for Taunton Deane it is appropriate to increase the number of councillors. However, we would welcome further evidence on council size at Stage Three. We propose to adopt the Borough Council's proposal to increase its council size from 54 members to 56 members.

Electoral equality

45 Electoral equality, in the sense of each elector in a local authority having a vote of equal weight when it comes to the election of councillors, is a fundamental democratic principle. The Electoral Commission expects The Boundary Committee's recommendations to provide for high levels of electoral equality, with variances normally well below 10%. Therefore, when making recommendations we will not simply aim for electoral variances of under 10%. Where inadequate justification is provided for specific ward proposals we will look to improve electoral equality, seeking to ensure that each councillor represents as close to the same number of electors as is possible, providing this can be achieved without compromising the reflection of the identities and interests of local communities and securing effective and convenient local government. We take the view that any proposals that would result in, or retain, electoral imbalances of over 10% from the average in any ward will have to be fully justified, and evidence provided which would justify such imbalances in terms of community identity or effective and convenient local government. We will rarely recommend wards with electoral variances of 20% or more, and any such variances proposed by local interested parties will require the strongest justification in terms of the other two statutory criteria. We note that the proposed West Monkton and Norton Fitzwarren wards have significant variances initially, but these are projected to improve by 2009.

General analysis

46 We have considered all the representations we received during Stage One. We note that the Borough Council's borough-wide scheme results in an improvement in electoral equality in comparison to the existing arrangements, and consequently we proposed to adopt nine of its proposed wards.

47 However, we are of the view that the Borough Council's scheme has not been underpinned by a strong case explaining how it reflects community identities and interests and secures effective and convenient local government. This is a particular issue for two aspects of the Borough Council's proposals.

48 In the areas of Taunton and Wellington the Borough Council has either not sought to achieve levels of electoral equality well below 10% or has not explained why the levels secured are justified by the proposed wards' ability to reflect community

identities and interests and provide for effective and convenient local government. In both these areas we propose to broadly adopt the Borough Council's proposals, but seek to improve upon the levels of electoral equality and as a result we have recommended five amendments in Taunton and two amendments in Wellington.

49 In the rural areas the Borough Council's proposed Bradford-on-Tone ward and its proposals in the north-east, affecting the existing Neroche, North Curry and Stoke St Gregory wards, result in variances of more than 10%. As noted above we would expect this level of electoral equality to be fully justified, which in our view has not been the case. We note that the Borough Council's proposals in the north-east have received local opposition, but the alternatives put forward produce an even higher level of electoral inequality, which we do not consider to have been sufficiently justified at this stage.

50 As we have not been persuaded to adopt locally developed schemes in the Bradford-on-Tone and north-eastern areas, we have examined options that provided for higher levels of electoral equality. In both areas we found that the distribution of electors constrains the opportunities for resolving the imbalances without resorting to either parish warding or substantial changes to surrounding wards. After identifying options involving parish warding we concluded that this approach would not reflect community identities and for this reason considered a better approach would be to improve electoral equality by combining whole parishes. Consequently we have recommended our own ward patterns in the north-eastern and western areas of the borough.

Warding arrangements

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

- a Neroche, North Curry, Ruishton & Creech and Stoke St Gregory wards (page 31)
- b Blackdown, Monument and Trull wards (page 33)
- c Norton Fitzwarren, Staplegrove and West Monkton wards (page 33)
- d Taunton Fairwater, Taunton Lyngford and Taunton Pryland & Rowbarton wards (page 34)
- e Taunton Blackbrook & Holway and Taunton Halcon wards (page 34)
- f Bishop's Hull, Comeytrove, Taunton Eastgate, Taunton Manor & Wilton and Taunton Killams & Mountfield wards (page 35)
- g Bishop's Lydeard, Bradford-on-Tone, Milverton & North Deane and Wiveliscombe & West Deane wards (page 36)
- h Wellington East, Wellington North and Wellington Rockwell Green & West wards (page 38)

52 Details of our draft recommendations are set out in Tables 1 and 2, and illustrated on the large maps accompanying this report.

Neroche, North Curry, Ruishton & Creech and Stoke St Gregory wards

53 Under the existing arrangements Neroche ward comprises the parishes of Corfe, Curland, Staple Fitzpaine, Hatch Beauchamp, Orchard Portman, Bickenhall, West Hatch and Stoke St Mary. North Curry ward comprises the parishes of Durston and North Curry. Ruishton & Creech ward comprises the parishes of Creech St Michael, Ruishton and Thornfalcon. Stoke St Gregory ward comprises the parishes of Burrowbridge and Stoke St Gregory. Table 4 (page 21) outlines the existing electoral variances for 2004 and the variances which the wards are forecast to have by 2009 if the existing arrangements were to remain in place.

