

Draft recommendations on the
future electoral arrangements for
Bracknell Forest

November 2001

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A large map illustrating the existing and proposed ward boundaries for Bracknell town, Crowthorne and Sandhurst is inserted inside the back cover of this report.

WHAT IS THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT COMMISSION FOR ENGLAND?

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

Members of the Commission are:

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

Barbara Stephens (Chief Executive)

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

SUMMARY

We began a review of the electoral arrangements for Bracknell Forest on 17 April 2001. The Commission's Stage One consultation period was put into abeyance from 10 May 2001 to 7 June 2001 as a consequence of the General Election; therefore, the closing date for the receipt of submissions at the end of Stage One was 13 August 2001.

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

We found that the current arrangements provide unequal representation of electors in Bracknell Forest:

- **in 16 of the 19 wards the number of electors represented by each councillor varies by more than 10 per cent from the average for the borough and 10 wards vary by more than 20 per cent from the average;**
- **by 2006 this situation is expected to worsen, with the number of electors per councillor forecast to vary by more than 10 per cent from the average in 16 wards and by more than 20 per cent in 12 wards.**

Our main draft recommendations for future electoral arrangements (see Tables 1 and 2 and paragraphs 132 - 133) are that:

- **Bracknell Forest Borough Council should have 42 councillors, two more than at present;**
- **there should be 19 wards, the same as at present;**
- **the boundaries of 18 of the existing wards should be modified, and one ward should retain its existing boundary;**
- **elections should continue to take place every four years.**

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

- **In 17 of the proposed 19 wards the number of electors per councillor would vary by no more than 10 per cent from the borough average;**
- **This level of electoral equality is forecast to improve further with the number of electors per councillor in all 19 wards expected to vary by no more than 10 per cent from the average for the borough in 2006.**

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

- **revised warding arrangements and the redistribution of councillors for the parishes of Binfield, Crowthorne, Warfield and Winkfield;**

- **revised warding arrangements and the redistribution of councillors for the town councils of Bracknell and Sandhurst.**

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

- **We will consult on these proposals for nine weeks from 27 November 2001. We take this consultation very seriously. We may decide to move away from our draft recommendations in the light of comments or suggestions that we receive. It is therefore important that all interested parties let us have their views and evidence, *whether or not* they agree with our draft recommendations.**
- **After considering local views, we will decide whether to modify our draft recommendations. We will then submit our final recommendations to the Electoral Commission which, subject to Parliamentary approval, with effect from 1 April 2002 will be responsible for implementing change to local authority electoral arrangements.**
- **The Electoral Commission will decide whether to accept, modify or reject our final recommendations. It will also determine when any changes come into effect.**

You should express your views by writing directly to us at the address below by 28 January 2002:

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Bracknell Forest Review
Local Government Commission for England
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E-mail: reviews@lgce.gov.uk
Website: www.lgce.gov.uk**

Table 1: Draft Recommendations: Summary

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Constituent areas	Map reference
1	Ascot	2	part of Winkfield parish (the proposed Ascot parish ward)	Maps 2 & A3
2	Binfield Popeswood	2	part of Binfield parish (the proposed Binfield Popeswood parish ward)	Large map
3	Binfield with Warfield	1	part of Binfield parish (the proposed Binfield North parish ward); part of Warfield parish (the proposed St Michael's parish ward)	Maps 2 & A2
4	Bullbrook	2	part of Bracknell parish (the proposed Bullbrook parish ward)	Large map
5	Central Sandhurst	2	part of Sandhurst parish (the proposed Central Sandhurst parish ward)	Large map
6	College Town	2	part of Sandhurst parish (the proposed College Town parish ward)	Large map
7	Crown Wood	3	part of Bracknell parish (the proposed Crown Wood parish ward); part of Winkfield parish (the proposed Forest Park parish ward)	Large map
8	Crowthorne	2	part of Crowthorne parish (the proposed Crowthorne parish ward)	Large map
9	Great Hollands North	2	part of Bracknell parish (the proposed Great Hollands North parish ward)	Large map
10	Great Hollands South	2	part of Bracknell parish (the proposed Great Hollands South parish ward)	Large map
11	Hanworth	3	part of Bracknell parish (the proposed Birch Hill and Hanworth parish wards)	Large map
12	Harmans Water	3	part of Bracknell parish (the proposed Harmans Water parish ward); part of Winkfield parish (the proposed Martins Heron & Warren parish ward)	Large map
13	Little Sandhurst	2	part of Sandhurst parish (the proposed Little Sandhurst parish ward); part of Crowthorne parish (the proposed Crowthorne South parish ward)	Large map
14	Old Bracknell	2	part of Bracknell parish (the proposed Old Bracknell parish ward)	Large map
15	Owlsmoor	2	part of Sandhurst parish (the proposed Owlsmoor parish ward)	Large map
16	Priestwood & Garth	3	part of Bracknell parish (the proposed Priestwood and Garth parish wards)	Large map
17	Warfield Harvest Ride	3	part of Warfield parish (the proposed Quelm and Whitegrove parish wards)	Large map
18	Wildridings	2	part of Bracknell parish (the proposed Wildridings parish ward)	Large map
19	Winkfield & Cranbourne	2	part of Winkfield parish (the proposed Winkfield & Cranbourne parish ward); part of Warfield parish (the proposed Warfield Park parish ward)	Maps 2 & A2

Notes: 1 The whole borough is parished.

2 The wards on the above table are illustrated on Map 2, Maps A1 – A3 in Appendix A and on the large map at the back of this report.

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 Bracknell Forest

Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2001)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2006)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
1 Ascot	2	3,941	1,971	5	3,801	1,901	0
2 Binfield Popeswood	2	3,936	1,968	5	3,923	1,962	3
3 Binfield with Warfield	1	1,943	1,943	3	1,968	1,968	3
4 Bullbrook	2	3,826	1,913	2	3,854	1,927	1
5 Central Sandhurst	2	4,035	2,018	7	3,644	1,822	-4
6 College Town	2	3,649	1,825	-3	3,655	1,828	-4
7 Crown Wood	3	5,871	1,957	4	5,976	1,992	5
8 Crowthorne	2	3,757	1,879	0	3,807	1,904	0
9 Great Hollands North	2	3,110	1,555	-17	3,660	1,830	-4
10 Great Hollands South	2	3,985	1,993	6	3,729	1,865	-2
11 Hanworth	3	6,549	2,183	16	6,073	2,024	6
12 Harmans Water	3	5,225	1,745	-7	5,413	1,804	-5
13 Little Sandhurst	2	3,830	1,915	2	3,802	1,901	0
14 Old Bracknell	2	3,511	1,756	-7	3,964	1,982	4
15 Owlsmoor	2	3,962	1,981	5	3,860	1,930	1
16 Priestwood & Garth	3	5,596	1,865	-1	5,705	1,902	0
17 Warfield Harvest Ride	3	5,093	1,698	-10	5,689	1,896	0
18 Wildridings	2	3,413	1,707	-9	3,503	1,752	-8
19 Winkfield & Cranbourne	2	3,680	1,840	-2	3,857	1,929	1
Totals	42	78,912	-	-	79,883	-	-
Averages	-	-	1,879	-	-	1,902	-

Source: Electorate figures are based on Bracknell Forest Borough Council's submission.

Note: The 'variance from average' column shows by how far, in percentage terms, the number of electors per councillor varies from the average for the 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 proposals for the electoral arrangements for the borough of Bracknell Forest, on which we are now consulting. We are reviewing the six unitary authorities in Berkshire as part of our programme of periodic electoral reviews (PERs) of all 386 principal local authority areas in England. Our programme started in 1996 and is currently expected to finish in 2004.

2 This is our first review of the electoral arrangements of Bracknell Forest. Bracknell Forest's last review was carried out by our predecessor, the Local Government Boundary Commission (LGBC), which reported to the Secretary of State in March 1977 (Report no. 196). Since undertaking that review, Bracknell Forest became a unitary authority in 1998. The change in unitary status has led to the loss of nine county councillors, reducing the total number of councillors for Bracknell Forest from 49 to 40.

3 In carrying out these reviews, we must have regard to:

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

4 Full details of the legislation under which we work are set out in a document entitled *Guidance and Procedural Advice for Local Authorities and Other Interested Parties* (fourth edition published in December 2000). This *Guidance* sets out our approach to the reviews.

5 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 parish and town councils in the borough.

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

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

8 We are not prescriptive on council size. We start from the assumption that the size of the existing council already secures effective and convenient local government, but we are willing to look carefully at arguments why this might not be so. However, we have found it necessary to

safeguard against upward drift in the number of councillors, and we believe that any proposal for an increase in council size will need to be fully justified. In particular, we do not accept that an increase in electorate should automatically result in an increase in the number of councillors, nor that changes should be made to the size of a council simply to make it more consistent with the size of other similar councils.

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

Table 3: Stages of the Review

Stage	Description
One	Submission of proposals to us
Two	Our analysis and deliberation
Three	Publication of draft recommendations and consultation on them
Four	Final deliberation and report to the Electoral Commission

10 In July 1998 the Government published a White Paper called *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. In unitary authority areas the White Paper proposed elections by thirds. 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 and three-member wards in unitary authority areas. However, it stated that there was no intention to move towards very large electoral wards in sparsely populated rural areas, and that single-member wards (and electoral divisions) would continue in many authorities. The proposals were taken forward in the Local Government Act 2000 which, among other matters, states that the Secretary of State may make Orders to change authorities’ electoral cycles. However, until such time as the Secretary of State makes any Order under the 2000 Act, we will continue to operate on the basis of existing legislation, which provides for elections by thirds or whole-council elections in two-tier areas, and our current *Guidance*.

11 Stage One began on 17 April 2001, when we wrote to Bracknell Forest Borough Council inviting proposals for future electoral arrangements. We also notified Thames Valley Police Authority, the local authority associations, Berkshire Local Councils Association, parish and town councils in the borough, the Members of Parliament with constituency interests in the borough, the Members of the European Parliament for the South East Region, and the headquarters of the main political parties. We placed a notice in the local press, issued a press release and invited Bracknell Forest Borough Council to publicise the review further. The Commission’s Stage One consultation period was put into abeyance from 10 May 2001 until 7 June 2001 as a consequence of the General Election; the closing date for receipt of submissions at the end of Stage One was 13 August 2001.

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

13 We are currently at Stage Three. This stage, which began on 27 November 2001 and will end on 28 January 2002, involves publishing the draft proposals in this report and public

consultation on them. **We take this consultation very seriously and it is therefore important that all those interested in the review should let us have their views and evidence, whether or not they agree with these draft proposals.**

14 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 it to accept, modify or reject our final recommendations. If the Electoral Commission accepts the recommendations, with or without modification, it will make an Order. The Electoral Commission will determine when any changes come into effect.

15 With effect from 1 April 2002, subject to Parliamentary approval, the Electoral Commission will assume the functions of the Local Government Commission for England and take over responsibility for making Orders putting in place the new arrangements resulting from periodic electoral reviews (powers which currently reside with the Secretary of State). As part of this transfer the Electoral Commission will set up a Boundary Committee for England which will take over responsibility for the conduct of PERs from the Local Government Commission. The Boundary Committee for England will conduct electoral reviews following the same rules and in the same manner as the Local Government Commission for England. The Boundary Committee for England's final recommendations on future electoral arrangements will then be presented to the Electoral Commission which will be able to accept, modify or reject the Boundary Committee for England's findings. Under these new arrangements there will remain a further opportunity to make representations directly to the Electoral Commission after the publication of the final recommendations, as was previously the case with the Secretary of State. Interested parties will have a further six weeks to send comments to the Electoral Commission.

2 CURRENT ELECTORAL ARRANGEMENTS

16 The borough of Bracknell Forest comprises the south-east section of the county of Berkshire, and was granted unitary status in 1998. The borough covers an area of some 11,000 hectares and has a population of approximately 110,000. It adjoins the unitary authorities of Windsor & Maidenhead and Wokingham to the north and west, and the county of Surrey to the south. The borough contains various centres of population including Bracknell, Sandhurst, Crowthorne and North Ascot. The borough has a strong economic base, with many companies involved in high technology industries located in the area. The borough also contains several national institutions including Sandhurst Royal Military Academy, Broadmoor Hospital and the Meteorological Office.

17 The borough is entirely parished, containing six civil parishes. Bracknell town is the largest settlement in the borough, comprising approximately half of the borough's total electorate. Since 1975, there has been an increase in the size of the electorate of 41 per cent, with the Borough Council forecasting a further increase of 1 per cent over the next five years.

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

19 The electorate of the borough is 78,912 (February 2001). The Council presently has 40 members who are elected from 19 wards, five of which are relatively rural in the north and east of the borough with the remainder being predominantly urban. Six of the wards are each represented by three councillors, nine are each represented by two councillors and four are single-member wards. The Council is elected as a whole every four years.

20 At present, each councillor represents an average of 1,973 electors, which the Borough Council forecasts will increase to 1,997 by the year 2006 if the present number of councillors is maintained. However, due to demographic and other changes over the past two decades, the number of electors per councillor in 16 of the 19 wards varies by more than 10 per cent from the borough average, 10 wards by more than 20 per cent and eight wards by more than 30 per cent. The worst imbalance is in Warfield ward where the councillor represents 232 per cent more electors than the borough average.

