

Final recommendations on the
future electoral arrangements
for Bedford in Bedfordshire

Report to the Secretary of State for
Transport, Local Government and the Regions

August 2001

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A large map illustrating the proposed ward boundaries for Bedford and Kempston is inserted inside the back cover of this report.

WHAT IS THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT COMMISSION FOR ENGLAND?

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

Members of the Commission are:

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

Barbara Stephens (Chief Executive)

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

This report sets out the Commission's final recommendations on the electoral arrangements for the borough of Bedford in Bedfordshire.

SUMMARY

We began a review of Bedford's electoral arrangements on 25 July 2000. We published our draft recommendations for electoral arrangements on 20 February 2001, after which we undertook a nine-week period of consultation.

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

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

- **in 11 of the 27 wards the number of electors represented by each councillor varies by more than 10 per cent from the average for the borough and six wards vary by more than 20 per cent;**
- **by 2005 this situation is expected to deteriorate, with the number of electors per councillor forecast to vary by more than 10 per cent from the average in 18 wards and by more than 20 per cent in 10 wards.**

Our main final recommendations for future electoral arrangements (see Tables 1 and 2 and paragraphs (170–171) are that:

- **Bedford Borough Council should have 54 councillors, one more than at present;**
- **there should be 26 wards, one fewer than at present;**
- **the boundaries of 21 of the existing wards should be modified and six wards should retain their existing boundaries;**
- **elections should continue to take place by thirds.**

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

- **In 20 of the proposed 26 wards the number of electors per councillor would vary by no more than 10 per cent from the borough average.**
- **This level of electoral equality is expected to improve further, with the number of electors per councillor in 23 wards expected to vary by no more than 10 per cent from the borough average by 2005.**

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 town of Kempston and the parishes of Eastcotts, Kempston Rural and Renhold;**

an increase in the number of councillors serving Bromham and Elstow parish councils.

All further correspondence on these final recommendations and the matters discussed in this report should be addressed to the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, who will not make an Order implementing them before 18 September 2001:

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

Table 1: Final Recommendations: Summary

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Constituent areas	Map reference
1	Brickhill (in Bedford)	3	Brickhill ward; De Parys ward (part); Putnoe ward (part)	Large map and Map 2
2	Bromham	3	<i>Unchanged</i> (Biddenham and Bromham parishes)	Large map and Map 2
3	Carlton	1	Carlton ward (Carlton & Chellington, Pavenham and Stevington parishes); Felmersham ward (part – Felmersham parish)	Map 2
4	Castle (in Bedford)	3	Castle ward (part); Queen’s Park ward (part)	Large map and Map 2
5	Cauldwell (in Bedford)	3	Cauldwell ward (part); Kempston East ward (part – East ward of Kempston Town (part))	Large map
6	Clapham	2	Clapham ward (Clapham parish); Felmersham ward (part – Bletsoe, Milton Ernest and Thurleigh parishes)	Map 2
7	De Parys (in Bedford)	2	Newnham ward (part); De Parys ward (part)	Large map and Map 2
8	Eastcotts	1	Eastcotts ward (part – Cardington parish and Rural ward of Eastcotts parish as proposed)	Large map and Map 2
9	Goldington (in Bedford)	3	Goldington ward (part); De Parys ward (part), Newnham ward (part); Putnoe ward (part); Renhold ward (part – South West ward of Renhold parish as proposed)	Large map and Map 2
10	Great Barford	2	Eastcotts ward (part – Cople parish); Great Barford ward (Great Barford and Willington parishes); Renhold ward (part – Ravensden parish and Renhold North ward of Renhold parish as proposed)	Map 2
11	Harpur (in Bedford)	3	Castle ward (part); De Parys ward (part); Harpur ward	Large map and Map 2
12	Harrold	1	<i>Unchanged</i> (Harrold, Odell, Podington and Wymington parishes)	Map 2
13	Kempston East	2	Cauldwell ward (part); Kempston East ward (part – East ward of Kempston Town (part)); Kempston West ward (part – West ward of Kempston Town (part))	Large map and Map 2
14	Kempston North	2	Cauldwell ward (part); Kempston West ward (part – West ward of Kempston Town (part))	Large map and Map 2
15	Kempston South	3	Kempston East ward (part – East ward of Kempston Town (part)); Kempston West ward (part – West ward of Kempston Town (part)); Kempston Rural ward (part – Hardwick ward of Kempston Rural parish as proposed)	Large map and Map 2
16	Kingsbrook (in Bedford)	3	Cauldwell ward (part); Eastcotts ward (part – Urban ward of Eastcotts parish as proposed); Kingsbrook ward (part)	Large map and Map 2
17	Newnham (in Bedford)	2	Castle ward (part); Goldington ward (part); Newnham ward (part)	Large map and Map 2

