

LOCAL
GOVERNMENT
COMMISSION
FOR ENGLAND

FINAL
RECOMMENDATIONS
ON THE FUTURE
ELECTORAL
ARRANGEMENTS FOR
SOUTH SHROPSHIRE

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

August 1999

LOCAL GOVERNMENT COMMISSION FOR ENGLAND

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

Members of the Commission are:

Professor Malcolm Grant (Chairman)

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



Local Government Commission for England

3 August 1999

Dear Secretary of State

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

We have now prepared our final recommendations in the light of the consultation. We have substantially confirmed our draft recommendations, although some modifications have been made (see paragraph 137) in the light of further evidence. This report sets out our final recommendations for changes to electoral arrangements in South Shropshire.

We recommend that South Shropshire District Council should be served by 34 councillors representing 23 wards, and that changes should be made to ward boundaries in order to improve electoral equality, having regard to the statutory criteria. We recommend that the Council should continue to be elected together every four years.

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

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

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Malcolm Grant'.

PROFESSOR MALCOLM GRANT
Chairman

SUMMARY

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

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

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

- **in 18 of the 28 wards the number of electors represented by each councillor varies by more than 10 per cent from the average for the district, and nine wards vary by more than 20 per cent from the average;**
- **by 2003 electoral equality is expected to worsen, with the number of electors per councillor forecast to vary by more than 10 per cent from the average in 18 wards and by more than 20 per cent in 12 wards.**

Our main final recommendations for future electoral arrangements (Figures 1 and 2 and paragraphs 137-138) are that:

- **South Shropshire District Council should have 34 councillors, six fewer than at present;**
- **there should be 23 wards, instead of 28 as at present;**
- **the boundaries of 23 of the existing wards should be modified and five wards should retain their existing boundaries;**
- **elections should continue to take place for the whole council every four years.**

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

- **In 17 of the proposed 23 wards the number of electors per councillor would vary by no more than 10 per cent from the district average.**
- **This level of electoral equality is forecast to improve, with the number of electors per councillor in only five wards expected to vary by more than 10 per cent from the average for the district in 2003.**

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

- **revised warding for the parishes of Church Stretton and Ludlow, the abolition of wards in Ludford parish, and a redistribution of councillors for Ludlow Parish Council.**

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

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

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

Ward name	Number of councillors	Constituent areas	Map reference
1 Apedale	1	<i>Unchanged</i> (Acton Scott, Eaton-under-Heywood, Hope Bowdler and Rushbury parishes)	Map 2
2 Bishop's Castle with Onny Valley	2	Bishop's Castle ward (part – Bishop's Castle and Lydham parishes); Wentnor ward (the parishes of More, Myndtown, Norbury, Ratlinghope and Wentnor)	Map 2
3 Bitterley with Stoke St Milborough	1	Bitterley ward (Bitterley parish); Stoke St Milborough ward (part – Hopton Cangeford, Stoke St Milborough and Wheathill parishes)	Map 2
4 Bucknell	1	Bucknell ward (part – Bedstone, Bucknell and Hopton Castle parishes); Clunbury ward (part – Clungunford parish)	Map 2
5 Burford	1	<i>Unchanged</i> (Boraston and Burford parishes)	Map 2
6 Caynham with Ashford	1	Ashford ward (Ashford Bowdler, Ashford Carbonel and Richard's Castle parishes); Caynham ward (part – Caynham parish)	Map 2
7 Chirbury	1	<i>Unchanged</i> (the parish of Chirbury with Brompton)	Map2
8 Church Stretton North	2	Church Stretton North ward (All Stretton and Church Stretton North parish wards of Church Stretton parish); Church Stretton South ward (part – parts of Church Stretton South and Little Stretton parish wards of Church Stretton parish)	Maps 2 and A3
9 Church Stretton South	2	Church Stretton South ward (part – parts of Church Stretton South and Little Stretton parish wards of Church Stretton parish)	Maps 2 and A3
10 Clee	2	Clee ward (Clee parish); Caynham ward (part – Greete, Hope Bagot, Nash and Whitton parishes); Hopton Wafers ward (Coreley and Hopton Wafers parishes)	Map 2
11 Cleobury Mortimer	2	<i>Unchanged</i> (the parishes of Cleobury Mortimer, Milson and Neen Sollars)	Map 2
12 Clun	1	Bishop's Castle ward (part – Colebatch and Mainstone parishes); Clun ward (part – Clun parish ward of Clun parish)	Maps 2 and A2

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

Ward name	Number of councillors	Constituent areas	Map reference
13 Clun Forest	1	Bucknell ward (part – Stowe parish); Newcastle ward (Bettws-y-Crwyn, Llanfair Waterdine and Newcastle on Clun parishes); Clun ward (part – Chapel Lawn parish ward of Clun parish)	Maps 2 and A2
14 Corve Valley	1	Diddlebury ward (part – Culmington parish); Stanton Lacy ward (Stanton Lacy and Bromfield parishes)	Map 2
15 Craven Arms	2	Stokesay ward (part – Craven Arms and Onibury parishes)	Map 2
16 Kemp Valley	1	Clunbury ward (part – Clunbury parish); Lydbury North ward (part – Lydbury North and Edgton parishes)	Map 2
17 Ludlow Henley	2	Ludlow East Hamlet ward (part – parts of Fishmore and Henley parish wards of Ludlow parish); Ludlow Galdeford ward (part – parts of Galdeford and Sheet parish wards of Ludlow parish)	Large map
18 Ludlow St Laurence's	2	Ludlow Castle ward (part – Castle parish ward and part of Teme parish ward of Ludlow parish); Ludlow Galdeford ward (part – part of Galdeford parish ward of Ludlow parish)	Large map
19 Ludlow St Peter's	2	Ludlow East Hamlet ward (part – parts of Fishmore and Henley parish wards of Ludlow parish)	Large map
20 Ludlow Sheet with Ludford	2	Ludlow Castle ward (part – Ludford parish and part of Teme parish ward of Ludlow parish); Ludlow East Hamlet ward (part – part of Henley parish ward of Ludlow parish); Ludlow Galdeford ward (part – parts of Galdeford and Sheet parish wards of Ludlow parish)	Large map
21 Upper Corvedale	1	Diddlebury ward (part – Diddlebury parish); Munslow ward (Abdon, Heath and Munslow parishes); Stoke St Milborough ward (part – Clee St Margaret parish)	Map 2

continued overleaf

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

Ward name	Number of councillors	Constituent areas	Map reference
22 Wistanstow with Hopesay	1	Lydbury North ward (part – Hopesay parish); Stokesay ward (part – Sibdon Carwood parish); Wistanstow ward (Wistanstow parish)	Map 2
23 Worthen	2	<i>Unchanged</i> (the parish of Worthen with Shelve)	Map 2

Notes: 1 The whole of the district is parished.

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

Figure 2:
The Commission's Final Recommendations for South Shropshire

Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (1998)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2003)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
1 Apedale	1	861	861	-9	911	911	-8
2 Bishop's Castle with Onny Valley	2	1,976	988	4	2,081	1,041	5
3 Bitterley with Stoke St Milborough	1	1,072	1,072	13	1,128	1,128	13
4 Bucknell	1	903	903	-5	964	964	-3
5 Burford	1	1,000	1,000	6	1,076	1,076	8
6 Caynham with Ashford	1	1,024	1,024	8	1,074	1,074	8
7 Chirbury	1	706	706	-25	734	734	-26
8 Church Stretton North	2	1,827	914	-4	1,836	918	-8
9 Church Stretton South	2	1,853	927	-2	1,889	945	-5
10 Clee	2	1,984	992	5	2,118	1,059	6
11 Cleobury Mortimer	2	2,117	1,059	12	2,234	1,117	12
12 Clun	1	945	945	0	992	992	0
13 Clun Forest	1	820	820	-13	846	846	-15
14 Corve Valley	1	881	881	-7	911	911	-8
15 Craven Arms	2	1,829	915	-3	1,973	987	-1
16 Kemp Valley	1	969	969	2	989	989	-1
17 Ludlow Henley	2	1,969	985	4	2,086	1,043	5
18 Ludlow St Laurence's	2	1,924	962	2	2,075	1,038	4
19 Ludlow St Peter's	2	2,056	1,028	9	2,062	1,031	4

continued overleaf

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

Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (1998)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2003)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
20 Ludlow Sheet with Ludford	2	1,817	909	-4	2,066	1,033	4
21 Upper Corvedale	1	1,060	1,060	12	1,084	1,084	9
22 Wistanstow with Hopesay	1	1,015	1,015	7	1,071	1,071	8
23 Worthen	2	1,585	793	-16	1,641	821	-18
Totals	34	32,193	—	—	33,841	—	—
Averages	—	—	947	—	—	995	—

Source: Electorate figures are based on South Shropshire District Council's submission.

Notes: 1 The 'variance from average' column shows by how far, in percentage terms, the number of electors per councillor varies from the average for the district. The minus symbol (-) denotes a lower than average number of electors. Figures have been rounded to the nearest whole number.

2 The total electorate figures for 1998 are marginally different to those in Figure 3 (by seven electors) which has a negligible impact on variances.

1. INTRODUCTION

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

2 This was our first review of the electoral arrangements of South Shropshire. The last such review was undertaken by our predecessor, the Local Government Boundary Commission (LGBC), which reported to the Secretary of State in July 1975 (Report No. 74). The electoral arrangements of Shropshire County Council were last reviewed in May 1980 (Report No. 382). We intend reviewing the County Council's electoral arrangements in due course.

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

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

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

5 In July 1998, the Government published a White Paper, *Modern Local Government – In Touch with the People*, which set out legislative proposals for local authority electoral arrangements. In two-tier areas it proposed introducing a pattern in which both the district and county councils would hold elections every two years, i.e. in year one half of the district council would be elected, in year two half the county council would be elected, and so on. The Government stated that local accountability

would be maximised where every elector has an opportunity to vote every year, thereby pointing to a pattern of two-member wards (and divisions) in two-tier areas. However, it stated that there was no intention to move towards very large electoral areas in sparsely populated rural areas, and that single-member wards (and electoral divisions) would continue in many authorities.

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

7 This review was in four stages. Stage One began on 4 August 1998, when we wrote to South Shropshire District Council inviting proposals for future electoral arrangements. We also notified Shropshire County Council, West Mercia Police Authority, the local authority associations, Shropshire Association of Parish and Town Councils, parish and town councils in the district, the Member of Parliament and the Member of the European Parliament with constituency interests in the district, and the headquarters of the main political parties. We placed a notice in the local press, issued a press release and invited the District Council to publicise the review further. The closing date for receipt of representations, the end of Stage One, was 7 December 1998. At Stage Two we considered all the representations received during Stage One and prepared our draft recommendations.

