

Final recommendations on the
future electoral arrangements
for Breckland in Norfolk

Report to The Electoral Commission

July 2002

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Report No: 323

CONTENTS

	page
WHAT IS THE BOUNDARY COMMITTEE FOR ENGLAND?	5
SUMMARY	7
1 INTRODUCTION	13
2 CURRENT ELECTORAL ARRANGEMENTS	15
3 DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS	19
4 RESPONSES TO CONSULTATION	21
5 ANALYSIS AND FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS	23
6 WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?	47
APPENDIX	
A Final Recommendations for Breckland: Detailed Mapping	49

Large maps illustrating the proposed ward boundaries for Attleborough, Dereham and Thetford are inserted at the back of this report.

WHAT IS THE BOUNDARY COMMITTEE FOR ENGLAND?

The Boundary Committee for England is a committee of The Electoral Commission, an independent body set up by Parliament under the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000. The functions of the Local Government Commission for England were transferred to The Electoral Commission and its Boundary Committee on 1 April 2002 by the Local Government Commission for England (Transfer of Functions) Order 2001 (SI 2001 No 3692). The Order also transferred to The Electoral Commission the functions of the Secretary of State in relation to taking decisions on recommendations for changes to local authority electoral arrangements and implementing them.

Members of the Committee are:

Pamela Gordon (Chair)
Professor Michael Clarke CBE
Robin Gray
Joan Jones
Ann M Kelly
Professor Colin Mellors

Archie Gall (Director)

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

This report sets out our final recommendations on the electoral arrangements for the district of Breckland in Norfolk.

SUMMARY

The Local Government Commission for England (LGCE) began a review of Breckland's electoral arrangements on 31 July 2001. It published its draft recommendations for electoral arrangements on 26 March 2002, after which it undertook an eight-week period of consultation. As a consequence of the transfer of functions referred to earlier, it falls to us, The Boundary Committee for England, to complete the work of the LGCE and submit final recommendations to The Electoral Commission.

- **This report summarises the representations received by the LGCE during consultation on its draft recommendations, and contains our final recommendations to The Electoral Commission.**

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

- **in 28 of the 41 wards the number of electors represented by each councillor varies by more than 10% from the average for the district and 12 wards vary by more than 20%;**
- **by 2006 this situation is expected to worsen, with the number of electors per councillor forecast to vary by more than 10% from the average in 27 wards and by more than 20% in 14 wards.**

Our main final recommendations for future electoral arrangements (see Tables 1 and 2 and paragraphs 151-152) are that:

- **Breckland District Council should have 54 councillors, one more than at present;**
- **there should be 36 wards, instead of 41 as at present;**
- **the boundaries of 35 of the existing wards should be modified, resulting in a net reduction of five, and six wards should retain their existing boundaries.**

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

- **In 30 of the proposed 36 wards the number of electors per councillor would vary by no more than 10% from the district average.**
- **This level of electoral equality is forecast to improve further, with the number of electors per councillor in only three wards, Buckenham, Conifer and Wissey, expected to vary by more than 10% from the average for the district in 2006.**

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

- **revised warding arrangements and the redistribution of councillors for the parishes of Attleborough, Dereham and Thetford.**

All further correspondence on these final recommendations and the matters discussed in this report should be addressed to The Electoral Commission, which will not make an Order implementing them before 10 September 2002:

**The Secretary
The Electoral Commission
Trevelyan House
Great Peter Street
London SW1P 2HW**

Table 1: Final Recommendations: Summary

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Constituent areas	Map reference
1	All Saints	1	The parishes of Great Ellingham, Little Ellingham, Rocklands and Scoulton	Map 2
2	Buckenham	1	<i>Unchanged</i> - The parishes of New Buckenham and Old Buckenham	Map 2
3	Burgh & Haverscroft	2	The proposed Burgh & Haverscroft parish ward of Attleborough parish	Large Map and Maps 2 and A2
4	Conifer	1	The parishes of Cranwich, Didlington, Hilborough, Ickburgh, Mundford, Stanford, Sturston and Tottington	Map 2
5	Dereham-Central	2	The proposed Dereham-Central parish ward of Dereham parish	Large Map and Map 2
6	Dereham-Humbletoft	1	The proposed Dereham-Humbletoft parish ward of Dereham parish	Large Map and Map 2
7	Dereham-Neatherd	2	The proposed Dereham-Neatherd parish ward of Dereham parish	Large Map and Map 2
8	Dereham-Toftwood	2	The proposed Dereham-Toftwood parish ward of Dereham parish	Large Map and Map 2
9	East Guiltcross	1	The parishes of Banham, Quidenham and Snetterton	Map 2
10	Eynsford	1	The parishes of Bawdeswell, Bylaugh, Foxley, Lyng and Sparham	Map 2
11	Haggard de Toni	1	<i>Unchanged</i> – the parishes of Bradenham and Saham Toney	Map 2
12	Harling & Heathlands	2	The parishes of Brettenham, Bridgham, Garboldisham, Harling, Kilverstone, Riddlesworth and Roudham & Larling & Larling	Map 2
13	Hermitage	1	The parishes of Colkirk, Horningtoft, Stanfield, Tittleshall, Weasenham All Saints, Weasenham St Peter, Wellingham and Whissonsett	Map 2
14	Launditch	1	The parishes of Beeston with Bittering, Great Dunham, Kempstone, Lexham, Litcham, Little Dunham and Rougham	Map 2
15	Mid Forest	1	The parishes of Beachamwell, Cockley Cley, Foulden, Gooderstone, Great Cressingham, Little Cressingham, Oxborough, South Pickenham	Map 2
16	Nar Valley	1	<i>Unchanged</i> – the parishes of Narborough, Narford, Newton by Castle Acre, South Acre and Sporle with Palgrave	Map 2
17	Necton	1	<i>Unchanged</i> – the parish of Necton	Map 2
18	Queen's	3	The proposed Queen's parish ward of Attleborough parish and the parish of Besthorpe	Large Map and Maps 2 and A2
19	Shipdham	1	The parish of Shipdham	Map 2
20	Springvale & Scarning	2	The parishes of Fransham, Gressenhall, Longham, Scarning and Wendling	Map2

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Constituent areas	Map reference
21	Swaffham	3	<i>Unchanged</i> – the parish of Swaffham	Map 2
22	Swanton Morley	1	The parishes of Elsing, Hoe and Swanton Morley	Map 2
23	Taverner	1	The parishes of Beetley, Brisley and Mileham	Map 2
24	Templar	1	The parishes of Carbrooke, Caston, Griston and Ovington	Map 2
25	Thetford-Abbey	2	The proposed Thetford-Abbey parish ward of Thetford parish	Large Map and Map 2
26	Thetford-Castle	1	The proposed Thetford-Castle parish ward of Thetford parish	Large Map and Map 2
27	Thetford-Guildhall	3	The proposed Thetford-Guildhall parish ward of Thetford parish	Large Map and Map 2
28	Thetford-Saxon	3	The proposed Thetford-Saxon parish ward of Thetford parish	Large Map and Map 2
29	Two Rivers	2	The parishes of East Tuddenham, Hockering, Mattishall and North Tuddenham	Map 2
30	Upper Wensum	1	The parishes of Billingford, Bintree, Gateley, Guist, North Elmham and Twyford	Map 2
31	Upper Yare	1	The parishes of Cranworth, Garvestone, Hardingham, Whinburgh & Westfield and Yaxham	Map 2
32	Watton	3	<i>Unchanged</i> – the parish of Watton	Map 2
33	Wayland	1	The parishes of Hockham, Merton, Shropham, Stow Bedon, Thompson and Wretham	Map 2
34	Weeting	1	The parishes of Croxton, Lynford and Weeting-with-Broomhill	Map 2
35	West Guiltcross	1	The parishes of Blo' Norton, Kenninghall, North Lopham and South Lopham	Map 2
36	Wissey	1	The parishes of Ashill, Holme Hale and North Pickenham	Map 2

Notes: 1 The whole district is parished.

2 The wards in the above table are illustrated on Maps 2 and A2, in Appendix A and the large maps at the back of the report.

3 We have made a number of minor boundary amendments to ensure that existing ward boundaries adhere to ground detail. These changes do not affect any electors.

Table 2: Final Recommendations for Breckland

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2001)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2006)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
1	All Saints	1	1,773	1,773	8	1,811	1,811	5
2	Buckenham	1	1,336	1,336	-19	1,381	1,381	-20
3	Burgh & Haverscroft	2	2,797	1,399	-15	3,252	1,626	-6
4	Conifer	1	1,582	1,582	-4	1,526	1,526	-12
5	Dereham-Central	2	2,359	1,180	-28	3,745	1,873	8
6	Dereham-Humbletoft	1	1,787	1,787	9	1,822	1,822	6
7	Dereham-Neatherd	2	3,318	1,659	1	3,780	1,890	10
8	Dereham-Toftwood	2	4,364	2,182	33	3,755	1,878	9
9	East Guiltcross	1	1,507	1,507	-8	1,582	1,582	-8
10	Eynsford	1	1,712	1,712	4	1,760	1,760	2
11	Haggard de Toni	1	1,748	1,748	7	1,765	1,765	2
12	Harling & Heathlands	2	3,178	1,589	-3	3,267	1,634	-5
13	Hermitage	1	1,702	1,702	4	1,749	1,749	1
14	Launditch	1	1,565	1,565	-5	1,608	1,608	-7
15	Mid Forest	1	1,564	1,564	-5	1,609	1,609	-7
16	Nar Valley	1	1,748	1,748	7	1,808	1,808	5
17	Necton	1	1,463	1,463	-11	1,631	1,631	-5
18	Queen's	3	4,958	1,653	1	4,954	1,651	-4
19	Shipdham	1	1,635	1,635	0	1,685	1,685	-2
20	Springvale & Scarning	2	3,560	1,780	8	3,613	1,807	5
21	Swaffham	3	5,150	1,717	5	5,341	1,780	3
22	Swanton Morley	1	1,616	1,616	-2	1,632	1,632	-5
23	Taverner	1	1,718	1,718	5	1,759	1,759	2
24	Templar	1	1,691	1,691	3	1,906	1,906	10
25	Thetford-Abbey	2	3,236	1,618	-1	3,249	1,625	-6
26	Thetford-Castle	1	1,561	1,561	-5	1,572	1,572	-9
27	Thetford-Guildhall	3	4,432	1,477	-10	5,259	1,753	2
28	Thetford-Saxon	3	5,063	1,688	3	5,227	1,742	1

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2001)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2006)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
29	Two Rivers	2	3,126	1,563	-5	3,203	1,602	-7
30	Upper Wensum	1	1,747	1,747	6	1,786	1,786	3
31	Upper Yare	1	1,771	1,771	8	1,848	1,848	7
32	Watton	3	5,035	1,678	2	5,277	1,759	2
33	Wayland	1	1,524	1,524	-7	1,670	1,670	-3
34	Weeting	1	1,754	1,754	7	1,767	1,767	2
35	West Guiltcross	1	1,640	1,640	0	1,672	1,672	-3
36	Wissey	1	1,897	1,897	16	1,925	1,925	12
	Totals	54	88,617	-	-	93,196	-	-
	Averages	-	-	1,641	-	-	1,726	-

Source: Electorate figures are based on information provided by Breckland District Council.

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

1 INTRODUCTION

1 This report contains our final recommendations on the electoral arrangements for the district of Breckland in Norfolk. The seven districts in Norfolk have now been reviewed as part of the programme of periodic electoral reviews (PERs) of all 386 principal local authority areas in England started by the LGCE in 1996. We have inherited that programme, which we currently expect to complete in 2004.

2 Breckland's last review was undertaken by the Local Government Boundary Commission for England, which reported to the Secretary of State in August 1978 (Report no. 283). The electoral arrangements of Norfolk County Council were last reviewed in June 1984 (Report no. 472). We expect to begin reviewing the County Council's electoral arrangements towards the end of the year.