54 During Stage One we received five submissions regarding this area. The Borough Council proposed to retain the existing Ruishton & Creech ward and the existing Neroche ward subject to one amendment. It put forward a new, as yet unnamed, two-member ward comprising the existing North Curry and Stoke St Gregory wards and West Hatch parish (transferred from the existing Neroche ward). This proposed ward, henceforth referred to as North Curry & Stoke St Gregory ward, would have 14% fewer electors per councillor than the borough average by 2009.

55 With regard to its proposed North Curry & Stoke St Gregory ward the Borough Council explained that it had received 'a number of representations against the proposed changes' and that 'it is clear...that there is strong opposition to this proposal' due to its impact on community identities and interests. It noted that the resulting electoral imbalance 'is still far from satisfactory', and expressed the opinion that the 'geographical position' of this area at the edge of the borough and the 'rural nature of North Curry, Stoke St Gregory and Burrowbridge makes a suitable alternative very difficult to envisage'. It concluded that it may be more appropriate for the 'status quo [to] be maintained in the three existing wards of Stoke St Gregory, North Curry and Neroche'.

56 Corfe, West Hatch and Stoke St Gregory parish councils expressed their opposition to the Borough Council's proposed North Curry & Stoke St Gregory ward. They explained that the proposed ward, by including West Hatch parish, would combine two geographically distinct areas. They explained that the A358 represents a demarcation between 'the hills and forest of Neroche and the wetlands of North Curry and Stoke St Gregory' and highlighted that the majority of the population of West Hatch parish is south of this road.

57 West Hatch Parish Council considered that the proposal 'makes no sense...in stimulating sustainable community'. It explained that it is closely linked to 'the neighbouring parishes of Staple Fitzpaine, Hatch Beauchamp and Stoke St Mary with whom [it] is associated in the wider benefice' whereas it has 'no natural informal networking meeting points with the communities' that comprise the rest of the proposed North Curry & Stoke St Gregory ward. Corfe Parish Council expressed a similar view explaining that it 'would prefer to see boundaries remain as they are so as to include communities which relate to one another'.

58 Stoke St Gregory Parish Council considered that the physical size of the proposed ward would hinder a councillor's ability to ensure effective representation and expressed a preference for single-member representation. It suggested an alternative proposal whereby Durston parish is transferred from the existing North Curry ward to comprise part of Stoke St Gregory ward.

59 Stoke St Mary Parish Council proposed an amendment to the Borough Council's proposals where Hatch Beauchamp parish would comprise part of the proposed North Curry & Stoke St Gregory ward and West Hatch parish would comprise part of the proposed Neroche ward. It suggested that this would ensure that a modified Neroche ward would be 'a more manageable area'. This proposal would result in Neroche ward having a variance of 20% fewer electors per councillor than the borough average by 2009, which we do not consider has been justified.

60 We have carefully considered the representations and proposals we have received for this area. We are of the view that there is a general consensus for the existing single-member Neroche, North Curry and Stoke St Gregory wards to be retained. We have considered this option and concluded that the evidence we have received is insufficient to justify the significant electoral imbalance secured by retaining Stoke St Gregory ward, which would have a variance of 33% fewer electors per councillor than the borough average by 2009. Indeed, it would require an exceptionally strong case to justify this level of electoral imbalance.

61 Nevertheless, we examined the potential for addressing this significant electoral imbalance. One option would be to combine Stoke St Gregory ward with part of North Curry parish. This would require dividing the village of North Curry, which we do not consider would reflect community identity. We note Stoke St Gregory Parish Council's proposal to combine Durston parish with Stoke St Gregory ward. However, as they do not share a boundary, this would create a detached ward, which we do not consider to be desirable.

62 We examined the option of modifying the Borough Council's North Curry & Stoke St Gregory ward by transferring West Hatch parish to Neroche ward. This would result in the proposed North Curry & Stoke St Gregory ward having a variance of 22% fewer electors per councillor than the borough average by 2009. We consider this to be a significant electoral imbalance, which would require strong justification. However, at this stage we are of the view that the evidence we have received is insufficient to justify this level of electoral inequality. We recognise that West Hatch parish's community links may be with the surrounding parishes which comprise Neroche ward, but the evidence we have received regarding these shared community identities and interests is not compelling. We accept that West Hatch parish and the rest of the proposed North Curry & Stoke St Gregory ward do not share a similar geographical composition, but we do not consider that we have received sufficient evidence of how this affects community identities and interests. In addition, we consider that we have not received sufficient evidence regarding how this combination of geography would hinder councillors in representing the comprising communities' interests.

63 However, due to the limited evidence supporting its proposals, we were not persuaded to adopt the Borough Council's proposed North Curry & Stoke St Gregory ward as we considered it did not provide an acceptable level of electoral equality. We examined a number of options to address this issue and found that the distribution of electors constrains the opportunities for resolving the imbalance without resorting to either parish warding or substantial changes to the existing Neroche and Ruishton & Creech wards. After identifying options involving parish warding, such as warding Creech St Michael parish in order for Creech Heathfield to comprise part of the proposed North Curry & Stoke St Gregory ward, we concluded that this would divide communities and are of the view that a better approach would be to improve electoral equality by combining whole parishes. While this approach results in larger wards

that include a number of communities that do not have strong links we consider this preferable to smaller wards that divide villages and communities.