8 Stage Three began on 2 March 1999 with the

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

2. CURRENT ELECTORAL ARRANGEMENTS

9 The district of South Shropshire covers an area of approximately 400 square miles in the south-western part of the county. It is the largest district in Shropshire, covering over 30 per cent of the total area. The district has a population of some 40,500 and a population density of approximately 0.4 persons per hectare, the lowest in Shropshire and one of the lowest in England.

10 The district is notably rural in character, with three prominent upland areas of the Clun Forest, Longmynd and Stiperstone Hills, and the Cleve Hills. The topography of the district is also reflected in the transport links through the area, with the only main trunk road, the A49, and the Cardiff to Crewe railway line running through Ludlow in the south to Church Stretton in the north. The district borders Wales to the west and the West Midlands conurbation to the east.

11 The rural nature of the district is illustrated by the fact that only five settlements currently have a population of more than 1,000 (Bishop's Castle, Church Stretton, Craven Arms, Cleobury Mortimer and Ludlow). Ludlow in the south of the district is the largest town and the administrative centre for the district. The town has experienced significant growth in population over the last two decades, although the rate of growth is forecast to slow down over the next five years. The district is entirely parished and contains 62 parishes, some of which share joint parish councils.

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

13 The electorate of the district is 32,200 (February 1998). The Council presently has 40 members who are elected from 28 wards, three of which are relatively urban (in Ludlow), the majority of the remainder being predominantly

rural. Of the 28 wards, the three in Ludlow are each represented by three councillors. Outside the town, six wards are each represented by two councillors and the remaining 19 are single-member wards. The whole Council is elected together every four years.

14 Since the last electoral review there has been an increase in the electorate in the district, with around 23 per cent more electors than two decades ago.

15 At present, each councillor represents an average of 805 electors, which the Council forecasts will increase to 846 by the year 2003 if the present number of councillors is maintained. However, due to demographic and other changes over the past two decades, the number of electors per councillor in 18 of the 28 wards varies by more than 10 per cent from the district average, of which nine wards vary by more than 20 per cent and six wards by 30 per cent or more. The worst imbalance is in Munslow ward where the councillor represents 40 per cent fewer electors than the district average. In fact, each of the two councillors for Cleobury Mortimer ward represents more than twice as many electors as the councillor for Munslow ward.

Map 1:
Existing Wards in South Shropshire



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Figure 3:
Existing Electoral Arrangements

Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (1998)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2003)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
1 Apedale	1	861	861	7	911	911	8
2 Ashford	1	618	618	-23	642	642	-24
3 Bishop's Castle	2	1,599	800	-1	1,698	849	0
4 Bitterley	1	626	626	-22	669	669	-21
5 Bucknell	1	769	769	-4	817	817	-3
6 Burford	1	1,000	1,000	24	1,076	1,076	27
7 Caynham	1	896	896	11	948	948	12
8 Chirbury	1	706	706	-12	734	734	-13
9 Church Stretton North	2	1,745	873	8	1,754	877	4
10 Church Stretton South	2	1,936	968	20	1,971	986	16
11 Clee	1	658	658	-18	717	717	-15
12 Cleobury Mortimer	2	2,117	1,059	31	2,234	1,117	32
13 Clun	1	775	775	-4	806	806	-5
14 Clunbury	1	648	648	-20	670	670	-21
15 Diddlebury	1	784	784	-3	810	810	-4
16 Hopton Wafers	1	846	846	5	885	885	5
17 Ludlow Castle	3	2,407	802	0	2,625	875	3
18 Ludlow East Hamlet	3	2,851	950	18	3,158	1,053	24
19 Ludlow Galdeford	3	2,504	835	4	2,506	835	-1
20 Lydbury North	1	942	942	17	972	972	15
21 Munslow	1	483	483	-40	496	496	-41

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Figure 3 (continued):
Existing Electoral Arrangements

Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (1998)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2003)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
22 Newcastle	1	710	710	-12	736	736	-13
23 Stanton Lacy	1	560	560	-30	573	573	-32
24 Stoke St Milborough	1	560	560	-30	575	575	-32
25 Stokesay	2	1,911	956	19	2,055	1,028	21
26 Wentnor	1	547	547	-32	569	569	-33
27 Wistanstow	1	556	556	-31	593	593	-30
28 Worthen	2	1,585	793	-2	1,641	821	-3
Totals	40	32,200	—	—	33,841	—	—
Averages	—	—	805	—	—	846	—

Source: Electorate figures are based on South Shropshire District Council's submission.

Note: The 'variance from average' column shows by how far, in percentage terms, the number of electors per councillor varies from the average for the district. The minus symbol (-) denotes a lower than average number of electors. For example, in 1998, electors in Munslow ward were relatively over-represented by 40 per cent, while electors in Cleobury Mortimer ward were relatively under-represented by 31 per cent. Figures have been rounded to the nearest whole number.

3. DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS

16 During Stage One we received 28 representations, including two district-wide proposals from the District Council and representations from Ludlow Constituency Labour Party and Ludlow Branch Labour Party, 17 parish and town councils and parish meetings, four district councillors, two local groups and three local residents. In the light of these representations and evidence available to us, we reached preliminary conclusions which were set out in our report, *Draft Recommendations on the Future Electoral Arrangements for South Shropshire*.

17 Our draft recommendations were based, in part, on proposals from the District Council, which achieved some improvement in electoral equality, and provided a pattern of two-member wards in Ludlow, and a mix of single- and two-member wards in the rest of the district. However, we moved away from the District Council's proposals in a number of areas, to reflect the views of some parish and town councils and parish meetings and other respondents, and to incorporate our own proposals. We proposed that:

- (a) South Shropshire District Council should be served by 33 councillors, compared with the current 40, representing 22 wards, six fewer than at present;
- (b) the boundaries of 25 of the existing wards should be modified, resulting in a decrease of six, while three wards should retain their existing boundaries;
- (c) there should be new warding arrangements for Ludlow and Church Stretton parishes and the warding of Ludford parish should be abolished.

Draft Recommendation

South Shropshire District Council should comprise 33 councillors, serving 22 wards. The Council should continue to hold whole-council elections.

18 Our draft recommendations would have resulted in significant improvements in electoral equality, with a reduction in the number of wards varying by more than 10 per cent from the district average from 18 to three. This improved electoral equality was forecast to continue in 2003.

4. RESPONSES TO CONSULTATION

19 During the consultation on our draft recommendations report, 33 representations were received. A list of all respondents is available on request from the Commission. All representations may be inspected at the offices of South Shropshire District Council and the Commission.

South Shropshire District Council

20 The District Council supported the majority of our draft recommendations, although it proposed the retention of two separate district wards for the area covered by our proposed Worthen with Chirbury ward, one covering Chirbury with Brompton parish (to return one district councillor) and one covering Worthen with Shelve parish (two councillors), as exists at present, thereby also proposing an increase in council size from 33 to 34. It also proposed changes involving the two parishes of Colebatch and Hopton Cangeford contained in our proposed wards of Bitterley with Stoke St Milborough and Clun.

21 The Council proposed renaming a number of the proposed district wards contained in our draft recommendations and supported Ludlow Town Council's revised parish ward names for the town.

Parish and Town Councils and Parish Meetings

22 We received representations from 13 parish and town councils and parish meetings. The parish meetings of Acton Scott and Ashford Bowdler, the parish councils of Eaton-under-Heywood & Hope Bowdler, Munslow and Rushbury, and Ludlow Town Council all supported the proposed warding pattern as it related to their areas. In addition, Ludlow Town Council proposed alternative names for district wards and parish wards in the Ludlow area.

23 Chirbury with Brompton and Worthen with Shelve parish councils both supported the retention of separate district wards for the two parishes, returning one and two councillors respectively, as exists at present. Bitterley Parish Council proposed

a modified warding pattern for its area, based on the District Council's Stage One submission, which did not form part of the draft recommendations. Clee St Margaret Parish Meeting opposed its inclusion in Bitterley & Stoke St Milborough ward. Stoke St Milborough & Hopton Cangeford Parish Council opposed its two constituent parishes forming parts of separate district wards for community identity reasons. Culmington Parish Council similarly opposed its parish and Diddlebury parish forming parts of separate district wards. Clun Parish Council suggested that the two parish wards of Clun and Chapel Lawn should form part of a single district ward for community identity reasons.

Other Representations

24 A further 18 representations were received in response to our draft recommendations, from a local group, three district councillors and 14 local residents. We also received two petitions: one signed by 47 residents of Chirbury with Brompton parish opposing our draft recommendations for the area; and one signed by 21 residents opposing Hopton Cangeford and Stoke St Milborough parishes forming parts of separate district wards.

25 Councillor Phillips (county councillor for Bishop's Castle and Chirbury & Worthen division and district councillor for Bishop's Castle ward), Councillor Neal (member for Worthen ward) and Councillor Kidd (member for Chirbury ward) all opposed a two-member district ward comprising the parishes of Chirbury with Brompton and Worthen with Shelve as included in the draft recommendations. Chirbury Women's Institute and nine local residents also opposed the proposed Worthen with Chirbury ward.

26 Two local residents proposed that Clee St Margaret parish should form part of a modified Bitterley with Stoke St Milborough ward, rather than part of Diddlebury with Munslow ward as in our draft recommendations. Three local residents opposed Hopton Cangeford and Stoke St Milborough parishes forming parts of separate district wards for community identity reasons.

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

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

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

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

imbalances of 20 per cent and over should arise only in the most exceptional of circumstances, and will require the strongest justification.

Electorate Forecasts

31 At Stage One the District Council submitted electorate forecasts for the year 2003, projecting an increase of some 5 per cent from 32,200 to 33,841 over the five-year period from 1998 to 2003. It expects the largest single area of growth to be in

suggesting a council size of between 32 and 34 members, while Craven Arms Town Council proposed retaining the current number of councillors and Eaton-under-Heywood & Hope Bowdler Parish Council proposed a reduction to 30 members.

35 In our draft recommendations report we considered the size and distribution of the electorate, the geography and other characteristics of the area, together with the representations received. We concluded that the statutory criteria and the achievement of electoral equality would be met by a council of 33 members.

36 At Stage Three the District Council and many other respondents commented on our proposed two-member Worthen with Chirbury ward. Many considered that the two constituent parishes should continue to be served by separate district wards in order to respect the distinct identities of the two areas, and that the area as a whole should return a total of three councillors as at present, not two as proposed in our draft recommendations, to allow effective representation of the area. Under these proposals for a separate single-member Chirbury ward and a two-member Worthen ward the number of councillors for South Shropshire District Council would increase from 33, as proposed in our draft recommendations, to 34.

