

LOCAL
GOVERNMENT
COMMISSION
FOR ENGLAND

FINAL
RECOMMENDATIONS
ON THE FUTURE
ELECTORAL
ARRANGEMENTS FOR
BRIDGNORTH
IN SHROPSHIRE

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

August 1999

LOCAL GOVERNMENT COMMISSION FOR ENGLAND

This report sets out the Commission's final recommendations on the electoral arrangements for the district of Bridgnorth in Shropshire.

Members of the Commission are:

Professor Malcolm Grant (Chairman)

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A large map illustrating the proposed ward boundaries for Bridgnorth town is inserted inside the back cover of the report



Local Government Commission for England

3 August 1999

Dear Secretary of State

On 4 August 1998 the Commission began a periodic electoral review of Bridgnorth under the Local Government Act 1992. We published our draft recommendations in March 1999 and undertook an eight-week period of consultation.

We have now prepared our final recommendations in the light of the consultation. We have substantially confirmed our draft recommendations, although some modifications have been made (see paragraphs 106-107) in the light of further evidence. This report sets out our final recommendations for changes to electoral arrangements in Bridgnorth.

We recommend that Bridgnorth District Council should be served by 34 councillors representing 21 wards, and that changes should be made to ward boundaries in order to improve electoral equality, having regard to the statutory criteria. We recommend that the whole Council should continue to be elected together.

We note that you have now set out in the White Paper *Modern Local Government – In Touch with the People* (Cm 4014, HMSO), legislative proposals for a number of changes to local authority electoral arrangements. However, until such time as that new legislation is in place we are obliged to conduct our work in accordance with current legislation, and to continue our current approach to periodic electoral reviews.

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

Yours sincerely

PROFESSOR MALCOLM GRANT
Chairman

SUMMARY

The Commission began a review of Bridgnorth on 4 August 1998. We published our draft recommendations for electoral arrangements on 2 March 1999, after which we undertook an eight-week period of consultation.

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

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

- **in 12 of the 20 wards the number of electors represented by each councillor varies by more than 10 per cent from the average for the district, and six wards vary by more than 20 per cent from the average;**
- **by 2003 little overall improvement in electoral equality is expected, with the number of electors per councillor forecast to vary by more than 10 per cent from the average in nine wards and by more than 20 per cent in seven wards.**

Our main final recommendations for future electoral arrangements (Figures 1 and 2 and paragraphs 106-107) are that:

- **Bridgnorth District Council should have 34 councillors, one more than at present;**
- **there should be 21 wards, one more than at present;**
- **the boundaries of 16 of the existing wards should be modified and four wards should retain their existing boundaries;**
- **elections should continue to take place every four years.**

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

- **The number of electors per councillor would vary by more than 10 per cent from the district average in only one ward, Stottesdon.**
- **An improved level of electoral equality is forecast to continue, with the number of electors per councillor in 19 wards expected to vary by no more than 10 per cent from the average for the district in 2003. Stottesdon and Worfield wards would each vary by 11 per cent.**

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

- **revised warding arrangements and the redistribution of councillors for the parishes of Albrighton, Bridgnorth, Broseley, Shifnal and Worfield.**

All further correspondence on these recommendations and the matters discussed in this report should be addressed to the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, who will not make an order implementing the Commission's recommendations before 13 September 1999:

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

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

Ward name	Number of councillors	Constituent areas	Map reference
1 Albrighton South	2	Albrighton ward (part – Boningale parish and part of Albrighton parish)	Maps 2 and A2
2 Alveley	2	Alveley ward (Alveley, Quatt Malvern and Romsley parishes); Worfield ward (part – part of Worfield parish)	Maps 2 and A4
3 Bridgnorth Castle	2	Bridgnorth Castle ward; Bridgnorth West ward (part)	Large map
4 Bridgnorth East	2	Bridgnorth East ward; Bridgnorth Morfe ward (part); Bridgnorth West ward (part)	Large map
5 Bridgnorth Morfe	2	Bridgnorth Morfe ward (part)	Large map
6 Bridgnorth West	2	Bridgnorth West ward (part)	Large map
7 Broseley East	2	Broseley ward (part – part of Broseley parish)	Maps 2 and A3
8 Broseley West	2	Broseley ward (part – part of Broseley parish); Much Wenlock ward (part – Barrow parish)	Maps 2 and A3
9 Claverley	1	<i>Unchanged</i> (Claverley parish)	Map 2
10 Ditton Priors	1	Ditton Priors ward (part – Ditton Priors parish); Kinlet ward (part – Farlow parish); Stottesdon ward (part – Aston Botterell, Burwarton, Cleobury North and Neenton parishes)	Map 2
11 Donington & Albrighton North	2	Albrighton ward (part – part of Albrighton parish); Sheriffhales ward (part – Boscobel, Donington and Tong parishes)	Maps 2 and A2
12 Glazeley	1	<i>Unchanged</i> (Billingsley, Chelmarsh, Chetton, Deuxhill, Eardington, Glazeley and Middleton Scriven parishes)	Map 2
13 Harrington	1	<i>Unchanged</i> (Badger, Beckbury, Ryton, Kemberton, Stockton and Sutton Maddock parishes)	Map 2
14 Highley	2	<i>Unchanged</i> (Highley parish)	Map 2

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

Ward name	Number of councillors	Constituent areas	Map reference
15 Morville	1	Morville ward (Acton Round, Astley Abbots, Aston Eyre, Morville, Tasley and Upton Cressett parishes); Ditton Priors ward (part – Monkhopton parish)	Map 2
16 Much Wenlock	2	Much Wenlock ward (part – Much Wenlock parish); Ditton Priors ward (part – Easthope, Shipton and Stanton Long parishes)	Map 2
17 Shifnal Idsall	2	Idsall ward (part – part of Idsall parish ward of Shifnal parish); Manor ward (part – part of Manor parish ward of Shifnal parish)	Maps 2 and A5
18 Shifnal Manor	2	Manor ward (part – part of Manor parish ward of Shifnal parish)	Maps 2 and A5
19 Shifnal Rural	1	Sheriffhales ward (part – Sheriffhales parish); Idsall ward (part – part of Idsall parish ward of Shifnal parish)	Maps 2 and A5
20 Stottesdon	1	Stottesdon ward (part – Sidbury and Stottesdon parishes); Kinlet ward (part – Kinlet and Neen Savage parishes)	Map 2
21 Worfield	1	Worfield ward (part – Rudge parish and part of Worfield parish)	Maps 2 and A4

Note: The district is entirely parished.

Figure 2:
The Commission's Final Recommendations for Bridgnorth

Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (1998)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2003)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
1 Albrighton South	2	2,473	1,237	3	2,576	1,288	4
2 Alveley	2	2,353	1,177	-2	2,397	1,199	-3
3 Bridgnorth Castle	2	2,453	1,227	2	2,472	1,236	0
4 Bridgnorth East	2	2,430	1,215	1	2,475	1,238	0
5 Bridgnorth Morfe	2	2,425	1,213	1	2,441	1,221	-2
6 Bridgnorth West	2	2,504	1,252	4	2,510	1,255	1
7 Broseley East	2	2,206	1,103	-9	2,236	1,118	-10
8 Broseley West	2	2,221	1,111	-8	2,256	1,128	-9
9 Claverley	1	1,249	1,249	4	1,275	1,275	3
10 Ditton Priors	1	1,247	1,247	3	1,329	1,329	7
11 Donington & Albrighton North	2	2,325	1,163	-4	2,382	1,191	-4
12 Glazeley	1	1,252	1,252	4	1,346	1,346	9
13 Harrington	1	1,126	1,126	-7	1,161	1,161	-6
14 Highley	2	2,574	1,287	7	2,663	1,332	7
15 Morville	1	1,229	1,229	2	1,292	1,292	4
16 Much Wenlock	2	2,456	1,228	2	2,624	1,312	6
17 Shifnal Idsall	2	2,389	1,195	-1	2,417	1,209	-3
18 Shifnal Manor	2	2,207	1,104	-9	2,269	1,135	-8
19 Shifnal Rural	1	1,243	1,243	3	1,269	1,269	2

Figure 2 (continued):
The Commission's Final Recommendations for Bridgnorth

Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (1998)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2003)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
20 Stottesdon	1	1,321	1,321	10	1,381	1,381	11
21 Worfield	1	1,334	1,334	11	1,370	1,370	11
Totals	34	41,017	—	—	42,141	—	—
Averages	—	—	1,206	—	—	1,239	—

Source: Electorate figures are based on information provided by Bridgnorth 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. Figures have been rounded to the nearest whole number.

1. INTRODUCTION

1 This report contains our final recommendations on the electoral arrangements for the district of Bridgnorth in Shropshire. We have now reviewed the districts in Shropshire (excluding Telford & Wrekin Council) as part of our programme of periodic electoral reviews (PERs) of all principal local authority areas in England. (At the direction of the Secretary of State we undertook an electoral review of Telford & Wrekin Council, formerly The Wrekin, in 1996; we will be undertaking a PER of Telford & Wrekin at a later date).

2 This was our first review of the electoral arrangements of Bridgnorth. The last such review was undertaken by our predecessor, the Local Government Boundary Commission (LGBC), which reported to the Secretary of State in June 1976 (Report No. 154). The electoral arrangements of Shropshire County Council were last reviewed in May 1980 (Report No. 382). We intend reviewing the County Council's electoral arrangements in due course.

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

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

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

5 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.

6 Following publication of the White Paper, we advised all authorities in our 1998/99 PER programme, including the Shropshire districts, that until any direction is received from the Secretary of State, the Commission would continue to maintain its current approach to PERs as set out in the March 1998 *Guidance*. Nevertheless, we considered that local authorities and other interested parties might wish to have regard to the Secretary of State's intentions and legislative proposals in formulating electoral schemes as part of PERs of their areas. In view of these developments, we therefore agreed to the request for an extension of four weeks to Stage One in Shropshire to allow local authorities and other interested parties to prepare schemes for our consideration.