64 Therefore, due to the limited evidence in support of alternative ward patterns and in order to achieve a good level of electoral equality while avoiding dividing parishes, we propose our own pattern of wards in this area. As part of our draft recommendations, we propose a new three-member ward combining the existing North Curry and Stoke St Gregory wards with Creech St Michael parish, which we propose to name Creech, North Curry & Stoke St Gregory ward, and a new two-member ward combining the existing Neroche ward with the parishes of Ruishton and Thornfalcon, which we propose to name Ruishton & Neroche ward.

65 Tables 1 and 2 (on pages 9 and 11, respectively) provide details of the constituent parts and electoral variances of our draft recommendations for Creech, North Curry & Stoke St Gregory and Ruishton & Neroche wards. Our draft recommendations are shown on Map 1 accompanying this report.

Blackdown, Monument and Trull wards

66 Under the existing arrangements Blackdown ward comprises the parishes of Churchstanton, Otterford and Pitminster. Monument ward comprises the parishes of Sampford Arundel, Wellington Without and West Buckland. Trull ward comprises the Trull parish ward of Trull parish. Table 4 (page 21) outlines the existing electoral variances for 2004 and the variances which the wards are forecast to have by 2009 if the existing arrangements were to remain in place.

67 The Borough Council proposed to retain the existing Blackdown, Monument and Trull wards. The Borough Council did not provide evidence to support its proposal, but given the good levels of electoral equality we propose to adopt the proposed Blackdown, Monument and Trull wards as part of our draft recommendations. Given the lack of community identity argument in the area we would welcome comments on our proposals and further evidence.

68 Tables 1 and 2 (on pages 9 and 11, respectively) provide details of the constituent parts and electoral variances of our draft recommendations for Blackdown, Monument and Trull wards. Our draft recommendations are shown on Map 1 accompanying this report.

Norton Fitzwarren, Staplegrove and West Monkton wards

69 Under the existing arrangements Norton Fitzwarren ward comprises the parish of Norton Fitzwarren. Staplegrove ward comprises the parishes of Kingston St Mary, Staplegrove and Cheddon parish ward of Cheddon Fitzpaine parish and an unparished area. West Monkton ward comprises West Monkton parish and Maidenbrook parish ward of Cheddon Fitzpaine parish. Table 4 (page 21) outlines the existing electoral variances for 2004 and the variances which the wards are forecast to have by 2009 if the existing arrangements were to remain in place.

70 The Borough Council proposed to retain the existing Norton Fitzwarren, Staplegrove and West Monkton wards, but it proposed to allocate an additional councillor to its proposed North Fitzwarren ward and West Monkton ward to address their projected high levels of electoral inequality. The Borough Council did not provide strong evidence in support of its proposals, but given the good levels of

electoral equality we propose to adopt the proposed Norton Fitzwarren, Staplegrove and West Monkton wards as part of our draft recommendations. Given the lack of community identity argument in the area we would welcome comments on our proposals and further evidence.

71 Tables 1 and 2 (on pages 9 and 11, respectively) provide details of the constituent parts and electoral variances of our draft recommendations for Norton Fitzwarren, Staplegrove and West Monkton wards. Our draft recommendations are shown on Map 1 accompanying this report.

Taunton Fairwater, Taunton Lyngford and Taunton Pryland & Rowbarton wards

72 Under the existing arrangements Taunton Fairwater, Taunton Lyngford and Taunton Pryland & Rowbarton wards are currently unparished. Table 4 (page 21) outlines the existing electoral variances for 2004 and the variances which the wards are forecast to have by 2009 if the existing arrangements were to remain in place.

73 The Borough Council proposed to retain the existing Taunton Fairwater ward and put forward an amendment to the existing Taunton Lyngford and Taunton Pryland & Rowbarton wards. It proposed to amend the existing boundary in order to transfer some 180 electors from the existing Taunton Lyngford ward to Taunton Pryland & Rowbarton ward, thereby securing an improved level of electoral equality. It proposed that the boundary, rather than departing Eastwick Road at the junction with Dorchester Road, should continue along Eastwick Road before turning to follow the centre of Buckland Road until it meets the existing eastern boundary of Taunton Lyngford and Taunton Pryland & Rowbarton wards. This amendment would ensure that Taunton Lyngford ward would have 7% more electors per councillor than the borough average and Taunton Pryland & Rowbarton ward would have 2% fewer electors by 2009.

74 We have considered the Borough Council's proposals and due to the good levels of electoral equality we propose to adopt its proposed Taunton Fairwater, Taunton Lyngford and Taunton Pryland & Rowbarton wards subject to a minor amendment. We consider that it would be appropriate for that the proposed boundary between Taunton Lyngford ward and Taunton Pryland & Rowbarton ward to follow the backs of the properties (numbered 2 to 48) on the southern side of Eastwick Road and the backs of the properties on the southern side of Buckland Road.