37 We have reviewed our draft recommendations and again considered the size and distribution of the electorate, the geography and other characteristics of the area, together with all the representations received. We have been persuaded by the arguments put to us regarding representation for the Worthen and Chirbury areas of the district and we are recommending the retention of the existing warding pattern, resulting in one additional councillor compared to the draft recommendations. We are therefore recommending that the total council size for South Shropshire should be reduced from the current 40 to 34, rather than 33 as in our draft recommendations.

Electoral Arrangements

38 As set out in our draft recommendations report, we carefully considered all the representations received at Stage One, including the two district-wide schemes from the District Council. From these representations, some considerations emerged which helped to inform us when preparing our draft recommendations.

39 Only the District Council submitted detailed warding proposals for the whole district. It submitted a preferred option for 34 councillors serving 24 wards and a reserve scheme for 33 councillors serving 23 wards. The two schemes were identical in all respects except in the north-west of the district where the parishes of Chirbury with Brompton and Worthen with Shelve would be combined to create a new two-member ward under the reserve scheme, instead of maintaining the existing separate single-member ward and two-member ward, respectively, under the preferred scheme. The District Council sought to maintain the current mix of single- and multi-member wards. It stated that its proposals were influenced by the Government's White Paper *Modern Local Government – In Touch with the People*, which implies a pattern of mainly two-member wards, with single-member wards in sparsely populated rural areas.

40 We recognised the sparsity of population in the district, most notably in the settlements which lie west of the A49 and particularly those parishes adjacent to the Welsh border, which creates difficulties in seeking to achieve electoral equality across the district. Under the Council's preferred option the number of electors per councillor would more than 10 per cent from the district average in eight wards, and more than 20 per cent in four wards (there would be no further improvement in electoral equality by 2003). The reserve option, with one less councillor, would result in six wards with an electoral variance of more than 10 per cent, three wards over 20 per cent and one ward over 30 per cent (unchanged in 2003). The Council's options also proposed a predominance of wards which would be over-represented in the north of the district and under-represented in the south of the district. While the District Council's proposals would improve electoral equality compared to the existing arrangements, we were concerned at the electoral imbalances that would continue under either of the District Council's options.

41 In formulating our draft recommendations, we noted that for the area broadly north of Wenlock Edge, but specifically excluding the parish of Rushbury (with approximately 450 electors), the District Council proposed a total of 15 councillors (14 under its reserve option) and in the area south of Wenlock Edge, including Rushbury parish, a total of 19 councillors. We concluded that, even by including Rushbury parish in a ward pattern to the

south, the District Council's options – both preferred and reserve – would not achieve the correct balance of representation across the district. However, we calculated that by retaining Rushbury parish in a ward to the north of Wenlock Edge, as exists at present, the distribution of councillors between the north and south under the Council's reserve option (i.e. 14 and 19 respectively) would be correct. In spite of this, the Council's proposed warding pattern could not be adopted, since the retention of Rushbury parish in a ward to the north would be inconsistent with the Council's proposed warding pattern and thus affect the achievement of electoral equality, particularly in the wards around Rushbury. We looked at alternative ward configurations.

42 In our draft recommendations, in seeking to improve upon the electoral equality which would result under the District Council's proposals, we sought first to address any imbalances in representation north and south of Wenlock Edge and provide a fairer balance of representation across the district. Second, we sought to alleviate the acute level of electoral imbalance in the north-west corner of the district, notably in the wards of Chirbury and Worthen. We carefully considered all representations received and noted the extensive local consultation

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The Southern Area

47 At Stage One we calculated that to include Rushbury parish (comprising approximately 450 electors) in a ward with parishes to the north of Wenlock Edge (as exists at present and favoured by Rushbury Parish Council), rather than to the south as proposed by the District Council, would result in the electorate in the southern part of the district being entitled to 19 councillors. The District Council also proposed 19 councillors, although under its proposals, with Rushbury parish in a ward to the south of Wenlock Edge, the electorate in the southern area would in fact have been entitled to 20 councillors. A revised proposal based on the inclusion of Rushbury parish in the northern area would therefore redress the imbalance in representation north and south of Wenlock Edge (with 14 and 19 councillors respectively), enabling the achievement of better electoral equality, and would better reflect community ties in the area. This formed the basis of our draft recommendations.

48 While our final recommendations, based on an increased council size of 34, would, on a purely statistical analysis, entitle the southern area to an additional councillor, we propose instead that the far north-west corner of the district should receive an additional councillor and therefore be relatively over-represented in order to more accurately reflect local community interests and identities and the distinct geography of the area, as argued by respondents.

Burford and Cleobury Mortimer wards

49 These two wards are situated in the south-east corner of the district. Burford ward currently comprises the parishes of Boraston and Burford and the number of electors represented by the councillor for the ward is 24 per cent above the district average (27 per cent above in 2003). Cleobury Mortimer ward is currently a two-member ward comprising the parishes of Milson, Neen Solars and Cleobury Mortimer and the number of electors per councillor for this ward is 31 per cent above the district average (32 per cent above in 2003). This area of the district is relatively under-represented under the current arrangements.

50 The District Council proposed no change to the existing wards of Burford and Cleobury Mortimer at Stage One, arguing that the proximity of the two

parishes of Burford and Boraston, along with their relatively dense population compared to the rest of the district, supported this view. With regard to Cleobury Mortimer, the Council stated that its proposals would “maintain the existing community, social and commercial ties throughout the area”.

51 Under the Council’s proposals, based on a 33-member council, the number of electors per councillor in Burford ward would be 2 per cent above the district average (5 per cent above in 2003), and in Cleobury Mortimer ward it would be 8 per cent above (9 per cent above in 2003). Cleobury Mortimer Parish Council and Cleobury Mortimer Women’s Institute supported no change to the boundaries of the current ward, as under the District Council’s proposals.

52 We carefully considered all the representations we received at Stage One. We also examined a number of alternative options. Although the two wards are under-represented under the current arrangements, a consequence of reducing council size from 40 to 33 would be that the single-member Burford ward and two-member Cleobury Mortimer ward would have a fairer level of representation in relation to the district as a whole. Based on a council size of 33, the District Council’s proposals for no change to Burford and Cleobury Mortimer wards would therefore result in reasonable electoral equality and reflect the statutory criteria. We concluded that any further improvement to electoral equality in this area would adversely affect the equality achieved in neighbouring wards. We therefore consulted upon no change to the existing wards of Burford and Cleobury Mortimer as part of our draft recommendations.

53 At Stage Three the District Council supported our proposals for these two wards, which reflected its own Stage One proposals. We received no further submissions commenting on our draft recommendations and we are therefore confirming our draft proposals for Burford and Cleobury Mortimer wards as final.

Ashford, Caynham, Clee and Hopton Wafers wards

54 These four wards are all currently single-member wards. Ashford ward comprises the three parishes of Ashford Bowdler, Ashford Carbonel

and Richard's Castle (Shropshire) and the number of electors per councillor is currently 23 per cent below the district average. Caynham ward, comprising the parish ward of Knowbury in the parish of Caynham, along with the parishes of Greete, Hope Bagot, Nash and Whitton, is currently under-represented, with the number of electors per councillor 11 per cent above the district average. Clee ward, covering Clee parish ward of Caynham parish, is currently over-represented at 18 per cent below the district average. Hopton Wafers ward comprises the parishes of Coreley and Hopton Wafers and the average number of electors per councillor is 5 per cent above the district average. Little or no improvement in electoral equality in these wards is expected over the five-year period.

55 At Stage One the District Council proposed addressing the electoral inequality in Ashford ward by extending the ward to include Knowbury parish ward of Caynham parish, currently part of Caynham ward, and renaming the ward as Caynham with Ashford. Ashford Bowdler Parish Meeting stated that the "existing set-up is judged to operate satisfactorily and fairly and any major changes would be undesirable". The District Council also proposed that Clee parish ward of Caynham parish, which currently forms a district ward on its own, should be joined with the surrounding parishes of Greete, Nash and Whitton. The Council argued that this group of parishes on the south-western side of Titterstone Clee shares good community links, and the proposed ward would improve electoral equality in the area.

56 Under the District Council's proposals the parish of Nash, currently part of the existing Caynham district ward, would be transferred into Hopton Wafers ward. The three parishes of Coreley, Hopton Wafers and Nash lie on the southern and eastern side of Titterstone Clee and the Council noted the good communication routes between them. Hopton Wafers Parish Council supported the Council's proposals for the parish to be included in a district ward with the parishes of Coreley and Nash.

57 The District Council proposed that each of the three wards for this area would return a single councillor, resulting in an overall reduction in the level of representation by one councillor from the current four. Under the District Council's proposals, with a council size of 33, the number of

electors per councillor in Caynham with Ashford ward would be 5 per cent above the average (unchanged in 2003), 9 per cent below in Clee (7 per cent below in 2003) and 14 per cent above in Hopton Wafers (13 per cent above in 2003). The Council acknowledged that a relatively high degree of electoral inequality would result under its proposed Hopton Wafers ward but suggested that "the lack of suitable alternatives provides special justification for this particular grouping".

58 In our draft recommendations we adopted, unaltered, the Council's suggested Caynham with Ashford ward which would achieve good electoral equality and, we considered, reflect existing community ties. However, we were not persuaded that the level of electoral inequality under the Council's proposed Clee ward (relatively over-represented) and Hopton Wafers ward (relatively under-represented) could not be improved and we therefore proposed combining these two single-member wards, thereby forming a two-member Clee ward for the area. This arrangement would significantly improve electoral equality in the area and, by maintaining the existing natural ward boundary along Titterstone Clee, we considered it would reflect community links in the area.

59 At Stage Three the District Council supported our proposed warding pattern for the area, although it proposed that Caynham with Ashford ward should be renamed Ashfords & Richard's Castle with Caynham. Ashford Bowdler Parish Meeting supported our proposed Caynham with Ashford ward. We received no further representations commenting on the proposed warding pattern for these wards, which we are confirming as final. We do not agree that the District Council's alternative ward name would provide a concise name with widespread support and we are therefore confirming the ward name of Caynham with Ashford as final.

Bitterley and Stoke St Milborough wards

60 Bitterley and Stoke St Milborough wards, both currently single-member wards, are located on the northern side of Titterstone Clee. Bitterley ward (and parish) is currently over-represented, with the number of electors represented by the councillor being 22 per cent below the district average (21 per cent below in 2003). Stoke St Milborough ward comprises the parishes of Clee St Margaret, Hopton Cangeford, Stoke St Milborough and

Wheathill and is also over-represented, with the number of electors represented by the councillor being 30 per cent below the district average (32 per cent below in 2003).