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Constituent areas	Map reference
18	Oakley	1	<i>Unchanged</i> (Oakley parish)	Map 2
19	Putnoe (in Bedford)	3	Goldington ward (part); De Parys ward (part); Putnoe ward (part)	Large map and Map 2
20	Queen's Park (in Bedford)	2	Queen's Park ward (part)	Large map and Map 2
21	Riseley	1	<i>Unchanged</i> (Bolnhurst & Keysoe, Dean & Shelton, Pertenhall, Riseley and Swineshead parishes)	Map 2
22	Roxton	1	Renhold ward (part – Wilden parish); Roxton ward (Colmworth, Little Barford, Little Staughton, Roxton and Staploe parishes)	Map 2
23	Sharnbrook	1	<i>Unchanged</i> (Knotting & Souldrop, Melchbourn & Yielden and Sharnbrook parishes)	Map 2
24	Turvey	1	Kempston Rural ward (part – Rural ward of Kempston Rural parish as proposed, Stagsden and Turvey parishes)	Large map and Map 2
25	Wilshamstead	2	Cauldwell ward (part); Wilshamstead ward (Elstow and Wilshamstead parishes)	Large map and Map 2
26	Wootton	3	<i>Unchanged</i> (Stewartby and Wootton parishes)	Map 2

Notes: 1 Bedford Town is the only unparished part of the borough and comprises the 10 wards indicated above.

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

Table 2: Final Recommendations for Bedford

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2000)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2005)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
1	Brickhill (in Bedford)	3	6,731	2,244	12	6,352	2,117	1
2	Bromham	3	5,531	1,844	-8	7,005	2,335	11
3	Carlton	1	2,365	2,365	18	2,252	2,252	7
4	Castle (in Bedford)	3	6,152	2,051	2	5,956	1,985	-5
5	Cauldwell (in Bedford)	3	5,497	1,832	-9	6,305	2,102	0
6	Clapham	2	4,121	2,061	3	4,460	2,230	6
7	De Parys (in Bedford)	2	4,132	2,066	3	4,415	2,208	5
8	Eastcotts	1	1,886	1,886	-6	2,209	2,209	5
9	Goldington (in Bedford)	3	6,217	2,072	3	6,110	2,037	-3
10	Great Barford	2	4,139	2,070	3	4,211	2,106	0
11	Harpur (in Bedford)	3	6,281	2,094	4	6,133	2,044	-3
12	Harrold	1	2,129	2,129	6	2,157	2,157	3
13	Kempston East	2	4,325	2,163	8	4,190	2,095	0
14	Kempston North	2	4,072	2,036	1	3,756	1,878	-11
15	Kempston South	3	5,526	1,842	-8	6,243	2,081	-1
16	Kingsbrook (in Bedford)	3	6,274	2,091	4	6,404	2,135	2
17	Newnham (in Bedford)	2	3,959	1,980	-1	3,886	1,943	-8
18	Oakley	1	1,858	1,858	-8	1,801	1,801	-14
19	Putnoe (in Bedford)	3	6,657	2,219	10	6,286	2,095	0
20	Queen's Park (in Bedford)	2	4,721	2,361	18	4,604	2,302	10
21	Riseley	1	2,185	2,185	9	2,105	2,105	0
22	Roxton	1	2,278	2,278	13	2,184	2,184	4
23	Sharnbrook	1	2,111	2,111	5	2,169	2,169	3
24	Turvey	1	2,167	2,167	8	2,170	2,170	3

Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2000)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2005)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
25 Wilshamstead	2	3,143	1,572	-22	4,340	2,170	3
26 Wootton	3	4,016	1,339	-33	5,737	1,912	-9
Totals	54	108,473	–	–	113,440	–	–
Averages	–	–	2,009	–	–	2,101	–

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

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

1 INTRODUCTION

1 This report contains our final recommendations on the electoral arrangements for the borough of Bedford in Bedfordshire. We have now reviewed the three two-tier districts in Bedfordshire as part of our programme of periodic electoral reviews (PERs) of all 386 principal local authority areas in England. Our programme started in 1996 and is currently expected to finish in 2004.

2 This was our first review of the electoral arrangements of Bedford. Bedford's last review was undertaken by our predecessor, the Local Government Boundary Commission (LGBC), which reported to the Secretary of State in June 1979 (Report no. 342), at which time the area was known as North Bedfordshire. The electoral arrangements of Bedfordshire County Council were last reviewed in January 1984 (Report no. 462). We commenced a periodic electoral review of Luton in September 2000, and expect to commence a review of the County Council's electoral arrangements in 2002.

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

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

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

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

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

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

8 We are not prescriptive on council size. We start from the assumption that the size of the existing council already secures effective and convenient local government, but we are willing to look carefully at arguments why this might not be so. However, we have found it necessary to safeguard against upward drift in the number of councillors, and we believe that any proposal for an increase in council size will need to be fully justified. In particular, we do not accept that an increase in electorate should automatically result in an increase in the number of councillors, nor that changes should be

made to the size of a council simply to make it more consistent with the size of other similar councils.

9 In July 1998, the Government published a White Paper called *Modern Local Government – In Touch with the People*, which set out legislative proposals for local authority electoral arrangements. In two-tier areas, it proposed introducing a pattern in which both the district and county councils would hold elections every two years, i.e. in year one, half of the district council would be elected, in year two, half the county council would be elected, and so on. The Government stated that local accountability would be maximised where every elector has an opportunity to vote every year, thereby pointing to a pattern of two-member wards (and divisions) in two-tier areas. However, it stated that there was no intention to move towards very large electoral areas in sparsely populated rural areas, and that single-member wards (and electoral divisions) would continue in many authorities. The proposals were taken forward in the Local Government Act 2000 which, among other matters, provides that the Secretary of State may make Orders to change authorities' electoral cycles. However, until such time as the Secretary of State makes any Orders under the 2000 Act, we will continue to operate on the basis of existing legislation, which provides for elections by thirds or whole-council elections in the two-tier district areas, and our current *Guidance*.

10 This review was in four stages. Stage One began on 25 July 2000, when we wrote to Bedford Borough Council inviting proposals for future electoral arrangements. We also notified Bedfordshire County Council, Bedfordshire Police, the local authority associations, Bedfordshire Association of Parish & Town Councils, parish and town councils in the borough, the Members of Parliament with constituencies in the borough, the Members of the European Parliament for the Eastern region, and the headquarters of the main political parties. We placed a notice in the local press, issued a press release and invited the Borough Council to publicise the review further. The closing date for receipt of representations, the end of Stage One, was 16 October 2000. At Stage Two we considered all the representations received during Stage One and prepared our draft recommendations.

11 Stage Three began on 20 February 2001 with the publication of our report, *Draft recommendations on the future electoral arrangements for Bedford in Bedfordshire*, and ended on 23 April 2001. During this period we sought comments from the public and any other interested parties on our preliminary conclusions. Finally, during Stage Four we reconsidered our draft recommendations in the light of the Stage Three consultation and now publish our final recommendations.

2 CURRENT ELECTORAL ARRANGEMENTS

12 The borough of Bedford lies in the north of Bedfordshire bordering the counties of Northamptonshire and Cambridgeshire in the north, and the district of Mid Bedfordshire and borough of Milton Keynes in the south and south-west. The borough has excellent links with Britain's two main north to south arteries, the M1 and the A1, and also contains the River Great Ouse which runs through the borough. The main urban settlements are Bedford and Kempston, with Kempston in particular being subject to significant development in recent years.