75 Tables 1 and 2 (on pages 9 and 11, respectively) provide details of the constituent parts and electoral variances of our draft recommendations for Taunton Fairwater, Taunton Lyngford and Taunton Pryland & Rowbarton wards. Our draft recommendations are shown on Map 1 and Map 2 accompanying this report.

Taunton Blackbrook & Holway and Taunton Halcon wards

76 Under the existing arrangements Taunton Blackbrook & Holway and Taunton Halcon wards are currently unparished. Table 4 (page 21) outlines the existing electoral variances for 2004 and the variances which the wards are forecast to have by 2009 if the existing arrangements were to remain in place.

77 The Borough Council proposed to retain the existing Taunton Blackbrook & Holway and Taunton Halcon wards.

78 We have considered the Borough Council's proposals and due to the good levels of electoral equality we propose to adopt its proposed Taunton Blackbrook & Holway and Taunton Halcon wards subject to a minor amendment. We note that the current boundary divides Severn Drive between these two wards. To address this issue we propose to transfer those properties on Severn Drive within the existing Taunton Blackbrook & Holway ward to Taunton Halcon ward.

79 Tables 1 and 2 (on pages 9 and 11, respectively) provide details of the constituent parts and electoral variances of our draft recommendations for Taunton Blackbrook & Holway and Taunton Halcon wards. Our draft recommendations are shown on Map 1 and Map 2 accompanying this report.

Bishop's Hull, Comeytrowe, Taunton Eastgate, Taunton Manor & Wilton and Taunton Killams & Mountfield wards

80 Under the existing arrangements Bishop's Hull ward comprises Bishop's Hull parish and an unparished area. Comeytrowe ward comprises the parish of Comeytrowe. Taunton Eastgate and Taunton Manor & Wilton wards are currently unparished, while Taunton Killams & Mountfield ward comprises Killams parish ward of Trull parish and an unparished area. Table 4 (page 21) outlines the existing electoral variances for 2004 and the variances which the wards are forecast to have by 2009 if the existing arrangements were to remain in place.

81 The Borough Council proposed to retain the existing Bishop's Hull, Comeytrowe and Taunton Manor & Wilton wards. It explained that the existing Comeytrowe ward 'is a single, identifiable community with a relatively minor electoral imbalance'. The Borough Council proposed to amend the boundary between the existing Taunton Eastgate and Taunton Killams & Mountfield ward to provide for an improved level of electoral equality. It proposed the properties on, and south of, Trinity Road and Trevor Smith Place and the area south of the properties on Tauntonfield Close should be transferred from Taunton Eastgate ward to Taunton Killams & Mountfield ward. This transfer would affect some 500 electors and would provide for an improved level of electoral equality, with Taunton Eastgate having 6% more electors and Taunton Killams & Mountfield having 5% fewer electors per councillor than the borough average by 2009.

82 We have considered the Borough Council's proposals and we propose to adopt its proposed Taunton Killams & Mountfield ward due to the good level of electoral equality it achieves.

83 However, we do not consider that the Borough Council has sufficiently justified the variances resulting from its proposal to retain Bishop's Hull and Comeytrowe wards. We have not received any evidence to suggest that the residential areas within Bishop's Hull, Comeytrowe and Taunton Manor & Wilton wards are separate and identifiable communities within the south-west of Taunton. Therefore, we have examined the potential for modifying the Borough Council's proposals to provide for an improved level of electoral equality. We propose to transfer two areas from Taunton Manor & Wilton ward to alleviate the electoral imbalances within Bishop's Hull and Comeytrowe wards. We propose to transfer the properties on, and south of, Southwood Grove and Hoveland Lane to Comeytrowe ward (affecting some 250 electors), and we propose to transfer the area broadly west of Musgrove Park Hospital, Henley Road and Somerset College of Arts and Technology to Bishop's Hull ward (affecting some 220 electors). Our proposals would ensure an improved

level of electoral equality, with the proposed Bishop's Hull and Comeytrove wards having variances of 3% fewer and 6% fewer electors per councillor than the borough average by 2009 respectively.

84 We examined options to address the detrimental effect these two transfers would have on the level of electoral equality secured by Taunton Manor & Wilton ward. As it is effectively separated from Taunton Fairwater ward and Taunton Killams & Mountfield ward, we considered the most appropriate option would be to transfer electors from Taunton Eastgate ward. Therefore, we propose to transfer the area broadly west of Foundary Road, Lower Middle Street, St Mary Magdalene's Church and Eastgate Gardens from Taunton Eastgate ward to Taunton Manor & Wilton ward. Subject to this amendment we propose to adopt the existing Taunton Eastgate and Taunton Manor & Wilton wards.

85 Tables 1 and 2 (on pages 9 and 11, respectively) provide details of the constituent parts and electoral variances of our draft recommendations for Bishop's Hull, Comeytrove, Taunton Eastgate, Taunton Manor & Wilton and Taunton Killams & Mountfield wards. Our draft recommendations are shown on Map 1 and Map 2 accompanying this report.