61 In the light of the relative over-representation in these two wards, the District Council proposed in its Stage One submission to merge the existing wards of Bitterley and Stoke St Milborough into a new single-member ward, to be called Bitterley with Stoke St Milborough. Under the Council's proposals, based on a council size of 33, Bitterley with Stoke St Milborough ward would be significantly under-represented, with the number of electors represented by the councillor varying by more than 20 per cent from the district average, a position which is not expected to improve in 2003.

62 We were not persuaded that the District Council's proposals for this area were the best solution in terms of electoral equality. We examined alternative warding arrangements, including those previously considered, and rejected, by the Council. While we recognised that there was some local support for the Council's proposed warding arrangements in this area, we concluded that the considerable electoral imbalance under the Council's proposals was avoidable in this case and did not provide a fair balance of representation. Therefore we proposed a modified Bitterley with Stoke St Milborough ward covering the three parishes of Bitterley, Stoke St Milborough and Wheathill, which would achieve good electoral equality, with an electoral variance of 5 per cent (6 per cent in 2003).

63 At Stage Three the District Council argued that the parish of Hopton Cangeford (forming part of our proposed Corve Valley ward) should be included in the proposed Bitterley with Stoke St Milborough ward, which it suggested should be renamed Stoke St Milborough with Bitterley. The joint Parish Council of Stoke St Milborough & Hopton Cangeford argued against the parishes forming parts of separate district wards, as they have strong community ties and share a joint parish council. We received representations from two local residents and a petition signed by 21 residents opposed to the separation of Hopton Cangeford parish from the parish of Stoke St Milborough for district warding purposes on community identity grounds.

64 We also received a representation from Clee St Margaret Parish Council at Stage Three which opposed the draft recommendation that the parish

should form part of a new Diddlebury with Munslow ward stating, "historically, the village [of Clee St Margaret] has always had strong cultural, historical and religious links with Stoke St Milborough".

65 In the light of Stage Three representations we are persuaded that the separation of Hopton Cangeford and Stoke St Milborough parishes into adjacent district wards, as contained in our draft recommendations, would have an adverse impact upon community identities in the area. Furthermore, we recognise that the parish of Hopton Cangeford comprises only 43 electors. We are proposing as our final recommendation that the parish of Hopton Cangeford should form part of a modified Bitterley & Stoke St Milborough ward with an electoral variance, based on a council size of 34, of 13 per cent (unchanged in 2003). With this modification, the electoral variance in the adjacent ward of Corve Valley would be 7 per cent (8 per cent in 2003). We judge that, while this modification would not achieve as good electoral equality as our draft recommendation, it would reflect the expressed close community links between the parishes and have the benefit of maintaining the constituent parishes represented by the joint parish council within one district ward.

66 We are not proposing to transfer the parish of Clee St Margaret (comprising 114 electors) into Bitterley & Stoke St Milborough ward which, with a much larger electorate than Hopton Cangeford, would have a serious adverse impact upon electoral equality in the area. We are not adopting the District Council's proposed ward name of Stoke St Milborough with Bitterley, as we consider our original proposed name accurately reflects the relative sizes of the electorate within the parishes of Bitterley and Stoke St Milborough.

Diddlebury, Stanton Lacy and Stokesay wards

67 Diddlebury and Culmington parishes currently form the single-member ward of Diddlebury and the number of electors represented by the councillor for the ward is 3 per cent below the district average. The single-member Stanton Lacy ward currently comprises the parishes of Bromfield and Stanton Lacy and is significantly over-represented with an electoral variance of 30 per cent. The two-member Stokesay ward comprises the parishes of Craven Arms, Onibury and Sibdon Carwood and is currently under-represented, with the average number of electors per councillor 19

per cent above the average. By 2003 the electoral imbalance is forecast to worsen in all three wards to 4 per cent below, 32 per cent below and 21 per cent above the district average respectively.

68 At Stage One the District Council proposed enlarging the existing Diddlebury ward to include the parish of Stanton Lacy to the south, thereby creating a single-member Corve Valley ward. The parish of Bromfield would form part of a new Craven Arms ward, detailed below. Culmington and Diddlebury parish councils both proposed an alternative warding pattern for the area: a two-member Corvedale ward to include the parishes of Abdon, Culmington, Diddlebury, Munslow, Rushbury and Stanton Lacy.

69 The District Council argued that its proposals respected community identity and local ties in the area, known locally as The Corvedale. Culmington Parish Council added that there are close community links between the parishes of Culmington and Diddlebury which should be maintained.

70 The District Council also proposed a new two-member Craven Arms with Bromfield ward at Stage One, covering the existing Stokesay ward (excluding Onibury parish) together with Bromfield parish. It argued that this grouping of parishes would create a district ward which covers an area along the main A49 corridor and the Cardiff to Crewe railway line, thereby reflecting the good communication links which exist between the settlements. The Council noted, however, that a degree of electoral imbalance would continue in this ward.

71 Based on a council of 33 members, the number of electors per councillor in the District Council's proposed single-member Corve Valley ward would be 9 per cent above the district average in 2003, and under Culmington and Diddlebury parish councils' proposed two-member Corvedale ward it would be equal to the district average in 2003. The District Council's proposed Craven Arms with Bromfield ward would be under-represented by 9 per cent in 2003.

72 We carefully considered all the representations received at Stage One regarding the three existing wards of Diddlebury, Stanton Lacy and Stokesay. We calculated that including Rushbury parish in a ward with parishes to the north of Wenlock Edge would facilitate more balanced representation

across the district, and would have regard to existing community ties. In light of this, we did not adopt Culmington and Diddlebury parish councils' proposal for a two-member Corvedale ward (which would include Rushbury parish in a ward with parishes to the south of Wenlock Edge). Furthermore, we judged that better electoral equality could be achieved than under the District Council's proposed Corve Valley and Craven Arms with Bromfield wards, both of which would be relatively under-represented.

73 We noted the preference expressed by Culmington and Diddlebury parish councils for remaining in a ward together. However, in seeking electoral equality we cannot consider one area in isolation but must consider the district as a whole. After careful consideration, we concluded that to retain the parishes in the same ward was not possible if a fair level of representation was to be achieved across the wider area and if single-member wards were to be retained, as favoured by the District Council. Therefore as part of our draft recommendations we proposed retaining the parishes of Craven Arms and Onibury within the same district ward, as at present, but with the parish of Sibdon Carwood forming part of an alternative ward with parishes to the north of the line of Wenlock Edge. We consulted on the District Council's proposed ward name of Craven Arms, as it reflects the name of the largest settlement in the modified ward. The number of electors per councillor in Craven Arms ward, based on a council size of 33, would be 6 per cent below the district average (4 per cent below in 2003).

74 For Stanton Lacy ward, we proposed extending the ward to the east to include Hopton Cangeford parish and to the west to include Culmington parish, to create a new single-member Corve Valley ward, which would significantly improve electoral equality in the area. We consulted on the ward name of Corve Valley, as put forward by the District Council. Our draft proposals would improve considerably on electoral equality at present and under the District Council's proposals. The number of electors per councillor in our Corve Valley ward would be 5 per cent below the district average (7 per cent in 2003).

75 To the north of this area we proposed a new single-member ward comprising Diddlebury parish, the parishes of Abdon, Heath and Munslow (currently forming Munslow ward) and Clee St Margaret parish (currently in Stoke St Milborough

ward), as part of our draft recommendations. We proposed that the ward should be called Diddlebury with Munslow, and the number of electors represented by the councillor would be 9 per cent above the district average (improving to 6 per cent in 2003).

76 In the light of the suggestion to retain Culmington and Diddlebury parishes in the same district ward, we noted that a two-member ward could be formed by combining our proposed single-member wards of Corve Valley and Diddlebury with Munslow (comprising the parishes of Abdon, Bromfield, Clee St Margaret, Culmington, Diddlebury, Heath, Hopton Cangeford, Munslow and Stanton Lacy). However, we decided not to put forward a two-member ward for this area as part of our draft recommendations, since the District Council favoured predominantly single-member wards in the rural areas and the two single-member wards of Corve Valley and Diddlebury with Munslow would achieve reasonable electoral equality. We invited views during Stage Three.

77 At Stage Three we received support from the District Council for our proposed warding pattern in Craven Arms, Corve Valley and Diddlebury with Munslow wards, although the Council proposed renaming the last of these wards as Upper Corvedale (also suggested by Munslow Parish Council which judged that the name would be more acceptable locally). Culmington Parish Council continued to argue against the parishes of Culmington and Diddlebury forming parts of separate district wards, noting the “close links between these two parishes and the necessity for these to be maintained together with their allegiance, both historically and financially, to Corvedale School”. The Parish Council resubmitted its Stage One proposals for the area which would place Culmington and Diddlebury parishes in the same district ward. We received no further representations concerning these three proposed wards.

78 We have carefully considered the representations received at Stage Three. While we note Culmington Parish Council’s resubmitted proposal that the parish should form part of a district ward with Diddlebury parish, we are unable to consider this area in isolation. When viewing the district as a whole we are unable to adopt the Parish Council’s proposed warding pattern as it would not be compatible with our proposals elsewhere.

Moreover, we did not receive any responses at Stage Three to the suggestion contained in our draft recommendations that the two proposed wards of Corve Valley and Diddlebury with Munslow could form a two-member ward, thereby permitting Culmington and Diddlebury parishes to remain in a ward together.

79 We have therefore decided to confirm our draft recommendations for the wards in this area as final, subject to renaming Diddlebury with Munslow ward as Corve Valley ward, as proposed by the District Council and Munslow Parish Council.

Ludlow Town (including Ludford)

80 Under the existing arrangements, Ludlow and Ludford parishes are together served by three three-member district wards. In light of the Government’s White Paper *Modern Local Government – In Touch with the People*, the District Council proposed a complete redrawing of wards in the town to create four two-member wards. Ludlow Constituency Labour Party and Ludlow Branch Labour Party supported the Council’s approach, stating “we do not favour using three-member wards within the district, notably Ludlow itself”.

Ludlow Castle, Ludlow East Hamlet and Ludlow Galdeford wards

81 The electoral variances, under current arrangements, in Ludlow Castle and Ludlow Galdeford wards are no more than 4 per cent from the district average (3 per cent in 2003). However, Ludlow East Hamlet ward is significantly under-represented, with the average number of electors per councillor forecast to be 24 per cent above the district average in 2003.