7 This review was in four stages. Stage One began on 4 August 1998, when we wrote to Bridgnorth District Council inviting proposals for future electoral arrangements. We also notified Shropshire County Council, West Mercia Police Authority, the local authority associations, Shropshire Association of Parish & Town Councils, parish and town councils in the district, the Members of Parliament and the Member of the European Parliament with constituency interests in the district, 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 7 December 1998. At Stage Two we considered all the representations received during Stage One and prepared our draft recommendations.

8 Stage Three began on 2 March 1999 with the publication of our report, *Draft Recommendations on the Future Electoral Arrangements for Bridgnorth in Shropshire*, and ended on 26 April 1999. Comments were sought on our preliminary conclusions. Finally, during Stage Four we reconsidered our draft recommendations in the light of the Stage Three consultation and now publish our final recommendations.

2. CURRENT ELECTORAL ARRANGEMENTS

9 The district of Bridgnorth has a population of 50,500 covering some 63,400 hectares. It is bounded to the north by Telford & Wrekin Council area, to the west by Shrewsbury & Atcham borough and South Shropshire district, and to the south and east by Worcestershire and Staffordshire. The district is bisected by the River Severn, with the only vehicular crossing point being in the town of Bridgnorth, the district's principal settlement. To the west of the River Severn the district extends along the valleys of the River Rea and Borle Brook towards the uplands in the area of Wenlock Edge. To the east, the district includes the River Worfe valley and extends to include the town of Shifnal and the residential areas around Albrighton and Donington. For the most part the district is agricultural.

10 The district is wholly parished, and contains 51 parishes (including three town councils and two parish meetings). Bridgnorth town comprises around 24 per cent of the district's total electorate.

11 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'.

12 The electorate of the district is 41,017 (February 1998). The Council presently has 33 members who are elected from 20 wards (Map 1 and Figure 4). Three of the wards are each represented by three councillors, seven are each represented by two councillors and the remaining 10 are single-member wards. The whole Council is elected together every four years.

13 Since the last electoral review there has been an increase in the electorate in Bridgnorth district, with around 17 per cent more electors than two decades ago as a result of new housing developments. The most notable increases have been in Bridgnorth West and Broseley wards, which have approximately 950 and 550 more electors respectively than 20 years ago.

14 At present, each councillor represents an average of 1,243 electors, which the District Council forecasts will increase to 1,277 by the year 2003 if the present number of councillors is maintained. However, due to demographic and other changes over the past two decades, the number of electors per councillor in 12 of the 20 wards varies by more than 10 per cent from the district average and in six wards by more than 20 per cent. The worst imbalance is in Worfield ward where the councillor represents 38 per cent more electors than the district average.

Map 1:
Existing Wards in Bridgnorth



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

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Key to Wards

1 Albrighton	8 Claverley	15 Manor
2 Alveley	9 Ditton Priors	16 Morville
3 Bridgnorth Castle	10 Glazeley	17 Much Wenlock
4 Bridgnorth East	11 Harrington	18 Sheriffhales
5 Bridgnorth Morfe	12 Highley	19 Stottesdon
6 Bridgnorth West	13 Idsall	20 Worfield
7 Broseley	14 Kinlet	

Figure 3:
Existing Electoral Arrangements

Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (1998)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2003)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
1 Albrighton	3	3,626	1,209	-3	3,756	1,252	-2
2 Alveley	2	1,978	989	-20	2,018	1,009	-21
3 Bridgnorth Castle	1	947	947	-24	955	955	-25
4 Bridgnorth East	1	1,562	1,562	26	1,603	1,603	26
5 Bridgnorth Morfe	2	3,106	1,553	25	3,126	1,563	22
6 Bridgnorth West	3	4,197	1,399	13	4,214	1,405	10
7 Broseley	3	3,880	1,293	4	3,935	1,312	3
8 Claverley	1	1,249	1,249	0	1,275	1,275	-0
9 Ditton Priors	1	1,044	1,044	-16	1,118	1,118	-12
10 Glazeley	1	1,252	1,252	1	1,346	1,346	5
11 Harrington	1	1,126	1,126	-9	1,161	1,161	-9
12 Highley	2	2,574	1,287	4	2,663	1,332	4
13 Idsall	2	2,753	1,377	11	2,785	1,393	9
14 Kinlet	1	1,101	1,101	-11	1,149	1,149	-10
15 Manor	2	2,536	1,268	2	2,600	1,300	2
16 Morville	1	1,085	1,085	-13	1,148	1,148	-10
17 Much Wenlock	2	2,681	1,341	8	2,839	1,420	11
18 Sheriffhales	2	1,722	861	-31	1,772	886	-31
19 Stottesdon	1	889	889	-28	929	929	-27
20 Worfield	1	1,709	1,709	38	1,749	1,749	37
Totals	33	41,017	—	—	42,141	—	—
Averages	—	—	1,243	—	—	1,277	—

Source: Electorate figures are based on information provided by Bridgnorth 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 1998, electors in Stottesdon ward were relatively over-represented by 28 per cent, while electors in Worfield ward were relatively under-represented by 38 per cent. Figures have been rounded to the nearest whole number.

3. DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS

15 During Stage One we received nine representations, including district-wide schemes from Bridgnorth District Council and Farlow Parish Council, and representations from five other parish and town councils, a councillor, and two local residents who made a joint submission. In the light of these representations and evidence available to us, we reached preliminary conclusions which were set out in our report, *Draft Recommendations on the Future Electoral Arrangements for Bridgnorth in Shropshire*.

16 Our draft recommendations were based on the District Council's proposals, which would achieve significant improvements in electoral equality, and provide a pattern of two-member wards in Bridgnorth town, and a mix of single- and two-member wards in the rest of the district. However, we moved away from the District Council's preferred scheme in a number of areas, affecting five wards, using options generated by Council officers during the early stages of the review process, together with our own proposals. We proposed that:

- (a) Bridgnorth District Council should be served by 34 councillors, compared with the current 33, representing 20 wards, the same number as at present;
- (b) the boundaries of 17 of the existing wards should be modified, while three wards should retain their existing boundaries;
- (c) there should be revised warding arrangements and the redistribution of councillors for the parishes of Albrighton, Bridgnorth, Broseley, Claverley and Shifnal.

Draft Recommendation

Bridgnorth District Council should comprise 34 councillors, serving 20 wards. The whole Council should continue to be elected together every four years.

17 Our proposals would have resulted in significant improvements in electoral equality, with the number of electors per councillor in all wards varying by no more than 10 per cent from the district average. By 2003 only one ward would vary by more than 10 per cent from the average. Stottesdon ward would vary by 11 per cent from the average.

4. RESPONSES TO CONSULTATION

18 During the consultation on our draft recommendations report, 13 representations were received. A list of all respondents is available on request from the Commission. All representations may be inspected at the offices of Bridgnorth District Council and the Commission.

Bridgnorth District Council

19 The District Council stated that, subject to two alternative proposals, “the Council accepts the draft proposals of the Commission”. However, the Council opposed the draft recommendation to transfer Cann Hall Drive and Cann Hall Road from Bridgnorth Morfe ward to Bridgnorth East ward. It also proposed that the new Alveley and Worfield wards should be renamed Alveley & Claverley South and Worfield & Claverley North respectively. In its submission the Council stated that Councillor Nickless, member for Idsall ward, “asked that his dissent be recorded in respect of the proposals for Shifnal”.

Parish Councils

20 At Stage Three we received submissions from four parish councils and Bridgnorth & Shifnal Area Committee of Parish & Town Councils. Claverley Parish Council opposed the draft recommendation to ward the parish in two and combine the northern part with Worfield ward and the southern part with Alveley ward for a mix of geographical, historical and social reasons. The Parish Council included a proforma letter signed by 956 residents of the parish opposing the proposal to divide it between Alveley and Worfield wards as it would not reflect the communities and history locally. The Parish Council proposed that the electoral imbalances in the existing Alveley and Worfield wards should be addressed by including an area in the south of Worfield parish in Alveley ward. Bridgnorth & Shifnal Area Committee of Parish and Town Councils stated that it supported the representations of Claverley Parish Council and Farlow Parish Council (we noted that Farlow Parish Council submitted a representation at Stage One only). Worfield & Rudge Parish Council

opposed the proposal to divide Claverley parish between Alveley and Worfield wards.

21 Chelmarsh and Ditton Priors parish councils both supported the draft recommendations for their areas.

Other Representations

22 A further seven representations were received in response to our draft recommendations from three members of the clergy, a local political group and three local residents.

23 Reverend Cawdell, The Right Reverend John Oliver (Bishop of Hereford) and The Right Reverend Dr John Saxbee (Bishop & Archdeacon of Ludlow) all opposed the draft recommendation to divide Claverley parish between Alveley and Worfield wards. Each supported the proposal to retain Claverley ward on its existing boundaries while proposing a possible alternative which would involve modifying Alveley ward to include part of Worfield parish in the area of The Hobbins.

24 Bridgnorth & Highley Branch Labour Party stated that it supported our draft recommendations.

25 Mr Taylor, member for Bridgnorth Castle ward until the recent elections, considered that the proposal which he had put forward for four two-member wards in Bridgnorth town, which had formed one of the District Council’s two options for the town at Stage One, was preferable to the option which we adopted as part of our draft recommendations, as it would better reflect local communities and geography.

26 A resident of Easthope stated that, although he did not oppose the proposal to include Easthope parish in Much Wenlock ward, he would have preferred Barrow parish to form part of a three-member Much Wenlock ward, as this would better reflect community identities. A resident of Bridgnorth town proposed that Tasley parish should be “fully incorporated into the town of Bridgnorth” for community reasons, stating that

“the residents of Tasley parish are enjoying the benefits of Bridgnorth town, without the requirement to contribute to the costs [of the town council]”. However it should be noted that the Commission is unable to recommend the creation, alteration or abolition of a parish as part of the current review. The District Council is responsible for reviewing parish arrangements under the Local Government and Rating Act 1997.

5. ANALYSIS AND FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS

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

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

29 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.

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

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

Electorate Forecasts

31 At Stage One, the District Council submitted electorate forecasts for the year 2003, projecting an increase in the electorate of some 3 per cent from 41,017 to 42,141 over the five-year period from 1998 to 2003. It expects the growth to be relatively evenly distributed across the district, with the most noticeable increases in Albrighton ward (130 electors) and Much Wenlock ward (158 electors). The Council estimated rates and locations of housing development with regard to structure and local plans, the expected rate of building over the five-year period and assumed occupancy rates. Advice from the District Council on the likely effect on electorates of changes to ward boundaries was obtained.