Bishop's Lydeard, Bradford-on-Tone, Milverton & North Deane and Wiveliscombe & West Deane wards

86 Under the existing arrangements Bishop's Lydeard ward comprises the parishes of Bishop's Lydeard and Cothelstone. Bradford-on-Tone ward comprises the parishes of Bradford-on-Tone, Langford Budville, Nynehead and Oake. Milverton & North Deane ward comprises the parishes of Ash Priors, Combe Florey, Fitzhead, Halse, Lydeard St Lawrence, Milverton, Tolland and West Bagborough. Wiveliscombe & West Deane ward comprises the parishes of Ashbrittle, Bathealton, Chipstable, Stawley and Wiveliscombe. Table 4 (page 21) outlines the existing electoral variances for 2004 and the variances which the wards are forecast to have by 2009 if the existing arrangements were to remain in place.

87 The Borough Council proposed to retain the existing Bradford-on-Tone and Wiveliscombe & West Deane wards. It noted that the existing Bradford-on-Tone ward would result in a variance of 14% more electors per councillor than the borough average by 2009, but considered that it had been 'unable to see any alternative to maintaining the status quo', particularly because it is 'anxious to avoid warding of parishes merely to produce a more satisfactory electoral ratio'. It contended that 'the existing ward provides effective and convenient local government'.

88 In order to alleviate the high level of electoral imbalance secured by the existing Bishop's Lydeard ward, the Borough Council put forward a new single- and three-member ward pattern. It proposed to transfer the parishes of Ash Priors, Combe Florey, Halse and West Bagborough from the existing two-member Milverton & North Deane ward and combine them with the existing Bishop's Lydeard ward to comprise a new, as yet unnamed, three-member ward (henceforth referred to as Bishop's Lydeard ward). The Borough Council proposed that the remaining parishes of Milverton, Fitzhead, Lydeard St Lawrence and Tolland comprise a new single-member Milverton & North Deane ward.

89 The Borough Council explained that 'since the last review the development at Cotford St Luke [within Bishop's Lydeard parish] has continued and some additional

dwellings remain to be built in the near future' and proposed to create a parish ward comprising the village of Cotford St Luke. However, as part of the Borough Council's submission, the Liberal Democrat Group proposed an amendment to the proposed three-member Bishop's Lydeard ward whereby the proposed Cotford St Luke parish ward would comprise a new single-member borough ward.

90 Bishops Lydeard & Cothelstone Parish Council submitted its support for the Borough Council's proposed three-member Bishop's Lydeard ward and the proposal to create a parish ward comprising Cotford St Luke. It also noted 'the potential' for a single-member ward comprising Cotford St Luke, but did not put this forward as a formal proposal.

91 We have considered the Borough Council's proposals for this area. We propose to adopt its proposed Bishop's Lydeard ward due to the good level of electoral equality achieved. We have considered the alternative proposal put forward by the Liberal Democrat Group, but as this achieves a worse level of electoral equality we do not propose to adopt it at this stage. We have considered the proposals of amending the electoral arrangements of Bishops Lydeard & Cothelstone Parish Council and this is discussed in more detail in the parish arrangements section below.

92 However, we consider the Borough Council has provided only limited evidence in support of its proposed Bradford-on-Tone ward in view of its high level of electoral inequality and we have, therefore, examined options to address this. We found that the distribution of electors constrains the opportunities for resolving the imbalance without resorting to either parish warding or substantial changes to surrounding wards. After identifying options involving parish warding, such as an option to ward Oake parish in order to transfer Heathfield and Hill Common to the proposed Bishop's Lydeard ward, we concluded such an approach would result in a division of communities and are of the view that a better approach would be to improve electoral equality by combining whole parishes. While this approach results in larger wards that include a number of communities that do not have strong links we consider this preferable to smaller wards that divide villages and communities.

93 Therefore, in light of the limited evidence in support of the proposed Bradford-on-Tone ward and in order to achieve a good level of electoral equality while avoiding dividing parishes, we propose our own new two two-member ward pattern. We propose to combine Bradford-on-Tone ward with the parishes of Ashbrittle, Bathealton, Stawley and Milverton to comprise a new two-member Milverton, Bradford-on-Tone & West Deane ward and to combine the parishes of Chipstable, Fitzhead, Lydeard St Lawrence, Tolland and Wiveliscombe to comprise a new two-member Wiveliscombe & North Deane ward.

94 Tables 1 and 2 (on pages 9 and 11, respectively) provide details of the constituent parts and electoral variances of our draft recommendations for Bishop's Lydeard, Milverton, Bradford-on-Tone & West Deane and Wiveliscombe & North Deane wards. Our draft recommendations are shown on Map 1 accompanying this report.