3 In making final recommendations to The Electoral Commission, we have had regard to:

- the statutory criteria contained in section 13(5) of the Local Government Act 1992 (as amended by SI 2001 No 3692), i.e. the need to:
 - a) reflect the identities and interests of local communities;
 - b) secure effective and convenient local government; and
 - c) achieve equality of representation.
- Schedule 11 to the Local Government Act 1972.

4 Details of the legislation under which the review of Breckland was conducted are set out in a document entitled *Guidance and Procedural Advice for Local Authorities and Other Interested Parties* (LGCE, fourth edition, published in December 2000). This *Guidance* sets out the approach to the review.

5 Our task is to make recommendations on the number of councillors who should serve on a council, and the number, boundaries and names of wards. We can also propose changes to the electoral arrangements for parish and town councils in the district.

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

7 The LGCE was not prescriptive on council size. Insofar as Breckland is concerned, it started from the assumption that the size of the existing council already secures effective and convenient local government, but was willing to look carefully at arguments why this might not be so. However, the LGCE found it necessary to safeguard against upward drift in the number of councillors, and that any proposal for an increase in council size would need to be fully justified. In particular, it did not accept that an increase in electorate should automatically result in an increase in the number of councillors, nor that changes should be made to the size of a council simply to make it more consistent with the size of other similar councils.

8 This review was in four stages. Stage One began on 31 July 2001, when the LGCE wrote to Breckland District Council inviting proposals for future electoral arrangements. It also notified Norfolk County Council, Norfolk Police Authority, the Local Government Association, Norfolk County Association of Parish and Town Councils, parish and town councils in the district, the Members of Parliament with constituencies in the district, the Members of the European Parliament for the Eastern region, and the headquarters of the main political parties. It 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 22 October 2001. At Stage Two it considered all the representations received during Stage One and prepared its draft recommendations.

9 Stage Three began on 26 March 2002 with the publication of the LGCE's report, *Draft recommendations on the future electoral arrangements for Breckland in Norfolk*, and ended on 20 May 2002. During this period comments were sought from the public and any other interested parties on the preliminary conclusions. Finally, during Stage Four the draft recommendations were reconsidered in the light of the Stage Three consultation and we now publish the final recommendations.

2 CURRENT ELECTORAL ARRANGEMENTS

10 With a population of around 121,000, Breckland District covers an area of approximately 130,510 hectares and is situated in the south-west of the County of Norfolk, bordering North Norfolk district to the north, the borough of Broadland to the east and the counties of Suffolk and Cambridgeshire to the south and to the west respectively. Breckland is predominantly rural with the majority of the population centred in the five main market towns of Attleborough, Dereham, Swaffham, Thetford and Watton. The district is parished in its entirety and contains 112 parishes.

11 The electorate of the district is 88,617 (February 2001). The Council presently has 53 members who are elected from 41 wards, 11 of which are relatively urban in Thetford, Dereham and Attleborough, with the remainder being mainly rural. Three of the wards are each represented by three councillors, six are each represented by two councillors and 32 are single-member wards. The Council is elected as a whole every four years.

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

13 At present, each councillor represents an average of 1,672 electors, which the District Council forecasts will increase to 1,758 by the year 2006 if the present number of councillors is maintained. However, due to demographic change and migration since the last review, the number of electors per councillor in 28 of the 41 wards varies by more than 10% from the district average, 12 wards by more than 20% and five wards by more than 30%. The worst imbalance is in Queen's ward where the councillor represents 142% more electors than the district average.

Map 1: Existing Wards in Breckland

Table 3: Existing Electoral Arrangements

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2001)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2006)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
1	All Saints	1	1,583	1,583	-5	1,619	1,619	-8
2	Beetley & Gressenhall	1	1,892	1,892	13	1,939	1,939	10
3	Besthorpe	1	2,050	2,050	23	2,362	2,362	34
4	Buckenham	1	1,336	1,336	-20	1,381	1,381	-21
5	Conifer	1	1,941	1,941	16	1,988	1,988	13
6	East Dereham-Neatherd	2	3,318	1,659	-1	3,911	1,956	11
7	East Dereham-St Withburga	1	1,981	1,981	18	2,229	2,229	27
8	East Dereham-Toftwood	2	4,387	2,194	31	4,764	2,382	35
9	East Dereham-Town	2	2,142	1,071	-36	2,198	1,099	-38
10	East Guiltcross	1	1,362	1,362	-19	1,431	1,431	-19
11	Eynsford	1	1,441	1,441	-14	1,491	1,491	-15
12	Haggard de Toni	1	1,748	1,748	5	1,765	1,765	0
13	Harling	1	1,724	1,724	3	1,782	1,782	1
14	Haverscroft	1	1,667	1,667	0	1,672	1,672	-5
15	Heathlands	1	1,549	1,549	-7	1,579	1,579	-10
16	Hermitage	1	1,230	1,230	-26	1,257	1,257	-29
17	Launditch	1	1,462	1,462	-13	1,511	1,511	-14
18	Mattishall	1	2,080	2,080	24	2,107	2,107	20
19	Mid-Forest	1	1,023	1,023	-39	1,067	1,067	-39
20	Nar Valley	1	1,748	1,748	5	1,808	1,808	3
21	Necton	1	1,463	1,463	-13	1,631	1,631	-7
22	Peddars Way	1	1,592	1,592	-5	1,636	1,636	-7
23	Queen's	1	4,038	4,038	142	4,172	4,172	137
24	Shipworth	1	1,948	1,948	17	2,000	2,000	14
25	Springvale	1	2,789	2,789	67	2,821	2,821	60
26	Swaffham	3	5,150	1,717	3	5,341	1,780	1
27	Swanton Morley	1	1,406	1,406	-16	1,419	1,419	-19
28	Taverner	1	1,172	1,172	-30	1,201	1,201	-32
29	Templar	1	1,169	1,169	-30	1,348	1,348	-23

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2001)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2006)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
30	Thetford-Abbey	2	3,317	1,659	-1	3,330	1,665	-5
31	Thetford-Barnham Cross	2	2,643	1,322	-21	2,645	1,323	-25
32	Thetford-Guildhall	3	5,912	1,971	18	6,750	2,250	28
33	Thetford-Saxon	2	2,420	1,210	-28	2,582	1,291	-27
34	Two Rivers	1	1,693	1,693	1	1,754	1,754	0
35	Upper Wensum	1	1,581	1,581	-5	1,610	1,610	-8
36	Upper Yare	1	1,458	1,458	-13	1,533	1,533	-13
37	Watton	3	5,035	1,678	0	5,277	1,759	0
38	Wayland	1	1,347	1,347	-19	1,399	1,399	-20
39	Weeting	1	1,412	1,412	-16	1,421	1,421	-19
40	West Guiltcross	1	1,441	1,441	-14	1,470	1,470	-16
41	Wissey	1	1,967	1,967	18	1,995	1,995	13
	Totals	53	88,617	-	-	93,196	-	-
	Averages	-	-	1,672	-	-	1,758	-

Source: Electorate figures are based on information provided by Breckland District Council.

Note: The 'variance from average' column shows by how far, in percentage terms, the number of electors per councillor varies from the average for the district. The minus symbol (-) denotes a lower than average number of electors. For example, in 2001, electors in Mid-Forest ward were relatively over-represented by 39%, while electors in Queen's ward were significantly under-represented by 142%. Figures have been rounded to the nearest whole number.

3 DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS

14 During Stage One the LGCE received nine representations, including a district-wide scheme from Breckland District Council, and representations from seven parish councils and a district councillor. In the light of these representations and evidence available to it, the LGCE reached preliminary conclusions which were set out in its report, *Draft recommendations on the future electoral arrangements for Breckland in Norfolk*.

15 The LGCE's draft recommendations were largely based on the District Council's proposals, which achieved some improvement in electoral equality, and provided a pattern of single-member, two-member and three-member wards throughout the district. However, the LGCE proposed increasing council size by one, to 54, in order to secure a better balance of representation across the district. It moved away from the District Council's scheme in a number of areas, affecting the towns of Attleborough, Dereham and Thetford and parts of the rural area. It proposed that:

- Breckland District Council should be served by 54 councillors, compared with the current 53, representing 36 wards, five fewer than at present;
- the boundaries of 36 of the existing wards should be modified, while five wards should retain their existing boundaries;
- there should be revised warding arrangements and the redistribution of councillors for the parishes of Attleborough, Dereham and Thetford;
- there should be new warding arrangements for the parish of Besthorpe.

Draft recommendation

Breckland District Council should comprise 54 councillors, serving 36 wards. The whole council should continue to be elected every four years.

16 The LGCE's proposals would have resulted in significant improvements in electoral equality, with the number of electors per councillor in 30 of the 36 wards varying by no more than 10% from the district average. This level of electoral equality was forecast to improve further, with only two wards, Conifer and Wissey, varying by more than 10% from the average by 2006.

4 RESPONSES TO CONSULTATION

17 During the consultation on its draft recommendations report, the LGCE received 17 representations. A list of all respondents is available from us on request. All representations may be inspected at our offices and those of Breckland District Council.

Breckland District Council

18 The District Council supported the draft recommendations in full. However, after the end of Stage Three, the District Council submitted revised electorate figures for the 2006 projected electorate in the district, notably in Dereham, Thetford and Carbrooke parishes. This resulted in a further increase in electorate of 590.

Norfolk County Council

19 Norfolk County Council made some general comments on the draft recommendations. It expressed the need to seek to balance carefully the issues of equal representation and community interests when formulating our final recommendations. It also raised an issue about achieving coterminosity between district wards and county divisions, suggesting that this may have been easier to maximise if the district and county reviews were undertaken at the same time.

Parish and town councils

20 We received nine submissions from parish and town councils. Thetford Town Council expressed support for the District Council's Stage One proposals for Thetford but did not provide any argument to explain why. It supported the new ward name of Castle.

21 Beeston with Bittering Parish Council objected to the revised Launditch ward. It proposed that the existing Launditch ward be retained stating that it 'sees no point in changes for changes sake'.

22 Brisley Parish Council objected to the revised Taverner ward. It argued that the parish has nothing in common with the parishes of Mileham and Beetley and would become an 'unheard voice' within that grouping.

23 Harling Parish Council and Garboldisham Parish Council objected to the proposed Harling & Heathlands ward. Harling Parish Council argued that 'Harling has been used to having its own councillor, with a detailed knowledge of the parish ... and it is felt that it will be very much a retrograde step for the parish to become merely a part of the proposed larger ward'. It proposed that the existing Harling ward be retained. Garboldisham Parish Council argued that it has strong community links with Blo Norton parish and that the parish will be 'dominated' by the larger Harling parish in the proposed Harling & Heathlands ward.

24 Mattishall Parish Council objected to the revised Two Rivers ward arguing that the parish should continue to be represented by its own district councillor.

25 Old Buckenham Parish Council objected to the draft recommendations for the proposed Buckenham & Besthorpe ward. It argued that Besthorpe parish does not have sufficient community links with the Buckenham and that Besthorpe parish is predominantly urban in character as opposed to the Buckenham, which are more rural in character. Besthorpe Parish Council objected to part of Besthorpe parish being included in a ward with the Old and New Buckenham parishes. It provided argumentation for the whole of Besthorpe parish to be included in an Attleborough ward as it has 'natural ties' with Attleborough and has no direct link with the Buckenham.

26 Scoulton Parish Council objected to being part of the revised All Saints ward. It provided argumentation for being included in a ward with Carbrooke parish based on community identity.

Other representations

27 A further six representations were received in response to the LGCE's draft recommendations from a local political group, councillors and a resident. South West Norfolk Conservative Association (The Buckenham Branch) objected to part of Besthorpe parish being joined with the Buckenham as the two communities have 'nothing in common'. It argued that Quidenham parish should be joined with the Buckenham instead to improve electoral equality.

28 County Councillor Armes (Thetford East Division) and County Councillor Paines (Thetford West Division) jointly objected to the Little Ouse and Thet Rivers being used as boundaries in Thetford. They proposed modifications to the four wards in Thetford arguing that the proposals would provide for more reasonably sized wards. The councillors also argued that their proposals 'would give a better balance to the two County Council wards of Thetford East and Thetford West'. They also queried the electoral forecast for the proposed Guildhall ward.