13 The borough contains 43 parishes, ranging in size from an electorate of 13,967 in Kempston Town Council to 28 electors in Little Barford parish, which together comprise approximately 35 per cent of the borough's total electorate.

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

15 The electorate of the borough is 108,473 (February 2000). The Council currently has 53 members who are elected from 27 wards. The relatively urban Bedford town and Kempston area contains 12 wards and is currently represented by 35 councillors, while the remaining, predominantly rural area is currently represented by 18 councillors. Eleven of the wards are each represented by three councillors, four are represented by two councillors and there are 12 single-member wards. The Council is elected by thirds.

16 Since the last electoral review there has been an increase in the electorate in Bedford borough, with around 24 per cent more electors than two decades ago as a result of new housing developments.

17 At present, each councillor represents an average of 2,047 electors, which the Borough Council forecasts will increase to 2,140 by the year 2005 if the present number of councillors is maintained. However, due to demographic and other changes over the past two decades, the number of electors per councillor in 11 of the 27 wards varies by more than 10 per cent from the borough average and in six wards by more than 20 per cent. The worst imbalance is in Wilshamstead ward where the councillor represents 52 per cent more electors per councillor than the borough average.

Map 1: Existing Wards in Bedford

Table 3: Existing Electoral Arrangements

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2000)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2005)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
1	Brickhill (in Bedford)	3	5,787	1,929	-6	5,453	1,818	-15
2	Bromham	2	5,531	2,766	35	7,005	3,503	64
3	Carlton	1	1,767	1,767	-14	1,679	1,679	-22
4	Castle (in Bedford)	3	4,651	1,550	-24	4,490	1,497	-30
5	Cauldwell (in Bedford)	3	6,353	2,118	3	7,427	2,476	16
6	Clapham	2	2,803	1,402	-32	3,173	1,587	-26
7	De Parys (in Bedford)	3	5,830	1,943	-5	5,616	1,872	-13
8	Eastcotts	1	2,967	2,967	45	3,279	3,279	53
9	Felmersham	1	1,916	1,916	-6	1,860	1,860	-13
10	Goldington (in Bedford)	3	5,312	1,771	-13	5,383	1,794	-16
11	Great Barford	1	2,011	2,011	-2	2,006	2,006	-6
12	Harpur (in Bedford)	3	6,054	2,018	-1	5,919	1,973	-8
13	Harrold	1	2,129	2,129	4	2,157	2,157	1
14	Kempston East	3	7,369	2,456	20	7,032	2,344	10
15	Kempston Rural	1	2,219	2,219	8	2,622	2,622	23
16	Kempston West	3	6,598	2,199	7	6,781	2,260	6
17	Kingsbrook (in Bedford)	3	4,901	1,634	-20	4,783	1,594	-26
18	Newnham (in Bedford)	2	5,209	2,605	27	5,077	2,539	19
19	Oakley	1	1,858	1,858	-9	1,801	1,801	-16
20	Putnoe (in Bedford)	3	5,413	1,804	-12	5,091	1,697	-21
21	Queen's Park (in Bedford)	3	6,455	2,152	5	6,291	2,097	-2
22	Renhold	1	1,976	1,976	-3	2,333	2,333	9
23	Riseley	1	2,185	2,185	7	2,098	2,098	-2
24	Roxton	1	1,944	1,944	-5	1,861	1,861	-13

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2000)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2005)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
25	Sharnbrook	1	2,111	2,111	3	2,180	2,180	2
26	Wilshamstead	1	3,108	3,108	52	4,306	4,306	101
27	Wootton	2	4,016	2,008	-2	5,737	2,869	34
	Totals	53	108,473	-	-	113,440	-	-
	Averages	-	-	2,047	-	-	2,140	-

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

Note: The 'variance from average' column shows by how far, in percentage terms, the number of electors per councillor varies from the average for the borough. The minus symbol (-) denotes a lower than average number of electors. For example, in 2000, electors in Clapham ward were relatively over-represented by 32 per cent, while electors in Wilshamstead ward were relatively under-represented by 52 per cent. Figures have been rounded to the nearest whole number.