82 At Stage One the District Council stated: “Ludlow Town and Ludford Parish Councils have [both] been involved in reviewing the warding arrangements for the area.” The District Council’s proposals would involve a complete reconfiguration of the district wards covering the parishes of Ludlow and Ludford. To the east of the Cardiff to Crewe railway line the Council proposed a new Ludlow St Peter’s ward which would comprise a large part of the existing Ludlow East Hamlet ward, following the same northern boundary and extending south as far as, and including, both sides of Henley Road.

83 Immediately south of the proposed Ludlow St Peter's ward, the Council proposed a new Ludlow Henley ward which would cover parts of the existing wards of Ludlow East Hamlet and Ludlow Galdeford. Its south-eastern boundary would extend as far as, but not including, the football ground lying to the east of Riddings Meadow, Milton Road and Sidney Road. The ward's southern and western boundary would broadly follow the railway line and its eastern boundary would follow the town boundary of the A49.

84 To the west of the railway line the Council proposed a new Ludlow St Laurence's ward which would extend southwards as far as the parish boundary between Ludlow and Ludford. The ward's eastern boundary would lie to the east of the properties on Jockey Field and east of St Laurence Primary School, continuing in a northerly direction to the east of Springfield Close until it meets the railway line. The fourth district ward in this area would cover the rest of Ludlow parish, including the Tameside and Steventon New Road area west of the railway line, and the Gallows Bank area east of the railway line, together with the whole of Ludford parish. The proposed name for this ward was Ludlow Sheet with Ludford.

85 Under the District Council's proposals the average number of electors per councillor in each of the four district wards in the Ludlow/Ludford areas would be no more than 10 per cent above the district average currently and no more than 5 per cent above in 2003. We were content that the Council's proposals would provide an appropriate level of representation for the area (i.e. eight councillors), achieve good electoral equality, follow easily identifiable ward boundaries and have regard to community identities within the area. Furthermore, the District Council's proposals were drawn up in consultation with Ludlow Town Council and Ludford Parish Council and therefore have some local support. We consulted on these proposals as part of our draft recommendations.

86 At Stage Three the District Council supported our proposals, including the district ward names, which reflected its own Stage One submission. Ludlow Town Council also supported our proposed ward reconfiguration in the town, although it proposed new district ward names based on the geographical location of each ward, which it considered would avoid confusion between either the existing ward names or ecclesiastical parishes in the town.

87 We were not persuaded that the Town Council's proposed names for the district council wards would be more appropriate than those contained in our draft recommendations, which were proposed by the District Council. The Town Council's proposals for alternative names for the parish wards are detailed later in the chapter. We continue to welcome the consensus support for the warding pattern in the Ludlow area which, together with the proposed ward names contained in our draft recommendations, we are confirming as final.

The Northern Area

88 As detailed under the 'Southern Area' section, to address the electoral imbalance between the north and south of the district we proposed in our draft recommendations that the parish of Rushbury be included in a ward with parishes to the north of Wenlock Edge, as at present, not with parishes to the south as proposed by the District Council. This would mean that the electorate in the northern part of the district merits a total of 14 councillors. Under a revised council size of 34, the Northern Area would still merit a total of 14 councillors. However, as noted under 'Council Size' and further detailed later, we are recommending an additional councillor in the far north-west of the district in order to adequately represent the disparate communities in the Chirbury and Worthen areas, as favoured locally.

Apedale and Wistanstow wards

89 Apedale and Wistanstow wards are located north of Wenlock Edge and are both single-member wards. Wistanstow ward comprises the parish of the same name, and Apedale ward comprises Acton Scott, Eaton-under-Heywood, Hope Bowdler and Rushbury parishes. The number of electors per councillor is 7 per cent above the average in Apedale ward and 31 per cent below the average in Wistanstow ward. No significant improvement in electoral equality is anticipated over the five-year period.

90 At Stage One the District Council proposed that a modified Apedale ward should comprise the parishes of Acton Scott, Eaton-under-Heywood and Hope Bowdler, as at present, together with Wistanstow parish to the south-west. The Council proposed combining the parish of Rushbury with the parishes of Munslow, Abdon and Heath to the south of Wenlock Edge, to form a new single-member Rushbury with Munslow ward (as

described earlier). It stated that this would “improve electoral equality along the district’s eastern boundary”. Although Wistanstow parish is separated from the other three parishes within the revised Apedale ward by the A49, the Council argued that Wistanstow parish shares a number of social, community and ecclesiastical ties with these adjoining parishes. Under the District Council’s proposed Apedale ward, based on a council size of 33 members, the number of electors represented by the councillor would be 1 per cent below the district average (2 per cent below in 2003).

91 Wistanstow Parish Council supported the District Council’s modified Apedale ward at Stage One, arguing against alternative suggestions to combine the “rural” parish of Wistanstow with the “suburban” parish of Craven Arms. Acton Scott Parish Meeting proposed a number of alternative ward configurations to the District Council’s proposals in the area. Rushbury Parish Council objected to any change to the current Apedale ward, arguing that “Apedale has been a community through history” and the current ward utilises “the natural divide of the Wenlock Edge”. The Parish Council also enclosed a petition, signed by 195 local residents, objecting to the District Council’s proposal to incorporate Rushbury parish in a ward with Abdon, Heath and Munslow parishes.

92 We recognised the improved electoral equality in this area under the District Council’s proposals, compared to the current arrangements. However, as detailed earlier, we concluded that Wenlock Edge forms a natural boundary in this area, a view which was supported by Rushbury Parish Council and some local residents. We judged that to include Rushbury parish in a district ward with the parishes of Abdon, Heath and Munslow would not have regard to community interests and might not secure effective and convenient local government in the area. Therefore, in order to facilitate a more balanced representation across the whole district, having regard to community links and natural boundaries, in our draft recommendations we proposed retaining Rushbury parish in a ward with parishes to the north of Wenlock Edge, thereby retaining Apedale ward on its existing boundaries.

93 Under our draft proposals, based on a council size of 33, the number of electors per councillor in Apedale ward would be 12 per cent below the district average (11 per cent below in 2003). We concluded that any changes to improve this

electoral variance would adversely affect electoral equality in neighbouring wards and the balance of representation across the district, and is restricted by the geography of the area.

94 As a consequence of our proposal for no change to Apedale ward, we were unable to adopt the District Council’s proposal for this area. We considered alternative ward configurations to address the significant over-representation in the existing Wistanstow ward. Some representations at Stage One had expressed opposition to including the rural Wistanstow parish in a ward with the relatively urban parish of Craven Arms. However, we proposed that Wistanstow parish should be joined with the parishes of Hopesay and Sibdon Carwood to form a new single-member ward to be called Wistanstow with Hopesay.

95 We noted that Hopesay Parish Council supported an alternative configuration of parishes for the area. However, in considering the district as a whole we believed that our ward pattern would achieve a good degree of electoral equality, having regard to the statutory criteria, and would facilitate a modified warding pattern in this part of the district. Under our draft recommendations, the average number of electors per councillor in Wistanstow with Hopesay ward would be 4 per cent below the district average in 2003.

96 At Stage Three our proposed wards of Apedale and Wistanstow with Hopesay received support from the District Council. Representations were also received from Eaton-under-Heywood & Hope Bowdler Parish Meeting and Rushbury Parish Council who both supported our proposal for no change to the existing Apedale ward. We received no other representations commenting on our draft recommendations for Apedale and Wistanstow with Hopesay wards and we are therefore confirming them as final.

Bucknell, Clunbury and Lydbury North wards

97 Bucknell is a single-member ward comprising the parishes of Bedstone, Bucknell, Hopton Castle and Stowe. The number of electors represented by the councillor for the ward is 4 per cent below the district average. Clunbury ward, to the north-east of Bucknell, comprises the parishes of Clunbury and Clungunford and has 20 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the district average. The parishes of Edgton, Hopesay and Lydbury

North currently form the single-member Lydbury North ward, which is relatively under-represented with 17 per cent more electors per councillor than the district average. Little or no improvement to electoral equality in the area is forecast over the five-year period.

98 Under the District Council's Stage One proposals Bucknell ward would be modified to include the parish of Clungunford to the east and to exclude the parish of Stowe, which would form part of a modified Newcastle ward. In addition, the Council proposed that the parishes of Edgton and Hopesay (currently in Lydbury North ward), Sibdon Carwood (currently in Craven Arms ward) and Clunbury would together form a new single-member ward to be called Clunbury with Hopesay. The parish of Lydbury North would form part of a new two-member Bishop's Castle with Lydbury ward along with the parishes of Bishop's Castle, Colebatch and Mainstone (detailed later). Under the District Council's proposed 33-member council the number of electors per councillor would be 7 per cent below the district average in Bucknell ward (6 per cent below in 2003) and 2 per cent below the average in Clunbury with Hopesay ward (4 per cent below in 2003).

99 Hopesay Parish Council supported the District Council's Stage One proposal for a single-member ward covering the parishes of Hopesay, Edgton, Clunbury and Sibdon Carwood. Conversely, Clunbury Parish Council argued that there should be no change to the current Clunbury ward, as the rural nature of the ward and the predominantly land-based economy of the area require specific representation on the District Council.

100 We carefully considered the representations received. We noted that although the District Council's proposals for the existing wards of Clunbury and Lydbury North would achieve good electoral equality and had received some local support, the proposed warding pattern for the wider area was not compatible with our proposals, in particular the Apedale and Wistanstow areas, but also in the western and northern areas of the district. We were not persuaded by the arguments put forward by Clunbury Parish Council for no change to the existing district ward of Clunbury. The prime objective of this review is to achieve electoral equality across the district, taking into account local circumstances, and we were not persuaded that the existing imbalances could not be improved upon.

101 We adopted the District Council's proposed Bucknell ward in our draft recommendations (comprising the parishes of Bedstone, Bucknell, Clungunford and Hopton Castle) as this would achieve good electoral equality and build on existing ward arrangements in the area. We also proposed uniting Clunbury parish with the parishes of Edgton and Lydbury North (currently in the same ward) in a single-member ward, which would achieve good electoral equality. Following discussions with council officers, we proposed that this new ward should be called Kemp Valley. Under our draft recommendations the number of electors per councillor would be 7 per cent below the district average in Bucknell ward (6 per cent below in 2003) and 1 per cent below in Kemp Valley ward (4 per cent below in 2003).

102 At Stage Three the District Council supported our proposals for Bucknell and Kemp Valley wards. We received no further comments during Stage Three and we are therefore endorsing our draft recommendations for these two wards as final.