29 District Councillor Ramm expressed support for the District Council's Stage One proposals for Thetford. He opposed our proposal to use the river in Thetford as a ward boundary and contended that the existing county divisions in Thetford straddled the river and that 'This has been acceptable for many years'. He also proposed including two areas of urban overspill from Croxton and Brettenham parishes in the revised Thetford-Abbey and the proposed Thetford-Castle wards respectively.

30 District Councillor Gould made comments regarding the review process, also contending that under or over-representation should not be considered an issue.

31 District Councillor Sheath and a resident objected to part of the existing Dereham-Toftwood ward (the Boyd Avenue area) being included in the proposed Dereham-Central ward and proposed that the community of Toftwood be given its own parish council.

Further consultation

32 After the end of Stage Three the District Council submitted revised electorate figures for 2006, as detailed above. In the most part this resulted in minor changes to electoral variances in the majority of wards. However, in Dereham it resulted in the proposed Dereham-Central, Dereham-Neatherd, Dereham-St Withburga and Dereham-Toftwood wards varying by 34% fewer, 1% more, 21% more and 33% more electors per councillor than the district average (3%, 10%, 17% and 9% more than the average respectively by 2006). We therefore undertook a limited local consultation on a revised warding pattern in order to secure a better level of electoral equality. We proposed modifying the boundary between Dereham-St Withburga and Dereham-Central wards to follow Swaffham Road, resulting in the revised Dereham-St Withburga and Dereham-Central wards varying by 28% fewer and 9% cent more electors per councillor than the district average (8% and 6% more than the average respectively by 2006).

33 We received two submissions commenting on our further consultation on the warding arrangements for Dereham-St Withburga and Dereham-Central wards. Dereham Town Council expressed support for our proposals but proposed a minor boundary amendment, retaining Becclesgate and Old Becclesgate in Dereham St Withburga ward, in order that the current location of the polling station for Dereham-St Withburga ward remain in that ward. It also proposed that Dereham-St Withburga ward be renamed Dereham-Humbletoft ward to better reflect the area.

34 District Councillor Sheath did not comment on the revised wards but reiterated his Stage Three proposals for the area of Toftwood.

5 ANALYSIS AND FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS

35 As described earlier, our prime objective in considering the most appropriate electoral arrangements for Breckland is, so far as reasonably practicable and consistent with the statutory criteria, to achieve electoral equality. In doing so we have regard to section 13(5) of the Local Government Act 1992 (as amended) – the need to secure effective and convenient local government; reflect the identities and interests of local communities; and secure the matters referred to in paragraph 3(2)(a) of Schedule 11 to the Local Government Act 1972 (equality of representation). Schedule 11 to the Local Government Act 1972 refers to the number of electors per councillor being ‘as nearly as may be, the same in every ward of the district or borough’.

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

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

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

Electorate Forecasts

39 Since 1975 there has been an 41% increase in the electorate of Breckland district. At Stage One the District Council submitted electorate forecasts for the year 2006, projecting an increase in the electorate of approximately 5% from 88,617 to 92,606 over the five-year period from 2001 to 2006. It expected most of the growth to be in Dereham and Thetford. In order to prepare these forecasts, the Council estimated rates and locations of housing development with regard to structure and local plans, the expected rate of building over the five-year period and assumed occupancy rates. Having accepted that this is an inexact science and, having considered the forecast electorates, the LGCE stated in its draft recommendations report that it was satisfied that they represented the best estimates that could reasonably be made at the time.

40 At Stage Three, following investigation of an electorate query made by Councillors Armes and Paine, the District Council submitted revised electorate figures for the 2006 projected electorate in the district, notably in Dereham, Thetford and Carbrooke, as detailed earlier. This resulted in a further increase in electorate of 590, in addition to those submitted at Stage One (with the overall forecast electorate being 93,196). Given the evidence put forward by the Council we accept the revised figures as the best estimates currently possible.

Council Size

41 As already explained, the LGCE started its review by assuming that the current council size facilitates effective and convenient local government, although was willing to carefully look at arguments why this might not be the case. Breckland District Council presently has 53 members. The District Council proposed retaining the existing council size, stating that it had 'sought to avoid' increasing council size, commenting, 'It is understood that the Commission prefers that any scheme does not increase the number of district councillors'.

42 The LGCE carefully considered the issue of council size, and noted that, given the configuration of parishes and the spread of electorate, it was not possible to secure the correct balance of electorate between the towns of Attleborough, Dereham and Thetford and the remainder of the district (the rural areas) under the current council size of 53. It therefore considered a number of options which could facilitate the provision of a better balance of representation across the district.

43 The LGCE noted that Besthorpe Parish Council submitted its own proposals for the Attleborough area as part of the Council's consultation, providing argumentation for Besthorpe remaining a part of Attleborough for district warding purposes and objecting to being combined with Old and New Buckenham parishes in a new Buckenham & Besthorpe ward. The LGCE therefore considered combining the residential village with the residential area in the east of Attleborough with which it is contiguous. This would facilitate the provision of a better balance of representation across the district, but would entail a minor increase in council size.

44 The LGCE noted that under a council size of 53, this area overall would be entitled to 4.52 councillors by 2006 and therefore should be allocated an additional councillor. The LGCE noted that the Council did not consider a minor increase in council size as an option, but was not persuaded that the retention of a notable imbalance of representation between the town areas and the rural areas would be acceptable. In any event, the proposed council size of 54 members only moved some way to securing a good balance, as a completely balanced level of representation would not be possible without a significant change in council size or significant parish warding. Under the revised electorate forecast figures, as submitted by the district council, this area would be entitled to 4.67 councillors by 2006 and therefore we maintain that this area should be allocated an additional councillor.

45 Having looked at the size and distribution of the electorate, the geography and other characteristics of the area, together with the responses received, the LGCE concluded that the achievement of electoral equality and the statutory criteria would best be met by a council of 54 members.

46 During Stage Three, we received no representations relating to council size, therefore we are confirming the draft recommendations for a council size of 54 as final.

Electoral Arrangements

47 As set out in the LGCE's draft recommendations report, all the representations received during Stage One were carefully considered, including the district-wide scheme from Breckland District Council. In view of the support given to large elements of the Council's proposals, and the consultation exercise which it undertook with interested parties, the LGCE decided to base its draft recommendations on the District Council's scheme, as it considered that the scheme provided a better balance between the statutory criteria than the existing arrangements. However, as detailed earlier, in order to facilitate a better allocation of councillors between the towns of Attleborough, Dereham and Thetford and the rural parts of the district, the LGCE proposed adopting a council size of 54 members. This would result in the warding of Besthorpe parish and the inclusion of the village of Besthorpe in a ward with part of Attleborough. Overall, the Attleborough area would be allocated five councillors. However, to improve electoral

equality further and bearing in mind local community identities and interests, the LGCE moved away from the District Council's proposals in a number of areas.

48 At Stage Three, the District Council supported the draft recommendations in full. We received representations in relation to the draft recommendations for Attleborough and Besthorpe, proposing that Besthorpe should be included in an Attleborough ward. We received a number of representations in relation to Dereham, objecting to the proposed Dereham-Central ward and also proposing that the area of Toftwood be given its own parish council to better reflect the needs and interests of the residents. We also received a number of representations in relation to Thetford, the Town Council supporting the District Council's Stage One proposals for Thetford and others proposing a number of boundary amendments. A number of representations were received from parish councils objecting to the draft recommendations, a majority of which submitted alternative proposals for their area. In light of the representations received at Stage Three, and the further consultation exercise we undertook, we propose confirming a majority of the draft recommendations as final. However, we propose to modify the draft recommendations in Attleborough and Dereham in order to better reflect community identities and interests and to provide for a better level of electoral equality in Dereham. Also, as a result of the District Council submitting revised electorate figures for 2006, as detailed earlier, there are minor changes to electoral variances in the majority of wards.

49 The draft recommendations have been reviewed in the light of further evidence and the representations received during Stage Three. For district warding purposes, the following areas, based on existing wards, are considered in turn:

- (a) Besthorpe, Haverscroft and Queen's wards;
- (b) Buckenham, East Guiltcross and West Guiltcross wards;
- (c) Harling and Heathlands wards;
- (d) Thetford (four wards);
- (e) Peddars Way and Wayland wards;
- (f) Conifer, Mid-Forest and Weeting wards;
- (g) Nar Valley, Necton, Swaffham and Wissey wards;
- (h) All Saints, Haggard de Toni, Templar and Watton wards;
- (i) Mattishall, Shipworth, Two Rivers and Upper Yare wards;
- (j) Dereham (four wards);
- (k) Eynsford, Swanton Morley and Upper Wensum wards;
- (l) Beetley & Gressenhall, Hermitage, Launditch, Springvale and Taverner wards.

50 Details of our final recommendations are set out in Tables 1 and 2, and illustrated on Map 2, in Appendix A and on the large maps in the back of this report.

Besthorpe, Haverscroft and Queen's wards

51 The three wards of Besthorpe, Haverscroft and Queen's are situated in the south-east of the district and broadly cover the town of Attleborough. The three wards are each represented by a single councillor. Haverscroft and Queen's wards are coterminous with the Haverscroft and Queen's parish wards of Attleborough parish and Besthorpe ward comprises the parish of Besthorpe and Burgh parish ward of Attleborough parish. At present, Besthorpe and Queen's wards are significantly under-represented with 23% and 142% more electors per councillor than the district average (34% and 137% more by 2006). Haverscroft ward has equal to the district average number of electors per councillor (5% fewer by 2006).

52 At Stage One, the District Council proposed combining the parish of Besthorpe, currently in Besthorpe ward, with the current Buckenham ward to form a new single-member Buckenhams & Besthorpe ward, arguing that 'the under-representation is addressed by transferring the Parish of Besthorpe'. In conjunction with this proposal, the Council proposed broadly retaining the existing Queen's ward, with the addition of an extra councillor to make it a two-member

ward. However, it proposed transferring the area to the south of West Carr Road and Long Street (including the properties to the north of these roads) into the single-member Haverscroft ward. The remaining part of the current Besthorpe ward, Burgh parish ward of Attleborough parish, would form a single-member Burgh ward. During the District Council's consultation process Besthorpe Parish Council objected to the District Council's proposals for their parish. The District Council acknowledged that Besthorpe parish has a 'natural affinity with Attleborough', but stated that the alternative of leaving Besthorpe within one of the Attleborough wards would have meant 'an additional member, i.e. a total of 5' for the three Attleborough wards. It further stated that this could only be achieved by increasing the total number of District Councillors by one member 'something which these proposals have sought to avoid'. Under the District Council's proposals, based on a council size of 53, the proposed Burgh, Buckenhams & Besthorpe, Haverscroft and Queen's wards would have 1% fewer, 4% more, equal to the average and 21% more electors per councillor than the district average respectively (9%, 5%, 7% and 14% more by 2006).

53 The LGCE noted that Besthorpe Parish Council submitted its own proposals for the Attleborough area as part of the Council's consultation, providing argumentation for Besthorpe remaining a part of Attleborough for district warding purposes and objecting to being combined with Old and New Buckenham parishes in a new Buckenhams & Besthorpe ward. It stated that 'we have no community of interest with the Buckenhams but plenty with Attleborough, with which we are grouped at present'.

54 Having considered all the representations received, and as detailed earlier, the LGCE proposed combining the residential village of Besthorpe with the residential area in the east of Attleborough with which it is contiguous. This would facilitate the provision of a better balance of representation across the district as detailed earlier. Under the existing council size of 53, this area overall would be entitled to 4.52 councillors by 2006 and therefore the LGCE proposed allocating an additional councillor and basing the draft recommendations on a council size of 54, as detailed earlier. Under the revised electorate forecast figures, as submitted by the district council, this area would be entitled to 4.67 councillors by 2006 and therefore we maintain that this area should be allocated an additional councillor.