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

Council Size

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

34 Bridgnorth District Council presently has 33 members. At Stage One, the District Council expressed a wish “to keep its membership at, or as near as possible to, its existing number”, and proposed a council of 34 members, an increase of one. Farlow Parish Council proposed a significant reduction in council size from 33 to 25, arguing that “the number of district council members is too high for the size and electorate of the district”.

35 In our draft recommendations report, we noted that retaining broadly the existing council size was supported by the majority of members on the

District Council, and the Council had consulted with all parish and town councils. We were unaware of any other views in support of a reduction in council size, as proposed by Farlow Parish Council, and had not received evidence to indicate that consideration had been given to how such a reduction in council size would affect the District Council's internal management arrangements, such as council committee sizes. Furthermore we noted that a council size of 25 would lie outside the indicative range we would normally expect for a district council.

36 We stated that, having considered the size and distribution of the electorate, the geography and other characteristics of the area, together with the representations received, we concluded in our consultation report that the achievement of electoral equality and the statutory criteria would best be met by a council of 34 members.

37 At Stage Three, Bridgnorth & Shifnal Area Committee of Parish & Town Councils stated that it supported Farlow Parish Council's representation, which we have assumed to be the Parish Council's Stage One submission as we have not received any further comments from the Parish Council. We received no further proposals or evidence regarding council size. Therefore, in view of the general support for a council size of 34, including that of the District Council, we are content to confirm our draft recommendation for council size as final.

Electoral Arrangements

38 At Stage One we considered carefully all the representations received, including the two district-wide schemes from the District Council and Farlow Parish Council. We noted that the schemes from the District Council and Farlow Parish Council were based on significantly different council sizes (34 and 25 members respectively). Also, Farlow Parish Council did not provide detailed boundaries where it proposed departing from using whole parishes to form new district wards, instead making a number of assumptions regarding the transfer of electors between wards. Having concluded that the current council size should, broadly, be retained, we stated that it had not been possible to adopt any of the Parish Council's proposed wards, which were based on a significantly different average number of electors per councillor.

39 In our draft recommendations report we concluded that in view of the improved electoral equality which would result in much of the district under the District Council's proposals, the consultation the Council had undertaken with parish and town councils, and the degree of consensus behind some of its proposals, our recommendations should be based on the District Council's scheme. We considered that this scheme would provide a better balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria than the current arrangements or other proposals submitted at Stage One. However, to improve electoral equality further, having regard to local community identities and interests, we proposed modifying the boundary between Bridgnorth East and Bridgnorth Morfe wards and adopting the Council's second preference for the Alveley, Claverley and Worfield area. We accepted that the River Severn should form a district ward boundary outside Bridgnorth town.

40 At Stage Three the District Council accepted the draft recommendations, subject to proposing an amendment to a ward boundary in Bridgnorth town and changes to the names of two proposed wards in the east of the district. Bridgnorth & Shifnal Area Committee of Parish & Town Councils stated that it supported Farlow Parish Council's submission. Bridgnorth & Highley Branch Labour Party supported our draft recommendations for the district. We received no other district-wide proposals.

41 We also received a proposal from Claverley Parish Council opposing our draft recommendation to divide Claverley parish between Alveley and Worfield wards. The Parish Council instead proposed that the levels of electoral imbalance in the existing Alveley and Worfield wards should be corrected by transferring an area in the south of Worfield ward to Alveley ward, a proposal which was supported by a number of other respondents. As this proposal had not been previously put forward for consideration during this review and had not been the subject of consultation, we sought further evidence. We wrote to the District Council, the County Council, Shropshire Association of Parish & Town Councils, the parish councils concerned, the local MP and those who had expressed a view on this area during Stage Three, asking for their views and evidence regarding the alternative configurations of wards which had been suggested for the area in order to assist us in arriving at our final recommendation. This aspect of the review is detailed in paragraphs 75 to 78.

42 We have reviewed our draft recommendations in the light of the representations received during Stage Three and the further evidence obtained thereafter and have made some modifications to our draft recommendations. For district warding purposes, the following areas, based on existing wards, are considered in turn:

- (a) Bridgnorth town (four wards);
- (b) Albrighton, Harrington, Idsall, Manor and Sheriffhales wards;
- (c) Alveley, Claverley and Worfield wards;
- (d) Broseley, Morville and Much Wenlock wards;
- (e) Ditton Priors, Glazeley, Highley, Kinlet and Stottesdon wards.

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

Bridgnorth town

44 The town of Bridgnorth is situated in the centre of the district and contains the only vehicle crossing-point over the River Severn in the whole district. The town is currently represented by a total of seven councillors: two single-member wards of Bridgnorth Castle and Bridgnorth East, the two-member Bridgnorth Morfe ward and the three-member Bridgnorth West ward. The town as a whole is relatively under-represented: the average number of electors per councillor is 24 per cent below the district average in Bridgnorth Castle ward (25 per cent in 2003), 26 per cent above in Bridgnorth East ward (the same in 2003), 25 per cent above in Bridgnorth Morfe ward (22 per cent in 2003) and 13 per cent above in Bridgnorth West ward (10 per cent in 2003).

45 At Stage One the District Council put forward two options for consideration for Bridgnorth town, and stated that “neither option [had been] given any higher ranking than the other”. The first option, which had been included in the District Council’s initial consultation document, proposed addressing the under-representation in the town by allocating an additional councillor to the town, which facilitated the creation of four two-member wards, in line with the Government’s White Paper. This option achieved good electoral equality and involved modifying

Bridgnorth Morfe ward so that the area to the north and west of and including the whole of Washbrook Road, and the centre of Hospital Street, Cann Hall Road and Wolverhampton Road would be included in a new Bridgnorth East ward, straddling the River Severn. Bridgnorth East ward would be further modified to include those properties on Dingle View, Greenfields Drive and Greenfields Road, currently in Bridgnorth West ward.

46 The District Council proposed further modifying Bridgnorth West ward so that those properties south of Wenlock Road and Westgate, and including Westgate Drive, would be transferred to a modified Bridgnorth Castle ward. It stated that such a reconfiguration would achieve improved levels of electoral equality while involving minimal change. Under this option the electoral variance in all four wards would be no more than 4 per cent (unchanged in 2003). Bridgnorth Town Council accepted these proposals for change to the town’s electoral arrangements.

47 The District Council’s second option, referred to as “Councillor Taylor’s proposal”, would also have provided four two-member wards, achieving significant improvements to electoral equality and, it argued, would accurately reflect the natural communities within the district. Bridgnorth Morfe ward would be as under the District Council’s first option, with the exception of Cann Hall Drive and the east side of Cann Hall Road, which would be included in a modified Bridgnorth Castle ward. The modified Bridgnorth Castle ward would extend from the south-western boundary of the town to the north-eastern boundary. Its boundary with Bridgnorth East ward would follow the River Severn, turning west to follow the north side of Abbots Way, then south to the west of Greyfriars Way, turning west along Moat Street and lying to the north of properties on Whitburn Street.

48 Under Councillor Taylor’s proposal the boundary between Bridgnorth Castle and Bridgnorth West wards would follow Pound Street, running generally east of Rosehill Drive and Highlands Road, before turning generally west along the A458 until it joins the town boundary. The boundary between Bridgnorth West and Bridgnorth East wards would follow Salop Street, lying east of Westgate Drive, and west of Victoria Road as far as the town boundary. Under this proposal the electoral variance in all four wards would be no more than 3 per cent (2 per cent in 2003).

49 We considered carefully the two proposals put forward by the District Council for this area. As indicated in our draft recommendations report, while both proposals would have secured significant improvements to electoral equality across the town as a whole, we considered that the first option, which was supported by Bridgnorth Town Council, would do so while, in the main, utilising clear boundaries and involving minimal change to the existing arrangements. We therefore put forward the first option as our draft recommendation for the town, subject to a minor modification to the boundary of Bridgnorth Morfe ward to include Cann Hall Road and Cann Hall Drive in the ward to the west, as proposed under Councillor Taylor's option, to further improve electoral equality. Subject to this modification, the number of electors per councillor would be 2 per cent above the district average in Bridgnorth Castle ward (equal to the average in 2003), 1 per cent above in Bridgnorth East ward (equal to the average in 2003), 1 per cent above in Bridgnorth Morfe ward (2 per cent below in 2003) and 4 per cent above in Bridgnorth West ward (1 per cent above in 2003).

50 At Stage Three the District Council stated that it accepted the draft recommendations for Bridgnorth town subject to opposing the transfer of Cann Hall Drive and Cann Hall Road from Bridgnorth Morfe ward to Bridgnorth East ward, which it stated would "sever an existing and established community of interest". Mr Taylor, member for Bridgnorth Castle ward until the recent elections, opposed our draft recommendations for Bridgnorth town, particularly Castle ward, as he considered that they would not reflect communities or geography locally. Mr Taylor preferred his own proposals, which had constituted one of the two options included in the District Council's Stage One submission (detailed earlier).

51 A resident of Bridgnorth proposed that Tasley parish should form part of Bridgnorth parish, stating that "Tasley parish are enjoying the benefits of Bridgnorth town, without the requirement to contribute towards the costs". He noted that incorporating Tasley parish into Bridgnorth town would increase the number of electors in the town, and acknowledged that "this would necessitate further work on revising the wards in both Bridgnorth town and elsewhere in the district". The resident did not provide proposals for such a warding revision.

52 We have considered the views received in relation to Bridgnorth town. With regard to the proposal from a local resident to incorporate Tasley parish into Bridgnorth parish as noted earlier, under the Local Government & Rating Act 1997 we are unable to recommend the creation or abolition of parishes; this power now lies with the District Council concerned. We have considered Mr Taylor's proposals but are not persuaded that the boundaries put forward would better reflect the statutory criteria, and recognise that the draft recommendations reflected proposals submitted and supported by the District Council and the Town Council. In the case of the District Council's opposition to including Cann Hall Drive and Cann Hall Road in Bridgnorth East ward, we note that our proposals would provide improved electoral equality by 2003 and, we judge, satisfactorily reflect community identities locally, in particular the ease of access from Cann Hall Drive to the rest of the proposed Bridgnorth East ward. We are therefore confirming our draft recommendations for the four town wards as final. Our proposed boundaries in the town are illustrated on the large map at the back of the report.