Clun and Newcastle wards

103 The existing two wards of Clun and Newcastle are located in the far west of the district. Clun ward currently comprises Clun parish ward of Clun parish. Newcastle ward comprises Chapel Lawn parish ward of Clun parish, and the parishes of Bettws-y-Crwyn, Llanfair Waterdine and Newcastle on Clun. The number of electors per councillor is 4 per cent below the average in Clun ward and 12 per cent below the average in Newcastle ward, with no improvement expected over the five-year period.

104 At Stage One the District Council proposed enlarging Clun district ward to include Chapel Lawn parish ward of Clun parish, currently in Newcastle ward, in order that the whole of Clun parish would form a single-member ward, to be renamed Clun Forest. With respect to the rest of the existing Newcastle ward, the Council proposed adding the parish of Stowe (currently in Bucknell ward) and renaming the modified single-member ward Newcastle with Stowe. Under a 33-member council the number of electors per councillor would be 30 per cent below the district average in Newcastle with Stowe ward and 6 per cent below the average in Clun Forest ward.

105 The District Council argued that its proposed Clun Forest ward would respect existing community ties which might be diluted under

alternative warding patterns for the area. It also stated that while its proposed Newcastle with Stowe ward would result in substantial over-representation, “the remoteness of these parishes from all other substantial settlements and their close proximity to the Welsh border, as well as the general sparsity of population, preclude a more effective solution”.

106 We recognised that the geography and sparsity of population in these areas limit the options for a suitable warding pattern. We considered a number of alternative warding patterns to address the electoral equality and the geographical remoteness of the area.

107 With these criteria in mind, we developed an option whereby Clun parish ward of Clun parish, together with Mainstone and Colebatch parishes, would form a single-member ward, in which the number of electors per councillor would vary by less than 3 per cent from the district average. The parishes of Bettws-y-Crwyn, Llanfair Waterdine, Newcastle on Clun and Chapel Lawn parish ward of Clun parish would form a single-member ward with an electoral variance of 16 per cent.

108 We recognised that a degree of over-representation would continue to exist under any of the alternative ward proposals for this area of the district. However, in order to minimise this imbalance we judged that this proposed warding pattern would provide the best available solution. We considered that these two single-member wards would strike an acceptable balance between the statutory criteria guiding our work and they therefore formed part of our draft recommendations. We proposed using the ward names of Clun and Clun Forest.

109 While preparing our draft recommendations, we noted an apparent anomaly under the existing arrangements between the boundary of Clun parish and the district ward boundary in the area: the existing Newcastle district ward comprises three small, unwarded areas within Clun parish. We therefore proposed rectifying this anomaly by realigning the boundary between the proposed Clun and Clun Forest wards so that it is coterminous with the boundary of Clun parish, as illustrated on Map A2 in Appendix A.

110 At Stage Three the District Council proposed that the parish of Colebatch should be transferred from the proposed Clun ward into Bishop’s Castle

with Onny Valley ward. Councillor Phillips, member for Bishop’s Castle ward, argued that the parish of Colebatch “is very much attached to Bishop’s Castle – that is, physically and geographically it is virtually an extension of the town of Bishop’s Castle”. Clun Parish Council argued that the whole of the parish of Clun should form all or part of a single district ward in order to assist in reflecting a homogenous Clun parish identity at district level. Clun Parish Council added that the draft recommendations “do not address the split in the small village of Whitcott Keysett, which might, in the Parish Council’s view, advisedly be brought within one ward”. However, we cannot accommodate this proposal that the settlement of Whitcott Keysett form part of one parish rather than be split between the parishes of Clun and Newcastle on Clun. As part of this review, we cannot recommend changes to the boundaries between parishes, although the District Council can review parish arrangements under the Local Government and Rating Act 1997.

111 We have carefully considered the representations regarding the proposed wards of Clun and Clun Forest. We note that under our draft recommendations Clun parish would form part of two district wards, reflecting the existing ward arrangements in the area. Under a council size of 34 members, the electoral variance in our proposed Clun ward would be equal to the district average both initially and in 2003. The parish of Colebatch comprises 69 electors and if it were to form part of a modified Bishop’s Castle with Onny Valley ward, the electoral variance in both Clun and Bishop’s Castle with Onny Valley wards would be 8 per cent in 2003. Should the whole of Clun parish form a district ward together with Mainstone parish the electoral variance would be 7 per cent (6 per cent in 2003) with, consequentially worse electoral equality in our proposed ward of Clun Forest (less Chapel Lawn parish ward of Clun parish) of 28 per cent (29 per cent in 2003). As expressed in our draft recommendations, we consider that to include Mainstone parish in a single-member district ward with the parishes of Bettws-y-Crwyn, Llanfair Waterdine, Newcastle on Clun and Stowe would create a geographically large ward which might have an adverse impact upon effective and convenient local government in the area.

112 We are not adopting the proposed modification affecting Colebatch parish as this would adversely affect the good electoral equality in our proposed

Clun and Bishop's Castle with Onny Valley wards, as noted above. Such a proposal would also have the effect of separating the parishes of Colebatch and Mainstone which together form a joint parish council between different district wards. Furthermore, we received no comments from the Parish Council during the review, and there had not been any consultation on a proposal in which the two parishes would form parts of separate district wards.

113 We are also not proposing to modify our proposed Clun ward. We are unable to view one area in isolation and while a single-member district ward comprising the whole of Clun parish would have reasonable electoral equality, as our calculations above show, it would significantly worsen electoral equality in the proposed Clun Forest ward and could also affect effective and convenient local government in the area.

Bishop's Castle and Wentnor wards

114 Bishop's Castle ward currently comprises the parishes of Bishop's Castle, Colebatch, Lydham and Mainstone. Wentnor ward currently comprises the parishes of More, Myndtown, Norbury, Ratlinghope and Wentnor. The average number of electors per councillor in the two wards is 1 per cent below and 32 per cent below the district average respectively. Minimal change in electoral equality is forecast over the five-year period.

115 At Stage One the District Council proposed a new two-member ward, to be called Bishop's Castle with Lydbury, comprising the parishes of Bishop's Castle, Colebatch, Lydbury North and Mainstone. The Council also proposed extending the existing boundary of Wentnor ward to include Lydham parish, currently in Bishop's Castle ward, to form a single-member ward to be renamed Onny Valley. In the Council's proposed Bishop's Castle with Lydbury and Onny Valley wards, under a 33-member council, the average number of electors per councillor would be 1 per cent above the district average and 26 per cent below respectively in 2003.

116 Myndtown Combined Parish Council, representing the parishes of Myndtown, Norbury, Ratlinghope and Wentnor, supported the District Council's proposed Onny Valley ward. We also received representations from three residents of the Bishop's Castle area who supported the District Council's proposal to transfer More parish from the existing Bishop's Castle ward into a reconfigured Wentnor ward.

117 We considered carefully all the representations that we received for this area during Stage One. We were concerned that the District Council's proposals would provide only a marginal improvement in the current electoral inequality in the area. We considered an alternative warding pattern for the area which would add the parish of Bishop's Castle to the existing Wentnor ward to form an enlarged, two-member ward. This grouping of parishes would result in the average number of electors per councillor in the two-member ward being 6 per cent below the district average in 2003. As previously described, under our draft recommendations the parishes of Colebatch, Lydbury North and Mainstone would constitute parts of adjacent district wards.

118 We consulted in our draft recommendations on this two-member ward, which we proposed should be named Bishop's Castle with Onny Valley. We considered that this proposed warding arrangement would achieve a significant improvement in electoral equality in the area, having regard to the statutory criteria.

119 At Stage Three the District Council and Councillor Phillips, member for Bishop's Castle ward, proposed modifying Bishop's Castle with Onny Valley ward by adding the parish of Colebatch, which formed part of our proposed Clun ward in our draft recommendations. In the interests of electoral equality and a good district-wide scheme, we are not adopting this modification, as detailed in the previous section. We are endorsing our draft recommendation for Bishop's Castle with Onny Valley ward as final.

Church Stretton North and Church Stretton South wards

120 The current two two-member wards of Church Stretton North and Church Stretton South cover the parish of Church Stretton, which includes the town and a rural hinterland. In Church Stretton North ward, comprising the parish wards of All Stretton and Church Stretton North of Church Stretton parish, the average number of electors per councillor is 8 per cent above the district average (4 per cent above in 2003) and in Church Stretton South ward, comprising the parish wards of Little Stretton and Church Stretton South, it is 20 per cent above the district average (16 per cent above in 2003).

121 At Stage One the District Council proposed only a minor boundary modification between the

129 Having concluded that the electorate in the area should merit two councillors, rather than three, we considered three alternative warding patterns for the area: the District Council's reserve option for a single two-member ward; two single-member wards on the basis of the parish boundaries; or two single-member wards involving warding Worthen parish. In a single two-member ward the number of electors per councillor would be 16 per cent above the district average in 2003. If the existing two wards, each returning a single district councillor, were to be maintained, the number of electors per councillor would be 60 per cent above the district average in Worthen and 28 per cent below the average in Chirbury in 2003. We considered that such electoral imbalances could not be justified. Finally, we considered that warding Worthen parish in order to form a modified Wentnor ward with an area to its south would not significantly improve electoral equality in the Worthen area or surrounding wards and might not reflect existing community ties in the area.

130 We therefore concluded that our draft recommendations should include the District Council's reserve option for a single, two-member ward covering the existing Chirbury and Worthen wards, which would achieve the most reasonable electoral equality of all the available options. We considered that, while this proposal might not reflect the preferences of all respondents, it would provide a fairer level of representation for the area and significantly improve upon the over-representation under the District Council's preferred option. We invited further evidence during Stage Three.

131 At Stage Three the District Council reaffirmed its support for retaining two separate district wards – a single-member Chirbury ward and a two-member Worthen ward – as at present and as suggested in its preferred option at Stage One. Chirbury with Brompton and Worthen with Shelve parish councils also restated their preference for retaining the present ward pattern in the area, arguing that the separate identities and geographical remoteness of the two parishes warranted special consideration. Worthen with Shelve Parish Council further argued that our draft recommendations might have a negative impact upon convenient and effective local government in the area, noting that under the draft recommendations the proposed two-member Worthen with Chirbury ward would be “the most

under-represented ward in the district despite being furthest from the administrative centre at Ludlow”.