55 As outlined above, the LGCE proposed warding Besthorpe parish and including the village of Besthorpe in the revised three-member Queen's ward, creating the new Besthorpe Village parish ward. As a consequence, the remaining part of Besthorpe parish would form a new Besthorpe Rural parish ward and be combined with the current Buckenham ward to form a new single-member Buckenhams & Besthorpe ward. The LGCE further proposed departing from the Council's proposals in Attleborough to provide for a better balance between electoral equality and reflecting communities while also providing for better boundaries. It proposed combining the proposed Haverscroft ward (less the area to the north of Swangey Lane and West Carr Road) and the proposed Burgh ward (less the properties to the north of Thieves Lane and Arlington Gardens), to form a new two-member Burgh & Haverscroft ward. The LGCE also proposed a number of minor amendments to existing boundaries to tie them to firm ground detail and to avoid defaced boundaries. As a result, it proposed amending the boundary between Queen's ward and Burgh & Haverscroft ward in order for all of Constable Close to be included in the revised Queen's ward and all the properties in Thorpe Drive to be included in the new Burgh & Haverscroft ward. The LGCE proposed that 27 Beech Avenue also be included in the new Burgh & Haverscroft ward.

56 Under the draft recommendations, based on a council size of 54, the proposed Burgh & Haverscroft ward would have 15% fewer electors than the district average (5% fewer by 2006). The proposed Queen's and Buckenhams & Besthorpe wards would have 4% and 3% fewer electors than the district average respectively (10% and 1% fewer by 2006).

57 At Stage Three, four representations were received in relation to this area. The District Council expressed support for the draft recommendations and made the point that the proposed

'Besthorpe Village' parish ward name is likely to cause confusion as it 'does not actually include the identifiably separate village of Besthorpe'. Old Buckenham Parish Council objected to the draft recommendations for the proposed Buckenham & Besthorpe ward. It argued that Besthorpe parish does not have sufficient community links with the Buckenham and that Besthorpe parish is predominantly urban in character as opposed to the Buckenham, who are more rural in character. Besthorpe Parish Council objected to part of Besthorpe parish being included in a ward with the Old and New Buckenham parishes. It provided argumentation for Besthorpe parish to be included in an Attleborough ward as it has 'natural ties' with Attleborough, further contending that there are no direct links with the Buckenham. South West Norfolk Conservative Association (The Buckenham Branch) objected to part of Besthorpe parish being joined with the Buckenham as the two communities have 'nothing in common'. It argued that Quidenham parish should be joined with the Buckenham instead.

58 Having carefully considered the representations received, we propose departing from the draft recommendations in order to better reflect local community identity and interests in the area. We have been persuaded by the argumentation that Besthorpe should remain with Attleborough for district warding purposes. We note that Besthorpe is currently joined with a part of Attleborough for district warding purposes and that the parishes of Attleborough and Besthorpe share community links. The urban areas of both parishes are contiguous and they also both contain a mix of rural and urban areas. We also note that there are no direct transport links between the parishes of Besthorpe and the Buckenham. Therefore, we have been persuaded to modify the draft recommendations and include all of Besthorpe parish in the proposed Queen's ward in Attleborough.

59 We note that Besthorpe Parish Council expressed a preference for being included in the proposed Burgh & Haverscroft ward stating 'The existing link with the "Burgh" area of Attleborough makes considerable sense. A link with "Queen's" area of the town would make sense but rather less so as it is less rural in nature'. However, we are of the view that Besthorpe parish being included in the revised Queen's ward would facilitate a better balance of representation across Attleborough and improved electoral equality, and therefore propose putting forward this proposal as part of the final recommendations.

60 As a result of revised electorate figures for the 2006 projected electorate in the district being submitted by the District Council, as detailed earlier, the proposed Burgh & Haverscroft ward would have, under our final recommendations 15% fewer electors per councillor than the district average (6% fewer by 2006). The proposed Queen's ward would have 1% more electors per councillor than the district average (4% fewer by 2006). Our final recommendations are illustrated on Map 2, Map A2 and on the large map at the back of the report.

Buckenham, East Guiltcross and West Guiltcross wards

61 The three wards of Buckenham, East Guiltcross and West Guiltcross are situated in the south-east of the district and to the south of Attleborough. The single-member Buckenham ward comprises the parishes of Old Buckenham and New Buckenham. East Guiltcross is currently a single-member ward and comprises the parishes of Banham and Quidenham. West Guiltcross is a single-member ward and comprises the parishes of Kenninghall, North Lopham and South Lopham. Buckenham, East Guiltcross and West Guiltcross wards are over-represented with 20%, 19% and 14% fewer electors per councillor than the district average respectively (21%, 19% and 16% fewer by 2006).

62 At Stage One, the District Council proposed combining the parish of Besthorpe, currently in Besthorpe ward, with the current Buckenham ward to form a new single-member Buckenham & Besthorpe ward, as detailed earlier. It proposed including the parish of Snetterton, currently in Peddars Way ward, in the current East Guiltcross ward to form a revised single-member East Guiltcross ward. The Council also proposed including the parish of Blo' Norton, currently in Heathlands ward, in the current West Guiltcross ward to form a revised single-member West

Guiltcross ward. Under the District Council's proposals, based on a council size of 53, Buckenhams & Besthorpe, East Guiltcross and West Guiltcross wards would have 4% more, 10% fewer and 2% fewer electors per councillor than the district average (5% more, 9% fewer and 4% fewer by 2006).

63 Having considered the District Council's proposals, the LGCE were of the view that they provide for a good balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria in the area and decided to adopt them as part of its draft recommendations, subject to one amendment. The LGCE proposed warding Besthorpe parish and including the village of Besthorpe in the Queen's ward, as detailed earlier. As a consequence, the remaining part of Besthorpe parish would form a new Besthorpe Rural parish ward and be included in a new Buckenhams & Besthorpe ward, as detailed earlier.

64 Under the draft recommendations, based on a council size of 54, the proposed Buckenhams & Besthorpe, East Guiltcross and West Guiltcross wards would have 3% fewer, 8% fewer and equal to the district average number of electors per councillor respectively (1% fewer, 8% fewer and 3% fewer by 2006).

65 At Stage Three, we received four representations in relation to this area. The District Council expressed support for the draft recommendations. Old Buckenham Parish Council objected to the draft recommendations for the proposed Buckenhams & Besthorpe ward, as detailed earlier. Besthorpe Parish Council objected to part of Besthorpe parish being included in a ward with the Old and New Buckenham parishes, arguing that Besthorpe parish be included in an Attleborough ward, as detailed earlier. South West Norfolk Conservative Association (Buckenham Branch) objected to part of Besthorpe parish being joined with the Buckenhams, as detailed earlier.

66 Having carefully considered the representations received in relation to this area, we propose confirming East Guiltcross and West Guiltcross wards as final. However, we propose departing from the draft recommendations in the proposed Buckenhams & Besthorpe ward, as detailed earlier.

67 As a result of including all of Besthorpe parish in the revised Queen's ward, we propose that the existing Buckenham ward remain unchanged. We note that Buckenham ward would have 19% fewer electors per councillor than the district average (20% fewer electors per councillor by 2006). We considered the options to reduce the significant electoral imbalance in Buckenham ward but are constrained because the ward is bounded by the district boundary to the east. Any boundary amendments involving surrounding wards to the west and south would necessitate a reconfiguration of wards in the south of the district and would thus create even more imbalance of representation across a wider area.

68 We therefore propose retaining the existing Buckenham ward and the revised East Guiltcross and West Guiltcross wards as final. As a result of revised electorate figures for the 2006 projected electorate in the district being submitted by the District Council, as detailed earlier, Buckenham ward would have, under our final recommendations, 19% fewer electors per councillor than the district average (20% fewer by 2006). The number of electors per councillor in East Guiltcross and West Guiltcross wards would be the same as under the draft recommendations. Our final recommendations are illustrated on Map 2.

Harling and Heathlands wards

69 The single-member wards of Harling and Heathlands are situated in the south of the district and to the east of Thetford. Harling ward is coterminous with the parish of Harling. Heathlands ward is currently a detached ward and comprises the parishes of Blo' Norton, Brettenham, Croxton, Garboldisham, Kilverstone and Riddlesworth. At present, Harling ward has 3% more electors per councillor than the district average (1% more by 2006). Heathlands ward is slightly

over-represented with 7% fewer electors per councillor than the district average (10% fewer by 2006).

70 At Stage One, the District Council proposed retaining the current Harling ward. The Council proposed combining the existing Heathlands ward, less the parishes of Blo' Norton and Croxton, with the parish of Roudham & Larling & Larling (currently in Peddars Way ward) to form a revised single-member Heathlands ward. The remaining part of the current Heathlands ward, the parish of Blo' Norton, would be included in a revised West Guiltcross ward, as detailed earlier. Finally, the Council proposed including the remaining part of the current Heathlands ward, the parish of Croxton, in a revised Weeting ward, as detailed below. Under the District Council's proposals, based on a council size of 53, Harling and Heathlands wards would have 3% more and 13% fewer electors per councillor than the district average (2% more and 15% fewer by 2006).

71 Having considered the District Council's proposals, the LGCE proposed departing from them to avoid the retention of a detached ward, as it had concerns over the ability of detached wards to provide convenient and effective local government, and in order to achieve a better balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria. The Council's proposed Heathlands ward would be a detached ward and would have 11% fewer electors than the district average (13% fewer by 2006) under a council size of 53. The LGCE therefore proposed combining the existing Harling ward with the proposed Heathlands ward to form a new two-member Harling & Heathlands ward. This would provide for improved electoral equality, with the new ward containing 3% fewer electors per councillor than the district average (5% fewer by 2006) and would avoid the provision of a detached Heathlands ward.

72 Under the draft recommendations, the number of electors per councillor in the proposed Harling & Heathlands ward would be as detailed earlier. The LGCE recognised that this new two-member ward would result in a ward covering a large geographic area. The LGCE therefore welcomed views on whether this ward could be divided into two single-member wards, without necessitating a detached ward.

73 At Stage Three, we received three representations in relation to this area. The District Council expressed support for the draft recommendations for this area.

74 Harling Parish Council and Garboldisham Parish Council objected to the proposed Harling & Heathlands ward. Harling Parish Council argued that 'Harling has been used to having its own councillor, with a detailed knowledge of the parish ... and it is felt that it will be very much a retrograde step for the parish to become merely a part of the proposed larger ward'. It proposed that the existing Harling ward be retained. Garboldisham Parish Council argued that it has strong community links with Blo' Norton parish and that the parish will be 'dominated' by the larger Harling parish in the proposed Harling & Heathlands ward.

75 Having carefully considered the representations received in relation to this area, we propose confirming the draft recommendations as final. We note the concerns of Harling Parish Council and Garboldisham Parish Council in relation to the proposed Harling & Heathlands ward however, we have not been persuaded by the argumentation that the existing Harling and Heathlands wards should be retained. We have not received significant justification for retaining a detached ward (the existing Heathlands ward). We also have concerns over a detached ward's ability to provide effect and convenient local government and are only minded to put forward a detached ward in exceptional circumstances. We have been unable to determine any viable alternatives that would not have a negative effect on electoral equality and we consider that in this entirely parished district the configuration and location of parishes and settlements is restrictive. Our ability to consider alternative arrangements has also been limited due to these wards proximity to the southern boundary of the district.

76 We therefore propose confirming the proposed Harling & Heathlands ward as final. The number of electors per councillor in this ward would be the same as under the draft recommendations. Our final recommendations are illustrated on Map2.

Thetford (four wards)

77 The four wards of Thetford-Abbey, Thetford-Barnham Cross, Thetford-Guildhall and Thetford-Saxon are situated in the south-west of the district and cover the town of Thetford. Thetford-Abbey, Thetford-Barnham Cross and Thetford-Saxon are each represented by two councillors and Thetford-Guildhall is represented by three councillors. The four wards are coterminous with Thetford-Abbey, Thetford-Barnham Cross, Thetford-Guildhall and Thetford-Saxon parish wards of Thetford parish. At present, Thetford-Abbey, Thetford-Barnham Cross and Thetford-Saxon are over-represented with 1%, 21% and 28% fewer electors per councillor than the district average respectively (5%, 25% and 27% fewer by 2006). Thetford-Guildhall is under-represented with 18% more electors per councillor than the district average (28% more by 2006).