Wellington East, Wellington North and Wellington Rockwell Green & West wards

95 Under the existing arrangements Wellington East, Wellington North and Wellington Rockwell Green & West wards encompass Wellington Town Council. Wellington East ward comprises Wellington East parish ward, Wellington North comprises Wellington North Parish ward, and Wellington Rockwell Green & West ward comprises Rockwell Green and Wellington West parish wards. Table 4 (page 21) outlines the existing electoral variances for 2004 and the variances which the wards are forecast to have by 2009 if the existing arrangements were to remain in place.

96 The Borough Council proposed to retain the existing Wellington East, Wellington North and Wellington Rockwell Green & West wards, but did not explain why retaining the existing wards would provide a good reflection of the statutory criteria.

97 Retaining the three existing wards in Wellington does result in relatively good levels of electoral equality. However, we note that Wellington North ward would have 8% more electors per councillor than the borough average and Wellington Rockwell Green & West ward would have 9% fewer by 2009 and, as there is no evidence to support these levels of electoral variance we examined options to minimise them.

98 We considered the option of transferring electors from Wellington East ward to Wellington Rockwell Green & West ward and from Wellington North ward to Wellington East ward. However, we considered that the existing boundary between Wellington North ward and Wellington East ward (following the High Street) provided a clear demarcation within the town. Consequently, we propose to transfer some 150 electors broadly west of Waterloo Road and south of Corams Lane from Wellington North ward to Wellington Rockwell Green & West ward. In addition, we propose to transfer the properties west of Hoyles Road from Wellington East ward to Wellington Rockwell Green & West ward, which would affect some 70 electors. This requires consequential amendments to Wellington Town Council's electoral arrangements and is discussed in more detail in the parish arrangements section below.

99 Tables 1 and 2 (on pages 9 and 11, respectively) provide details of the constituent parts and electoral variances of our draft recommendations for Wellington East, Wellington North and Wellington Rockwell Green & West wards. Our draft recommendations are shown on Map 1 and Map 3 accompanying this report.

Conclusions

100 Table 5 shows how our draft recommendations will affect electoral equality, comparing them with the current arrangements (based on 2004 electorate figures) and with forecast electorates for the year 2009.

Table 5: Comparison of current and recommended electoral arrangements

| | Current arrangements | | Draft recommendations | |
|--|----------------------|-------|-----------------------|-------|
| | 2004 | 2009 | 2004 | 2009 |
| Number of councillors | 54 | 54 | 56 | 56 |
| Number of wards | 27 | 27 | 24 | 24 |
| Average number of electors per councillor | 1,514 | 1,663 | 1,460 | 1,603 |
| Number of wards with a variance more than 10% from the average | 11 | 11 | 7 | 0 |
| Number of wards with a variance more than 20% from the average | 2 | 6 | 2 | 0 |

101 As shown in Table 5, our draft recommendations for Taunton Deane Borough Council would result in a reduction in the number of wards with an electoral variance of more than 10% from 11 to seven. By 2009 no wards are forecast to have an electoral variance of more than 8%. We propose to increase council size and are recommending a council of 56 members.

Draft recommendation:

Taunton Deane Borough Council should comprise 56 councillors serving 24 wards, as detailed and named in Tables 1 and 2, and illustrated on the large maps accompanying this report.

Parish electoral arrangements

102 As part of an FER the Committee can make recommendations for new electoral arrangements for parishes. Where there is no impact on the Borough Council's electoral arrangements, the Committee will generally be content to put forward for consideration proposals from parish and town councils for changes to parish electoral arrangements in FERs. However, The Boundary Committee will usually wish to see a degree of consensus between the Borough Council and the parish council concerned. Proposals should be supported by evidence, illustrating why changes to parish electoral arrangements are required. The Boundary Committee cannot recommend changes to the external boundaries of parishes as part of an FER.

103 Responsibility for reviewing and implementing changes to the electoral arrangements of existing parishes, outside of an electoral review conducted by The Boundary Committee, lies with district or borough councils.² If a district or borough council wishes to make an Order amending the electoral arrangements of a parish that has been subject to an electoral arrangements Order made by either the Secretary of State or The Electoral Commission within the past five years, the consent of the Commission is required.

104 During Stage One we received proposals for revised parish council electoral arrangements from the Borough Council and Bishops Lydeard & Cothelstone Parish Council. Currently the Parish Council comprises 16 councillors where 15 councillors are returned from Bishop's Lydeard parish and one councillor is returned from Cothelstone parish. The Borough Council and the Parish Council proposed to create a parish ward based on Cotford St Luke (within Bishop's Lydeard parish). However, they submitted conflicting proposals to revise the distribution of parish councillors.

105 The Borough Council did not put forward a formal proposal, but considered that 'some reduction' in the number of councillors is 'advisable' and put forward a 'possible division of seats' where Cothelstone parish continues to return one councillor, the proposed Bishop's Lydeard parish ward returns five parish councillors and the proposed Cotford St Luke parish ward returns three parish councillors. The Parish Council also proposed that Cothelstone parish continues to return one councillor, but suggested that the proposed Bishop's Lydeard parish ward returns 10 parish councillors and the proposed Cotford St Luke parish ward returns five parish councillors. In addition, it considered that 'a further modification ... may be the rationalisation to a lesser number [of parish councillors], [where] allocation [is] apportioned to the appropriate electorate distribution'.