132 Councillor Phillips (county councillor for Bishop's Castle and Chirbury & Worthen division and district councillor for Bishop's Castle ward) and Councillor Neal (member for Worthen ward) both argued that our proposed Worthen with Chirbury ward would be difficult to represent effectively. Councillor Phillips stated that “geographically, it will be impossible for the member to represent their voters with any degree of credibility or intimate knowledge”. In opposing the draft recommendations, Councillor Kidd (member for Chirbury ward) added that “contact with elected members is all important if we are to encourage participation in the electoral process”. We received a further 10 representations from local residents and Chirbury Women's Institute opposing the joint Worthen with Chirbury ward. We also received a petition signed by 46 residents of Chirbury with Brompton parish, who objected to a combined district ward for the two parishes for community identity and geographical reasons.

133 We have carefully re-examined the issues for this area before formulating our final recommendations. We have been persuaded by evidence presented to us that our draft recommendations for a joint two-member Worthen with Chirbury ward would adversely affect effective and convenient local government in the area, in particular the ability of two district councillors to adequately represent the diverse community identities in the two parishes effectively. We are therefore proposing to modify our proposals for this area and recommend no change from the present arrangements for Chirbury ward (returning one district councillor) and Worthen ward (returning two district councillors). Therefore, while under our draft recommendations the area would have been under-represented and under our final recommendations over-represented, retaining the existing ward configuration for the Chirbury and Worthen area would best reflect the statutory criteria.

134 Under our final recommendations the average number of electors per councillor in Chirbury ward would initially be 25 per cent below the district average, rising marginally to 26 per cent below in 2003. In Worthen ward the average number of electors per councillor would initially be 16 per cent below the district average (18 per cent below

in 2003). While electoral imbalances would persist in both wards, we consider this represents an exceptional case, due to the sparse electorate, the parishes' location on the edge of the district and Chirbury's outlook west to Wales and Worthen's east to Shrewsbury.

Electoral Cycle

135 In the initial stage of the review we received five representations regarding South Shropshire District Council's electoral cycle. The District Council stated that it had considered proposing the introduction of elections by thirds, but had rejected such a change, instead preferring to retain whole-council elections. Ludlow Constituency Labour Party and Ludlow Branch Labour Party argued that annual or biennial elections would be "healthy for democracy and will heighten the sense of accountability of the Council". Craven Arms Town Council, Eaton-under-Heywood and Hope Bowdler parish councils (joint submission) and Worthen with Shelve Parish Council all expressed support for retaining the current electoral cycle.

136 In our draft recommendations report we considered that there appeared to be a majority view that the present electoral cycle should be retained and we therefore proposed no change to the current electoral cycle of whole-council elections. At Stage Three no further comments were received to the contrary, and we confirm our draft recommendation as final.

Conclusions

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

- Chirbury with Brompton parish should continue to form a single-member district ward, and the parish of Worthen with Shelve should form a separate two-member district ward, thereby resulting in an additional councillor and one more ward compared to our draft recommendations;
- the parish of Hopton Cangeford should form part of a modified Bitterley with Stoke St Milborough ward;
- Diddlebury with Munslow ward should be renamed Upper Corvedale.

138 We conclude that, in South Shropshire:

- (a) there should be a reduction in council size from 40 to 34;
- (b) there should be 23 wards, five fewer than at present;
- (c) the boundaries of 23 of the existing wards should be modified;
- (d) the Council should continue to hold whole-council elections.

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

140 As Figure 4 shows, our final recommendations would result in a reduction in the number of wards with an electoral variance of more than 10 per cent from 18 to six, with only one ward, Chirbury, varying by more than 20 per cent from the district average. This improved level of electoral equality would continue in 2003, with only five wards varying by more than 10 per cent from the average, and Chirbury ward remaining the only ward with a variance over 20 per cent. We conclude that our recommendations would best meet the need for electoral equality, having regard to the statutory criteria.

Final Recommendation

South Shropshire District Council should comprise 34 councillors serving 23 wards, as detailed and named in Figures 1 and 2, and illustrated on Map 2 and in Appendix A. The Council should continue to hold whole council elections.

Parish and Town Council Electoral Arrangements

141 In undertaking reviews of electoral arrangements, we are required to comply as far as is reasonably practicable with the provisions set out in Schedule 11 to the 1972 Act. The Schedule provides that, if a parish is to be divided between different district wards, it must also be divided into parish wards, so that each parish ward lies wholly within a single ward of the district. Accordingly, in our draft recommendations report we proposed

Figure 4 :
Comparison of Current and Recommended Electoral Arrangements

	1998 electorate		2003 forecast electorate	
	Current arrangements	Final recommendations	Current arrangements	Final recommendations
Number of councillors	40	34	40	34
Number of wards	28	23	28	23
Average number of electors per councillor	805	947	846	995
Number of wards with a variance more than 10 per cent from the average	18	6	18	5
Number of wards with a variance more than 20 per cent from the average	9	1	12	1

consequential warding arrangements for the parishes of Ludlow and Church Stretton to reflect the proposed district wards. In response to a request from Ludford Parish Council, we also proposed changes to its warding arrangements.

142 The parish of Ludlow is currently served by 15 councillors representing six wards: Castle (returning three councillors), Galdeford (two), Fishmore (two), Henley (three), Sheet (three) and Teme (two).

143 The District Council, in consultation with Ludlow Town Council, proposed re-warding the parish of Ludlow to reflect the reconfigured district wards. Under their proposals, each of the three district wards wholly within Ludlow parish would form two parish wards and return a total of four parish councillors, with the Ludlow area of Ludlow Sheet with Ludford ward returning three parish councillors. Having adopted the District Council's proposed district wards in this area, we recommended adopting the proposed seven wards for Ludlow parish. Our draft recommendations included descriptions of the ward boundaries. We invited views on parish ward names during Stage Three.

144 At Stage Three the District Council and Ludlow Town Council supported the draft recommendations for re-warding the parish of

Ludlow. The Town Council, supported by the District Council, proposed renaming the seven parish wards. The Town Council noted that its new names should be adopted "to avoid confusion with the old wards and that saints names should be avoided as there is already confusion between the civil and ecclesiastical parishes".

145 We are confirming our draft recommendations for re-warding Ludlow parish as final, subject to adopting the revised ward names suggested by Ludlow Town Council. These names, together with the proposed parish ward boundaries, are detailed on the large map at the back of this report.

Final Recommendation

Ludlow Town Council should comprise 15 councillors, as at present, representing seven wards: Bringewood (returning two councillors), Hayton (two), Clee View (two), Rockspring (two), Gallows Bank (three), Corve (two) and Whitcliffe (two). The parish ward boundaries are illustrated on the large map.

146 The parish of Ludford is currently served by seven councillors and comprises three wards: Ludford (returning two councillors), Rock (two) and Sheet (three).

147 At Stage One, in view of the District Council's proposals to include the whole of Ludford parish in a district ward with part of Ludlow town, Ludford Parish Council proposed that its three parish wards be abolished. The whole parish would continue to elect seven councillors.

148 We have received no representations or evidence in opposition to this proposal and, as the district warding arrangement for the area would not be affected, we are content to put forward the Parish Council's proposals as a final recommendation.

Final Recommendation

The parish of Ludford should be unwarded and the Parish Council should continue to be served by seven councillors.

149 The parish of Church Stretton is currently divided into four parish wards: All Stretton (returning two parish councillors), Church Stretton North (four), Church Stretton South (five) and Little Stretton (two). At Stage One the District Council, in agreement with Church Stretton Parish Council, proposed a minor modification to the district ward boundary, transferring 90 electors from Church Stretton South district ward to Church Stretton North district ward. We adopted this modification as part of our draft recommendations for the district warding arrangements in the area and proposed a consequential modification to the parish ward boundaries of Church Stretton North, Church Stretton South and Little Stretton in order to reflect our proposed district ward boundaries in the area.

150 At Stage Three we received support for district warding in this area from the District Council and no further views from Church Stretton Parish Council. In view of our confirmation of our draft recommendations for district ward boundaries in this area, we are confirming the consequential warding of Church Stretton parish as final.

Final Recommendation

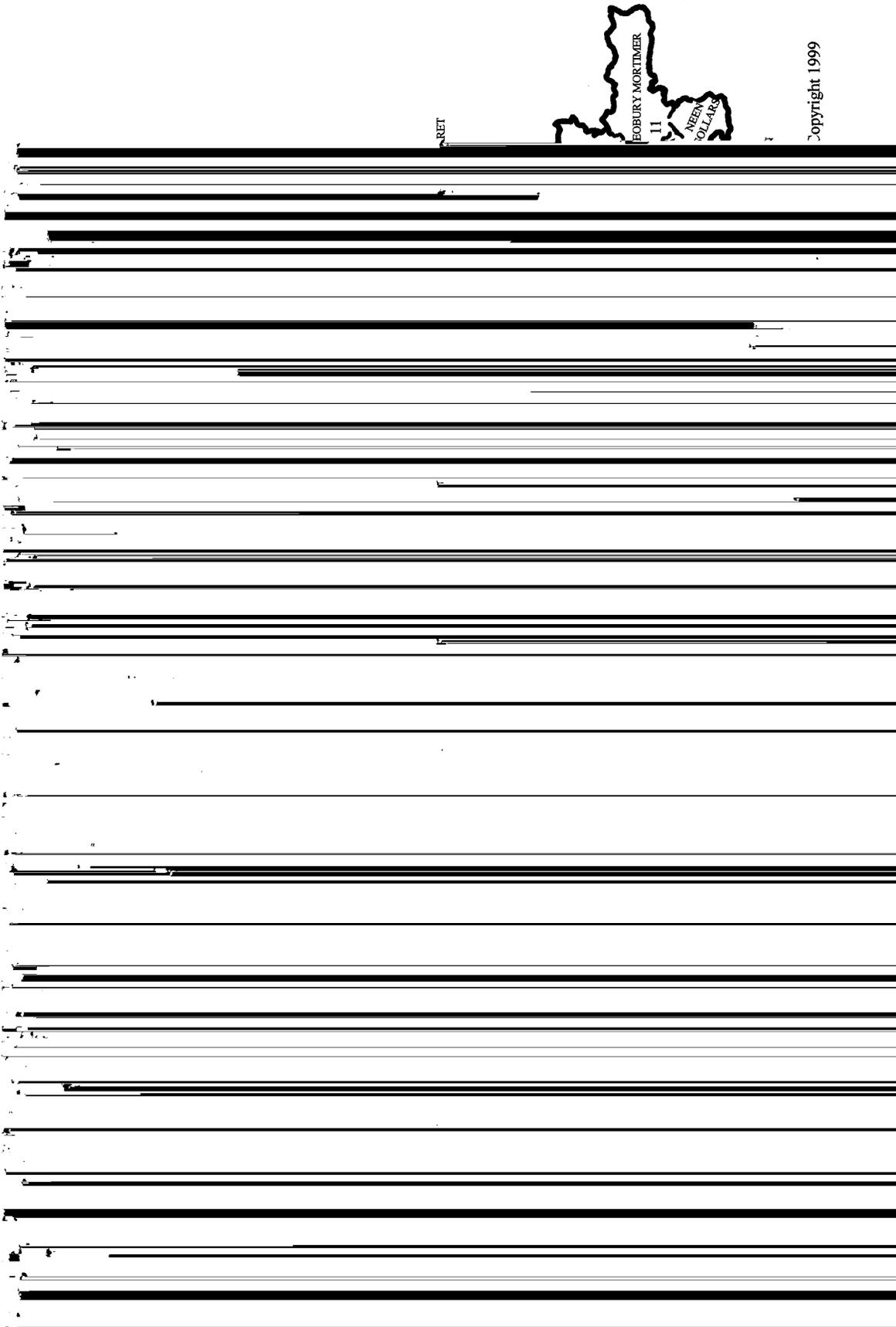
Church Stretton Parish Council should comprise 13 parish councillors representing four wards, as at present: All Stretton (returning two councillors), Church Stretton North (four), Church Stretton South (five) and Little Stretton (two). The parish ward boundaries between All Stretton, Church Stretton North, Church Stretton South and Little Stretton should be modified to reflect the proposed district ward boundaries in the area, as illustrated and named on Map A3 in Appendix A.