Albrighton, Harrington, Idsall, Manor and Sheriffhales wards

53 These five wards are situated in the north-east of the district. Sheriffhales ward currently comprises the parishes of Boscobel, Donington, Sheriffhales and Tong, and the number of electors represented by each of the ward's two district councillors is 31 per cent below the district average (unchanged in 2003). In Albrighton ward, which comprises Albrighton and Boningale parishes, the number of electors represented by each of the ward's three district councillors is 3 per cent below the district average (2 per cent in 2003).

54 At Stage One, the District Council calculated that the total electorate for the parishes of Albrighton, Boningale, Boscobel, Donington and Tong warrants four district councillors, which it proposed should be represented by two two-member wards. The Council proposed one ward comprising the northern part of Albrighton parish together with the parishes of Boscobel, Donington and Tong, to be called Donington & Albrighton North ward; the other ward, comprising Boningale parish and the southern part of Albrighton parish, would be called Albrighton South. The Council argued that the proposals for these two wards

“would allow the Parish of Donington and the north of the adjoining Parish of Albrighton which share a community of interest to be linked together”.

55 During its own consultation, the District Council’s proposals had been supported by Albrighton Parish Council, and opposed by Donington with Boscobel and Tong parish councils. The District Council informed us that Donington with Boscobel Parish Council had proposed a single-member Donington ward comprising the parishes of Boscobel, Donington and Tong, a two-member ward covering most of Albrighton parish and a single-member ward covering Boscobel parish and the remainder of Albrighton parish, without providing details of the precise boundary for dividing Albrighton parish.

56 Under the District Council’s proposal the number of electors per councillor would be 4 per cent below the district average in Donington & Albrighton North ward (unchanged in 2003), and 3 per cent above the average in Albrighton South ward (4 per cent in 2003).

57 Councillor Leeson, one of the members for Albrighton ward, submitted similar proposals to those of the District Council, which would have produced two wards with similar electorates to those of the District Council.

58 In our draft recommendations, we gave careful consideration to the views received relating to these two wards. We noted the substantial improvements to electoral equality which would be secured across both these two wards and the area as a whole under the District Council’s scheme, and Albrighton Parish Council’s support for the District Council’s proposal to ward the parish. We therefore decided to put forward the District Council’s proposed wards for this area as our draft recommendations. The mapping within our draft recommendations report detailed the proposed division of Albrighton parish, reflecting the District Council’s proposals.

59 Shifnal parish currently comprises the two district and parish wards of Idsall and Manor, each represented by two district councillors. The number of electors per councillor is 11 per cent above the district average in Idsall ward and 2 per cent above the average in Manor ward (9 per cent above and 2 per cent above respectively in 2003).

60 The District Council proposed creating three new wards to cover the area currently occupied by

Idsall ward, Manor ward and Sheriffhales parish. First, it proposed a new two-member Shifnal Idsall ward, comprising the urban area of the existing Idsall ward together with that part of the existing Manor ward which lies generally north of, and including, Greenfields Crescent and the area around Tudor Way. Second, the Council proposed a new single-member Shifnal Rural ward which would comprise Sheriffhales parish and the rest of the existing Idsall ward. Third, it proposed a new two-member Shifnal Manor ward which would comprise the existing Manor ward, except for the area transferred to the proposed Shifnal Idsall ward, as noted earlier.

61 We understood from the District Council that both Sheriffhales Parish Council and Shifnal Town Council supported the proposals for this area. The District Council argued that “there is a clear community of interest between Sheriffhales and Shifnal and this proposal seeks to acknowledge the fact and resolve the existing anomaly whereby Sheriffhales is linked with other parishes with no obvious shared identities”. It stated that it had considered alternative proposals in this area but had discounted them as they would be less representative of community identity and achieve worse electoral equality.

62 Under the District Council’s proposals the number of electors per councillor would be 1 per cent below the district average in Shifnal Idsall ward (3 per cent in 2003), 9 per cent below in Shifnal Manor ward (8 per cent in 2003) and 3 per cent above in Shifnal Rural ward (2 per cent in 2003).

63 In our draft recommendations we gave careful consideration to the District Council’s proposals in this area. We noted that under these proposals Shifnal Manor ward would have a greater degree of electoral imbalance compared with the two wards of Shifnal Idsall and Shifnal Rural and looked at modifying the boundaries between the three wards to provide a more balanced representation across the area. We considered transferring properties in the Admirals Close area from the proposed Shifnal Rural ward to the proposed Shifnal Idsall ward, and transferring properties in the Greenfields Crescent area from the proposed Shifnal Idsall ward to the proposed Shifnal Manor ward. However, we concluded that this would have necessitated transferring parts of roads and would lead to less recognisable boundaries than those proposed by the District Council. In view of the overall improvements in electoral equality which

would result across this area and the positive response which the Council received to its proposals, we put forward the District Council's proposals for these three wards as our draft recommendations. We included mapping for the proposed boundaries in the Shifnal area, reflecting the District Council's proposals.

64 Harrington ward comprises the parishes of Badger, Beckbury, Kemberton, Ryton, Stockton and Sutton Maddock, and the number of electors represented by the ward's councillor is 9 per cent below the average (unchanged in 2003).

65 The District Council proposed that Harrington ward should be retained on its existing boundaries, and referred to its rural nature. Under a council size of 34, the number of electors per councillor would be 7 per cent below the district average (6 per cent in 2003). In view of the reasonable electoral equality and the fact that the proposals would retain the community identity of the existing ward, we proposed no change to Harrington ward as part of our draft recommendations.

66 At Stage Three the District Council accepted the Commission's draft recommendations for the wards in this area, although it informed us that Councillor Nickless, member for Idsall ward, "asked that his dissent be recorded in respect of the proposals for Shifnal". We received no other proposal relating specifically to the wards in this area. We are not persuaded to depart from our draft recommendations for Shifnal, or any other ward in this area, as we remain of the view that they represent the best balance of the statutory criteria. We are therefore confirming our proposals for the wards of Albrighton South, Donington & Albrighton North, Harrington, Shifnal Idsall, Shifnal Manor and Shifnal Rural as final. Maps A2 and A5 show our final recommendations for ward boundaries in the Albrighton and Shifnal areas respectively.

Alveley, Claverley and Worfield wards

67 Alveley, Claverley and Worfield wards are situated in the south-east of the borough. Alveley ward, which currently comprises Alveley, Quatt Malvern and Romsley parishes, is served by two councillors, each of whom represents on average 20 per cent fewer electors than the district average (21 per cent in 2003). Claverley ward (and parish) is served by a single district councillor and the number of electors in the ward is equal to the

district average both now and in 2003. Worfield ward, which comprises the parishes of Rudge and Worfield, is represented by a single councillor who represents 38 per cent more electors than the district average (37 per cent in 2003).

68 At Stage One the District Council stated that its preferred option was for no change to Alveley, Claverley and Worfield wards. The Council stated that "strong views were received from Alveley and Worfield Parish Councils and particularly Claverley Parish Council who considered that the only way to retain community identity was to leave the warding arrangements as they currently exist". Under the Council's preferred option significant electoral imbalances would continue. Under a council size of 34, the number of electors per councillor would be 18 per cent below the district average in Alveley ward (19 per cent in 2003), 4 per cent above in Claverley ward (3 per cent in 2003) and 42 per cent above in Worfield ward (41 per cent in 2003).

69 The District Council also submitted a second option, "the Council's fallback position", which would ward Claverley parish in two, with the southern part of Claverley parish forming part of a two-member Alveley ward, while the northern part of Claverley parish would be included in a two-member Worfield ward. Under this option it stated that the whole of the village of Claverley would fall within Worfield ward, while the rural southern area of the parish would be included in Alveley ward. The boundary would follow a minor road and field edges to the south of Claverley village. The Council stated that it had considered alternative options for these three wards but that, in view of Alveley ward's boundary with the River Severn to the west, and Worcestershire and Staffordshire to the south and east, the options to improve electoral equality are limited. Under its second option the number of electors per councillor would be 4 per cent below the district average in Alveley ward (5 per cent in 2003) and 8 per cent above the district average in Worfield ward (unchanged in 2003).

70 During Stage One we also heard from Claverley Parish Council, who opposed the District Council's second option, arguing that it would not reflect Claverley's community identity and interests, or secure more effective and convenient local government. It argued that, as Alveley and Worfield wards share a common boundary, any electoral imbalances should be rectified without affecting Claverley ward.

71 We gave careful consideration to the representations received for this area. In our draft recommendations report we expressed concern at the considerable electoral imbalance which would persist under the District Council's preferred option for the status quo in this area, and judged that such an imbalance would be too severe to leave the wards unchanged. As the Council noted, the options in this area are limited: Alveley ward is bounded to the west by the River Severn and to the south and east by the district boundary. For this reason, any attempt to address the electoral inequality in Alveley ward would necessitate modification to its northern boundary.

72 While Claverley Parish Council proposed that the electoral inequality in Alveley and Worfield wards should be addressed, it wanted to retain Claverley ward on its existing boundaries. However, in our consultation report we noted that there are no direct road links between Alveley and Worfield wards, while such links do exist between Alveley and Claverley wards. Moreover, under the proposal for change, the whole of Claverley village would form part of a modified Worfield ward, thereby retaining the identity of the village community. In view of the considerable improvements to electoral equality which would be secured under the District Council's second preference for two two-member wards, we decided to put it forward as part of our draft recommendations.