106 The proposal to ward Bishop's Lydeard parish has no impact on the Borough Council's electoral arrangements and, generally, we would be content to recommend the proposed change. However, we would wish to see a degree of consensus between local proposals. Consequently, as the Borough Council and Parish Council's proposals do not agree on the appropriate number and distribution of parish councillors, we do not propose to recommend changes to the Parish Council's electoral arrangements, but we would welcome further comments on this issue during Stage Three.

Draft recommendation:

Bishops Lydeard & Cothelstone Parish Council should comprise 16 councillors, as at present, representing two parishes: Bishop's Lydeard (returning 15 councillors); and Cothelstone (returning one councillor).

107 When reviewing electoral arrangements, we are required to comply as far as possible with the rules set out in Schedule 11 to the 1972 Act. The Schedule provides that if a parish is to be divided between different borough wards it must also be divided into parish wards, so that each parish ward lies wholly within a single ward of the borough. Accordingly, we propose consequential warding arrangements for the parish of Wellington to reflect the proposed borough wards.

² Such reviews must be conducted in accordance with section 17 of the Local Government and Rating Act 1997.

108 The parish of Wellington is currently served by 15 councillors representing four wards: Wellington East, Wellington North and Wellington West parish wards all return four councillors, while Rockwell Green parish ward returns three councillors. Wellington East and Wellington North parish wards comprise the borough wards of the same name and the parish wards of Rockwell Green and Wellington West comprise Wellington Rockwell Green & West ward. We propose to retain the current number and distribution of councillors, but we recommend that the parish wards' boundaries are amended to reflect our proposed amendments to Wellington East, Wellington West and Wellington Rockwell Green & West borough wards.

Draft recommendation:

Wellington Town Council should comprise 15 councillors, as at present, representing four wards: Wellington East (returning four councillors); Wellington North (returning four councillors); Wellington West (returning four councillors); and Rockwell Green (returning three councillors). The parish ward boundaries should reflect the proposed borough ward boundaries in the area, as illustrated and named on Map 3.

5 What happens next?

109 There will now be a consultation period of 14 weeks, during which everyone is invited to comment on the draft recommendations on future electoral arrangements for Taunton Deane contained in this report. We will take into account fully all submissions received by 6 March 2006. Any received after this date may not be taken into account.

110 We have not finalised our conclusions on the electoral arrangements for Taunton Deane and welcome comments from interested parties relating to the proposed ward boundaries, number of councillors, ward names, and parish council electoral arrangements. In particular, we found our decisions regarding the rural areas in the north-east and the west of the borough to be a difficult judgement between our statutory criteria. This was due to high levels of electoral inequality and the lack of evidence received from local interested parties during Stage One. In these cases, we have sought to achieve the best levels of electoral equality in the absence of any evidence reflecting the other two criteria, and would particularly welcome local views, backed up by demonstrable evidence, during Stage Three. We will consider all the evidence submitted to us during the consultation period before preparing our final recommendations.

111 Express your views by writing directly to:

**Review Manager
Taunton Deane Review
The Boundary Committee for England
Trevelyan House
Great Peter Street
London SW1P 2HW**

reviews@boundarycommittee.org.uk

Submissions can also be made online at
www.boundarycommittee.org.uk/our-work/ferfeedback.cfm.

112 Please note that the consultation stages of an electoral review are public consultations. In the interests of openness and transparency, the Committee now makes available for public inspection full copies of all representations it takes into account as part of a review. Accordingly, copies of all Stage Three representations will be placed on deposit locally at the offices of Taunton Deane Council, at the Committee's offices in Trevelyan House and on its website at www.boundarycommittee.org.uk. A list of respondents will be available from us on request after the end of the consultation period.

113 In the light of representations received, we will review our draft recommendations and 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 Electoral Commission. After the publication of our final recommendations, all further correspondence should be sent to The Electoral Commission, which cannot make the electoral change Order giving effect to our recommendations until six weeks after it receives them.

6 Mapping

Draft recommendations for Taunton Deane:

The following maps illustrate our proposed ward boundaries for Taunton Deane.

Sheet 1, Map 1 illustrates in outline form the proposed wards for Taunton Deane, including constituent parishes.

Sheet 2, Map 2 illustrates the proposed boundaries in the town of Taunton.

Sheet 3, Map 3 illustrates the proposed boundaries in the town of Wellington.