78 At Stage One, the District Council proposed two boundary amendments in Thetford in order to improve electoral equality, stating that 'some realignment of ward boundaries is necessary to give more balanced representation'. It proposed that the area to the north of Fulmerston Road and east of Kimms Belt, currently in Thetford-Barnham Cross ward, be included in a revised two-member Thetford-Saxon ward. It also proposed combining the remaining part of the current Thetford-Barnham Cross ward with the area to the south of Furth Way and Norwich Road (currently in Thetford-Guildhall ward) to form a new two-member Thetford-Castle ward. The remaining part of the current Thetford-Guildhall ward would become a revised three-member Thetford-Guildhall ward. Finally, the Council proposed retaining the current two-member Thetford-Abbey ward. Under the District Council's proposals, based on a council size of 53, the proposed Thetford-Abbey, Thetford-Castle, Thetford-Guildhall and Thetford-Saxon wards would have 1% fewer, 8% more, 12% fewer and 12% fewer electors per councillor than the district average respectively (5% fewer, 3% more, 4% fewer and 11% fewer by 2006).

79 Having considered the District Council's proposals, the LGCE proposed departing from them in order to provide for more identifiable boundaries and a better reflection of local communities. It noted that the Council's proposed Thetford-Castle ward would breach the Little Ouse River and the River Thet. Having visited the area the LGCE noted that the only access between the two areas either side of the two rivers is by a small narrow bridge. Furthermore, it was of the view that the ward's western boundary would divide the residential estates either side of Fulmerston Road. Therefore, the LGCE proposed combining the current Thetford-Saxon and Thetford-Barnham Cross wards to create a single three-member Thetford-Saxon ward, using the river as a strong identifiable northern boundary. In the north of Thetford (to the north of the river) the LGCE proposed adopting the Council's proposed three-member Thetford-Guildhall ward, but proposed alternative arrangements for the remaining area. The LGCE proposed that the area to the north of the river and to the south of the London Road/Norwich Road/Hurth Road inner ring-road should form a new single-member Thetford-Castle ward and that the remainder of the current Thetford-Abbey ward form a revised two-member Thetford-Abbey ward. These proposals would provide for more identifiable boundaries and the 'old town' area, currently in Thetford-Guildhall ward, would be placed in its own ward rather than linked with the area to the south of the river with which it has few links and limited means of access.

80 Under the LGCE's proposals, based on a council size of 54, the levels of electoral equality would also be improved, with the proposed Thetford-Saxon ward having 3% more electors than the district average (2% more by 2006). In the north, the proposed Thetford-Abbey, Thetford-Castle and Thetford-Guildhall wards would have 1%, 5% and 10% fewer electors than the district average respectively (5%, 8% and 2% fewer by 2006). The LGCE noted that in its submission, the Council pointed out that 'Thetford Town Council is happy with what the District Council is proposing'. While the LGCE was of the view that its proposed district wards provided

for the best balance between the statutory criteria at district level, the LGCE welcomed views as to whether any further modifications could be made with regard to Town Council electoral arrangements, as discussed later in this report.

81 At Stage Three, we received four representations in relation to this area. The District Council expressed support for the draft recommendations for this area.

82 Thetford Town Council expressed support for the District Council's Stage One proposals for Thetford. It supported the new ward name of Castle.

83 County Councillor Armes (Thetford East Division) and County Councillor Paines (Thetford West Division) jointly objected to the Little Ouse and Thet Rivers being used as boundaries in Thetford. They proposed including the area to the south of Mundford Road and to the east of Croxton Road, from the revised Guildhall ward, in the proposed Castle ward. They also proposed including the area to the east of Bury Road and to the north of the allotment gardens and Mill Lane, from the revised Thetford-Saxon ward, in the proposed Castle ward. They also proposed including the area to the east of London Road, from the revised Thetford-Abbey Road, and the area to the west of Bridge Street and to the north of Brandon Road (up to Canons Walk where it joins Blaydon Bridge), from the revised Thetford-Saxon ward, in the revised Thetford-Abbey ward, arguing that the proposals would provide for more reasonably sized wards. The Councillors also argued that their proposals 'would give a better balance to the two County Council wards of Thetford East and Thetford West'. Under County Councillors Armes and Paines proposals, Thetford-Abbey, Thetford-Castle, Thetford-Guildhall, Thetford-Saxon wards would have 6% more, 37% more, 21% fewer and 5% fewer electors per councillor than the district average respectively (1% more, 31% more, 7% fewer and 9% fewer by 2006 respectively).

84 District Councillor Ramm expressed support for the District Council's Stage One proposals for Thetford. Councillor Ramm expressed support for retaining the existing County boundaries in Thetford and proposed including two areas of urban overspill from Croxton and Brettenham parishes in the revised Thetford-Abbey and the proposed Thetford-Castle wards respectively.

85 Having carefully considered the representations received in relation to this area, we propose confirming the draft recommendations as final. We note the concerns of County Councillors Armes and Paines and District Councillor Ramm in relation to facilitating co-terminosity between district wards and county divisions however, we do not consider this a justifiable reason for making modifications to the boundaries in Thetford. We also note that District Councillor Ramm proposed amending the boundaries in Thetford in order to include two areas of urban overspill in Thetford. Including the areas in Thetford would improve electoral equality but would involve moving a significant part of the electorate into Thetford from sparsely populated rural parishes. In the absence of any wide-spread support we therefore, in this instance, believe that this proposal would not provide for more effective and convenient local government.

86 We propose confirming the draft recommendations for Thetford-Abbey, Thetford-Castle, Thetford-Guildhall and Thetford-Saxon wards as final. As a result of revised electorate figures for the 2006 projected electorate in the district being submitted by the District Council, as detailed earlier, Thetford-Abbey, Thetford-Castle, Thetford-Guildhall and Thetford-Saxon wards would have 1% fewer, 5% fewer, 10% fewer and 3% more electors per councillor than the district average respectively (6% fewer, 9% fewer, 2% more and 1% more by 2006 respectively). Our final recommendations are illustrated on Map 2 and on the large map at the back of the report.

Peddars Way and Wayland wards

87 The single-member Peddars Way and Wayland wards are situated in the south and in the centre of the district. Peddars Way ward comprises the parishes of Bridgham, Hockham,

Roudham & Larling, Shropham, Snetterton and Wretham. Wayland ward comprises the parishes of Caston, Griston, Merton, Stow Bedon, Thompson and Tottington. At present, Peddars Way and Wayland wards are over-represented, with 5% and 19% fewer electors per councillor than the district average respectively (7% and 20% fewer by 2006).

88 At Stage One, the District Council proposed combining the parishes of Hockham, Shropham and Wretham, currently in Peddars Way ward, with the parishes of Stow Bedon, Merton and Thompson, currently in Wayland ward, to form a revised single-member Wayland ward. The Council proposed combining part of the remaining part of the current Wayland ward, the parishes of Caston and Griston, with the parishes of Carbrooke and Ovington (currently in Templar ward) to form a revised single-member Templar ward. Part of the remaining part of the current Peddars Way ward, the parishes of Bridgham and Roudham & Larling, would form part of the revised Heathlands ward, as detailed earlier. The remaining part of the current Wayland ward, the parish of Tottington, would form part of a revised Conifer ward, as detailed below, while the remaining part of Peddars Way ward, the parish of Snetterton, would form part of a revised East Guiltcross ward, as detailed earlier. Under the District Council's proposals, based on a council size of 53, the proposed Templar ward would have 1% more electors per councillor than the district average (5% more by 2006). Wayland ward would have 3% fewer electors per councillor than the district average (4% fewer by 2006).

89 Caston Parish Council and Griston Parish Council proposed retaining the existing single-member Wayland ward. Griston Parish Council stated that its 'Parish Councillors can see no fundamental reason for any change'.

90 Having carefully considered the representations received at Stage One, the LGCE decided to adopt the District Council's proposals for this area as part of its draft recommendations, without amendment. While the LGCE noted the concerns of Caston Parish Council and Griston Parish Council, it considered that the Council's proposals provided a better balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria. The LGCE was also unable to determine any viable alternatives that would not have a negative effect on electoral equality.

91 Under the draft recommendations, based on a council size of 54, Templar and Wayland wards would have 3% more and 7% fewer electors per councillor than the district average (7% more and 3% fewer by 2006).

92 At Stage Three, the District Council expressed support for the draft recommendations for this area.

93 Given the support received at Stage Three for the LGCE's draft recommendations and in the absence of any opposition, we propose confirming the proposed Templar and Wayland wards as final. The number of electors per councillor in Wayland ward would be the same as under the draft recommendations. As a result of revised electorate figures for the 2006 projected electorate in the district being submitted by the District Council, as detailed earlier, Templar ward would have, under our final recommendations, 3% more electors per councillor than the district average (10% more by 2006). Our final recommendations are illustrated on Map 2.

Conifer, Mid-Forest and Weeting wards

94 The largely rural wards of Conifer, Mid-Forest and Weeting are situated in the west and south of the district, to the north of Thetford. The three wards are each represented by a single councillor. Conifer ward comprises the parishes of Cranwich, Didlington, Gooderstone, Ickburgh, Mundford and Foulden. Mid-Forest ward comprises the parishes of Beachamwell, Cockley Cley, Hillborough, Great Cressingham, Little Cressingham and Oxborough. Weeting ward comprises the parishes of Lynford, Stanford, Sturston and Weeting-with-Broomhill. Conifer ward is under-represented, with 16% more electors than the district average (13% more by

2006). Mid-Forest and Weeting wards are over-represented with 39% and 16% fewer electors per councillor than the district average respectively (39% and 19% fewer by 2006).

95 At Stage One, the District Council proposed combining part of the current Conifer ward, the parishes of Mundford, Cranwich, Didlington and Ickburgh, with the parish of Hilborough (currently in Mid-Forest ward), the parishes Stanford and Sturston (currently in Weeting ward) and the parish of Tottington (currently in Wayland ward) to form a revised single-member Conifer ward. The Council proposed combining the remainder of Mid-Forest ward with the parishes of Foulden and Gooderstone (currently in Conifer ward) to form a revised single-member Mid-Forest ward. In addition, the Council also proposed combining the remaining part of Weeting ward, the parishes of Lynford and Weeting-with-Broomhill, with the parish of Croxton from the neighbouring Heathlands ward to form a revised single-member Weeting ward. It provided justification for the electoral inequality in the proposed Conifer ward, stating that 'this is considered to be inevitable in a large geographical area' and stated that the proposals for the Mid-Forest and Conifer wards were 'supported by those parish councils affected'. Under the District Council's proposals, the proposed Conifer, Mid-Forest and Weeting wards would have 12% fewer, 11% fewer and 5% more electors per councillor than the district average respectively (13% fewer, 12% fewer and 1% more by 2006).

96 Having considered the District Council's proposals, the LGCE were of the view that they provided for a reasonable balance between the statutory criteria and decided to adopt them as part of its draft recommendations, subject to one amendment. The LGCE proposed transferring the parish of South Pickenham from the revised Wissey ward to the revised Mid-Forest ward to provide for a better level of electoral equality. It noted that Foulden and Mundford Parish Councils supported the District Council's proposals (for their parishes) during its consultation period. In adopting the Council's proposed Conifer ward it took into consideration the rural nature of the area and was unable to determine any viable alternatives that would not have a negative effect on electoral equality or the reflection of local communities. The LGCE also considered that in this entirely parished district the configuration and location of parishes and settlements is restrictive.

97 Under the draft recommendations, based on a council size of 54, Conifer, Mid-Forest and Weeting wards would have 4% fewer, 5% fewer and 7% more electors per councillor than the district average respectively (11% fewer, 6% fewer and 3% more by 2006).