73 At Stage Three Claverley Parish Council opposed our draft recommendation to divide the parish between Alveley and Worfield wards, reiterating its Stage One view that such a warding pattern would not reflect local community identities, or the geography and history of the area concerned. The Parish Council included a proforma signed by 956 residents of the parish opposing the proposal to divide it between Alveley and Worfield wards as this would not reflect the communities and history locally. As an alternative, the Parish Council proposed that the current levels of electoral imbalance in Alveley and Worfield wards should be addressed by transferring some 350 electors in the south of Worfield parish (generally in the area of The Hobbins and Russell Close) from Worfield ward to Alveley ward. It stated that such a proposal would secure improvements to electoral equality while better reflecting local community identities. Bridgnorth & Shifnal Area Committee of Parish & Town Councils supported Claverley Parish Council's submission. The Right Reverend John Oliver

(Bishop of Hereford), The Right Reverend Dr John Saxbee (the Bishop & Archdeacon of Ludlow) and Reverend Simon Cawdell also opposed the proposal to divide Claverley parish between Alveley and Worfield wards, favouring instead the transfer of the area of The Hobbins in the south of Worfield parish to Alveley ward. Worfield Parish Council also opposed the proposal to divide Claverley parish between Alveley and Worfield wards.

74 In its Stage Three submission, Bridgnorth District Council proposed that the modified Alveley and Worfield wards included in the draft recommendations should be renamed Alveley & Claverley South and Worfield & Claverley North respectively, and made no comment on alternative warding arrangements.

75 In considering the views received at Stage Three for warding arrangements in this area, we recognised that an alternative proposal to correct the electoral imbalances in the existing Alveley and Worfield wards had not been put forward for consideration at any time earlier in the review. The proposal had, therefore, not been the subject of consultation and we decided to seek the views of interested parties to such a solution. We wrote to the District Council, the County Council, the parish councils and district councillors affected, the MP for the area and other interested parties asking for their views and further evidence on the alternative ward configuration in this area which had been put forward by Claverley Parish Council, so that we could take all views into consideration before arriving at our final recommendations.

76 We received 10 responses to our request for further evidence relating to the wards of Alveley, Claverley and Worfield. The District Council supported the retention of the status quo for the three wards as its first preference, which had not been stated in its Stage Three submission. However, it "realised that the status quo was unlikely to prove acceptable to the Commission", and had therefore decided to support the proposal of Claverley Parish Council to ward Worfield parish and include the southern parish ward in a revised two-member Alveley district ward. The remainder of Worfield parish, together with Rudge parish, would form a revised single-member Worfield ward, while Claverley ward would retain its existing boundaries and level of representation. The District Council stated that The Hobbins, Russell Close and Stanmore areas did not have a significant shared community identity with the remainder of

Worfield parish and “to ward Worfield in the manner suggested will be the least disruptive arrangement to existing communities of interest”. The Council noted that although there are no direct road links crossing the boundary between Alveley and Worfield wards, “there are major roads in the area which provide good access from the Alveley area to ‘The Hobbins’”. The Council included electorate details and mapping as part of its response which would transfer 375 electors from Worfield to Alveley ward.

77 Claverley Parish Council reiterated its Stage Three proposals for warding Worfield parish. The Parish Council provided electorate details and mapping which would transfer 359 electors from Worfield to Alveley ward. Worfield & Rudge Parish Council stated that its first preference was to retain the status quo for the wards of Alveley, Claverley and Worfield. The Parish Council added that, if change was necessary, it supported the proposal to transfer the southern part of Worfield parish to Alveley ward, and included electorate details which would transfer 354 electors. Shropshire County Council stated that “within the timescale it has not been possible to refer this matter to committee”, but it had consulted with local councillors who preferred no change to Worfield ward. However, it added that “if this option is not possible then the proposal for The Hobbins area to become part of a modified Alveley district ward would be the second option”. The Right Reverend John Oliver, The Right Reverend Dr John Saxbee, and Reverend Simon Cawdell each reiterated their support for their Stage Three proposals.

78 Alveley Parish Council (representing Alveley and Romsley parishes) opposed the proposal to include The Hobbins area of Worfield parish in Alveley ward as it is remote from Alveley parish. The Parish Council also supported the retention of the existing Claverley district ward. Councillor Voysey, member for Alveley ward, opposed the proposal to transfer part of Worfield parish to Alveley ward, stating that it would be at the expense of local community identities. He argued that The Hobbins area should form part of Bridgnorth town and that further investigation should be undertaken relating to such a proposal. Christopher Gill MP argued that the existing arrangements should not be changed.

79 We have given careful consideration to the views received. We note that the proposal contained in our draft recommendations to divide Claverley

parish between Alveley and Worfield wards does not enjoy local support. As stated in our draft recommendations report, we do not consider that the area represents an exceptional circumstance which sufficiently justifies the severe levels of electoral imbalance which would result if the existing arrangements were to be retained. Neither do we consider that this area should be treated differently to the rest of the district in terms of a balanced level of representation. We have therefore reconsidered the available options in this area. We note the arguments from Claverley Parish Council and others regarding the similar community identities in The Hobbins area and Alveley ward and understand that combining the two for district warding purposes would enjoy a degree of local support. Furthermore, although there are no direct road links between Alveley and Worfield wards, Claverley Parish Council and the District Council both referred to roads in the area which would facilitate access between the two areas.

80 In conclusion, we agree with the District Council that the proposal to combine The Hobbins area with Alveley ward would be the least disruptive solution if substantial improvements to electoral equality are to be secured. We are therefore proposing that the single-member Claverley ward (and parish) should be retained on its existing boundaries; the two-member Alveley ward should be modified to include the southern part of Worfield parish, encompassing The Hobbins, Russell Close and Stanmore Industrial Estate; and the remainder of Worfield parish, together with Rudge parish, should form a modified single-member Worfield ward.

81 With regard to the siting of the boundary between Alveley and Worfield wards, the proposals from the District Council, Claverley Parish Council and Worfield Parish Council were marginally different, with each proposing the transfer of slightly different total numbers of electors. We note that the proposal included in the District Council’s response would secure marginally better electoral equality across the area by 2003 than the other two options, while providing a clearly identifiable boundary, and we are therefore including it as our final recommendation. The number of electors per councillor would be 2 per cent below the district average in Alveley ward (3 per cent in 2003), 4 per cent above in Claverley ward (3 per cent in 2003) and 11 per cent above in Worfield ward (unchanged in 2003). We recognise that, under this option, the electoral equality in Worfield ward

would not be as good as under our draft recommendations, but consider that this warding arrangement would represent a more satisfactory balance of the statutory criteria in this area and enjoy a greater degree of local support.

Broseley, Morville and Much Wenlock wards

82 These three wards are situated in the north-west of the district. Broseley ward (and parish) is represented by three district councillors, Morville ward (comprising the parishes of Acton Round, Astley Abbots, Aston Eyre, Morville, Tasley and Upton Cressett) is represented by a single councillor and Much Wenlock ward (comprising Barrow and Much Wenlock parishes) is represented by two councillors. The number of electors per councillor is 4 per cent above the district average in Broseley ward (3 per cent above in 2003), 13 per cent below the average in Morville ward (10 per cent below in 2003) and 8 per cent above in Much Wenlock ward (11 per cent above in 2003).

83 At Stage One, the District Council stated that, in order to have regard to the White Paper's stated preference for two-member wards, the current three-member Broseley ward (and parish) would need to be combined with a neighbouring area to allow it to be divided into two two-member wards. Since the River Severn forms the ward's eastern boundary, and the ward's northern boundary is also the district boundary, the only possible area with which Broseley parish might be combined is Barrow parish, currently in Much Wenlock ward. The District Council calculated that the combined electorate in Broseley and Barrow parishes merits four district councillors and, accordingly, it proposed two two-member wards called Broseley East and Broseley West. Broseley West ward would comprise the whole of Barrow parish, together with that part of Broseley parish to the west of a boundary running north along the centre of Bridgnorth Road and the High Street, then east of properties on Jackson Avenue and Edinburgh Road, following Cockshutt Lane and field edges, turning east into Ball's Lane before turning north along a footpath until joining the district boundary. The rest of Broseley parish would constitute Broseley East ward.

84 Under the District Council's Stage One proposals the number of electors per councillor would be 9 per cent below the district average in Broseley East ward (10 per cent in 2003) and 8 per cent below the district average in Broseley West ward (9 per cent in 2003).

85 The District Council informed us that Broseley Town Council had proposed two modifications to the boundary between the two proposed wards so that all of Bridgnorth Road, Park View, Sherlock Hoy Close and a property on Hockley Road would be included in Broseley East ward, while Birch Meadow and Birchmeadow Road, Cumberland Close, the remainder of Duke Street, Fox Lane, Barber Street, the remainder of the High Street, Four Winds Caravan Park and part of Cockshutt Lane would be included in Broseley West ward. Under this proposal the number of electors per councillor would be 8 per cent below the district average in Broseley East ward (9 per cent in 2003) and 8 per cent below the district average in Broseley West ward (9 per cent in 2003). The District Council stated that it wished to "advise the Commission that if it prefers the Town Council's alternative proposal this Council would not object". The Council also informed us that Barrow Parish Council was opposed to the inclusion of Barrow parish in a new Broseley West ward.

86 At Stage One, two residents of Barrow parish expressed opposition to the proposal to combine Barrow parish with part of Broseley parish as they considered that the two parishes have different community identities and interests.

87 We gave careful consideration to the proposals which we had received for this area. In our draft recommendations report we noted that both the District Council's and Broseley Parish Council's proposals would result in slightly worse electoral equality than currently exists in the three-member Broseley ward. However, we judged that the creation of two two-member wards covering Barrow and Broseley parishes would facilitate substantial improvements in electoral equality in surrounding areas, while providing reasonable electoral equality in the two wards concerned. We therefore put forward the District Council's proposed Broseley East and Broseley West district wards as part of our draft recommendations, utilising the boundary submitted by the District Council, as we considered it to be more clearly defined and more readily identifiable to the electorate than the alternative proposed by Broseley Town Council.

88 As previously noted, at Stage One the District Council proposed transferring Barrow parish from Much Wenlock ward to a new Broseley West ward. Consequently, in order to secure improved electoral equality in the Much Wenlock area, the District Council proposed adding Much Wenlock parish to

the parishes of Easthope, Shipton and Stanton Long, currently in Ditton Priors ward, to form a modified Much Wenlock ward. In addition to achieving improved electoral equality in Much Wenlock, the Council stated that the parishes of Easthope, Shipton and Stanton Long “are currently grouped for parish purposes and this proposal will allow them to remain together within one ward”.