Map 1: Existing Wards in Bracknell Forest

Table 4: Existing Electoral Arrangements

Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2001)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2006)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
1 Ascot	3	8,179	2,726	38	7,886	2,629	32
2 Binfield	2	5,312	2,656	35	5,294	2,647	33
3 Bullbrook	3	5,074	1,691	-14	5,096	1,699	-15
4 Central Sandhurst	2	3,346	1,673	-15	3,079	1,540	-23
5 College Town	2	4,097	2,049	4	3,985	1,993	0
6 Cranbourne	1	1,110	1,110	-44	1,161	1,161	-42
7 Crowthorne	3	4,433	1,478	-25	4,453	1,484	-26
8 Garth	2	2,926	1,463	-26	2,840	1,420	-29
9 Great Hollands North	2	3,499	1,750	-11	4,118	2,059	3
10 Great Hollands South	2	3,596	1,798	-9	3,271	1,636	-18
11 Hanworth	3	6,549	2,183	11	6,073	2,024	1
12 Harmans Water	3	6,295	2,098	6	6,728	2,243	12
13 Little Sandhurst	2	3,154	1,577	-20	3,156	1,578	-21
14 Old Bracknell	3	4,037	1,346	-32	4,520	1,507	-25
15 Owlsmoor	1	4,203	4,203	113	4,095	4,095	105
16 Priestwood	2	2,670	1,335	-32	2,865	1,433	-28
17 St Mary's	1	1,675	1,675	-15	1,721	1,721	-14
18 Warfield	1	6,556	6,556	232	7,261	7,261	264
19 Wildridings	2	2,201	1,101	-44	2,281	1,141	-43
Totals	40	78,912	-	-	79,883	-	-
Averages	-	-	1,973	-	-	1,997	-

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

Note: The 'variance from average' column shows by how far, in percentage terms, the number of electors per councillor varies from the average for the borough. The minus symbol (-) denotes a lower than average number of electors. For example, in 2001, electors in Bullbrook ward were relatively over-represented by 14 per cent, while electors in Binfield ward were relatively under-represented by 35 per cent. Figures have been rounded to the nearest whole number.

3 SUBMISSIONS RECEIVED

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

22 During this initial stage of the review, officers from the LGCE visited the area and met officers and members from the Borough Council. We are grateful to all concerned for their co-operation and assistance. We received 11 representations during Stage One, including borough-wide schemes from the Borough Council and Bracknell Forest Borough Council Labour Group, all of which may be inspected at our offices and those of the Borough Council.

Bracknell Forest Borough Council

23 The Borough Council proposed a council of 43 members, three more than at present, serving 21 wards, compared to the existing 19. It proposed changes to 18 of the existing wards and that there should be one single-member, 18 two-member and two three-member wards. The Council had convened a working group of borough councillors to consider revised electoral arrangements and had conducted a consultation exercise with local interested parties on two warding options (Options A and B). Based on those who expressed a preference, it submitted Option A as its proposed warding arrangements for the borough, stating that its proposals “took account of the main parameters indicated by the Commission”. In particular, the Council proposed transferring the more urban developments of parishes surrounding Bracknell into the borough wards of the town, while proposing relatively minor amendments to the existing ward structure in the Sandhurst area.

24 Under the Borough Council’s proposed council size of 43, the number of electors per councillor in 16 of the proposed 21 wards would vary by no more than 10 per cent from the borough average. By 2006, this level of electoral equality is projected to improve, with no wards having an electoral variance of more than 10 per cent.

Bracknell Forest Borough Council Labour Group

25 The Bracknell Forest Borough Council Labour Group (‘the Labour Group’) argued that the Borough Council’s proposals had insufficient regard for the opinions expressed during the local consultation exercise and put forward its own warding arrangements for the borough. It stated that its proposal “builds on the Option B proposal and amends it in the light of feedback from the parishes and others”. It proposed a council of 42 members serving 19 wards and that there should be six three-member, 11 two-member and two single-member wards. In particular, the Labour Group proposed transferring urban settlements in the west of Winkfield parish into the borough wards of Bracknell town. It also proposed a new single-member Bracknell Central ward to represent newer communities towards the centre of the town. The Labour Group concurred with the Borough Council’s proposed warding arrangements in the Sandhurst and Crowthorne areas.

26 Under the Labour Group’s proposed council size of 42, the number of electors per councillor in 17 of the proposed 19 wards would vary by no more than 10 per cent from the borough average. By 2006, this level of electoral equality is projected to improve, with no wards having an electoral variance of more than 10 per cent.

Political Groups

27 Garth Branch Conservative Party endorsed the Borough Council's revised Garth ward and argued that it should retain its existing name. The Bracknell Constituency Liberal Democrats stated that the Borough Council's proposals were "misconceived, poorly presented and unlikely to meet with either much public understanding or support". They argued that its proposals could leave the Council open to the charge of "political opportunism". The Liberal Democrats expressed general support for the creation of more three-member wards in order to facilitate a move to elections by thirds. They also made some general comments on the representation of town councils in the borough.

Parish and Town Councils

28 We received representations from four parish and town councils. Winkfield Parish Council strongly objected to the Borough Council's proposals and put forward detailed borough warding proposals for the parish. It argued that incorporating parts of the parish into the borough wards of Bracknell town would breach existing parish and parliamentary constituency boundaries. It stated that the Borough Council's proposals would result in arbitrary ward boundaries and were therefore "completely unacceptable". The Parish Council proposed a new single-member St Mary's & St Peter's ward, a new three-member Priory ward and a new two-member Swinley Forest ward. It also put forward revised parish council electoral arrangements. The Parish Council had conducted its own local consultation process in the Martins Heron, Warren and Forest Park areas of the parish and stated that 94 per cent of respondents opposed the establishment of borough wards that would breach the parish boundary.

29 Warfield Parish Council argued that the Borough Council's proposals would "totally destroy" parish identity. It put forward its own warding arrangements for the parish and proposed a new single-member Warfield Lark's Hill ward and a new two-member Warfield Whitegrove ward which would both encompass the more recent urban developments in the south of the parish. It also proposed a new single-member Warfield St Michael's ward that would contain the more rural part of the parish. The Parish Council had conducted its own consultation process and stated that 89 per cent of respondents favoured the Parish Council's proposals. Bracknell Town Council objected to the Borough Council's proposals and argued that existing borough wards should be retained where they had an acceptable level of electoral equality. It supported the establishment of a Town Centre ward to represent new and developing communities in the centre of the town and put forward revised electoral arrangements for the Town Council. Binfield Parish Council opposed the division of the parish into more than one borough ward, arguing that this would be divisive. It supported the Borough Council's proposal to retain the existing Binfield ward and increase its representation to three borough councillors.

Other Representations

30 We received a further three representations from local organisations and others. Binfield Village Protection Society argued that warding Binfield parish would damage the cohesion of the village as a community. Martins Heron & Warren Residents Association stated that its primary concern was to preserve community identities and not create wards that would contain electors of "mixed age and areas of interest". It argued that a natural alliance for borough warding would be with Forest Park to its south. Councillor Flood (St Mary's) supported Winkfield Parish Council's proposals. However, he proposed a further sub division of its proposed Priory ward into a new two-member Winkfield East ward and a new single-member Winkfield West ward.

4 ANALYSIS AND DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS

31 We have not finalised our conclusions on the electoral arrangements for Bracknell Forest and welcome comments from all those interested relating to the proposed ward boundaries, number of councillors, electoral cycle, ward names, and parish and town council electoral arrangements. We will consider all the evidence submitted to us during the consultation period before preparing our final recommendations.

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

33 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 identifiable boundaries and to maintaining local ties.

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

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

Electorate Forecasts

36 Since 1975 there has been a 41 per cent increase in the electorate of Bracknell Forest borough. The Borough Council submitted electorate forecasts for the year 2006, projecting an increase in the electorate of approximately 1 per cent from 78,912 to 79,883 over the five-year period from 2001 to 2006. It expects most of the growth to be in Great Hollands North ward, although a significant amount is also expected in Old Bracknell ward and the more rural Warfield ward. In order to prepare these forecasts the Council, using a county-wide methodology, had 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 Borough Council on the likely effect on electorates of changes to ward boundaries has been obtained.

37 The Labour Group had substantially based its proposed electoral arrangements on the five-year electorate projections forecast by the Borough Council. However, while it proposed near identical proposals to the Borough Council in the Great Hollands area, it queried the Council’s electorate projections. It argued that the criteria used to calculate the projected electorate for the

Beedon Drive and Eddington Road area was incorrect as this area differs demographically from more established communities in the Great Hollands area. It considered that the proposed Great Hollands North ward would contain 3,729 electors by 2006, as compared to the Borough Council's figure of 3,660 and that the proposed Great Hollands South ward would contain 3,660 electors, as compared to the Borough Council's figure of 3,729.

38 In the light of the Labour Group's alternative electorate projection in the Great Hollands area, we carefully considered the evidence provided by the Borough Council and the Labour Group. We noted that the Borough Council and the Labour Group have put forward near identical warding arrangements in this area and proposed transferring the same number of electors from Great Hollands North ward to Great Hollands South ward. We noted that neither electorate projection would have a substantive effect on either the proposed warding arrangements or electoral equality in this area. Therefore, for the purposes of consultation, we have adopted the Borough Council's electorate projections for the Great Hollands area.

39 Winkfield Parish Council stated that it had "some reservations" in respect of the accuracy of the Borough Council's projected electorate figures in the Winkfield area. It argued that a number of new development sites in the Ascot area had not been taken into account by the Borough Council, and that the projected electorate increase in the more rural Cranbourne and St Mary's wards appeared unlikely. However, the Parish Council considered that these reservations would not materially affect the allocation of borough councillors for the Winkfield area and therefore used them as the basis of its warding proposals for the parish. Councillor Flood (St Mary's) concurred with Winkfield Parish Council. He stated that the projected decline and increase in electorate for some parts of the parish were "beyond comprehension".

40 In the light of these arguments, we sought further clarification from the Borough Council with regard to its electorate forecasts in the Winkfield area. We also carefully considered the comments of Winkfield Parish Council and Councillor Flood. The Borough Council confirmed that its electorate projection had been derived from a county-wide methodology and had, on the advice of the Commission, been amended to take account of all proposed developments within the parish over the course of the next five years. We acknowledge that forecasting electorates is a difficult and inexact science. However, having looked at the Borough Council's figures, we accept that they are the best estimates that can reasonably be made at this time. We note in particular that they have formed the basis of not only the Borough Council's proposals, but those of the Labour Group and Winkfield Parish Council.

41 As detailed below, we intend basing our draft recommendations in the Sandhurst and Crowthorne areas on the Borough Council's proposals. However, we have noted a minor inconsistency between the figures detailed in the Borough Council's Option A and Option B proposals that were put out to public consultation. For the purposes of consultation we have based the electorate projection in this area on the Option B figures. This has no substantive effect on either the proposed warding arrangements or the total projected electorate for the borough as a whole. However, we acknowledge the difference of opinion in respect of electorate projections for some parts of the borough and would therefore welcome further evidence during Stage Three.

Council Size

42 As explained earlier, we start by assuming that the current council size facilitates effective and convenient local government, although we are willing to look carefully at arguments why this might not be the case. Bracknell Forest Borough Council presently has 40 members. The Borough Council proposed a council of 43 members. It argued that unitary status for the borough

had placed additional responsibilities on members, and stated that its Focus Group had considered such an increase “not only justifiable but necessary”. The Labour Group stated that, in “all party” discussion prior to formulating warding proposals, borough councillors had agreed to a small increase in council size to offset the loss of county representation and the consequential increase in workload for borough councillors. It stated that an increase to 42 members could be justified to ensure more equitable representation in parts of the borough. Winkfield and Warfield parish councils had based their proposed warding arrangements on a council size of 43. Winkfield Parish Council stated that an increase to 43 borough councillors “is appropriate at this time”.

43 While noting the lack of consensus in respect of council size, we recognise that both borough-wide schemes have proposed a similar increase in council size. While we do not necessarily subscribe to the point of view that loss of county councillor representation automatically justifies an increase in the number of members representing the borough, we accept there is a broad consensus in favour of a small increase in council size. We note that both borough-wide schemes provide the correct allocation of councillors between the primary areas of the borough and would therefore provide much improved levels of electoral equality. However, we note that a council size of 42 would facilitate the most equitable distribution of councillors and therefore secure the greater improvement in electoral equality across the borough.

44 Having looked at the size and distribution of the electorate, the geography and other characteristics of the area, together with the responses received, we therefore conclude that the achievement of electoral equality and the statutory criteria would best be met by a council of 42 members.

Electoral Arrangements

45 A number of considerations have emerged which have assisted us in preparing our draft recommendations. We recognise that Bracknell Forest is a diverse borough that combines rural areas in the north and east with large urban developments to the west and south and has been subject to significant changes in the size and distribution of its electorate over recent years. We acknowledge that both borough-wide schemes would secure much improved levels of electoral equality both now and by 2006. For the Sandhurst and Crowthorne areas of the borough, we note a broad degree of consensus in favour of the Borough Council’s proposals. We consider that the Borough Council’s proposed warding arrangements for this area provide a satisfactory balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria and have therefore adopted them as part of our draft recommendations.