Appendix A

Glossary and abbreviations

| | |
|---|--|
| AONB (Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty) | A landscape whose distinctive character and natural beauty are so outstanding that it is in the nation's interest to safeguard it |
| The Boundary Committee | The Boundary Committee for England is a committee of The Electoral Commission, responsible for undertaking electoral reviews |
| Constituent areas | The geographical areas that make up any one ward, expressed in parishes or existing wards, or parts of either |
| Consultation | An opportunity for interested parties to comment and make proposals at key stages during the review |
| Council size | The number of councillors elected to serve a council |
| Order (or electoral change Order) | A legal document which implements changes to the electoral arrangements of a local authority |
| The Electoral Commission | An independent body that was set up by the UK Parliament. Its mission is to foster public confidence and participation by promoting integrity, involvement and effectiveness in the democratic process |
| Electoral equality | A measure of ensuring that every person's vote is of equal worth |
| Electoral imbalance | Where there is a large difference between the number of electors represented by a councillor and the average for the borough |
| Electorate | People in the authority who are registered to vote in local government elections |
| FER (or Further Electoral Review) | A further review of the electoral arrangements of a local authority following significant shifts in the electorate since the last Periodic Electoral Review conducted between 1996 and 2004 |

| | |
|-----------------------------------|---|
| Multi-member ward | A ward represented by more than one councillor and usually not more than three councillors |
| National Park | <p>The twelve National Parks in England and Wales were designated under the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act of 1949 and will soon be joined by the new designation of the South Downs. The definition of a National Park is:</p> <p>‘an extensive area of beautiful and relatively wild country in which, for the nation’s benefit and by appropriate national decision and action:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the characteristic landscape beauty is strictly preserved; - access and facilities for open-air enjoyment are amply provided; - wildlife and buildings and places of architectural and historic interest are suitably protected; - established farming use is effectively maintained’ |
| Number of electors per councillor | The total number of electors in a local authority divided by the number of councillors |
| Over-represented | Where there are fewer electors per councillor in a ward than the average the electors can be described as being over-represented |
| Parish | A specific and defined area of land within a single borough enclosed within a parish boundary. There are over 10,000 parishes in England, which provide the first tier of representation to their local residents |
| Parish council | A body elected by residents of the parish who are on the electoral register, which serves and represents the area defined by the parish boundaries |
| Parish electoral arrangements | The total number of parish councillors; the number, names and boundaries of parish wards; and the number of councillors for each ward |

| | |
|------------------------------------|---|
| Parish ward | A particular area of a parish, defined for electoral, administrative and representational purposes. Eligible electors vote in whichever parish ward they live for candidate or candidates they wish to represent them on the parish council |
| PER (or Periodic Electoral Review) | A review of the electoral arrangements of all local authorities in England, undertaken periodically. The last programme of PERs was undertaken between 1996 and 2004 by The Boundary Committee for England and its predecessor, the now-defunct Local Government Commission for England |
| Political management arrangements | The Local Government Act 2000 enabled local authorities to modernise their decision-making process. Councils could choose from three broad categories; a directly elected mayor and cabinet; a cabinet with a leader; or a directly elected mayor and council manager. Whichever of the categories it adopted became the new political management structure for the council |
| Under-represented | Where there are more electors per councillor in a ward than the average the electors can be described as being under-represented |
| Variance (or electoral variance) | How far the number of electors per councillor in a ward varies in percentage terms from the borough average |
| Ward | A specific area of a district or borough, defined for electoral, administrative and representational purposes. Eligible electors vote in whichever ward they are registered for the candidate or candidates they wish to represent them on the borough council |

Appendix B

Code of practice on written consultation

The Cabinet Office's November 2000 *Code of Practice on Written Consultation* (available www.cabinet-office.gov.uk/regulation/Consultation/Code.htm), requires all Government Departments and Agencies to adhere to certain criteria, set out below, on the conduct of public consultations. Public bodies, such as The Boundary Committee for England, are encouraged to follow the Code.

The Code of Practice applies to consultation documents published after 1 January 2001, which should reproduce the criteria, give explanations of any departures, and confirm that the criteria have otherwise been followed.

Table B1: The Boundary Committee for England's compliance with Code criteria

| Criteria | Compliance/departure |
|---|----------------------------------|
| Timing of consultation should be built into the planning process for a policy (including legislation) or service from the start, so that it has the best prospect of improving the proposals concerned, and so that sufficient time is left for it at each stage. | We comply with this requirement. |
| It should be clear who is being consulted, about what questions, in what timescale and for what purpose. | We comply with this requirement. |
| A consultation document should be as simple and concise as possible. It should include a summary, in two pages at most, of the main questions it seeks views on. It should make it as easy as possible for readers to respond, make contact or complain. | We comply with this requirement. |
| Documents should be made widely available, with the fullest use of electronic means (though not to the exclusion of others), and effectively drawn to the attention of all interested groups and individuals. | We comply with this requirement. |
| Sufficient time should be allowed for considered responses from all groups with an interest. Twelve weeks should be the standard minimum period for a consultation. | We comply with this requirement. |
| Responses should be carefully and open-mindedly analysed, and the results made widely available, with an account of the views expressed, and reasons for decisions finally taken. | We comply with this requirement. |
| Departments should monitor and evaluate consultations, designating a consultation coordinator who will ensure the lessons are disseminated. | We comply with this requirement. |