89 Morville ward is currently over-represented and, in order to improve electoral equality in the area, the District Council therefore proposed expanding the ward to include Monkhopton parish, currently in Ditton Priors ward. The Council noted that Monkhopton parish forms part of a joint parish council with Acton Round, Astley Abbots, Aston Eyre, Morville and Upton Cressett, which are all currently in Morville ward. It argued that the inclusion of Monkhopton parish in Morville ward “will clarify and reinforce the affinity between those parishes”.

90 Under the District Council’s proposals for the two wards of Morville and Much Wenlock, the number of electors per councillor would be 2 per cent above the district average in both wards (4 per cent and 6 per cent above respectively in 2003).

91 In our draft recommendations, we considered that the warding arrangements proposed in this area reflected community identities and interests and, in view of the improved levels of electoral equality which would result in Morville and Much Wenlock wards, we consulted on the District Council’s proposals for this area.

92 At Stage Three we received a submission from a resident of Easthope which offered no objection to the proposal to include Easthope parish in Much Wenlock ward. The resident considered, however, that Barrow parish could have formed part of a three-member Much Wenlock ward as this would better reflect community identities locally, although this proposal was not accompanied by supporting electorate data. Bridgnorth District Council accepted our draft recommendations. We received no other views specifically relating to electoral arrangements for the proposed wards in this area.

93 We considered the proposal received during Stage Three that Barrow parish should form part of a three-member Much Wenlock ward. However, we calculated that under the proposal to

incorporate Barrow parish into a three-member Much Wenlock ward, the number of electors per councillor would be 17 per cent below the average in Much Wenlock ward (14 per cent below in 2003). In view of the worse electoral equality which would result from this proposed modification, and the absence of further evidence of local support for it, we are not persuaded to modify our warding pattern in this area. In the absence of further views relating to our draft recommendations for the wards of Broseley East, Broseley West, Morville and Much Wenlock, we are confirming them as final.

Ditton Priors, Glazeley, Highley, Kinlet and Stottesdon wards

94 These five wards are situated in the south and west of the district and each is represented by a single councillor, with the exception of Highley ward which is represented by two councillors. In three of the wards the number of electors per councillor is 16 per cent below the district average in Ditton Priors ward (12 per cent in 2003), 11 per cent below in Kinlet ward (10 per cent in 2003) and 28 per cent below in Stottesdon ward (27 per cent in 2003).

95 Ditton Priors ward currently comprises the parishes of Ditton Priors, Easthope, Monkhopton, Shipton and Stanton Long. As detailed earlier, as part of the proposed warding to the north of this area, the District Council proposed including the parishes of Easthope, Monkhopton, Shipton and Stanton Long in different wards than at present. As a result it proposed that a modified Ditton Priors ward should comprise the parish of the same name, together with Aston Botterell, Burwarton, Cleobury North and Neenton parishes (currently in Stottesdon ward) and Farlow parish (currently in Kinlet ward). While it acknowledged that this would constitute a significant change, the Council stated that such modifications were necessary if electoral equality was to be improved in neighbouring wards. It considered that such a ward would still retain an acceptable community of interest. Under the District Council’s scheme the number of electors per councillor would be 3 per cent above the district average in the modified Ditton Priors ward (7 per cent in 2003).

96 As part of its district-wide scheme, Farlow Parish Council proposed that Ditton Priors ward should comprise the parishes of Aston Botterell, Burwarton, Cleobury North, Ditton Priors,

Electoral Cycle

104 We received no comments at Stage One regarding change to the current electoral cycle for Bridgnorth as permitted under the existing legislation. We therefore proposed no change to the current cycle of whole-council elections for the district.

105 At Stage Three no further comments were received, and we confirm our draft recommendation as final.

Conclusions

106 Having considered carefully all the representations and evidence received in response to our consultation report, we have decided substantially to endorse our draft recommendations, subject to modifying the warding arrangements in the east of the district to retain Claverley ward on its existing boundaries, while modifying the boundary between Alveley and Worfield wards by warding Worfield parish.

107 We conclude that, in Bridgnorth:

- (a) there should be an increase in council size from 33 to 34;
- (b) there should be 21 wards, one more than at present;

- (c) the boundaries of 16 of the existing wards should be modified;
- (d) the whole Council should continue to be elected together.

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

109 As Figure 4 shows, our recommendations would result in a reduction in the number of wards with an electoral variance of more than 10 per cent from 12 to one, with no wards varying by more than 20 per cent from the district average. By 2003 only two wards, Stottesdon and Worfield, would vary by more than 10 per cent from the average, each in fact varying by 11 per cent. We conclude that our recommendations would best meet the need for electoral equality, having regard to the statutory criteria.

Final Recommendation

Bridgnorth District Council should comprise 34 councillors serving 21 wards, as detailed and named in Figures 1 and 2, and illustrated on Map 2 and in Appendix A. The Council should continue to be elected together.

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

	1998 electorate		2003 forecast electorate	
	Current arrangements	Final recommendations	Current arrangements	Final recommendations
Number of councillors	33	34	33	34
Number of wards	20	21	20	21
Average number of electors per councillor	1,243	1,206	1,277	1,239
Number of wards with a variance more than 10 per cent from the average	12	1	9	2
Number of wards with a variance more than 20 per cent from the average	6	0	7	0

Parish and Town Council Electoral Arrangements

110 In undertaking reviews of electoral arrangements, we are required to comply as far as is reasonably practicable with the provisions set out in Schedule 11 to the 1972 Act. The Schedule provides that if a parish is to be divided between different district wards, it must also be divided into parish wards, so that each parish ward lies wholly within a single ward of the district. Accordingly in our draft recommendations, we proposed consequential warding arrangements for the parishes of Albrighton, Bridgnorth, Broseley, Claverley and Sheriffhales to reflect the proposed district ward boundaries.

111 The parish of Albrighton is currently served by 15 councillors and is unwarded. In order to facilitate its proposals for district warding in this area, in its Stage One submission the District Council proposed that Albrighton parish should be divided in two, one parish ward broadly covering the area to the north of the High Street and the other parish ward covering the area to the south, represented by five and 10 councillors respectively. The proposed North parish ward would form part of a new Donington and Albrighton North district ward and the proposed South parish ward would form part of a new Albrighton South district ward. We understood that this proposed warding was supported by Albrighton Parish Council.

112 We also received a proposal from Councillor Leeson, member for Albrighton ward, based on a slightly different ward boundary in Albrighton. However, in view of our draft recommendation for district warding in this area, we included the District Council's proposed warding for Albrighton parish as part of our draft recommendations.

113 At Stage Three no further comments were received on the warding of the parish and, in the light of our final proposals for district warding, we confirm our draft recommendation as final.

Final Recommendation

Albrighton Parish Council should comprise 15 councillors, as at present, representing two wards: North (returning five councillors) and South (10). The boundary between the two parish wards should reflect the proposed district ward boundary in the area, as illustrated and named on Map A2 at Appendix A.

114 The parish of Bridgnorth has four wards, each of which is coterminous with the district wards, and represented by four parish councillors. At Stage One the District Council submitted two sets of proposals for the town, under each of which the parish wards would be modified to be coterminous with the district wards, and continue to elect four councillors each. Bridgnorth Town Council stated that it supported the District Council's 'consultation proposal'. In the light of our draft recommendations for district warding in Bridgnorth town, which reflected the District Council's proposal and was supported by Bridgnorth Town Council, subject to our amendment to the boundary between Morfe and East wards, we proposed modifying the parish ward boundaries to correspond with the proposed district ward boundaries in the town.

115 At Stage Three Bridgnorth District Council proposed a modification to the boundary between Bridgnorth East and Bridgnorth Morfe wards. Mr Taylor, member for Bridgnorth Castle ward until the recent elections, reiterated his support for his alternative proposal which had formed one of the District Council's two options at Stage One. We received no other detailed proposals relating to ward boundaries, or to parish warding in this area. In the light of our final recommendations for district warding in Bridgnorth town, we are also confirming our draft recommendation for parish warding arrangements as final.

Final Recommendation

Bridgnorth Town Council should comprise 16 councillors, as at present, representing four wards: Castle, East, Morfe and West, each returning four councillors. The boundaries between the four parish wards should be modified to reflect the proposed district ward boundaries, as illustrated and named on the large map at the back of this report.

116 Broseley parish is represented by 11 councillors and is unwarded. At Stage One the District Council proposed creating two parish wards, East and West, to reflect its proposed district warding arrangements in the area, which would be represented by six and five councillors respectively. Broseley Town Council proposed a slightly different boundary between the two new wards. However, in the light of our draft recommendations for district wards in the area, we consulted on the District Council's proposals in this area, particularly as this boundary appears to be more recognisable.

117 At Stage Three we received no further views on the warding of Broseley parish and in the light of our proposals for district warding we are confirming our draft recommendations as final.

Final Recommendation

Broseley Town Council should comprise 11 parish councillors, representing two wards: East (returning six councillors) and West (five). The boundary between the two parish wards should reflect the proposed district ward boundary, as illustrated and named on Map A3 at Appendix A.

118 Claverley parish is represented by 13 councillors and is unwarded. At Stage One Claverley Parish Council opposed any proposal to split the parish between different district wards. However, in order to provide a fair balance of representation on the District Council, our draft recommendations adopted the District Council's second preference for district warding in this area, which would involve splitting Claverley parish. In order to facilitate our proposed district warding, our draft recommendations proposed that Claverley parish should be divided into two wards, North and South, represented by nine and four councillors respectively, as submitted by the District Council. North parish ward would form part of Worfield district ward while South parish ward would form part of Alveley district ward.

119 At Stage Three Claverley Parish Council and a number of other respondents opposed our draft recommendations for the parish. In the light of our proposals for the district warding in this area, which moved away from those which were contained in our draft recommendations, we are no longer recommending that Claverley parish should be divided between the two district wards of Alveley and Worfield. We are therefore not recommending consequential changes to the warding arrangements of Claverley parish.

Final Recommendation

Claverley Parish Council should continue to comprise 13 parish councillors representing the parish as a whole. The parish should not be warded.