46 We recognise that the review process has been somewhat contentious in Bracknell town and the surrounding ‘northern parishes’. However, we note that there are some areas of consensus between the two borough-wide proposals. In particular, we note that both make provision for the transfer of a number of more urban settlements in the existing Ascot ward into the borough wards of Bracknell town. However, we also recognise the strong opposition to these proposals from the parishes affected and the alternative warding arrangements they put forward that had been the subject of a thorough consultation exercise. We note that both Winkfield and Warfield parish councils strongly opposed the creation of borough wards that would breach existing parish boundaries. However, we have concluded that change to the warding structure in this area is necessary in order to secure the effective and convenient representation of more urban communities that abut the parish boundary with Bracknell town, as well as ensuring clear and easily identifiable ward boundaries.

47 We have carefully considered the evidence received at Stage One, and officers from the Commission have visited the borough to examine the viability of each warding proposal. We are basing our draft recommendations in the Bracknell and surrounding area on the Labour Group's proposals, which we consider will provide a better balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria than the current arrangements. However, to ensure more easily identifiable ward boundaries that better reflect community identities and interests, we have decided to move away from the Labour Group's proposals in some areas, particularly towards the centre of Bracknell town, and propose utilising a number of alternative warding options put forward by the Borough Council, together with some of our own proposals. We consider our proposed warding arrangements for the borough will ensure the best balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria, and will secure the most effective and convenient representation of its constituent communities. For borough warding purposes, the following areas, based on existing wards, are considered in turn:

Northern Parishes

- (a) Ascot, Cranbourne and St Mary's wards;
- (b) Binfield and Warfield wards;

Bracknell town

- (c) Bullbrook, Garth and Priestwood wards;
- (d) Old Bracknell and Wildridings wards;
- (e) Great Hollands North and Great Hollands South wards;
- (f) Hanworth and Harmans Water wards;

Sandhurst and Crowthorne

- (g) Central Sandhurst, College Town and Owlsmoor wards;
- (h) Crowthorne and Little Sandhurst wards.

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

Ascot, Cranbourne and St Mary's wards

49 The existing wards of Ascot, Cranbourne and St Mary's are situated in the north-east of the borough, and together form the parish of Winkfield. Ascot ward contains North Ascot town and is a three-member ward while the more rural Cranbourne and St Mary's wards are each served by a single councillor. Under existing arrangements, Ascot ward has 38 per cent more electors per councillor than the borough average and is forecast to contain 32 per cent more than the average by 2006. Cranbourne and St Mary's wards have 44 per cent fewer and 15 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the borough average respectively (42 per cent fewer and 14 per cent fewer than the average by 2006).

50 At Stage One, the Borough Council proposed a new two-member ward that would comprise the existing Cranbourne ward, the existing St Mary's ward (with minor amendments to tie the southern boundary of the proposed ward to clear ground detail) and the more rural part of the existing Warfield ward broadly to the north of Harvest Ride, Forest Road and the Warfield Park Mobile Home Site. The Borough Council argued that the constituent communities of its proposed ward share common rural characteristics and are subject to the issue of rural

development. The Borough Council did not put forward a name for the proposed ward. As discussed in detail later, it proposed that more urban areas in the south of the existing Warfield ward should be incorporated into the borough wards of Bracknell town.

51 The Borough Council proposed a new two-member Ascot Priory ward comprising that part of the existing Ascot ward broadly to the east of New Forest Ride and the B3017 Priory Road. It also proposed a new single-member Ascot & the Warren ward comprising Chalvey Down, Warren and that part of Forest Park to the rear of properties on the north side of Chisbury Close and Micheldever Way. As discussed in detail later, it proposed that the remaining urban developments in the west of the existing Ascot ward should be transferred to the borough wards of Bracknell town. Under the Borough Council's proposals for a council size of 43, the proposed ward comprising the Cranbourne, St Mary's and rural Warfield areas of the borough would have 1 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the borough average currently and 3 per cent more than the average by 2006. Ascot Priory and Ascot & the Warren wards would have 2 per cent fewer and 12 per cent more electors per councillor than the borough average respectively (8 per cent fewer and 7 per cent more than the average by 2006).

52 The Labour Group proposed that the existing Cranbourne and St Mary's wards should be combined with that part of the existing Warfield ward broadly to the east of Ascot Road and Malt Hill (and including a number of properties on the west side of these roads) in a new two-member Winkfield & Cranbourne ward. The Labour Group argued that its proposed ward would encompass the distinctive Green Belt area to the north of Bracknell town and stated that the eastern part of Warfield parish shared clear transportation links with the Cranbourne and St Mary's areas of Winkfield parish. It argued that the Borough Council's proposed ward encompassed too large a geographical area and asserted that these communities would be more effectively represented under its proposed two-member ward. The Labour Group also proposed a revised two-member Ascot ward comprising that part of the existing ward to the east of New Forest Ride and Bog Lane. It argued that its proposed ward contained a number of rural and semi-rural Green Belt areas that had a clear and separate identity from urban areas to its west. It also argued that New Forest Ride and Bog Lane provide clear and well-defined features on which to base borough ward boundaries.

53 As discussed in detail later, the Labour Group proposed that more recent urban developments in the west of the existing Ascot ward should be transferred to the borough wards of Bracknell town. Under the Labour Group's proposed council size of 42, Ascot and Winkfield & Cranbourne wards would have 5 per cent more and 2 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the borough average respectively (equal to and 1 per cent more than the average by 2006).

54 Winkfield Parish Council strongly objected to the Borough Council's proposals and argued that they would divide the parish into "too many artificially contrived areas which do not reflect identifiable communities". It further stated that residents in the west of the parish feel no affinity with communities in Bracknell town and opposed any warding option that would breach either the parish boundary with Bracknell or the existing boundary between the parliamentary constituencies of Bracknell and Windsor. It stated that the Borough Council's proposals would cause confusion among electors and concluded that they were "completely unacceptable". Having conducted its own consultation exercise in the Martins Heron, Warren and Forest Park communities, it stated that, out of some 650 responses, approximately 94 per cent opposed the creation of borough wards that would straddle the parish boundary and supported the continuation of these areas in the same borough ward.

55 The Parish Council therefore put forward its own warding arrangements for the Winkfield area. It proposed a new single-member St Mary's & St Peter's ward that would comprise that area of the parish broadly to the north of Forest Road, and a new three-member Priory ward comprising that part of the parish to the north of the London to Reading railway line. It proposed that the remainder of the parish, to the south of the railway line should form a new two-member Swinley Forest ward. The Parish Council argued that its proposals utilised clear and distinct local features as a basis for its proposed ward boundaries, and provided the best reflection of the views of local residents. While acknowledging that its proposals would result in the division of Martins Heron and the Warren between two borough wards, it noted that these communities are separated by the railway line. It considered the Martins Heron area to be distinctive in that it contains the oldest and least densely populated area of the combined development. Under our proposed council size of 42, St Mary's & St Peter's, Priory and Swinley Forest wards would have 8 per cent fewer, 6 per cent fewer and 5 per cent more electors per councillor than the borough average respectively (5 per cent fewer, 9 per cent fewer and equal to the borough average by 2006).

56 Councillor Flood (St Mary's ward) argued that Borough Council's proposals were "wholly unacceptable" and stated that the established communities of Winkfield had already been forced to accept considerable changes over recent years, particularly with the development of Bracknell New Town. He considered that the Borough Council's proposals had little respect for the identity of individual communities and were purely a "mathematical exercise". Councillor Flood supported the proposals of Winkfield Parish Council, subject to one amendment. He proposed a further division of the Parish Council's proposed Priory ward into a new two-member Winkfield East ward broadly focussed on North Ascot town and including London Road, and a new single-member Winkfield West ward comprising the remainder of the proposed ward. He argued that the two areas were distinct from each other and share limited communication and transport links. He concluded that his proposals would ensure the "proper and sufficient democratic representation" of the constituent communities of Winkfield parish. Under our proposed council size of 42, Winkfield East and Winkfield West wards would have 13 per cent fewer and 10 per cent more electors per councillor than the borough average respectively (16 per cent fewer and 6 per cent more than the average by 2006).

57 Martins Heron & Warren Residents Association stated that its overriding concern was that the identity of the community be preserved and not be "lost in the search for equal-sized electoral wards". While acknowledging that the Martins Heron and Warren area did not contain sufficient electors to sustain a coterminous single-member ward, it considered the most logical alliance for the purposes of borough warding was with the Forest Park area to its south. Warfield Parish Council argued that the Borough Council's proposals would divide communities that share clear identities and interests. For this reason, the Parish Council was opposed to the creation of borough wards that would breach existing parish boundaries and put forward its own warding arrangements for the parish which are outlined below.

58 We have carefully considered the representations received at Stage One and note that both borough-wide schemes would provide excellent levels of electoral equality. However, we have not been persuaded that the Borough Council's proposals would appropriately reflect local community identities and interests in this area. We consider that its proposed single-member Ascot & the Warren ward would divide communities in Forest Park and combine disparate areas that are separated from each other by a number of main roads. We also consider that the proposed ward utilises an arbitrary boundary and would divide the communities of Martins Heron and the Warren. While we recognise that these areas are separated from each other by the London to Reading railway line, we consider that they have shared community identities and interests and have not been persuaded that they should be divided for the purposes of borough

warding. In respect of the Borough Council's proposed ward that would comprise the rural Warfield, Cranbourne and St Mary's areas of the borough, we consider that it covers a relatively large geographical area and has insufficient regard for the statutory criteria. We generally concur with the views of Winkfield Parish Council that the Borough Council's proposals would result in the excessive division of Winkfield parish between borough wards. We have therefore not been persuaded to adopt the Borough Council's proposed warding arrangements for this area as part of our draft recommendations.

59 We are particularly grateful to Winkfield Parish Council for its submission and recognise the extremely thorough consultation process that it undertook with local residents of the parish. While we recognise that a substantial majority of respondents opposed the creation of borough wards that breached the parish boundary with Bracknell town, we have not been persuaded that the Parish Council's proposals will ensure the best balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria. We consider that the communities of Martins Heron, the Warren and Forest Park utilise joint amenities and facilities with adjoining communities in Bracknell. We note in particular that Forest Park shares a number of communication and transport links with the Crown Wood area of Bracknell town. While we accept that such links are less clearly defined in the Martins Heron area, we have concluded that this community shares even weaker communication links with North Ascot and other communities in the Parish Council's proposed Priory ward. We consider there is further scope for improving electoral equality in this area and are not persuaded that this issue has been sufficiently addressed in the supplementary proposals of Councillor Flood.

60 We note that the Parish Council raised the issue of the parliamentary constituency boundary in this area. Although the creation of cross-parish borough wards would breach the existing constituency boundary, this is not an issue we can have regard to as part of this review. The Parliamentary Boundary Commission for England is in the process of conducting its fifth review of parliamentary constituency boundaries. The borough ward boundaries proposed by the Local Government Commission will form the basis of the Boundary Commission's recommended parliamentary boundaries.

61 Officers from the Commission have visited the borough and assessed the viability of all the proposed warding arrangements for this area. We have concluded that to ensure effective and convenient local government in this area, as well as securing the best balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria, that urban developments in the west of Winkfield parish should be incorporated into the borough wards of Bracknell town. We have carefully considered the Labour Group's proposals and consider that they provide the best balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria, as well as utilising clear and well-defined ward boundaries. We are persuaded that they reflect an appropriate balance between the Borough Council's proposals and the views expressed by Winkfield Parish Council and others at Stage One. In particular we consider that its proposals will not excessively divide the parish of Winkfield between individual borough wards and will facilitate the most effective and convenient representation of both urban and rural communities in the Winkfield area. We therefore intend adopting the Labour Group's proposals for this area as part of our draft recommendations.

62 We would emphasise that our proposed borough warding arrangements in no way indicate a view as to any future amendments to existing parish boundaries. It is the responsibility of the Borough Council to conduct a parish review, and no changes to parish boundaries can be made without local consultation. We recognise that the review has been particularly controversial in this area at Stage One and would particularly welcome further comments on our draft recommendations at Stage Three. Under our draft recommendations for a council size of 42,

Winkfield & Cranbourne and Ascot wards would have 2 per cent fewer and 5 per cent more electors per councillor than the borough average respectively (1 per cent more and equal to the average by 2006). Our draft proposals are illustrated on Map 2, and on Map A2 and A3 in Appendix A.

Binfield and Warfield wards

63 The existing wards of Binfield and Warfield are situated in the north of the borough, and abut the northern boundary of Bracknell town. Binfield ward is coterminous with Binfield parish and is a two-member ward. Warfield ward is coterminous with Warfield parish and is a single-member ward. Over the past two decades, there has been substantial residential development in Warfield ward, particularly in the area that adjoins the northern boundary of Bracknell town. Under existing arrangements, Binfield and Warfield wards have 35 per cent more and 232 per cent more electors per councillor than the borough average respectively (33 per cent more and 264 per cent more than the average by 2006).