98 At Stage Three, the District Council expressed support for the draft recommendations for this area.

99 Given the support received at Stage Three for the LGCE's draft recommendations and in the absence of any opposition, we propose confirming the proposed Templar and Wayland wards as final. As a result of revised electorate figures for the 2006 projected electorate in the district being submitted by the District Council, as detailed earlier, Conifer, Mid-Forest and Weeting wards would have, under our final recommendations, 4% fewer, 5% fewer and 7% more electors per councillor than the district average (12% fewer, 7% fewer and 2% more by 2006). Our final recommendations are illustrated on Map 2.

Nar Valley, Necton, Swaffham and Wissey wards

100 The four wards of Nar Valley, Necton, Swaffham and Wissey are situated in the centre and in the west of the district. Nar Valley ward is currently represented by a single councillor and comprises the parishes of Narborough, Narford, Newton-by-Castleacre, Southacre and Sporle with Palgrave. Necton ward is a single-member ward and is coterminous with the parish of Necton. Swaffham ward is a three-member ward and is coterminous with the parish of Swaffham. At present, Wissey ward is a single-member ward and comprises the parishes of Ashill, Holme Hale, North Pickenham and South Pickenham. Nar Valley, Swaffham and Wissey wards are under-represented, with 5%, 3% and 18% more electors per councillor than the

district average respectively (3%, 1% and 13% more by 2006). Necton ward is relatively over-represented with 13% fewer electors per councillor than the district average (7% fewer by 2006).

101 At Stage One, the District Council proposed retaining the current Swaffham and Nar Valley wards. In relation to the current Necton ward, the Council proposed combining the ward with the parish of Holme Hale, currently in Wissey ward, to form a new single-member Necton & Holme Hale ward. The remaining part of the Wissey ward would form a revised single-member Wissey ward. Under the District Council's proposals, based on a council size of 53, the proposed Nar Valley, Necton & Holme Hale, Swaffham and Wissey wards would have 5% more, 9% more, 3% more and 3% fewer electors per councillor than the district average respectively (3% more, 14% more, 2% more and 6% fewer by 2006).

102 The LGCE received two further representations in relation to this area. Ashill Parish Council proposed retaining the status quo in Wissey district ward, in which Ashill parish is situated, stating that 'we, along with the existing parishes, have been served very well over many years by the District Councillor for this ward and do not wish this to change'. Holme Hale Parish Council also objected to any change to Wissey ward.

103 Having carefully considered all the representations received for this area, the LGCE proposed broadly adopting the District Council's proposals, subject to one amendment in order to achieve a broadly better level of electoral equality overall and a better reflection of local community identity. The Council's proposed Necton & Holme Hale ward would have 9% more electors per councillor than the district average (14% more by 2006); therefore the LGCE propose combining the parish of Holme Hale with the proposed Wissey ward to form a revised single-member Wissey ward (less the parish of South Pickenham which would be included in a revised Mid-Forest ward). The LGCE proposed retaining the existing Necton ward unchanged. The revised Wissey and Necton wards, under a council size of 54, would have 16% more and 11% fewer electors than the district average respectively (12% more and 5% fewer by 2006).

104 Under the draft recommendations, based on a council size of 54, the proposed Nar Valley, Necton, Swaffham and Wissey wards would have 7% more, 11% fewer, 5% more and 16% more electors per councillor than the district average respectively (5% more, 5% fewer, 4% more and 12% more by 2006).

105 At Stage Three, the District Council expressed support for the draft recommendations for this area.

106 Given the support received at Stage Three for the LGCE's draft recommendations and in the absence of any opposition, we propose confirming the proposed Nar Valley, Necton, Swaffham and Wissey wards as final. The number of electors per councillor in Nar Valley, Necton and Wissey wards would be the same as under the draft recommendations. As a result of revised electorate figures for the 2006 projected electorate in the district being submitted by the District Council, as detailed earlier, Swaffham ward would have, under our final recommendations, 5% more electors per councillor than the district average (3% more by 2006). Our final recommendations are illustrated on Map 2.

All Saints, Haggard de Toni, Templar and Watton wards

107 The four wards of All Saints, Haggard de Toni, Templar and Watton are situated in the east of the district. The three wards of All Saints, Haggard de Toni and Templar are each represented by a single councillor and Watton ward is represented by three councillors. All Saints ward comprises the parishes of Great Ellingham, Little Ellingham and Rocklands. Haggard de Toni ward comprises the parishes of Bradenham and Saham Toney, while Templar ward comprises the parishes of Carbrooke, Ovington and Scoulton. Watton ward is coterminous with the parish of Watton. At present, All Saints and Templar wards are over-represented, with

5% and 30% fewer electors per councillor than the district average respectively (8% and 23% fewer by 2006). Haggard de Toni and Watton wards contain 5% more and equal to the district average number of electors per councillor respectively (equal to the district average for both wards by 2006).

108 At Stage One, the District Council proposed combining the parish of Scoulton (currently in Templar ward) with the current All Saints ward to form a revised single-member All Saints ward. The Council also proposed combining the remaining part of Templar ward, the parishes of Carbrooke and Ovington, with the parishes of Caston and Griston (currently in Wayland ward) to form a revised single-member Templar ward, as detailed earlier. In relation to Haggard de Toni and Watton wards, the Council proposed retaining the existing wards. Under the Council's proposals, based on a council size of 53, the proposed All Saints and Templar wards would have 6% and 1% more electors per councillor than the district average (4% and 5% more by 2006). Haggard de Toni and Watton wards would have 5% more and equal to the district average number of electors per councillor respectively (1% more for both wards by 2006).

109 Great Ellingham Parish Council proposed retaining the present number of parish councillors in the parish, stating that, 'We would wish to stay within the boundary of All Saints ward, along with the parishes of Little Ellingham and Rocklands with whom we have a good working relationship'.

110 Having carefully considered the representations received at Stage One, the LGCE decided to adopt the District Council's proposals for this area as part of its draft recommendations, without amendment. The LGCE considered that the Council's proposals provided a good balance between electoral equality and the other statutory criteria and were largely based on the existing warding arrangements. It noted that this arrangement would meet the concerns of Great Ellingham Parish Council.

111 Under the draft recommendations, based on a council size of 54, the proposed All Saints and Templar wards would have 8% and 3% more electors per councillor than the district average (6% and 7% more by 2006). Haggard de Toni and Watton wards would have 7% more and 2% more electors per councillor than the district average respectively (3% more in both wards by 2006).

112 At Stage Three, the District Council expressed support for the draft recommendations for this area. Scoulton Parish Council objected to forming part of the revised All Saints ward. It provided argumentation for being included in a ward with Carbrooke parish stating, 'Geographically and historically Scoulton is connected to Carbrooke. We live on the same stretch of road and therefore "communicate" with each other'.

113 We have carefully considered the representations received. We note the concerns of Scoulton Parish Council with regard to the revised All Saints ward, but do not propose to amend the draft recommendations. We were unable to determine any viable alternatives, which would address the views of Scoulton parish, that would not result in a negative effect on electoral equality in the surrounding district wards. We consider that, in an entirely parished district such as Breckland, the configuration and location of parishes is restrictive and that the draft recommendations offer the best balance between the statutory criteria. We also note that the draft recommendations received the support of the District Council in this area.

114 We therefore propose confirming the proposed All Saints, Haggard de Toni, Templar and Watton wards as final. As a result of revised electorate figures for the 2006 projected electorate in the district being submitted by the District Council, as detailed earlier, All Saints, Haggard de Toni, Templar and Watton wards would have, under our final recommendations, 8%, 7%, 3% and 2% more electors per councillor than the district average respectively (5%, 2%, 10% and 2% more by 2006 respectively). Our final recommendations are illustrated on Map 2.

Mattishall, Shipworth, Two Rivers and Upper Yare wards

115 The four wards of Mattishall, Shipworth, Two Rivers and Upper Yare are situated in the north-east of the district and to the east of Dereham. The four wards are each represented by a single councillor. Mattishall ward is coterminous with the parish of Mattishall. At present, Shipworth ward comprises the parishes of Cranworth and Shipdham, and Two Rivers ward comprises the parishes of East Tuddenham, Hockering, Lyng and North Tuddenham. Upper Yare ward comprises the parishes of Garverstone, Hardingham, Whinburgh & Westfield and Yaxham. Mattishall, Shipworth and Two Rivers wards are under-represented, with 24%, 17% and 1% more electors per councillor than the district average respectively (20% more, 14% more and equal to the average by 2006). Upper Yare ward is over-represented with 13% fewer electors per councillor than the district average (13% fewer by 2006).

116 At Stage One, the District Council proposed combining the parish of Cranworth (currently in Shipworth ward) with the current Upper Yare ward to form a revised single-member Upper Yare ward. It proposed that the remaining part of the current Shipworth ward, the parish of Shipdham, become the new single-member Shipdham ward. The Council also proposed combining the current Mattishall ward with the current Two Rivers ward, less the parish of Lyng, to form a revised two member Two-Rivers ward. The Council stated that Mattishall ward is 'too small to justify two members, but [is] too far above the average for [a] single member [ward]'. The recommended solution was therefore to create a new two-member ward. The Council proposed transferring the remaining part of the current Two Rivers ward, the parish of Lyng, into the current Eynsford ward, as detailed below. Under the District Council's proposals, based on a council size of 53, the proposed Shipdham, Two Rivers and Upper Yare wards would have 2% fewer, 7% fewer and 6% more electors per councillor than the district average respectively (4% fewer, 8% fewer and 6% more by 2006).

117 Cranworth Parish Council expressed support for the District Council's proposals for the parish.

118 Having considered the District Council's proposals, the LGCE were of the view that they provided for a good balance between the statutory criteria in the area and had received some local support. The LGCE decided to adopt them as part of its draft recommendations, without amendment. Under the draft recommendations, based on a council size of 54, the proposed Shipdham, Two Rivers and Upper Yare wards would have equal to the district average number of electors per councillor, 5% fewer and 8% more electors per councillor than the district average respectively (2% fewer, 7% fewer and 8% more by 2006).

119 At Stage Three, the District Council expressed support for the draft recommendations for this area. Mattishall Parish Council objected to the revised Two Rivers ward. It argued that the parish should comprise a single-member ward as 'Mattishall has had an elected member for the District Council who has lived in the village ... It is the view of the Parish Council that this has been an advantage, and the Council would wish this to continue'.

120 Having considered the representations received, we note the concerns of Mattishall Parish Council with regard to the draft recommendations for the parish. However, a single-member Mattishall ward that is coterminous with Mattishall parish (as existing) would have 24% more electors per councillor than the district average (20% by 2006). This is an unacceptable level of electoral equality and we maintain that the draft recommendations offer the best balance between the statutory criteria. We also note that the draft recommendations received the support of the District Council in this area.

121 We therefore propose confirming the proposed Shipdham, Two Rivers and Upper Yare wards as final. The number of electors per councillor in Shipdham and Two Rivers wards would be the same as under the draft recommendations. As a result of revised electorate figures for the 2006 projected electorate in the district being submitted by the District Council, as detailed

earlier, Upper Yare ward would have, under our final recommendations, 8% more electors per councillor than the district average (7% more by 2006). Our final recommendations are illustrated on Map 2.

Dereham (four wards)

122 The four wards of East Dereham-Neatherd, East Dereham-Toftwood, East Dereham-Town and East Dereham-St Withburga are situated in the north-east of the district and cover the town of Dereham. East Dereham-Neatherd, East Dereham-Toftwood and East Dereham-Town wards are each represented by two councillors and are coterminous with the parish wards of the same name of Dereham parish. East Dereham-St Withburga is a single-member ward and is coterminous with East Dereham-St Withburga parish ward of Dereham parish. East Dereham-Neatherd and East Dereham-Town wards are over-represented with 1% and 36% fewer electors per councillor than the district average respectively (11% more and 38% fewer by 2006). East Dereham-Toftwood and East Dereham-St Withburga wards are under-represented with 31% and 18% more electors per councillor than the district average respectively (35% and 27% more by 2006).