120 Shifnal parish is currently warded into two parish wards, Idsall and Manor, represented by eight councillors and seven councillors respectively. To reflect its revised district warding proposals in this area, at Stage One the District Council proposed an additional ward for Shifnal parish: Rural parish ward, to be served by two councillors, and that the modified Idsall and Manor parish wards would be represented by seven and six councillors respectively. The District Council informed us that Shifnal Town Council supported its proposals in this area.

121 Having adopted the District Council's proposals for district wards in this area, we also included its proposed warding for Shifnal parish as part of our draft recommendations.

122 At Stage Three we received no detailed comments on our proposals for parish warding for Shifnal parish and, in the light of our final recommendations for district warding, we are therefore confirming our draft recommendations for Shifnal parish as final.

Final Recommendation

Shifnal Town Council should comprise 15 councillors, representing three wards: Idsall (returning seven councillors), Manor (six) and Rural (two). The parish ward boundaries should reflect the district ward boundaries in this area, as illustrated on Map A5 at Appendix A.

123 Worfield Parish Council has 13 members and is unwarded. At Stage One we did not receive any proposals regarding the electoral arrangements of Worfield parish and therefore did not propose any change as part of our draft recommendations. At Stage Three we received a proposal from Claverley Parish Council and other respondents to ward Worfield parish into two parish wards in order to facilitate an alternative district warding configuration in the Alveley, Claverley and Worfield area. In order to consult on this proposal we wrote to interested parties asking for their views and evidence. The District Council included a possible consequential warding of Worfield parish which would create a southern 'The Hobbins' parish ward containing some 375 electors, while the remainder of the parish would

constitute a North parish ward. North parish ward would be represented by 10 councillors while The Hobbins parish ward would be represented by three councillors. As we have adopted the District Council's proposals for district warding in this area, we are putting forward these proposals for Worfield parish as part of our final recommendations.

Final Recommendation

Worfield Parish Council should comprise 13 councillors, representing two wards: The Hobbins (returning three councillors) and North (10). The parish ward boundaries should reflect the district ward boundary in this area, as illustrated on Map A4 at Appendix A.

¹²⁴ During Stage One, we received a request from Councillor Leeson, member for Albrighton ward, who considered that Boscobel parish, which elects one parish councillor to Donington with Boscobel Parish Council, should be “removed from the political scene”, arguing that it has only an electorate of eight. However, such action lies outside the Commission's remit. Under the Local Government and Rating Act 1997, district councils have the powers to recommend changes to parish boundaries (including the creation, alteration or abolition of a parish).

¹²⁵ We are not proposing any change to the electoral cycle of parish and town councils in the district.

Final 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.

6. NEXT STEPS

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

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

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

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

APPENDIX A

Final Recommendations for Bridgnorth: Detailed Mapping

The following maps illustrate the Commission's proposed ward boundaries for the Bridgnorth area.

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

Map A2 illustrates the proposed warding of Albrighton parish, and the proposed district ward boundary between Donington & Albrighton North and Albrighton South wards.

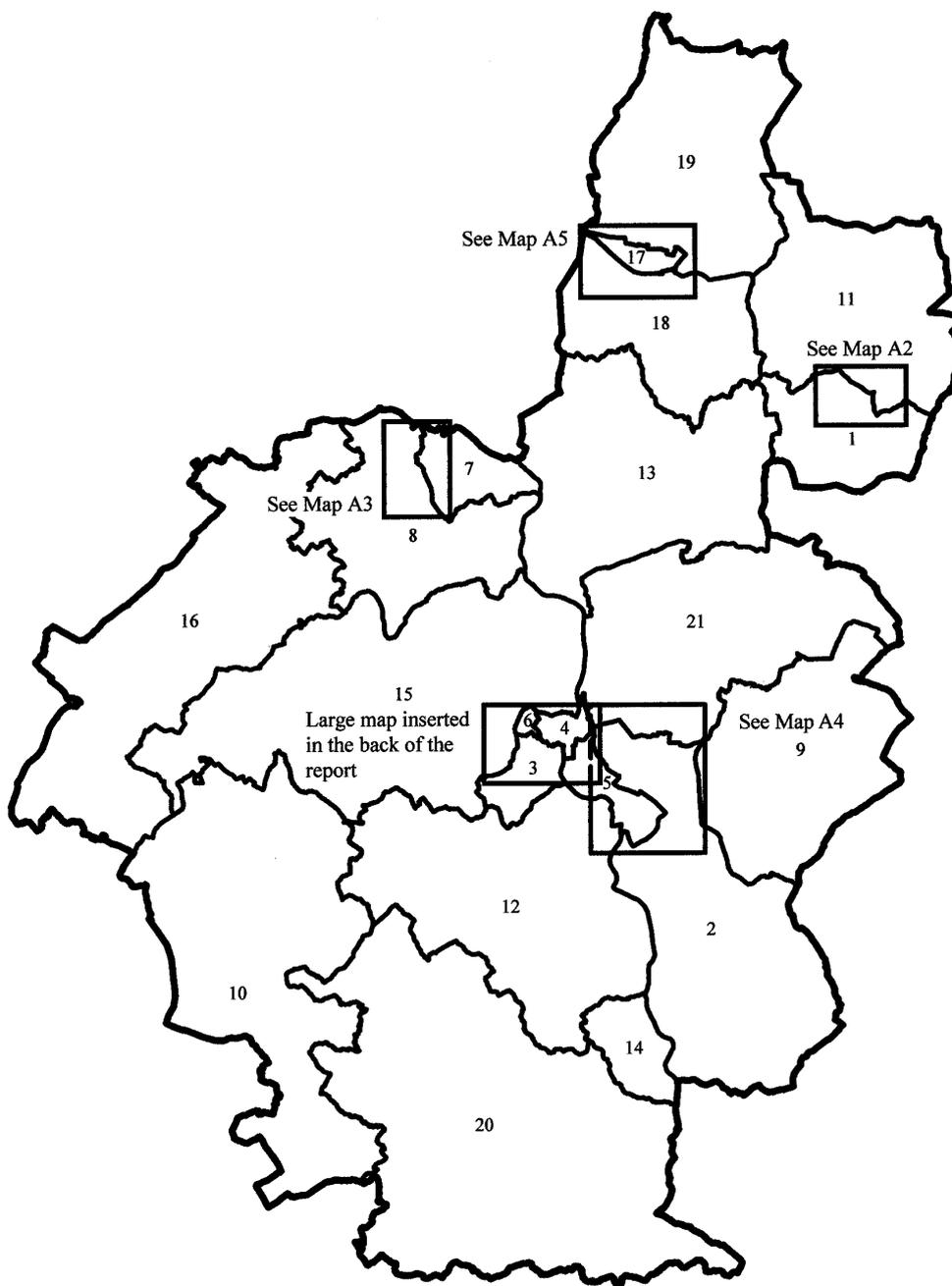
Map A3 illustrates the proposed warding of Broseley parish and the proposed district ward boundary between Broseley East and Broseley West wards.

Map A4 illustrates the proposed warding of Worfield parish and the proposed district ward boundary between the modified Alveley and Worfield wards.

Map A5 illustrates the proposed warding of Shifnal parish and the proposed district ward boundaries between Shifnal Idsall, Shifnal Manor and Shifnal Rural wards.

The **large map** inserted in the back of the report illustrates the proposed warding arrangements for Bridgnorth town.

Map A1:
Final Recommendations for Bridgnorth: Key Map

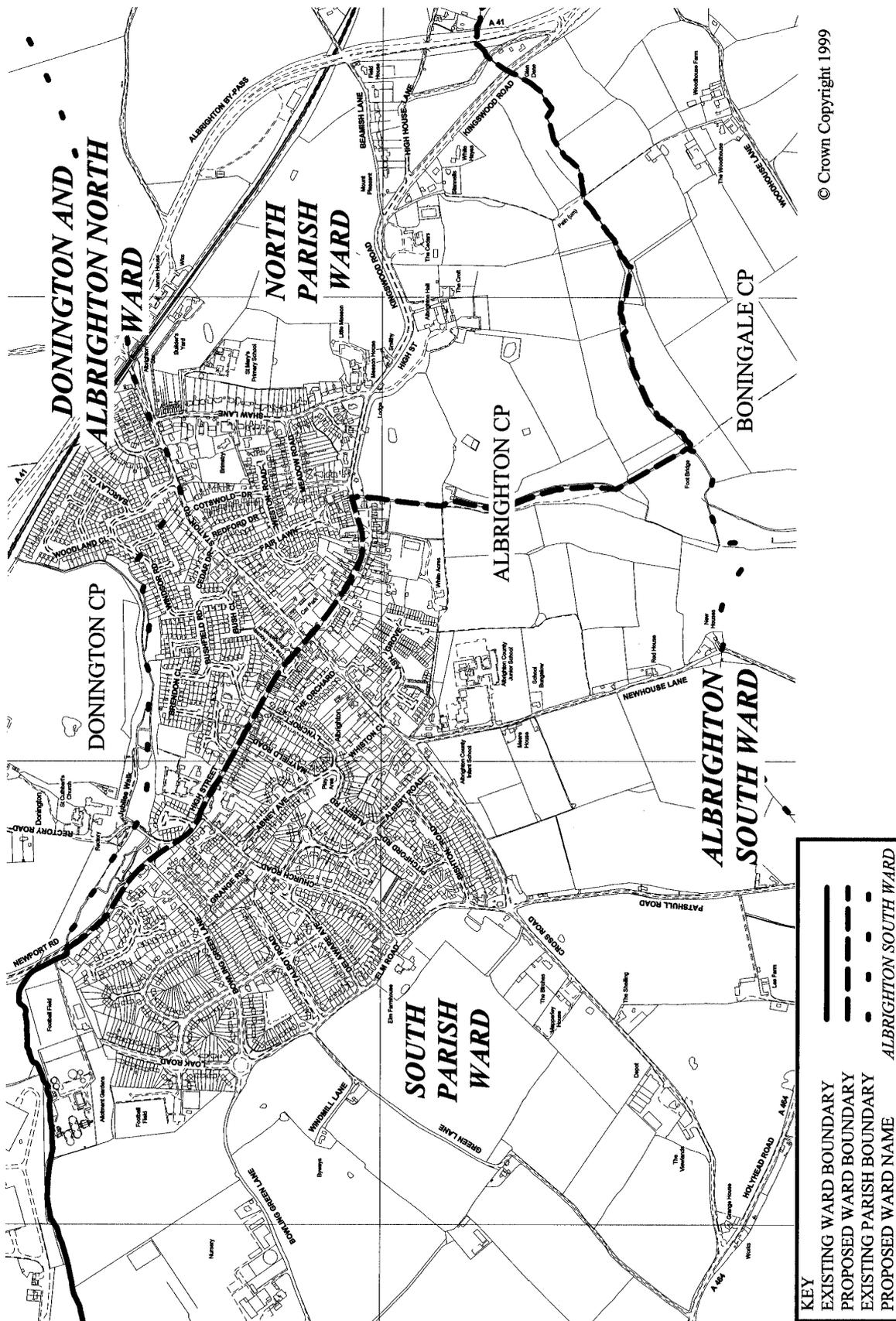


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Key to Wards

1 Albrighton South	8 Broseley West	15 Morville
2 Alveley	9 Claverley	16 Much Wenlock
3 Bridgnorth Castle	10 Ditton Priors	17 Shifnal Idsall
4 Bridgnorth East	11 Donington & Albrighton North	18 Shifnal Manor
5 Bridgnorth Morfe	12 Glazeley	19 Shifnal Rural
6 Bridgnorth West	13 Harrington	20 Stottesdon
7 Broseley East	14 Highley	21 Worfield