64 At Stage One, the Borough Council proposed retaining the existing Binfield ward but proposed that its representation increase from two to three borough councillors. It argued that with three councillors, the existing Binfield ward would have a good level of electoral equality while utilising a well-established ward boundary. As detailed earlier, the Borough Council proposed incorporating the northern part of Warfield ward with the existing St Mary's and Cranbourne wards in a new two-member ward. It proposed that the more urban Whitegrove development (excluding the Field Park area to the west of Jig's Lane South) and including Top Common, form a new three-member Whitegrove ward. The Borough Council argued that electors in this area utilise joint amenities and facilities. As detailed below, the Borough Council proposed transferring that part of the Whitegrove area, broadly to the south and west of Harvest Ride and Jig's Lane South to a revised three-member Bullbrook ward. It also proposed that the Quelm Park area be incorporated in a revised two-member Garth ward. Under the Borough Council's proposed council size of 43, Binfield and Whitegrove wards would have 4 per cent fewer and 7 per cent more electors per councillor than the borough average respectively (5 per cent fewer and 9 per cent more than the average by 2006).

65 The Labour Group proposed a new two-member Binfield Popeswood ward that would comprise more recent developments in the south of Binfield parish. It proposed that the more rural part of the existing Binfield ward, to the north of Forest Road and focused on the old village of Binfield, be combined with that part of the existing Warfield ward to the north of Harvest Ride and west of Ascot Road and Malt Hill in a new single-member Binfield with Warfield ward. The Labour Group noted that its proposed Binfield Popeswood ward would contain the more urban south of the parish while its proposed Binfield with Warfield ward would utilise strong ward boundaries and would enable the effective representation of "rural and village interests". It rejected combining parts of the existing Binfield ward with the borough wards of Bracknell town, arguing that its proposals would avoid the "fragmentation" of Binfield parish.

66 The Labour Group proposed that the remainder of the existing Warfield ward, broadly to the south of Harvest Ride and comprising the more urban Whitegrove and Quelm Park areas form a new three-member Warfield Harvest Ride ward. It argued that the Borough Council's proposals would fragment this area, and asserted that its proposals provided a more coherent solution by combining all of the relatively new urban developments in the south of Warfield in its proposed ward. It argued that these communities utilise joint amenities and facilities and stated that its proposals utilised clear boundaries formed by Harvest Ride to the north and the parish boundary to the south. As discussed earlier, the Labour Group proposed that the eastern part of the existing

Warfield ward be combined with part of Winkfield parish in a new two-member Winkfield & Cranbourne ward. Under the Labour Group's proposed council size of 42, Binfield Popeswood and Binfield with Warfield wards would have 5 per cent more and 3 per cent more electors per councillor than the borough average respectively (both wards would have 3 per cent more electors per councillor than the borough average by 2006). Warfield Harvest Ride ward would have 10 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the current borough average and equal to the average by 2006.

67 Warfield Parish Council strongly objected to the Borough Council's proposals, and argued that they would hinder the effective representation of Warfield parish at borough level. It stated that the Borough Council's proposals were unacceptable and had conducted its own consultation exercise among local residents in the Warfield area. The Parish Council stated that 89 per cent of respondents favoured a warding solution that reflected the existing parish boundary and put forward its own proposals for the Warfield area stating that they were "compliant with the Commission's criteria and retained the parish identity". The Parish Council proposed a new single-member Warfield St Michael's ward that would reflect the rural area of the parish, but would also include the Bedfordshire Down area of the more urban Whitegrove development. It also proposed a new single-member Lark's Hill ward reflecting that part of existing ward to the south of Harvest Ride and up to and including the rear of properties on the east side of Top Common. It proposed that the remainder of the existing Warfield ward containing the majority of the Whitegrove area form a new two-member Warfield Whitegrove ward. The Parish Council argued that its proposals would meet the statutory criteria, while providing good electoral equality and addressing the "urban overspill issue".

68 Under our proposed council size of 42, Warfield Parish Council's proposed St Michaels, Whitegrove and Lark's Hill wards would have 16 per cent, 12 per cent and 9 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the borough average respectively (7 per cent fewer, 7 per cent fewer and 4 per cent more than the average by 2006).

69 Binfield Parish Council was opposed to the creation of borough wards that would straddle existing parish boundaries. It argued that this would dilute parish identity and cause confusion among local electors. In respect of the Binfield area, the parish supported the Borough Council's proposals for a revised three-member Binfield ward that would remain coterminous with the parish. Binfield Village Protection Society was also opposed to the establishment of borough wards that would straddle existing parish boundaries. It stated that its main objective had been to "enhance the individual identity of the village", and argued that the warding of Binfield at parish or borough level would have an adverse affect on the continuing cohesion of the village. It supported increasing the representation of the area to three borough councillors and considered that this could enhance interest among local electors. As stated above, Winkfield Parish Council was opposed to the creation of borough wards that would breach parish boundaries, and put forward its own electoral arrangements in the Winkfield area.

70 We have carefully considered the representations received at Stage One. We recognise that the Borough Council's proposals would secure much improved levels of electoral equality. However, we consider that its proposals utilise insufficiently clear ward boundaries, particularly in the south Warfield and north Bracknell areas. We acknowledge that the Borough Council's proposed Binfield ward is supported by both Binfield Parish Council and the Binfield Village Protection Society and would secure good electoral equality. However, we must adopt a borough-wide approach when formulating our draft recommendations and consider the impact on adjacent areas of retaining the existing ward. We are not persuaded that division of the parish between more than one borough ward would necessarily hinder the effective and convenient

representation of its constituent communities. Furthermore, we consider that there are a number of discrete communities within the parish that warrant separate representation on the Borough Council. We consider that, by combining parts of Warfield ward with the borough wards of Bracknell town, the Borough Council's proposals would divide communities in the Whitegrove and Quelm Park areas. We consider that the parish boundary between Warfield and Bracknell continues to provide a sufficiently clear feature on which to base borough ward boundaries. Moreover, we consider that the more urban areas of the existing ward are of sufficient size to sustain a separate borough ward. We are therefore not persuaded to adopt the Borough Council's proposed warding arrangements for this area as part of our draft recommendations.

71 We are particularly grateful to Warfield Parish Council for the detailed proposals it put forward at Stage One. We recognise that the Parish Council had conducted a thorough consultation exercise among local residents and that a substantial majority of respondents were opposed the creation of borough wards that would straddle existing parish boundaries. We accept that the Parish Council's proposals have some merit, in that they would secure significant improvement in the current high levels of electoral inequality in the existing Warfield ward. However, in attempting to retain borough wards that are coterminous with the existing parish boundary, we consider that the Parish Council has not sufficiently addressed the need to ensure clear and distinct ward boundaries. In particular, we consider that the proposed two-member Whitegrove ward would separate the Bedfordshire Down and Top Common areas from the remainder of the Whitegrove area. As stated above, we have to adopt a borough-wide approach in formulating our recommendations and seek to ensure that our proposals will both reflect the identities and interests of local communities while securing effective and convenient local government. We have therefore not been persuaded that the proposals of Warfield Parish Council provide the best balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria in this area.

72 We have concluded that the Labour Group's proposals will secure the most effective and convenient representation of the area, while ensuring much improved electoral equality. We consider that the Labour Group's proposed Binfield Popeswood ward would ensure the effective and convenient representation of more recent developments in the south of the parish. Moreover, we consider that the proposed Binfield with Warfield ward would more effectively represent the interests of more established rural communities in the north of Binfield and Warfield parishes.

73 In respect of the south Warfield area, we consider that the Labour Group's proposed Warfield Harvest Ride ward would reflect the identities and interests of local communities while ensuring that more recent developments which adjoin the northern boundary of Bracknell town are effectively represented at borough level. We consider that the Labour Group's proposals in the Warfield area secure an appropriate balance between the proposals of the Borough Council and the views expressed by local interested parties at Stage One, while providing excellent levels of electoral equality. We note in particular that its proposed wards would not breach the parish boundary with Bracknell town in either the Binfield or Warfield areas. We therefore consider that the Labour Group's proposals provide the best balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria in this area and intend adopting them as part of our draft recommendations.

74 We would emphasise that our proposed borough warding arrangements in no way indicate a view as to any future amendments to existing parish boundaries. It is the responsibility of the Borough Council to conduct a parish review, and no changes to parish boundaries can be made without local consultation. We recognise that we have significantly departed from a number of the warding proposals put forward at Stage One for this area and would particularly welcome further views on our draft recommendations for these wards at Stage Three. Under our draft recommendations for a council size of 42, Binfield Popeswood, Binfield with Warfield and

Warfield Harvest Ride wards would have 5 per cent more, 3 per cent more and 10 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the borough average respectively (3 per cent more, 3 per cent more and equal to the average by 2006). Our draft proposals are illustrated on Map 2, Map A2 in Appendix A and on the large map at the back of this report.

Bullbrook, Garth and Priestwood wards

75 The existing wards of Bullbrook, Garth and Priestwood are situated in the north of Bracknell, a town of some 37,000 electors that constitutes the largest settlement in the borough. Garth and Priestwood wards are two of the original new-town neighbourhoods and are each represented by two councillors. Bullbrook ward is situated in the north-east of the town and is a three-member ward. Under existing arrangements, Bullbrook, Garth and Priestwood wards have 14 per cent, 26 per cent and 32 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the borough average respectively (15 per cent, 29 per cent and 28 per cent fewer than the average by 2006).

76 At Stage One, the Borough Council proposed a revised two-member Priestwood ward that would comprise the existing ward and that part of Garth ward up to the rear of properties on the south of Shepherds Lane, and a number of properties on the east side of the B3018 Binfield Road. It proposed that the remainder of the existing Garth ward be combined with that part of the existing Warfield ward to the west of Gough's Lane and south of Harvest Ride, and that part of Bullbrook ward to the north of the junction between Priory Lane and Warfield Road in a new two-member ward. It did not put forward a name for the proposed ward. The Borough Council stated that its proposed wards would unite adjacent areas that share the same "urban characteristics" and utilise shared amenities and facilities.

77 The Borough Council proposed that the remainder of Bullbrook ward (less that part broadly to the west of Gypsy Lane and South of London Road) should be combined with the Martins Heron area of Ascot ward, and the Field Park area of the existing Warfield ward in a new three-member ward. It did not put forward a name for the proposed ward. The Borough Council argued that the Field Park area of Warfield ward shared clear and direct communication links with the Bullbrook area. While acknowledging that the Martins Heron area is a self-contained community with its own local facilities and railway station, it noted that Bullbrook residents have ready access to facilities in Martins Heron across Bullbrook recreation ground.

78 As discussed in detail below, the Borough Council proposed that the south-west of the existing Bullbrook ward should be incorporated in a new two-member ward comprising the central and Wildridings areas of Bracknell town. Under the Borough Council's proposed council size of 43, its revised Bullbrook and Garth wards would have 1 per cent fewer and 13 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the borough average respectively (2 per cent fewer and 3 per cent fewer than the average by 2006). Priestwood ward would have 2 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the borough average now, and 1 per cent more than the average by 2006.

79 The Labour Group proposed a revised three-member Priestwood ward, comprising the existing ward and that part of Garth ward to the north and west of Sandy Lane and Bull Lane. As discussed below, it proposed that the Shepherds Hill and Grange Road area of Garth ward be transferred to a new single-member Central ward. It proposed a revised two-member Bullbrook ward with the transfer of the Calfridus Way area to a revised three-member Harmans Water ward. It proposed that the area broadly to the west of Larges Lane be transferred to a new single-member Bracknell Central ward (as detailed below). The Labour Group argued that its proposed Priestwood ward united the two parts of the original 1950s Priestwood development in a single ward and stated that these areas have an "established identity". It argued that transferring parts of

the existing Warfield ward to the borough wards of Bracknell town was neither “necessary or desirable”. The Labour Group had considered a number of warding options in the Bullbrook area. It conceded that its proposed ward would breach the London to Reading railway line but argued that the Calfridus Way area shared more convenient communication links with Harmans Water than with areas to the north of London Road. It argued that its proposed Bullbrook ward would ensure good electoral equality, while respecting community identities and would not confuse local electors.

80 Under the Labour Group’s proposed council size of 42, Bullbrook and Priestwood wards would have 2 per cent more and 5 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the borough average respectively (2 per cent more and 4 per cent fewer than the average by 2006).

81 Bracknell Town Council opposed the Borough Council’s proposed warding arrangements. It stated that Garth and Priestwood were the two original new town neighbourhoods and therefore have a “natural affinity”, as well as utilising joint amenities and facilities. It argued that the Borough Council’s proposals would arbitrarily divide the Garth area and combine it with parts of Warfield ward with which it shared poor communication links and no sense of community identity. The Town Council argued that the Borough Council’s proposed Bullbrook ward was a “complete hotch potch” that would combine parts of three different parishes which have no natural links or cohesion. While the Town Council did not put forward detailed borough warding arrangements of its own, it considered that existing wards should be retained where they have acceptable electoral equality, and urged the Commission to have regard for the unique identities and boundaries of existing communities in the town.