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

Final Recommendation

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

Map 2:
The Commission's Final Recommendations for South Shropshire



6. NEXT STEPS

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

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

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

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

APPENDIX A

Final Recommendations for South Shropshire: Detailed Mapping

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

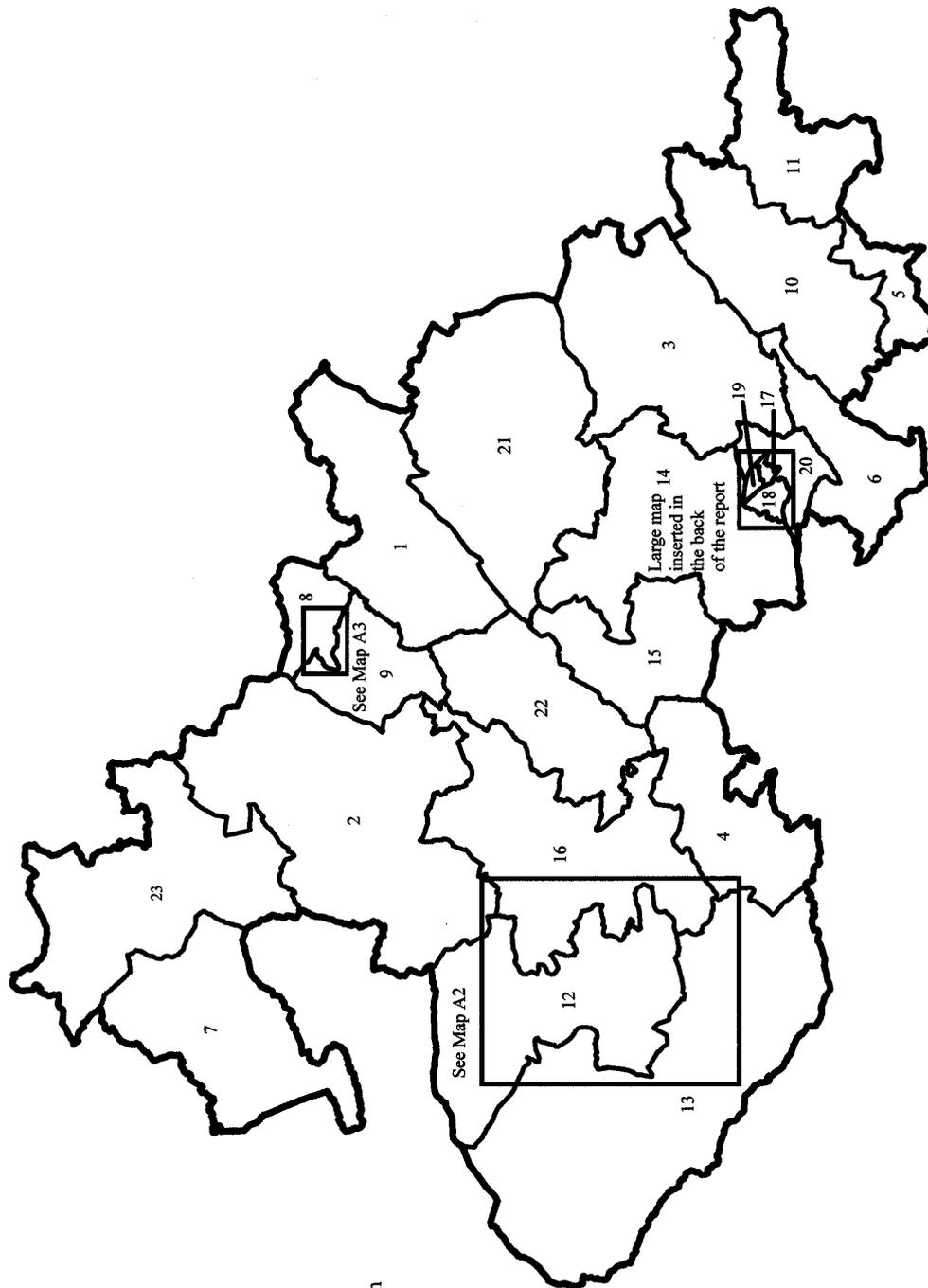
Map A1 illustrates, in outline form, the proposed ward boundaries within the district and indicates the areas which are shown in more detail on Maps A2 and A3 and the large map inserted at the back of the report.

Map A2 illustrates the realigned ward boundary between the proposed Clun and Clun Forest wards.

Map A3 illustrates the proposed district ward boundary between Church Stretton North and Church Stretton South and the proposed parish ward boundaries between All Stretton, Church Stretton North, Church Stretton South and Little Stretton wards of Church Stretton parish.

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

Map A1:
Final Recommendations for South Shropshire: Key Map

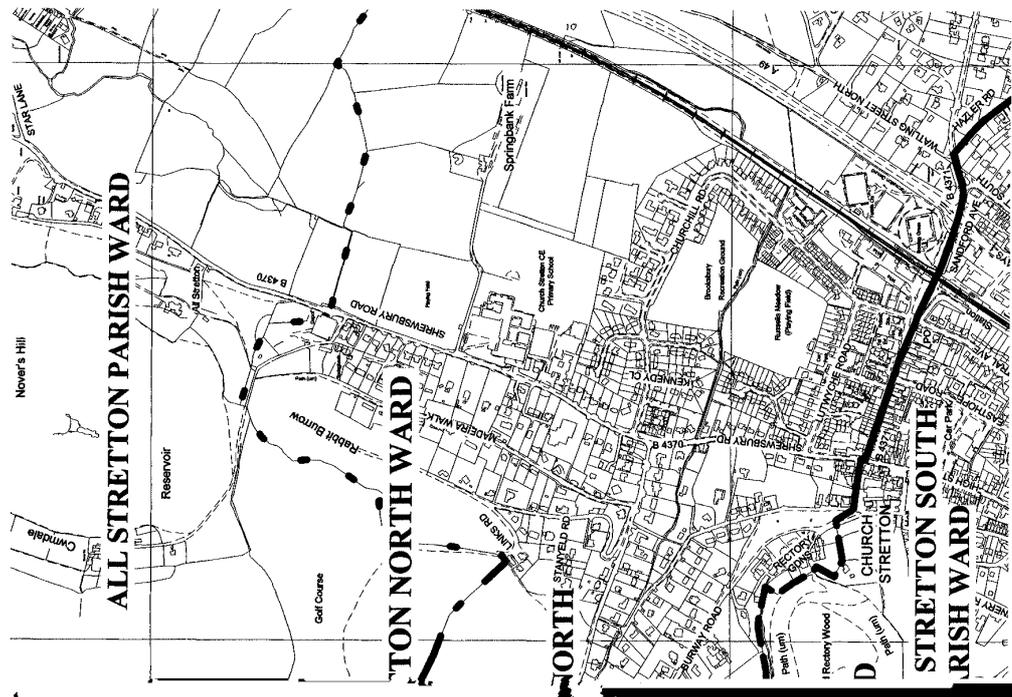


- Key to Wards
- 1 Apedale
 - 2 Bishop's Castle with Onny Valley
 - 3 Bitterley with Stoke St Milborough
 - 4 Bucknell
 - 5 Burford
 - 6 Caynham with Ashford
 - 7 Chirbury
 - 8 Church Stretton North
 - 9 Church Stretton South
 - 10 Clee
 - 11 Cleobury Mortimer
 - 12 Clun
 - 13 Clun Forest
 - 14 Corve Valley
 - 15 Craven Arms
 - 16 Kemp Valley
 - 17 Ludlow Henley
 - 18 Ludlow St Laurence's
 - 19 Ludlow St Peter's
 - 20 Ludlow Sheet with Ludford
 - 21 Upper Corvedale
 - 22 Wistanstow with Hopesay
 - 23 Worthen

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*Map A2:
Proposed Boundary between Clun and Clun Forest Wards*

Map A3:
Proposed Boundary Between Church Stretton North and Church Stretton South Wards:



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APPENDIX B

Draft Recommendations for South Shropshire

Our final recommendations, detailed in Figures 1 and 2, differ from those we put forward as draft recommendations in respect of only three wards, where our draft proposals are set out below. The only other change from draft to final recommendations, which is not included in Figures B1 and B2, is that we propose renaming Diddlebury with Munslow ward as Upper Corvedale.

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

Ward name	Constituent areas
Bitterley with Stoke St Milborough	Bitterley ward (Bitterley parish); Stoke St Milborough ward (part – Stoke St Milborough and Wheathill parishes)
Corve Valley	Diddlebury ward (part – Culmington parish); Stanton Lacy ward (Stanton Lacy and Bromfield parishes); Stoke St Milborough ward (part – Hopton Cangeford parish)
Worthen with Chirbury	Chirbury ward (Chirbury with Brompton parish); Worthen ward (Worthen with Shelve parish)

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

Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (1998)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2003)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
Bitterley with Stoke St Milborough	1	1,029	1,029	5	1,085	1,085	6
Corve Valley	1	924	924	-5	954	954	-7
Worthen with Chirbury	2	2,291	1,146	17	2,375	1,188	16
Totals	33	32,193	—	—	33,841	—	—
Averages	—	—	975	—	—	1,025	—

Source: Electorate figures are based on material provided by South Shropshire District Council.

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