Map A2:
Proposed Warding of Albrighton Parish

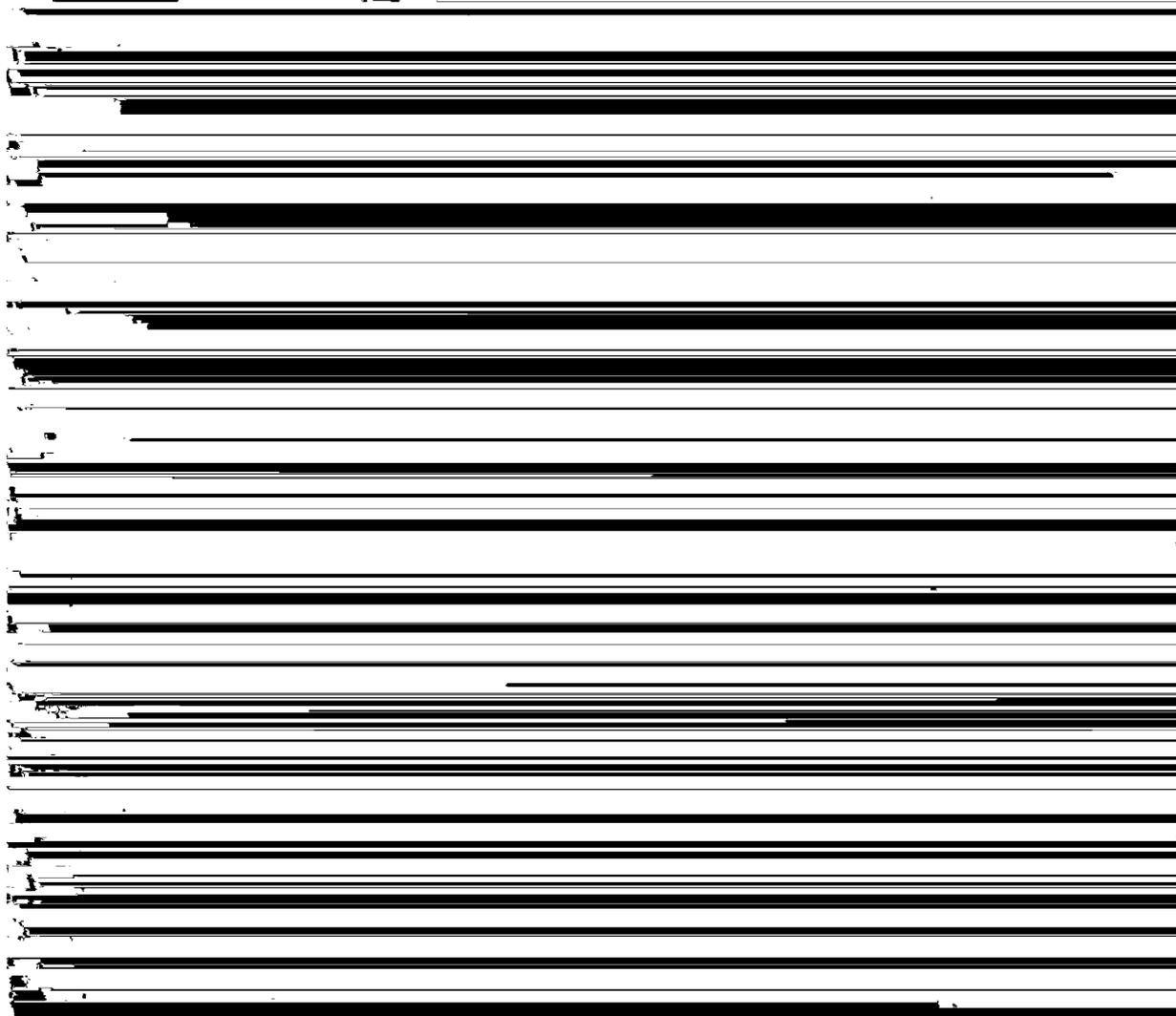
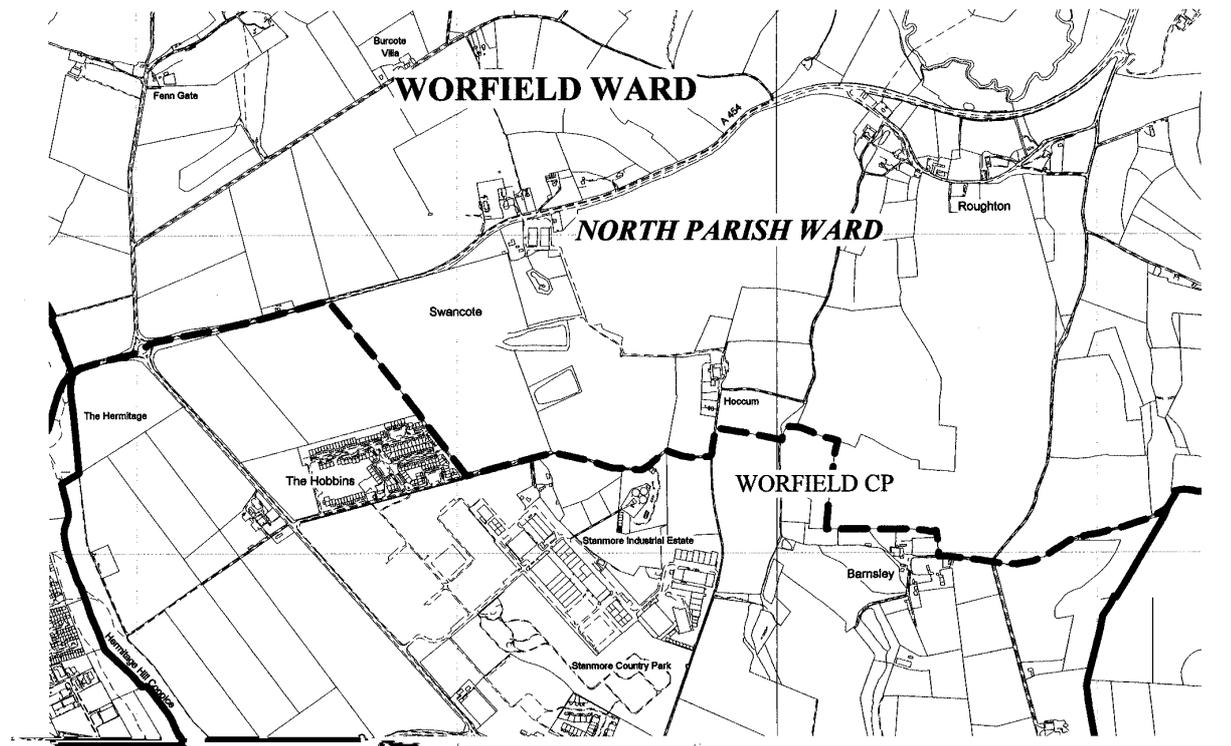


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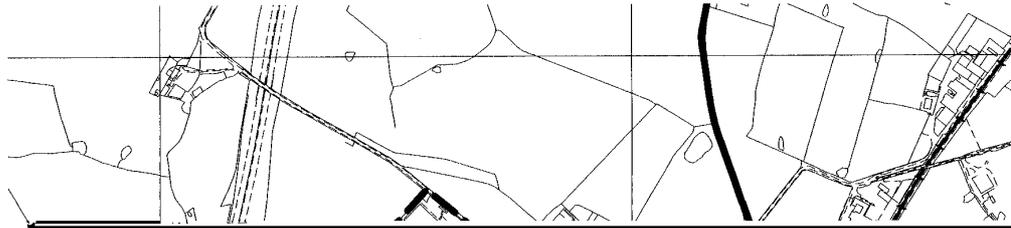
Map A3:
Proposed Warding of Broseley Parish



Map A4:
Proposed Warding of Worfield Parish



Map A5:
Proposed Warding of Shifnal Parish



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APPENDIX B

Draft Recommendations for Bridgnorth

Our final recommendations, detailed in Figures 1 and 2, differ from those we put forward as draft recommendations in respect of three of the existing wards, where our draft proposals are set out below.

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

Ward name	Constituent areas
Alveley	Alveley ward (Alveley, Quatt Malvern and Romsley parishes); Claverley ward (part – part of Claverley parish)
Worfield	Worfield ward (Rudge and Worfield parishes); Claverley ward (part – part of Claverley parish)

*Figure B2:
The Commission's Draft Recommendations: Number of Councillors and Electors by Ward*

Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (1998)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2003)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
Alveley	2	2,325	1,163	-4	2,365	1,183	-5
Worfield	2	2,611	1,306	8	2,677	1,339	8

Source: Electorate figures are based on information provided by Bridgnorth 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. Figures have been rounded to the nearest whole number.