82 Warfield Parish Council opposed the Borough Council’s proposal to combine parts of newer developments in the south of the parish into the borough wards of Garth and Bullbrook. It argued that it would prove difficult for the interests of the parish to be effectively represented at borough level if parts of the parish were combined with neighbouring parishes where conflicting views might be held. As detailed earlier, it put forward its own borough warding arrangements for the Warfield area. Winkfield Parish Council strongly objected to the Borough Council’s proposal to transfer the Martins Heron area into a revised Bullbrook ward. It was also opposed to the establishment of borough wards that would straddle existing parish boundaries in this area. As detailed earlier, the Parish Council put forward its own warding arrangements for the Winkfield area.

83 The Garth Branch of Bracknell Conservative Association supported the Borough Council’s proposals in the Garth area. It argued for “historical and pragmatic reasons”, that Garth should be retained as the name of the proposed ward. Martins Heron & Warren Residents Association stated that its overriding concern was that the identity of the community be preserved and not “lost in the search for equal-sized electoral wards”. While acknowledging that the Martins Heron and Warren area did not contain sufficient electors to sustain a coterminous single-member ward, it considered the most logical alliance for the purposes of borough warding was with the Forest Park area to its south.

84 We have given careful consideration to the representations received at Stage One. Having considered the Borough Council’s proposed electoral arrangements, we recognise that it has sought to combine adjoining urban areas, even where this would result in the creation of borough wards that breach existing parish boundaries. Moreover, we acknowledge that the Borough Council’s proposals would ensure much improved electoral equality in the wards affected. However, we have not been persuaded that the Borough Council’s proposals would secure effective and convenient local government in this area.

85 We consider that the Borough Council's proposals do not utilise sufficiently clear and distinct ward boundaries and would divide communities in the Garth area of Bracknell and the Quelm Park area of Warfield ward. We note that in some areas, the Borough Council has proposed that entire roads be united within the same borough ward. While we are not opposed to this approach, we would emphasise that main roads often provide a clear demarcation, as well as a focus of established communities, and consider that the Borough Council's proposals would result in arbitrary ward boundaries in this area. Furthermore, we consider that its proposed Bullbrook ward would encompass a relatively large geographical area and contain a number of disparate communities that are separated from each other by a number of main roads. In particular, we consider that the proposed ward would divide communities in the Whitegrove, Martins Heron and Warren areas of the borough.

86 As stated earlier, we have concluded that the parish boundary between Bracknell town, and the parishes of Binfield and Warfield provides a clear and distinct feature on which to base borough ward boundaries. We consider that the Borough Council's proposals would result in the excessive fragmentation of communities in the Warfield area. We consider that the more urban Whitegrove and Quelm Park areas of the parish are of sufficient size to warrant separate representation at borough level and have not been persuaded that the Borough Council's proposals would secure the best balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria in this area.

87 We consider that the Labour Group's proposals will secure the most effective and convenient representation of the area, while ensuring much improved electoral equality. We note in particular that its proposals would unite the established new-town neighbourhoods of Priestwood and Garth in the same borough ward. We consider that these areas, which are the earliest neighbourhoods of Bracknell new-town, have shared identities and interests and would therefore make an appropriate alliance for the purposes of borough warding. We consider that the Labour Group's proposals would reflect the identities and interests of the Bullbrook, Priestwood and Garth areas, while utilising distinct ward boundaries that are tied to clear ground detail. Its proposals would also avoid the excessive warding and fragmentation of communities in the Warfield and Binfield areas and would not involve the establishment of borough wards that straddle the boundary with Bracknell town. We consider that the Labour Group's proposals would secure an appropriate balance between the proposals of the Borough Council and the parishes affected, while providing excellent levels of electoral equality. We therefore intend adopting the Labour Group's proposals for this area as part of our draft recommendations, subject to two amendments.

88 As detailed below, the Labour Group proposed that approximately 200 electors in the south of the existing Garth ward be transferred to a new single-member Bracknell Central ward. We have not been persuaded that this proposed ward would utilise sufficiently clear and distinct ward boundaries and therefore propose that this area should be retained with the Garth area for the purposes of borough warding. Furthermore, we propose that the Labour Group's proposed Priestwood ward be named Priestwood & Garth to more accurately reflect the constituent communities of the proposed ward. Under our draft recommendations for a council size of 42, Priestwood & Garth and Bullbrook wards would have 1 per cent fewer and 2 per cent more electors per councillor than the borough average respectively (equal to and 1 per cent more than the average by 2006). Our draft proposals are illustrated on the large map at the back of this report.

Old Bracknell and Wildridings wards

89 The existing wards of Old Bracknell and Wildridings are situated towards the centre of Bracknell town. Old Bracknell ward is based on the pre-new town settlement of Bracknell and is currently represented by three councillors. Wildridings ward is based on the new-town neighbourhood of the same name and is a two-member ward. Under existing arrangements, Old Bracknell and Wildridings wards have 32 per cent fewer and 44 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the borough average respectively (25 per cent fewer and 43 per cent fewer than the average by 2006).

90 At Stage One, the Borough Council proposed a revised two-member Old Bracknell ward, with the transfer of Finmere, Gainsborough and Greenham Wood to a new two-member Birch Hill ward (as discussed below). It proposed that the part of the existing ward to the south and east of Crowthorne Road and up to the rear of properties on the north side of Rectory Lane and the rear of properties on the west side of South Lynn Crescent be transferred to a revised two-member Wildridings ward. The Borough Council proposed that its revised Wildridings ward also include that part of Bullbrook ward to the south and west of London Road and Gipsy Lane, and that part of Priestwood ward to the east of Skimped Hill. The Borough Council stated that the Wildridings and Central areas of Bracknell “combine well to be regarded as a town centre area”. It argued that properties in the central area of the proposed ward access only onto the town centre area and are not linked in any way to surrounding estates. It did not put forward a name for the proposed ward. The Borough Council argued that its proposed Old Bracknell ward utilised strong ward boundaries and that the proposed Church Hill House estate, situated in the south of the proposed ward would ensure good electoral equality in the long term. Under the Borough Council’s proposed council size of 43, Old Bracknell and Wildridings wards would have 16 per cent fewer and 3 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the borough average respectively (5 per cent fewer and equal to the average by 2006).

91 The Labour Group proposed combining that part of the existing Old Bracknell ward broadly to the south of Bill Hill and to the rear of properties on the south side of Beech Glen (and less those roads to the north of the sports centre that exit onto Bagshot Road) with that part of Wildridings ward broadly to the south of Wildridings Road and Kyle Close in a new three-member Easthampstead & Wildridings ward. It proposed a new single-member Bracknell Central ward, comprising the remainder of the existing Old Bracknell and Wildridings wards, that part of Harmans Water ward to the north of Broad Lane and including a number of roads that exit onto Bagshot Road, that part of Bullbrook ward to the west of Larges Lane and that part of Garth ward to the south and west of Sandy Lane and Warfield Road. The Labour Group accepted that communities in the Wildridings and Old Bracknell areas have strong individual identities, but noted that both areas share educational, religious and community facilities and have been combined in the same county division in the past. The Labour Group argued that communities towards the centre of Bracknell have always been used as a “make weight” for neighbouring borough wards and considered that its proposed Bracknell Central ward would unite central communities that look to the town centre and are subject to different local issues from the established neighbourhoods of the town. While acknowledging that the boundaries of its proposed ward utilised “less obvious physical features”, it argued that the different nature and interests of these areas justified the proposed arrangement.

92 Under the Labour Group’s proposed council size of 42, Easthampstead & Wildridings and Bracknell Central wards would have 4 per cent fewer and 6 per cent more electors per councillor than the borough average respectively (4 per cent more and 3 per cent more than the average by 2006).

93 Bracknell Town Council accepted the Borough Council's proposal to transfer Finmere, Gainsborough and Greenham Wood from Old Bracknell ward to its proposed ward containing the Birch Hill and Forest Park areas. However, it stressed the importance of the Wildridings area retaining its uniqueness and community identity. It argued that the Borough Council's proposal to combine Wildridings and central Bracknell would link areas that do not have a natural affinity and that are separated by a number of main roads. In respect of central Bracknell, the Town Council expressed support for the establishment of a Town Centre ward. It stated that central Bracknell had been the subject of a number of new residential developments in recent years and argued that electors in this area do not have a "readily identifiable voice". While not providing any detailed proposals for borough warding arrangements in this area, it stated that it would support a proposed Central ward providing electors are taken from existing wards "as appropriately as possible".

94 We have carefully considered the representations received at Stage One and recognise that both the Borough Council's and the Labour Group's proposals would secure much improved electoral equality in this area. We have carefully examined the Labour Group's proposed Bracknell Central ward. We acknowledge that there have been a number of recent residential developments towards the centre of the town and that these communities are presently divided between several borough wards. While we accept that these areas may have particular interests and concerns, we have not been persuaded that the Labour Group's proposed Bracknell Central ward utilises sufficiently clear and distinct ward boundaries and judge that it would combine a number of geographically dispersed communities. In particular, we are not persuaded that areas to the south of Downshire Way identify with communities towards the centre of the town, and consider that they share greater identities and interests with the Wildridings and Old Bracknell neighbourhoods.

95 We consider that the Borough Council's proposed ward containing the Wildridings and Central areas of the town and its proposed Old Bracknell ward would provide a better balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria. We consider that they would utilise clearly defined ward boundaries and not divide communities between different borough wards. We therefore intend basing our draft recommendations for this area on the Borough Council's proposals, subject to several amendments. We note that the Borough Council proposed incorporating the Goodways Drive area of the existing Bullbrook ward in its revised Wildridings ward. We have concluded that this area shares greater identities and interests with the Bullbrook area of the town. Moreover, we note that it shares more direct communication links with areas to its north than with the Wildridings area. We therefore propose that the eastern boundary of the proposed ward follow Larges Lane, up to the London to Reading railway line.

96 We also consider that electors to the east of Ranelagh Drive identify with communities to the south of Broad Lane and therefore propose that this area be incorporated within our proposed Harmans Water ward. We are not prescriptive in respect of ward names and note that the Borough Council did not express a preference in the case of the proposed ward, which would encompass the Wildridings and Central area of Bracknell. Having examined the views expressed by interested parties during the Council's consultation exercise, there appears to be a majority view in favour of retaining the existing ward name of Wildridings. We consider that this name would accurately reflect the constituent communities of the proposed ward and therefore intend adopting it as part of our draft recommendations, although we would welcome local views at Stage Three.

97 We acknowledge that Finmere, Gainsborough and Greenham Wood share convenient communication links with the Birch Hill area to the south. However, we propose retaining this

area within the proposed Old Bracknell ward to secure further improvement in electoral equality and to ensure clear and distinct ward boundaries in this area. Under our draft recommendations for a council size of 42, Old Bracknell and Wildridings wards would have 7 per cent fewer and 9 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the borough average respectively (4 per cent more and 8 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the average by 2006). Our draft proposals are illustrated on the large map at the back of this report.

Great Hollands North and Great Hollands South wards

98 The existing wards of Great Hollands North and Great Hollands South are situated in the south-west of Bracknell and are each represented by two councillors. Under existing arrangements, Great Hollands North and Great Hollands South wards have 11 per cent fewer and 9 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the borough average respectively (3 per cent more and 18 per cent fewer than the average by 2006).

99 At Stage One, the Borough Council proposed a minor amendment to the existing boundary between these two wards to facilitate improved electoral equality. It proposed that the whole of Beedon Drive and Eddington Road be transferred from Great Hollands North ward to Great Hollands South ward, and proposed that the Easthampstead Park Educational Centre be transferred to Great Hollands South ward. The Borough Council argued that its proposed wards would retain the strong south and east boundary formed by Nine Mile Ride, Mill Lane and the A329 Berkshire Way to the north. It stated that the new development at the Peacock Farm site necessitated the boundary amendment between the two wards, and would ensure that both proposed wards would have good long term levels of electoral equality. Under the Borough Council's proposed council size of 43, Great Hollands North and Great Hollands South wards would have 15 per cent fewer and 9 per cent more electors per councillor than the borough average respectively (1 per cent fewer and equal to the average by 2006).

100 The Labour Group put forward almost identical warding arrangements in this area. It also proposed that the Beedon Drive area of Great Hollands North ward be transferred to Great Hollands South ward. However, it proposed retaining the Easthampstead Park Educational Centre in Great Hollands North ward. It argued that Great Hollands Road and Ringmead provide the most logical features on which to base ward boundaries in this area. It also proposed that the boundary follow the stream that runs across the golf course in order that boundaries are tied to clear ground detail. This proposed amendment to the Borough Council's scheme would not affect any electors.

101 As stated earlier, although the Labour Group proposed transferring an identical amount of electors from Great Hollands North ward to Great Hollands South ward as the Borough Council, it queried the Borough Council's electorate projections. We are satisfied that the Borough Council's projections provide the best estimate that can be made at this time, and note that they do not materially affect the proposals put forward by the Labour Group. Under the Labour Group's proposed council size of 42, Great Hollands North and Great Hollands South wards would have 17 per cent fewer and 6 per cent more electors per councillor than the borough average respectively (2 per cent fewer and 4 per cent fewer than the average by 2006).

102 We received one further representation regarding these wards. Bracknell Town Council stated that it considered the Borough Council's proposed warding arrangements in this area to be "acceptable".