123 At Stage One, the District Council proposed retaining four wards in Dereham, subject to boundary amendments in order to improve electoral equality. It proposed that the area to the east of the properties on the eastern side of Shipdham Road and the area to the north of the A47 around South Green, from the current East Dereham-Toftwood ward, be included in a revised two-member Dereham-Town ward, together with the area to the south of Norwich Road and Cherry Lane, east of the railway and north of the A47 (currently in East Dereham-Neatherd ward). The Council argued that 'the transfer of the properties to the east of Shipdham Road into the Town ward ... was considered preferable to an alternative whereby the "Middlemarch" development to the west of Shipdham Road would transfer'. The remainder of East Dereham-Toftwood ward would form a revised two-member Dereham-Toftwood ward. It also proposed including the area to the east of Quebec Road, currently in St Withburga ward, in a revised two-member Neatherd ward, with the remainder of East Dereham-St Withburga ward forming a revised single-member Dereham-St Withburga ward. It also proposed that the prefix 'East' be removed from the four ward names. Under the District Council's proposals, based on a council size of 53, the proposed Dereham-Neatherd, Dereham-St Withburga, Dereham-Toftwood and Dereham-Town wards would have 1% fewer, 18% more, 31% more and 36% fewer electors per councillor than the district average respectively (equal to the average, 5% more, 8% more and 5% more by 2006).

124 Councillor Monument provided argumentation for removing the prefix 'East' from the four ward names in Dereham. The Councillor also proposed that the proposed East Dereham Town ward be renamed Dereham-Central ward, stating that it 'would be an improvement in the interests of clarity'.

125 Having carefully considered the representations received, the LGCE decided to adopt the District Council's proposals for this area as part of its draft recommendations, subject to one minor boundary modification to improve electoral equality. The LGCE proposed transferring The Woodlands and The Sycamores from the proposed Dereham-Toftwood ward into the proposed Dereham-Town ward. It also proposed removing the prefix 'East' from the district ward names and renaming Dereham-Town ward as Dereham-Central ward to better reflect community identities. The LGCE recognised that the A47 dissects the proposed Dereham-Central ward. However, the LGCE assessed alternative warding arrangements and were of the opinion that to facilitate an acceptable ward pattern in Dereham, its proposals offered the most acceptable option for this area. Furthermore, it noted that this was a locally derived proposal.

126 Under the draft recommendations, based on a council size of 54, the proposed Dereham-Central, Dereham-Neatherd, Dereham-St Withburga and Dereham-Toftwood wards

would have 34% fewer, 1% more, 21% more and 33% more electors per councillor than the district average respectively (8% more, 2% more, 7% more and 10% more by 2006).

127 At Stage Three, the District Council expressed support for the draft recommendations for this area. District Councillor Sheath and a local resident objected to Boyd Avenue from the current Dereham-Toftwood ward being included in the proposed Dereham-Central ward. It was argued that Boyd Avenue is a 'long standing' part of Toftwood. Councillor Sheath and the resident also proposed that the community of Toftwood be represented by its own parish council.

128 We have carefully considered all the representations received. We note the concerns of Councillor Sheath and the resident with regard to the draft recommendations for Dereham. However, we maintain that the draft recommendations offer the more identifiable boundaries and a better reflection of the statutory criteria, furthermore, if Boyd Avenue were included in the proposed Dereham-Toftwood ward it would have 16% more electors per councillor than the district average by 2006 which we do not believe to be acceptable in a relatively urban area like Dereham. We also note that the draft recommendations for Dereham were based on a locally derived proposal, as detailed earlier. With regard to being able to create a new parish council in the area of Toftwood, we are unable to create parish councils as part of a periodic electoral review. However, under the provisions of the Local Government Act of 1997 a parish review can be undertaken by the District Council.

129 Having considered the representations received at Stage Three we propose confirming the proposed Dereham-Central, Dereham-Neatherd, Dereham-St Withburga and Dereham-Toftwood wards as final, subject to two amendments. After the end of Stage Three the District Council submitted revised electorate figures for 2006, as detailed earlier. In Dereham it resulted in the proposed Dereham-Central, Dereham-Neatherd, Dereham-St Withburga and Dereham-Toftwood wards varying by 34% fewer, 1% more, 21% more and 33% more electors per councillor than the district average (3%, 10%, 17% and 9% more respectively by 2006). In order to secure a better level of electoral equality we undertook a limited local consultation on a revised warding pattern. We proposed modifying the boundary between Dereham-St Withburga and Dereham-Central wards to follow Swaffham Road, resulting in the revised Dereham-St Withburga and Dereham-Central wards varying by 9% more and 28% fewer electors per councillor than the district average (8% and 6% more respectively by 2006).

130 We received two submissions commenting on our further consultation on the warding arrangements for Dereham St-Withburga and Dereham-Central wards. Dereham Town Council expressed support for our proposals but proposed a minor boundary amendment retaining Becclesgate and Old Becclesgate in Dereham-St Withburga ward, in order that the location of the polling station for Dereham-St Withburga ward remain in that ward. It also proposed that Dereham St-Withburga ward be renamed Dereham-Humbletoft ward to better reflect the area.

131 District Councillor Sheath reiterated his Stage Three proposals for the area of Toftwood.

132 In order to address the levels of electoral inequality, given the updated electorate forecast figures and having considered the responses to our further consultation, we propose modifying the boundary between Dereham-St Withburga and Dereham-Central wards to follow Swaffham Road. We noted Dereham Town Council's proposed amendment but we consider that the location of the polling station is not a justifiable reason for amending our proposals and therefore confirm our revised wards in Dereham as final. We note Dereham Town Council's proposal to change Dereham St-Withburga's ward name to Dereham-Humbletoft in order to better reflect the area. Therefore, in the interest of community identity we propose adopting this revised ward name.

133 Under our final recommendations, the proposed Dereham-Central, Dereham-Humbletoft, Dereham-Neatherd and Dereham-Toftwood wards would have 28% fewer, 9% more, 1% more

and 33% more electors per councillor than the district average respectively (8%, 6%, 10% and 9% more by 2006 respectively). Our final recommendations are illustrated on Map 2 and on the large map at the back of the report.

Eynsford, Swanton Morley and Upper Wensum wards

134 The three wards of Eynsford, Swanton Morley and Upper Yare are situated in the north-east of the district and to the north of Dereham. The three wards are each represented by a single councillor. Eynsford ward comprises the parishes of Bawdeswell, Billingford, Bylaugh, Elsing, Foxley and Sparham. Swanton Morley ward comprises the parishes of Hoe and Swanton Morley. Upper Wensum ward comprises the parishes of Bintree, Gateley, Guist, North Elmham and Twyford. At present, Eynsford, Swanton Morley and Upper Wensum wards are relatively over-represented with 14%, 16% and 5% fewer electors per councillor than the district average respectively (15%, 19% and 8% fewer respectively by 2006).

135 At Stage One, the District Council proposed combining the current Eynsford ward, less the parishes of Billingford and Elsing, with the neighbouring parish of Lyng (currently in Two Rivers ward) to form a revised single-member Eynsford ward. It further proposed combining the current Swanton Morley ward with the parish of Elsing, currently in Eynsford ward, to form a new single-member ward (the Council did not provide a ward name). The Council proposed combining the remaining part of the current Eynsford ward, the parish of Billingford, with the current Upper Wensum ward to form a revised single-member Upper Wensum ward. Under the District Council's proposals, based on a council size of 53, the proposed Eynsford and Upper Wensum wards would have 2% more and 4% more electors per councillor than the district average respectively (1% more and 2% more by 2006). Its unnamed single-member ward would have 3% fewer electors per councillor than the district average (7% fewer by 2006).

136 Having considered the District Council's proposals, the LGCE were of the view that they provided for a good balance between electoral equality and the other statutory criteria and decided to adopt them as part of its draft recommendations. In relation to the Council's unnamed new single-member ward, the LGCE proposed naming the ward Swanton Morley to reflect the largest local community contained in the ward.

137 Under the draft recommendations, based on a council size of 54, the proposed Eynsford, Swanton Morley and Upper Wensum wards would have 4% more, 2% fewer and 6% more electors per councillor than the district average respectively (3% more, 5% fewer and 4% more by 2006 respectively).

138 At Stage Three, the District Council expressed support for the draft recommendations for this area.

139 Given the support received at Stage Three for the LGCE's draft recommendations and in the absence of any opposition, we propose confirming the proposed Eynsford, Swanton Morley and Upper Wensum wards as final. The number of electors per councillor in Swanton Morley ward would be the same as under the draft recommendations. As a result of revised electorate figures for the 2006 projected electorate in the district being submitted by the District Council, as detailed earlier, Eynsford and Upper Wensum wards would have, under our final recommendations, 4% and 6% more electors per councillor than the district average (2% and 3% more by 2006). Our final recommendations are illustrated on Map 2.

Beetley & Gressenhall, Hermitage, Launditch, Springvale and Taverner wards

140 The five wards of Beetley & Gressenhall, Hermitage, Launditch, Springvale and Taverner are situated in the north-west of the district and are each represented by a single councillor. At present, Beetley & Gressenhall ward comprises the parishes of Beetley and Gressenhall while Hermitage ward comprises the parishes of Great Dunham, Lexham, Litcham,

Kempstone, Rougham, Weasenham All Saints, Weasenham St Peters and Wellingham. The current Launditch ward comprises the parishes of Beeston with Bittering, Longham, Mileham, Stanfield and Tittleshall. Springvale ward comprises the parishes of Fransham, Little Dunham, Scarning and Wending. Taverner ward comprises the parishes of Brisley, Colkirk, Horningtoft and Whissonsett. Beetley & Gressenhall and Springvale wards are under-represented with 13% and 67% more electors per councillor than the district average respectively (10% more and 60% more by 2006). Hermitage, Launditch and Taverner wards are over-represented with 26% fewer, 13% fewer and 30% fewer electors per councillor than the district average respectively (29% fewer, 14% fewer and 32% fewer by 2006).

141 At Stage One, the District Council proposed combining the parish of Beetley (currently in Beetley & Gressenhall ward), the parish of Brisley (currently in Taverner ward) and the parish of Mileham (currently in Launditch ward) to form a revised single-member Taverner ward. It proposed combining the remaining part of the Beetley & Gressenhall ward, the parish of Gressenhall, with the parishes of Fransham and Wending (currently in Springvale ward) and the parish of Longham (currently in Launditch ward) to form a revised single-member Springvale ward. Part of the remainder of the current Springvale ward, the parish of Little Dunham, would be combined with the parishes of Great Dunham, Kempstone, Lexham, Litcham and Rougham (currently in Hermitage ward) and the parish of Beeston with Bittering (currently in Launditch ward) to form a revised single-member Launditch ward. The parish of Scarning would then comprise a new single-member Scarning ward. Finally, the remaining part of the current Launditch ward, the parishes of Stanfield and Tittleshall, the remaining part of the current Hermitage ward, the parishes of Weasenham All Saints, Weasenham St Peter and Wellingham and the remaining part of the current Taverner ward, the parishes of Colkirk, Horningtoft and Whissonsett, would all be combined to form a revised single-member Hermitage ward. The Council's proposals, based on a council size of 53, would result in the proposed Hermitage, Launditch, Scarning, Springvale and Taverner wards having 2% more, 6% fewer, 18% more, 5% fewer and 3% more electors per councillor than the district average respectively (equal to the average, 8% fewer, 14% more, 8% fewer and 1% more by 2006).

142 During the District Council's consultation process the parishes of Mileham and Brisley objected to the District Council's proposals for their respective parishes, with Mileham Parish Council expressing concern about the representation of smaller parishes where they are grouped with larger ones. In its submission the District Council stated that, 'It would be difficult to address these concerns without a knock-on-effect ... and, although these parishes will be used to groupings with others, they are situated closely together with no obvious natural barriers between them'.

143 The LGCE received one further representation. Colkirk Parish Council stated that, 'We would not wish to see any changes to the current arrangements'.