103 We have carefully considered the representations received at Stage One and note a degree of consensus in respect of the most appropriate warding arrangements for the Great Hollands area. We note that both borough-wide schemes proposed the transfer of more recent residential development on Beedon Drive and Eddington Road from Great Hollands North ward to Great Hollands South ward. While we note that the proposed Great Hollands North ward would initially contain a relatively high electoral variance, we recognise that the Peacock Farm development site will result in a substantial improvement in electoral equality for the proposed ward by 2006. Having noted the degree of consensus in this area, we intend basing our draft recommendations on the proposals of the Borough Council and the Labour Group. We consider that they reflect the identities and interests of local communities while securing improved levels of electoral equality.

104 We note that the only discernable difference between the two proposals was with regard to the location of the Easthampstead Park Educational Centre. We consider that the Borough Council's proposal to transfer the centre to its proposed Great Hollands South ward would ensure more clearly defined ward boundary in this area. However, we propose a minor amendment to both proposals, affecting no electors, to ensure more clearly defined boundaries in the west of the Great Hollands area. Under our draft recommendations for a council size of 42, Great Hollands North and Great Hollands South ward would have 17 per cent fewer and 6 per cent more electors per councillor than the borough average respectively (4 per cent fewer and 2 per cent fewer than the average by 2006). Our draft proposals are illustrated on the large map at the back of this report.

Hanworth and Harmans Water wards

105 The existing wards of Hanworth and Harmans Water are situated in the south and east of Bracknell town and are both three-member wards. Under existing arrangements, Hanworth and Harmans Water wards have 11 per cent more and 6 per cent more electors per councillor than the borough average respectively (1 per cent more and 12 per cent more than the average by 2006).

106 At Stage One, the Borough Council proposed a new two-member Hanworth ward comprising that part of the existing ward broadly to the west of Knightswood, Birch Hill Road, Liscombe and Evedon. It proposed that the remainder of Hanworth ward be combined with the Forest Park area (to the south of Bere Road and Worlds End Hill) of Ascot ward in a new two-member Birch Hill ward. It also proposed that this ward contain Finmere, Gainsborough and Greenham Wood from the existing Old Bracknell ward, arguing that these roads share superior communication links with the Birch Hill area. The Borough Council considered that the Sainsbury's site in Birch Hill provided the main focus for retail and medical facilities for Forest Park residents, and noted that the two closest primary schools to Forest Park were located in Birch Hill and Crown Wood.

107 The Borough Council proposed a new two-member Crown Wood ward comprising that part of the existing Harmans Water ward to the south of properties on Primrose Walk, Pankhurst Drive, Faringdon Drive and Wellington Drive, and including that part of Ascot ward to the south of Savernake Way and Crofton Close. It proposed that the remainder of the existing Harmans Water ward form a revised two-member ward. The Borough Council argued that its proposed Harmans Water ward would encompass a well-established local community and utilise strong boundaries. It stated that the constituent communities of its proposed Crown Wood ward share joint amenities and facilities and noted that residents in Forest Park have convenient access to the Crown Wood area via Farningham. Under the Borough Council's proposed council size of 43, Birch Hill and Hanworth wards would have 8 per cent more and 10 per cent more electors per

councillor than the borough average respectively (equal to and 1 per cent more than the average by 2006). Crown Wood and Harmans Water wards would have 7 per cent more and 11 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the borough average respectively (5 per cent more and equal to the borough average by 2006).

108 The Labour Group proposed retaining the existing three-member Hanworth ward. It argued that the constituent communities of the existing ward share joint amenities and facilities and are separated from other communities in the town by a number of main roads that form clearly defined boundaries. It proposed a revised three-member Harmans Water ward combining that part of the existing ward to the south of Broad Lane, to the rear of properties on the east side of Elizabeth Close, Dolphin Court and Lime Walk, and up to and including roads that exit onto the south side of Harmans Water Road. As stated earlier, it proposed that the Calfridus Way area of the existing Bullbrook ward, and the Martins Heron, Warren and Mendip Road areas of the existing Ascot ward should be contained within the proposed ward. While recognising that its proposed Harmans Water ward would breach the London to Reading railway line, the Labour Group argued that the Calfridus Way area was separated from the majority of Bullbrook ward by the London Road, and had clear access to Harmans Water via Ralphs Ride. The Labour Group argued that the Martins Heron and Warren areas are urban in nature and would therefore “fit better with the urban Harmans Water area than with the rural and Green Belt area to the east”. It argued that this area had no direct links with areas beyond Swinley Forest and only weak ones with the town of North Ascot. As stated earlier, it proposed that the north-west section of the existing Harmans Water ward be combined in a new single-member Bracknell Central ward. It argued that these areas are geographically closer to the town centre and are divided from the majority of Harmans Water by the Staff College site.

109 The Labour Group proposed that the remainder of the existing Harmans Water ward, comprising the Crown Wood area, be combined with the Forest Park area of the existing Ascot ward in a new three-member Crown Forest ward. It argued that local electors would be familiar with the proposed ward boundaries and noted that the Crown Wood area currently forms a separate town council ward. It considered that the parish boundary formed an “artificial separation” between Forest Park and Crown Wood and stated that these areas share clear and convenient communication links and utilise a number of joint neighbourhood facilities. The Labour Group also argued that the Mendip Way area of Ascot ward is geographically closer to the centre of Harmans Water and should therefore be incorporated in its proposed Harmans Water ward. Under the Labour Group’s proposed council size of 42, Crown Forest, Hanworth and Harmans Water wards would have 6 per cent fewer, 16 per cent more and 2 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the borough average respectively (5 per cent fewer, 6 per cent more and equal to the average by 2006).

110 Bracknell Town Council considered the Borough Council’s proposed Harmans Water ward to be “a sensible proposal”. However, it strongly opposed the Borough Council’s proposed Birch Hill ward describing it as a “most amazing proposal”. While acknowledging that some Forest Park residents identify with Bracknell town, it argued that these communities have nothing in common and are divided by the A322 Bagshot Road. The Town Council considered that the boundaries of the proposed ward were “unsustainable” and concluded that this was an example of unnecessary cross-parish warding that would not encourage elector participation.

111 Winkfield Parish Council strongly objected to the creation of borough wards that would straddle existing parish boundaries. It argued that such proposals would have no regard for community identities and would also breach existing parliamentary constituency boundaries. In particular, it opposed transferring more urban developments in the west of the parish into the

borough wards of Bracknell town. As stated earlier, it had conducted a consultation exercise among electors in the Martins Heron, Warren and Forest Park areas and stated that over 90 per cent of respondents opposed being combined with parts of Bracknell for the purposes of borough warding. The Parish Council stated that these areas have no affinity with communities in Bracknell and would not be adequately represented if combined with parts of the town. As outlined in detail earlier, the Parish Council put forward its own borough warding arrangements for the parish and proposed the establishment of three borough wards that would not straddle any existing parish boundary. It proposed that Martins Heron be combined in a new three-member Priory ward and that Forest Park and the Warren be combined in a new two-member Swinley Forest ward. Councillor Flood (St Mary's ward) concurred with the Parish Council's proposals in the Martins Heron, Warren and Forest Park areas of the parish.

112 Martins Heron & Warren Residents Association stated that its primary concern was that community identities were preserved and that it was opposed to the establishment of wards that contained electors of "mixed age and areas of interest". In respect of borough warding, it considered the most appropriate alliance would be with Forest Park, its immediate neighbours to the South.

113 We have carefully considered the representations received at Stage One and recognise that the review has been somewhat contentious in this area. Our initial consideration in formulating appropriate warding arrangements for this area has been to decide whether the more recent residential developments in the west of the existing Ascot ward should be transferred to the borough wards of Bracknell town. We recognise that Winkfield Parish Council has conducted an extremely thorough consultation process in the areas affected and note that a substantial majority of respondents opposed the creation of borough wards that would breach existing parish boundaries. Moreover, we acknowledge that the Parish Council's proposed warding arrangements would secure improved levels of electoral equality and have a large degree of local support. However, we must adopt a borough-wide approach in formulating our draft recommendations. We need to ensure that our proposals not only have regard for community identities but that they will secure the effective and convenient representation of electors across Bracknell Forest. We recognise that the arguments are finely balanced but have concluded that the Martins Heron, Warren and Forest Park areas of Winkfield parish should be transferred to the borough wards of Bracknell town.

114 We have taken a number of factors into account in formulating our draft recommendations for this area and officers from the Commission have visited the borough and examined the viability of each warding proposal. We consider that the Martins Heron, Warren and Forest Park areas share joint amenities and facilities with neighbouring communities in Bracknell town, including retail, medical and educational facilities. In respect of the Forest Park area, we are persuaded that it shares a number of clear and convenient communication links with areas immediately to its west. The Crown Wood area can be accessed via both Farningham and Nuneaton roads, and by a number of interconnecting footpaths. We would accept that such links are not as clearly defined between the Martins Heron and Warren areas, and Bracknell town. However, we have concluded that communication and transportation links are even weaker with the remainder of Winkfield Parish, and particularly with North Ascot, which constitutes the only other substantial urban area in Winkfield parish. We note that Bracknell town can be accessed via Bog Lane and London Road, and that the area shares a convenient and direct rail link with Bracknell town centre.

115 We note that Winkfield Parish Council have argued that transferring parts of the parish into the borough wards of adjacent parished areas would breach parliamentary constituency

boundaries. As stated in our Guidance, we take no account of constituency boundaries in recommending a new pattern of ward boundaries. The Parliamentary Boundary Commission for England is currently in the process of conducting its fifth boundary review and the warding configuration that we propose will form the basis of the Boundary Commission's recommendations. Moreover, we note that Winkfield Parish Council's proposals would divide communities in the Martins Heron and Warren areas. While we note that these two areas are separated from each other by the London to Reading railway line, we consider that they form a clear community, utilise joint amenities and facilities and note that they share an active local residents association. We conclude that all these factors taken together demonstrate a clear sense of community identity and interest and have therefore not been persuaded that the Martins Heron and Warren areas should be separated for the purposes of borough warding.

116 We have given careful consideration to both borough-wide warding proposals and are basing our draft recommendations for this part of the borough on the proposals put forward by the Labour Group. While we recognise that both borough-wide proposals would provide much improved levels of electoral equality, we consider that the Labour Group's proposals more accurately reflect local community ties and identities in this area, and would facilitate the most effective and convenient representation of its constituent communities. We note in particular that these proposals utilise the whole of New Forest Ride and Bog Lane as ward boundaries in the east of this area and concur with the Labour Group that they provide a strong feature on which to base borough ward boundaries. We consider that the existing Hanworth ward forms a coherent community and utilises strong and clearly defined ward boundaries. We note that the Borough Council's proposed Birch Hill ward would combine areas that are separated by the A322 Bagshot Road. We consider that electors in the south of Forest Park share greater community ties and identities with the Crown Wood area of Bracknell, and note that both areas are connected by a number of convenient communication links, including Farningham and Nuneaton. We have therefore concluded that Forest Park forms a clear and cohesive community and should not be divided for the purposes of borough warding.

117 We consider that the Borough Council's proposed single-member Ascot & the Warren ward would divide the more urban Martins Heron and Warren communities and note that the Labour Group's proposals would ensure that both areas remain in a single borough ward. We are of the view that boundaries in this area should be rationalised for the purposes of borough warding and consider that more urban areas in the west of Winkfield parish would be most effectively represented alongside neighbouring urban areas in the east of Bracknell town. We have concluded that the Labour Group's proposals would provide the best balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria, while utilising clear and distinct ward boundaries. We therefore intend adopting its proposals for this area as part of our draft recommendations, subject to several minor amendments.

118 While we recognise that the Mendip Way area shares convenient communication links with Harmans Water, we consider that it shares strong community links with the majority of Forest Park, to its south. We therefore propose that this area be incorporated in the proposed Crown Forest ward. As stated above, we proposed that the Ridgeway area of the existing Harmans Water ward be combined in a revised two-member Wildridings ward. We were not persuaded that the Labour Group's proposed Bracknell Central ward would utilise sufficiently clear ward boundaries. We also propose that the Labour Group's proposed Crown Forest ward be named Crown Wood in order to more clearly reflect the geographical extent of the proposed ward. However we would welcome local views on an appropriate name for the proposed ward at Stage Three.

119 We would emphasise that our proposed borough warding arrangements in no way indicate a view as to any future amendments to existing parish boundaries. It is the responsibility of the Borough Council to conduct a parish review, and no changes to parish boundaries can be made without local consultation. We recognise that we have significantly departed from a number of the warding proposals put forward for this area and would particularly welcome further views on our draft recommendations for these wards at Stage Three. Under our draft recommendations for a council size of 42, Crown Wood, Hanworth and Harmans Water wards would have 4 per cent more, 16 per cent more and 7 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the borough average respectively (5 per cent more, 6 per cent more and 5 per cent fewer than the average by 2006). Our draft proposals are illustrated on the large map at the back of this report.

Central Sandhurst, College Town and Owlsmoor wards

120 The existing wards of Central Sandhurst, College Town and Owlsmoor form the central and eastern part of Sandhurst, a settlement of some 15,000 electors that is situated in the south of the borough and constitutes its second largest town. Central Sandhurst and College Town wards are currently served by two councillors each while Owlsmoor is a single-member ward. Under existing arrangements, Central Sandhurst and College Town wards have 15 per cent fewer and 4 per cent more electors per councillor than the borough average respectively (23 per cent fewer and equal to the borough average by 2006). Owlsmoor ward has 113 per cent more electors per councillor than the borough average currently, and is forecast to have 105 per cent more electors than the average by 2006.

121 At Stage One, the Borough Council proposed that the Avocet Crescent area of College Town ward, to the north of Inverness Way and Moray Avenue, and that part of the existing Owlsmoor ward up to and including properties on the north side of Wargrove Drive be transferred to a revised two-member Central Sandhurst ward. The Borough Council proposed that the remainder of Owlsmoor ward and the remainder of College Town ward each form revised two-member wards. The Borough Council stated that it had made minor amendments to these wards in order to secure improved electoral equality and noted that its proposals had been endorsed by Sandhurst Town Council during its consultation exercise with local interested parties. The Labour Group accepted the Borough Council's proposals for Sandhurst and did not put forward alternative warding arrangements for this area. Under the Borough Council's proposed council size of 43, Central Sandhurst, Owlsmoor and College Town wards would have 10 per cent more, 8 per cent more and 1 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the borough average respectively (1 per cent more, 4 per cent more and 4 per cent fewer than the average by 2006).

122 We have carefully considered the representations received at Stage One, and note the consensus in support of the Borough Council's proposed warding arrangements. We note, in particular, that the Borough Council's proposals were supported by Sandhurst Town Council during local consultation with interested parties. Having noted the support of both the Labour Group and Sandhurst Town Council, and in the absence of alternative arrangements that would facilitate a better balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria, we intend endorsing the Borough Council's proposals as part of our draft recommendations, subject to two minor amendments. In order to secure borough ward boundaries that adhere to clearly identifiable ground detail, we propose that the southern boundary between the proposed Central Sandhurst and College Town wards be amended to follow Marshall Road up to the roundabout at which Raeburn Way exits, and follow the western edge of Shepherds Meadow up to the borough boundary. We also propose that the southern boundary between the proposed Central Sandhurst and Little Sandhurst wards be amended to follow the railway line up to the sewage works, and

then follow Swan Lane up to the borough boundary. Our amendments to the Borough Council's proposals will not affect any electors.

123 Under our draft recommendations for a council size of 42, Central Sandhurst, College Town and Owlsmoor wards would have 7 per cent more, 3 per cent fewer and 5 per cent more electors per councillor than the borough average respectively (4 per cent fewer, 4 per cent fewer and 1 per cent more than the average by 2006). Our draft proposals are illustrated on the large map at the back of this report.

Crowthorne and Little Sandhurst wards

124 The existing three-member ward of Crowthorne is situated to the north of Sandhurst town and is coterminous with the parish of the same name. The existing ward of Little Sandhurst is situated in the west of Sandhurst town and is currently represented by two councillors. Under existing arrangements, Crowthorne and Little Sandhurst wards have 25 per cent fewer and 20 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the borough average respectively (26 per cent fewer and 21 per cent fewer than the average by 2006).

125 At Stage One, the Borough Council proposed a revised two-member Crowthorne ward comprising that part of the existing ward to the east of Sandhurst Road and up to properties on the south side of Dukes Ride, Waterloo Road, Lake End Way and Alcot Close. The Borough Council proposed that the remainder of the existing Crowthorne ward, broadly to the west of Sandhurst Road and comprising the Wellington College site be combined with the existing Little Sandhurst ward in a new two-member ward; the Borough Council did not put forward a name for the proposed ward. The Borough Council stated that the current electoral variance in the existing Crowthorne ward "could never realistically conform to the Commission's numerical criteria" and noted that its proposal would unite Wellington College and its feeder school, Eagle House, in the same borough ward. It stated that many new developments surrounding Wellington College have close ties with the establishment and have been built on former college land. The Borough Council also noted that its proposals had been accepted by Crowthorne Parish Council and Sandhurst Town Council during its consultation exercise with local interested parties. As stated earlier, the Labour Group accepted the Borough Council's proposals for Sandhurst and Crowthorne and did not put forward alternative warding arrangements for this area.

126 Under the Borough Council's proposed council size of 43, Crowthorne and Little Sandhurst wards would have 2 per cent more and 4 per cent more electors per councillor than the borough average respectively (both would have 3 per cent more electors per councillor than the borough average by 2006).

127 We have carefully considered the representations received at Stage One and note the support for the Borough Council's proposals. While we acknowledge that the boundary between the Borough Council's proposed Crowthorne and Little Sandhurst wards adheres to the rear of properties to the north of Wellington College and therefore has a somewhat irregular appearance, we accept that these proposals are supported by the parishes affected and will ensure much improved electoral equality. We accept that the proposals would result in the establishment of a borough ward that straddles two relatively urban parished areas. However, our options for change in this area are somewhat limited due to the current electoral imbalance in the existing Crowthorne ward and its proximity to the borough boundary. We have concluded that due to these limitations, and in the absence of an alternative proposal that would sufficiently address the issue of electoral equality, that the Borough Council's proposals provide the best balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria and are adopting them as part of our draft

recommendations. As stated earlier, we propose a minor amendment to the southern boundary between Little Sandhurst and Central Sandhurst wards to ensure the ward boundaries in this area are tied to clear ground detail. This amendment will not affect any electors.

128 We are not prescriptive in respect of ward names and note that the Borough Council did not express a preference in the case of its proposed ward that would encompass the Little Sandhurst and south Crowthorne areas of the borough. Having examined the views expressed by interested parties during the Borough Council's consultation exercise, there appears to be a majority view in favour of retaining the existing ward name of Little Sandhurst. We consider that this name would accurately reflect the constituent communities of the proposed ward and therefore intend adopting it as part of our draft recommendations. Under our draft recommendations for a council size of 42, Crowthorne and Little Sandhurst wards would have equal to, and two per cent more electors per councillor than the borough average respectively. Both wards would have an equal ratio of electors per councillor to the average by 2006. Our draft proposals for this area are illustrated on the large map at the back of this report.

Electoral Cycle

129 We received two representations regarding the Borough Council's electoral cycle. The Borough Council welcomed the Commission's view that it would have regard to local preference in determining the electoral cycle of the Borough. It therefore recommended that the current electoral cycle of whole council elections every four years be retained.

130 The Bracknell Constituency Liberal Democrats argued that the review provided an opportunity to change the current electoral cycle and hold more frequent elections, in line with the Local Government Act 2000 and the Government White Paper 'Modern Local Government – In Touch with the People'. To this end, they favoured the establishment of more three-member wards and argued that more frequent elections would "do much more to foster public participation and greater accountability than the proposals the Borough Council plan to adopt".

131 We have considered carefully all representations. While we acknowledge the views expressed by the Liberal Democrats, we are not persuaded that we have received sufficient evidence of local support to change the current electoral cycle. We therefore propose no change to the current electoral cycle of whole council elections every four years.

Conclusions

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

- there should be an increase in council size from 40 to 42;
- there should be 19 wards;
- the boundaries of 18 of the existing wards should be modified, and one ward (Hanworth) should retain its existing boundaries;
- elections should continue to be held every four years for the whole council.

133 As already indicated, we have based our draft recommendations for the majority of the borough on the Labour Group's proposals, but propose departing from them in the following areas:

- in Sandhurst and Crowthorne, we propose adopting the Borough Council's proposals, subject to minor amendments affecting no electors, to ensure that ward boundaries in this area are tied to clear ground detail;
- we intend basing our recommendations for the central part of Bracknell town on the Borough Council's proposals and propose a revised two-member Wildridings ward and revised two-member Old Bracknell ward;
- we propose that the Mendip Way area of the borough be combined in the Labour Group's proposed three-member Crown Forest ward;
- we propose that the Labour Group's proposed Crown Forest ward be named Crown Wood ward and that its proposed Priestwood ward be named Priestwood & Garth ward.

134 Table 5 shows how our draft recommendations will effect electoral equality, comparing them with the current arrangements (based on 2001 electorate figures) and with forecast electorates for the year 2006.

Table 5: Comparison of Current and Recommended Electoral Arrangements

	2001 electorate		2006 forecast electorate	
	Current arrangements	Draft recommendations	Current arrangements	Draft recommendations
Number of councillors	40	42	40	42
Number of wards	19	19	19	19
Average number of electors per councillor	1,973	1,879	1,997	1,902
Number of wards with a variance more than 10 per cent from the average	16	2	16	0
Number of wards with a variance more than 20 per cent from the average	10	0	12	0

135 As shown in Table 5, our draft recommendations for Bracknell Forest Borough Council would result in a reduction in the number of wards with an electoral variance of more than 10 per cent from 16 to two. By 2006 no wards are forecast to have an electoral variance of more than 10 per cent.

Draft Recommendation

Bracknell Forest Borough Council should comprise 42 councillors serving 19 wards, as detailed and named in Tables 1 and 2, and illustrated on Map 2, in Appendix A and on the large map inside the back cover. The Council should continue to hold whole-council elections every four years.

Parish and Town Council Electoral Arrangements

136 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 district wards it must also be divided into parish wards, so that each parish ward lies wholly within a single ward of the district. Accordingly, we propose consequential warding arrangements for the town councils of Bracknell and Sandhurst and the parishes of Binfield Crowthorne, Warfield and Winkfield.

137 Bracknell Town Council is currently served by 25 councillors representing 11 wards: Bullbrook ward returning four town councillors, Hanworth ward returning three town councillors, and Birch Hill, Crown Wood, Garth, Great Hollands North, Great Hollands South, Harmans Water, Old Bracknell, Priestwood and Wildridings wards returning two councillors each.

138 At Stage One the Borough Council proposed that the town council wards be amended to reflect its proposed borough-warding arrangements but did not put forward any detailed proposals. The Labour Group had examined a number of warding proposals for Bracknell Town Council and had concluded that a town council of 20 members, five fewer than at present, would be most compatible with its proposed borough warding arrangements. However, it did put forward a 28-member scheme for the Town Council as an alternative, stating that this was closer to the Town Council's preferred council size.

139 The Labour Group proposed that the town council ward boundaries should be coterminous with borough ward boundaries, except in the proposed wards of Crown Forest and Harmans Water, where it proposed that they should reflect only that part of the proposed borough ward contained within the Bracknell Town Council area. The Liberal Democrats argued that there were numerous disparities between the ratio of electors to parish councillors across the different parishes of the borough and argued that the review provided the opportunity to rationalise this situation. In particular, they noted that Sandhurst has approximately a third of the electorate of Bracknell town but is served by almost as many councillors. They did not put forward detailed proposals for parish and town council electoral arrangements in Bracknell Forest.

140 Bracknell Town Council put forward its own proposals for the Town Council. It supported increasing the representation of the council to 26 members. In particular it supported the establishment of a Town Centre ward to represent more recent residential developments towards the centre of the town. It supported the retention of a majority of the existing wards and proposed new Easthampstead, Harmans Water and Great Hollands North wards (returning three councillors each), new Birch Hill, Bullbrook, Crown Wood, Garth, Great Hollands South, Hanworth, Priestwood and Wildridings wards (returning two councillors each), and a new Town Centre ward (returning a single councillor). The Town Council acknowledged that it had devised its warding scheme for the Town Council without prior knowledge of our proposed borough warding arrangements. It therefore stated that it would make further comment on our draft recommendations at Stage Three.

141 In our draft recommendations we have proposed new three-member Crown Wood, Hanworth, Harmans Water and Priestwood & Garth borough wards and new two-member Bullbrook, Great Hollands North, Great Hollands South, Old Bracknell and Wildridings borough wards. We have carefully considered the representations received at Stage One concerning town council warding. In formulating our proposed electoral arrangements for Bracknell Town Council, we have sought as far as possible to reflect the preferences of respondents while

retaining a coterminous parish and borough warding structure. While we acknowledge the broad support for a new Town Centre ward, we have not been persuaded that the Labour Group's proposed ward would adhere to clear and distinct ground detail. We note that the Town Council's proposed Town Centre ward would not be compatible with our proposed borough warding arrangements in that it would encompass areas contained within several of our proposed borough wards.

142 While we note the views of the Liberal Democrats, we consider that the current diversity in the representation of parish councils in Bracknell Forest reflects the diverse nature of these authorities. We are not persuaded that equal ratios of electors per councillor between parishes are a necessary prerequisite of effective and convenient local government.

143 We note that the Town Council favoured increasing the size of the Town Council by one to 26. We consider this to be compatible with a town council warding structure based on our proposed borough wards. We therefore propose revised Bullbrook, Great Hollands South and Old Bracknell wards (returning three councillors each) and revised Great Hollands North and Wildridings wards (returning two councillors each), whose boundaries would be coterminous with our proposed borough wards of the same name. We propose revised Garth and Priestwood wards (returning two councillors each). Taken together, these wards would be coterminous with our proposed Priestwood & Garth borough ward. We propose revised Hanworth and Birch Hill wards (returning two councillors each). Taken together, these wards would be coterminous with our proposed Hanworth borough ward. We also propose a revised Harmans Water ward (returning three members) and a revised Crown Wood ward (returning two members). The boundary of these proposed wards should reflect that part of Bracknell town contained within the borough wards of the same name.