144 Having carefully considered the representations received, the LGCE decided to adopt the District Council's proposals for this area as part of its draft recommendations, subject to one amendment to improve electoral equality under a council size of 54. The Council's proposed Scarning ward would have 18% more electors than the district average (14% by 2006); therefore the LGCE proposed combining the proposed Scarning and Springvale wards to form a new two-member Springvale & Scarning ward. Under the proposed council size of 54, this would provide for a ward containing 8% more electors per councillor than the district average (5% more by 2006). The LGCE also noted the concerns raised about the regrouping of parishes in this area. However, it was unable to devise any viable alternatives in this area which would not have a detrimental effect on electoral equality.

145 Under the draft recommendations, based on a council size of 54, the proposed Hermitage, Launditch, Springvale & Scarning and Taverner wards would have 4% more, 5% fewer, 8% more and 5% more electors per councillor than the district average respectively (2% more, 6% fewer, 5% more and 3% more by 2006).

146 At Stage Three, the District Council expressed support for the draft recommendations for this area. Beeston with Bittering Parish Council objected to the revised Launditch ward. It proposed that the existing Launditch ward be retained stating that it 'sees no point in changes for changes sake'.

147 Brisley Parish Council objected to the revised Taverner ward. It argued that the parish has nothing in common with the parishes of Mileham and Beetley and would become an 'unheard voice' within that grouping.

148 Having carefully considered the representations received in relation to this area, we propose confirming the proposed Hermitage, Launditch, Springvale & Scarning and Taverner wards as final. We note the concerns of Beeston with Bittering Parish Council however, we are not convinced by the justification provided that the existing Launditch ward should be retained and we were unable to determine any viable alternatives that would not result in a negative effect on electoral equality (the existing Launditch ward will have 14% fewer electors per councillor than the district average by 2006). Under a council size of 54 the existing Launditch ward would have 12% fewer electors per councillor than the district average by 2006. We note the concerns of Brisley Parish Council however, we were also unable to determine any viable alternatives that would not result in a negative effect on electoral equality or create even more imbalance of representation across a wider area. In proposing the wards in this area we have taken into consideration the rural nature of the area and we consider that, in an entirely parished district such as Breckland, the configuration and location of parishes is restrictive.

149 Under our final recommendations, the number of electors per councillor in Springvale & Scarning ward would be the same as under the draft recommendations. Hermitage, Launditch and Taverner wards would have 4% more, 5% fewer and 5% more electors per councillor than the district average respectively (1% more, 7% fewer and 2% more by 2006 respectively). Our final recommendations are illustrated on Map 2.

Electoral Cycle

150 By virtue of the amendments made to the Local Government Act 1992 by the Local Government Commission for England (Transfer of Functions) Order 2001, we have no powers to make recommendations concerning electoral cycle.

Conclusions

151 Having considered carefully all the representations and evidence received in response to the LGCE's consultation report, we have decided substantially to endorse its draft recommendations, subject to the following amendments:

- We propose including the whole of the parish of Besthorpe in the revised Queen's ward and consequently that the existing Buckenham ward should be retained;
- We propose amending the boundary between the proposed Dereham-St Withburga and Dereham-Central wards so that it follows Swaffham Road and propose that Dereham-St Withburga ward be renamed Dereham-Humbletoft ward.

152 We conclude that, in Breckland:

- there should be a increase in council size from 53 to 54;
- there should be 36 wards, five fewer than at present;
- the boundaries of 35 of the existing wards should be modified.

153 Table 4 shows the impact of our final recommendations on electoral equality, comparing them with the current arrangements, based on 2001 and 2006 electorate figures.

Table 4: Comparison of Current and Recommended Electoral Arrangements

	2001 electorate		2006 forecast electorate	
	Current arrangements	Final recommendations	Current arrangements	Final recommendations
Number of councillors	53	54	53	54
Number of wards	41	36	41	36
Average number of electors per councillor	1,672	1,641	1,758	1,726
Number of wards with a variance more than 10 per cent from the average	28	6	27	3
Number of wards with a variance more than 20 per cent from the average	12	2	14	0

154 As Table 4 shows, our recommendations would result in a reduction in the number of wards with an electoral variance of more than 10% from 28 to six, with only two wards varying by more than 20% from the district average. This level of electoral equality would improve further in 2006, with only three wards varying by more than 10% from the average. We conclude that our recommendations would best meet the statutory criteria.

Final Recommendation

Breckland District Council should comprise 54 councillors serving 36 wards, as detailed and named in Tables 1 and 2, and illustrated on Map 2 and in Appendix A including the large maps at the back of the report.

Parish and Town Council Electoral Arrangements

155 When reviewing parish electoral arrangements, we are required to comply as far as is reasonably practicable with the rules set out in Schedule 11 to the 1972 Act. The Schedule states that if a parish is to be divided between different district wards, it should also be divided into parish wards, so that each parish ward lies wholly within a single ward of the district. In the LGCE’s draft recommendations report it proposed consequential changes to the warding arrangements for Attleborough, Dereham and Thetford parishes to reflect the proposed district wards.

156 At Stage One, Colkirk Parish Council stated that it did not see any reason to change the number of parish councillors representing the parish. Similarly, Great Ellingham Parish Council stated that ‘the present number of nine parish councillors to be eminently satisfactory’. Given this local support, and in the absence of any proposition for change in these areas, the LGCE did not propose any amendments to their parish electoral arrangements.

157 Attleborough Town Council is currently served by 15 councillors representing three wards: Burgh, Haverscroft and Queen’s returning four, four and seven councillors respectively. In order to reflect the draft recommendations for district wards in this area, the LGCE proposed creating a new Burgh & Haverscroft parish ward and a revised Queen’s parish ward of Attleborough parish. The proposed Burgh & Haverscroft and Queen’s wards would be

coterminous with the district wards of the same name. The new Burgh & Haverscroft ward would return six councillors and the revised Queen's ward would return nine councillors.

158 In response to the LGCE's consultation report, we received no representations in relation to the parish warding for this area.

159 Having considered all the evidence received, we confirm the draft recommendation for warding Attleborough parish as final. We note that we propose modifications to the district ward boundary in Queen's ward, however, it does not have any effect on the proposed parish ward boundaries in Attleborough parish.

Final Recommendation

Attleborough Town Council should comprise 15 councillors, as at present, representing two wards: Burgh & Haverscroft (returning six councillors) and Queen's (returning nine councillors). The parish ward boundaries should reflect the proposed district ward boundaries in the area, as illustrated and named on the large map at the back of the report.

160 Dereham Town Council is currently served by 12 councillors representing four parish wards: East Dereham-Neatherd, East Dereham-St Withburga, East Dereham-Toftwood and East Dereham-Town, returning three, two, four and three councillors respectively. In the draft recommendations the LGCE proposed modifying the boundaries of all four district wards in the town. In order to reflect the revised district warding arrangements the LGCE proposed that the boundaries of East Dereham-Neatherd, East Dereham-St Withburga, East Dereham-Toftwood and East Dereham-Town parish wards be amended accordingly to be coterminous with the district wards of the same name. The LGCE proposed removing the prefix 'East' from the parish ward names to reflect the proposed district ward names. It also proposed renaming Dereham-Town parish ward as Dereham-Central parish ward to further reflect the proposed district ward names. The proposed Dereham-Central, Dereham-Neatherd, Dereham-St Withburga and Dereham-Toftwood parish wards would be represented by three, three, two and four parish councillors respectively. The LGCE welcomed the Town Council's views on these recommendations at Stage Three.

161 In response to the LGCE's consultation report, Councillor Sheath and a local resident proposed that the area of Toftwood be given its own parish council to reflect the needs and interests of the residents. However, as outlined earlier, we are unable to address this issue as part of this review.

162 In response to the further consultation that was undertaken, as detailed earlier, Dereham Town Council expressed support for our proposals but proposed a minor boundary amendment in order that the location of the polling station for Dereham-St Withburga ward remain in that ward. It also proposed that Dereham-St Withburga ward be renamed Dereham-Humbletoft ward. Councillor Sheath reiterated his Stage Three proposals concerning the area of Toftwood.

163 Having carefully considered the representations received in relation to this area, we confirm the draft recommendations as final, subject to two amendments. As detailed earlier, we propose that Dereham-St Withburga district ward be renamed Dereham-Humbletoft district ward. We also propose including the area to the south of Swaffham Road in Dereham-Central district ward and not Dereham-St Withburga district ward. Therefore, in order to reflect the revised district warding arrangements we propose that the boundaries of Dereham-Central and Dereham-St Withburga parish wards are amended accordingly. We also propose that Dereham-St Withburga parish ward be renamed Dereham-Humbletoft parish ward to reflect the proposed district ward name.

Final Recommendation

Dereham Town Council should comprise 12 parish councillors, as at present, representing four wards: Dereham-Central (returning three councillors), Dereham-Neatherd (returning three councillors), Dereham-Humbletoft (returning two councillors) and Dereham-Toftwood (returning four councillors). The parish boundaries should reflect the proposed district ward boundaries, as illustrated and named on the large map at the back of the report.

164 Thetford Town Council is currently served by 16 councillors representing four parish wards: Thetford-Abbey, Thetford-Barnham Cross, Thetford-Guildhall and Thetford-Saxon, returning four, three, six and three councillors respectively. In the draft recommendations the LGCE proposed modifying the boundaries of all four district wards in the town. Therefore, in order to reflect the revised district warding arrangements the LGCE proposed that the boundaries of Thetford-Abbey, Thetford-Barnham Cross, Thetford-Guildhall and Thetford-Saxon parish wards were amended accordingly to be coterminous with the district wards of the same names. It also proposed that the revised parish ward names reflect the proposed district ward names. The revised Thetford-Abbey, Thetford-Guildhall and Thetford-Saxon parish wards would be represented by four, five and five councillors respectively. The new Thetford-Castle parish ward would be represented by two councillors. The LGCE welcomed the Town Council's views on its proposals at Stage Three.

165 In response to the LGCE's consultation report, we received three submissions. Thetford Town Council expressed support for the District Council's proposals submitted at Stage One and supported the new ward name of 'Castle'. County councillors Paine and Armes proposed boundary amendments to the four wards in Thetford. District Councillor Ramm proposed including two areas of urban overspill from Brettenham and Croxton parishes in Castle and Abbey wards respectively. He also expressed support for the District Council's proposals for Thetford.

166 Having considered all the evidence received, and in light of the confirmation of our proposed district wards in the area, we confirm the draft recommendations for warding the parish of Thetford as final.

Final Recommendation

Thetford Town Council should comprise 16 councillors, as at present, representing four wards: Thetford-Abbey (returning four councillors), Thetford-Castle (returning two councillors), Thetford-Guildhall (returning five councillors) and Thetford-Saxon (returning five councillors). The parish ward boundaries should reflect the proposed district ward boundaries, as illustrated and named on the large map at the back of the report.

167 Besthorpe parish currently comprises seven councillors and is not warded. As part of the draft recommendations the LGCE proposed warding Besthorpe parish and creating two parish wards, Besthorpe Village and Besthorpe Rural parish wards. However, as a result of the amendments to the draft recommendations we no longer propose any change to Besthorpe parish's electoral arrangements and propose that the parish retain its existing electoral arrangements.

Map 2: Final Recommendations for Breckland

6 WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

168 Having completed the review of electoral arrangements in Breckland and submitted our final recommendations to The Electoral Commission, we have fulfilled our statutory obligation under the Local Government Act 1992 (as amended by SI 2001 No 3692).

169 It is now up to The Electoral Commission to decide whether to endorse our recommendations, with or without modification, and to implement them by means of an Order. Such an Order will not be made before 10 September 2002.

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

The Secretary
The Electoral Commission
Trevelyan House
Great Peter Street
London SW1P 2HW

APPENDIX A

Final Recommendations for Breckland: Detailed Mapping

The following maps illustrate our proposed ward boundaries for the Breckland 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 Map A2 and the large maps at the back of the report.

Map A2 illustrates the proposed boundary between Burgh & Haverscroft and Queen's wards in Attleborough.

The **large maps** inserted at the back of this report illustrate the proposed warding arrangements for Attleborough, Dereham and Thetford.

Map A1: Final Recommendations for Breckland: Key Map

Map A2: Proposed boundary between Burgh & Haverscroft and Queen's wards