Draft Recommendation

Bracknell Town Council should comprise 26 councillors, one more than at present, representing 11 wards: Bullbrook, Great Hollands South, Harmans Water and Old Bracknell wards (returning three councillors each) and Birch Hill, Crown Wood, Garth, Great Hollands North, Hanworth, Priestwood and Wildridings wards (returning two councillors each). Our proposed parish ward boundaries are illustrated and named on the large map at the back of this report.

144 Sandhurst Town Council is currently served by 24 councillors representing four wards: Central Sandhurst, College Town, Little Sandhurst and Owlsmoor wards, returning six councillors each. At Stage One the Borough Council proposed that the town council wards should be amended to reflect its proposed borough warding arrangements and that each town council ward should retain its existing name and representation. The Borough Council noted that these arrangements had been agreed with Sandhurst Town Council.

145 The Liberal Democrats argued that there were numerous disparities between the ratio of electors to parish councillors across the different parishes of the borough and argued that the review provided the opportunity to rationalise this situation. In particular, they noted that Sandhurst has approximately a third of the electorate of Bracknell town but is served by almost as many councillors. They did not put forward detailed proposals for parish and town council electoral arrangements in Bracknell Forest.

146 As part our draft recommendations we have proposed amendments to the borough wards of the town. We propose revised two-member Central Sandhurst, College Town and Owlsmoor

wards. We also propose amendments to the existing Little Sandhurst ward, and that it should also comprise the southwest part of the existing Crowthorne ward. While we note the views of the Liberal Democrats, we consider that the current diversity in the representation of parish councils in Bracknell Forest reflects the diverse nature of these authorities. We are not persuaded that equal ratios of electors per councillor between parishes are a necessary prerequisite of effective and convenient local government. Having considered the representations received at Stage One, we intend adopting the Borough Council’s proposed electoral arrangements for Sandhurst Town Council. We propose revised Central Sandhurst, College Town, and Owlsmoor parish wards, returning six councillors each. We also propose a revised Little Sandhurst parish ward (returning six councillors) whose boundaries should reflect that part of the proposed Little Sandhurst ward that is situated in Sandhurst parish.

Draft Recommendation
Sandhurst Town Council should comprise 24 councillors, as at present, representing four wards: Central Sandhurst, College Town, Little Sandhurst and Owlsmoor wards, each returning six councillors. The boundary between the four parish wards should reflect the proposed borough ward boundaries, as illustrated and named on the large map at the back of this report.

147 Binfield Parish Council is currently served by 11 parish councillors and is not warded. At Stage One, the Borough Council proposed retaining the existing arrangements for Binfield Parish Council. The Labour Group acknowledged that the Parish Council was opposed to warding of the parish. However, it recognised the need to ward the parish in order to reflect its proposed borough warding arrangements. It therefore proposed a new Binfield North ward returning three councillors and a new Binfield South ward returning eight parish councillors. It proposed that the parish wards should reflect its proposed borough warding arrangements for the parish. It also put forward an alternative proposal that would further divide the parish into four parish wards.

148 Binfield Parish Council stated it was not in favour of establishing parish wards. It argued that the introduction of parish warding would “prejudice the sense of a whole community” and result in the competition for resources between parish wards. It further argued that a concentration on ward issues would be at the expense of the parish as a whole. Binfield Village Protection Society reiterated these points and argued that warding of the parish would contribute little to the “continuing cohesion of the village as a community in the 21st Century”.

149 As part of our draft recommendations, we have proposed a new two-member Binfield Popeswood borough ward and a new single-member Binfield with Warfield borough ward. While we note the comments of Binfield Parish Council and the Binfield Village Protection Society, we are not persuaded that the warding of the parish will have an adverse affect on the cohesion of the parish. We consider that the parish contains a number of discrete communities that warrant separate representation on the Parish Council. However, we consider the Labour Group’s alternative proposal to divide the parish into four parish wards would be excessive and command little local support. We therefore intend basing our draft recommendations for parish council electoral arrangements in this area on the main proposals of the Labour Group. However we propose that its proposed Binfield South parish ward be named Binfield Popeswood ward to reflect our proposed borough warding arrangements.

Draft Recommendation

Binfield Parish Council should comprise 11 councillors, as at present, representing two wards: Binfield North ward returning three councillors and Binfield Popeswood ward, returning eight councillors. The boundary between the two parish wards should reflect the proposed borough ward boundary, as illustrated and named on the large map at the back of this report.

150 Crowthorne Parish Council is currently served by 10 parish councillors and is not warded. At Stage One the Borough Council proposed a consequential warding of the parish in order to reflect its proposed borough wards in the area. It proposed a new Crowthorne ward served by eight councillors and a new two-member Crowthorne South parish ward reflecting that part of Crowthorne parish located in its proposed Little Sandhurst borough ward. The Borough Council noted that these arrangements had been agreed with Crowthorne Parish Council.

151 As part of our draft recommendations, we have proposed a new two-member Crowthorne borough ward and a new two-member Little Sandhurst borough ward that would contain the Wellington College area of Crowthorne. Having considered the evidence received at Stage One, we concur with the proposals of the Borough Council, and note the support of Crowthorne Parish Council. We therefore propose adopting the Borough Council's proposals as part of our draft recommendations. We propose a new Crowthorne ward (returning eight councillors) whose boundaries should reflect the borough ward of the same name. We also propose a new Crowthorne South ward (returning two councillors) whose boundaries should reflect that part of the proposed Little Sandhurst borough ward contained within Crowthorne parish.

Draft Recommendation

Crowthorne Parish Council should comprise 10 councillors, as at present, representing two wards: Crowthorne ward (returning eight councillors) and Crowthorne South ward (returning two councillors). The boundary between the two parish wards should reflect the proposed borough ward boundary, as illustrated and named on the large map at the back of this report.

152 Warfield Parish Council is currently served by 11 councillors and is not warded. At Stage One the Borough Council proposed the warding of Warfield parish to reflect its proposed borough warding arrangements. Having noted the opposition of the Parish Council to its proposed borough warding arrangements, it chose not to put forward detailed electoral arrangements for the Parish Council. The Labour Group proposed the warding of Warfield parish to broadly reflect its proposed borough warding arrangements. It proposed a council size of 15 members representing six parish wards: Harvest Ride, Quelm, Warfield Park and Whitegrove wards returning three councillors each and a new Shakespeare parish ward returning two councillors. It proposed that the area contained within its proposed Binfield with Warfield borough ward form a new single member parish ward.

153 As detailed earlier, Warfield Parish Council put forward its own borough warding arrangements for the parish. It proposed a consequential warding of the parish to reflect its proposed borough warding arrangements and proposed increasing the number of parish councillors by one, to 12. The Parish Council proposed a new Warfield Whitegrove parish ward

returning six councillors, and new Warfield St Michael's and Warfield Lark's Hill parish wards returning three parish councillors each.

154 In our draft recommendations, we have adopted the Labour Group's proposed borough warding arrangements. However, we consider that the Labour Group's proposed parish warding arrangements will result in the excessive warding of the parish and consider that parish wards in this area should substantially reflect our proposed borough wards. We therefore propose a new Warfield Whitegrove ward (returning seven councillors) containing that part of our proposed Warfield Harvest Ride borough ward to the east of Gough's Lane, and a new Quelm ward (returning three councillors) reflecting that part of our proposed Warfield Harvest Ride borough ward to the west of Gough's Lane. We also propose a new Warfield Park ward (returning two councillors) reflecting that part of Warfield parish contained within our proposed Winkfield & Cranbourne ward, and a new St Michael's ward (returning a single councillor) reflecting that part of Warfield parish contained within our proposed Binfield with Warfield ward. As a consequence of these arrangements, we are proposing that the council be increased to 13 members.

Draft Recommendation
Warfield Parish Council should comprise 13 councillors, two more than at present, representing four wards: Whitegrove ward (returning seven councillors), Quelm ward (returning three councillors), Warfield Park ward (returning two councillors) and St Michael's ward (returning a single councillor). Our proposals are illustrated and named on Map A2 in Appendix A and on the large map at the back of this report.

155 Winkfield Parish Council is currently served by 21 parish councillors representing five wards: Firlands ward returning six councillors, Manor ward returning five councillors, Cranbourne ward returning four councillors and Priory and St Mary's wards returning three councillors each.

156 At Stage One the Borough Council favoured the warding of Winkfield parish to reflect its proposed borough warding arrangements. Having noted the opposition of the Parish Council to its proposed borough warding arrangements, the Borough Council chose not to put forward detailed electoral arrangements for the Parish Council. The Labour Group proposed the re-warding of Winkfield Parish Council to broadly reflect its proposed borough warding arrangements. It proposed a parish council of 21 members representing five parish wards: Winkfield ward (returning six councillors), Forest Park, Martins Heron and Manor & Priory wards (returning four councillors each) and Firlands ward (returning three councillors). The Labour Group stated that this accommodated the wishes of the Parish Council in respect of the number of councillors representing the parish, but that a parish council of 19 could be accommodated within its proposals.

157 Winkfield Parish Council stated that it had not been consulted on implications for parish warding under the Borough Council's proposals. As detailed earlier, the Parish Council put forward its own proposals for borough warding in the parish and proposed a consequential re-warding of the parish to reflect its proposed borough wards. The Parish Council proposed reducing the total number of parish councillors by three, to 18, and proposed a new Priory ward returning nine councillors, a new Swinley Forest ward returning six councillors and a new St Mary's & St Peter's ward returning three councillors. Martins Heron & Warren Residents

Association argued that parish council electoral arrangements needed to be rationalised in order to provide more equal representation for more urban areas in the west of the parish.

158 In respect of borough warding, our draft recommendations are based on the proposals of the Labour Group. We proposed a new two-member Winkfield & Cranbourne ward and a new two-member Ascot Priory ward. We proposed that the Martins Heron and Warren areas be transferred to a new three-member Harmans Water ward and that the Forest Park area of the parish be transferred to a new three-member Crown Wood ward. Notwithstanding the alternative borough warding proposals put forward at Stage One, we consider that parish wards should reflect our proposed borough warding arrangements in this area. We consider that the Labour Group's proposed parish warding arrangements would result in the excessive division of the parish, and note that Winkfield Parish Council favoured the division of the parish into only three parish wards.

159 As stated above, in order to facilitate effective and convenient local government in this area, we propose that parish wards should reflect our proposed borough warding arrangements. We therefore propose a new Winkfield & Cranbourne parish ward (returning five councillors) reflecting that part of Winkfield parish contained within our proposed Winkfield & Cranbourne borough ward, and a new Ascot Priory ward (returning six councillors) with boundaries coterminous with the proposed borough ward of the same name. We also propose a new Forest Park ward (returning five councillors) and a new Martins Heron & Warren ward (returning two councillors) whose boundaries should reflect those parts of Winkfield parish contained within our proposed Crown Wood and Harmans Water borough wards respectively. We consider our proposed parish warding arrangements provide a suitable balance between the proposals of the Borough Council, and the views expressed by Winkfield Parish Council at Stage One.

Draft Recommendation

Winkfield Parish Council should comprise 18 parish councillors, instead of the current 21, representing four wards: Ascot Priory ward (returning six councillors), Forest Park ward (returning five councillors), Winkfield & Cranbourne ward (returning five councillors) and Martins Heron & Warren ward (returning two councillors). The boundary between the four parish wards should reflect the proposed borough ward boundaries, as illustrated and named on Map A3 in Appendix A and on the large map at the back of this report.

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

Draft Recommendation

Parish and town council elections should continue to take place every four years, at the same time as elections for the district ward of which they are part.

Map 2: Draft Recommendations for Bracknell Forest

5 WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

161 There will now be a consultation period, during which everyone is invited to comment on the draft recommendations on future electoral arrangements for Bracknell Forest contained in this report. We will take fully into account all submissions received by 28 January 2002. Any received *after* this date may not be taken into account. All responses may be inspected at our offices and those of the Borough Council. A list of respondents will be available from us on request after the end of the consultation period.

162 Express your views by writing directly to us:

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

Fax: 020 7404 6142
E-mail: reviews@lgce.gov.uk
www.lgce.gov.uk

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

APPENDIX A

Draft Recommendations for Bracknell Forest: Detailed Mapping

The following maps illustrate our proposed ward boundaries for the Bracknell Forest area.

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

Map A2 illustrates the proposed warding of Warfield parish.

Map A3 illustrates the proposed warding of Winkfield parish.

The **large map** inserted at the back of this report illustrates the existing and proposed warding arrangements for Bracknell, Crowthorne and Sandhurst.

Map A1: Draft Recommendations for Bracknell Forest: Key Map

Map A2: Proposed Warding of Warfield Parish

Map A3: Proposed Warding of Winkfield Parish

APPENDIX B

Code of Practice on Written Consultation

The Cabinet Office's November 2000 *Code of Practice on Written Consultation*, www.cabinet-office.gov.uk/servicefirst/index/consultation.htm, requires all Government Departments and Agencies to adhere to certain criteria, set out below, on the conduct of public consultations. Non-Departmental Public Bodies, such as the Local Government Commission 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: LGCE 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 consult on draft recommendations for a minimum of eight weeks, but may extend the period if consultations take place over holiday periods.
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.