3 DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS

18 During Stage One we received 25 representations, including a borough-wide scheme from Bedford Borough Council, and representations from Bedford & Kempston Conservative Association, De Parys Liberal Democrats, North East Bedfordshire Conservative Association, 12 parish and town councils, one borough councillor, six local residents and Rutland Road Church. In the light of these representations and evidence available to us, we reached preliminary conclusions which were set out in our report, *Draft recommendations on the future electoral arrangements for Bedford in Bedfordshire*.

19 Our draft recommendations were based on the Borough Council's proposals, which achieved an improvement in electoral equality, and provided a mixed pattern of one, two and three-member wards. However, we moved away from the Borough Council's scheme in a number of areas, using options generated by the Conservatives, together with some of our own proposals. We proposed that:

- Bedford Borough Council should be served by 54 councillors, compared with the current 53, representing 26 wards, one fewer than at present;
- the boundaries of 21 of the existing wards should be modified, while six wards should retain their existing boundaries;
- there should be revised warding arrangements and the redistribution of councillors for the town of Kempston and the parishes of Eastcotts, Kempston Rural and Renhold, together with an increase in the number of councillors serving Elstow Parish Council.

Draft Recommendation

Bedford Borough Council should comprise 54 councillors, serving 26 wards. The Council should continue to hold elections by thirds.

20 Our proposals would have resulted in significant improvements in electoral equality, with the number of electors per councillor in 20 of the 26 wards varying by no more than 10 per cent from the borough average. This level of electoral equality was forecast to improve further, with only Bromham, Kempston North and Oakley wards varying by more than 10 per cent from the average by 2005.

4 RESPONSES TO CONSULTATION

21 During the consultation on our draft recommendations report, we received 36 representations. A list of all respondents is available from us on request. All representations may be inspected at our offices and those of Bedford Borough Council.

Bedford Borough Council

22 Bedford Borough Council broadly supported our draft recommendations including the issues of council size and electoral cycle. However, it proposed a number of minor modifications. It reiterated its Stage One proposal in relation to the Wilshamstead and Elstow area. It argued that two separate single-member wards should be created based on the separate parishes. It also proposed that Cardington parish be transferred from Eastcotts ward to Great Barford ward, in accordance with the Parish Council's wishes.

23 In the Bedford town area, the Borough Council reiterated its Stage One proposals for Brickhill, De Parys and Putnoe wards. It proposed that the Nursery Gardens and Kimbolton Close area should form part of Putnoe ward, and that Ellis Road and part of Kimbolton Road should form part of De Parys ward. It argued that the electorate from the roads affected had been consulted on our draft recommendations and that the majority view was that the Council's proposals should be adopted in this area. The Borough Council expressed concern over our proposed warding of Kempston Rural parish. It reiterated its Stage One proposal, arguing that the southern boundary of the proposed Kempston South ward should follow the proposed line of the Kempston By Pass. Argumentation was provided as to why the transfer of the Kempston Hardwick area was so strongly opposed. Finally, the Borough Council proposed amending our town ward names within Kempston Town Council together with an alternative distribution of town councillors.

Bedfordshire County Council

24 We received submissions from Bedfordshire County Council and County Councillor Gwynne Jones (Bromham Division). Both submissions referred to the consequential effect that our draft recommendations would have on the forthcoming review of Bedfordshire County Council. However, County Councillor Gwynne Jones also expressed support for our draft recommendations, specifically in relation to the proposed Bromham and Oakley wards, council size and the allocation of councillors between the urban and rural parts of the borough.

Bedford & Kempston Conservative Association

25 Bedford & Kempston Conservative Association ('the Conservatives') commented on our draft recommendations in relation to the urban areas of Bedford and Kempston. It strongly opposed our proposed wards in the town centre area of Bedford and reiterated its Stage One proposals, stating that there is a need for two wards for the central Bedford area. They expressed support for our proposed Brickhill, De Parys and Putnoe wards and questioned the consultation exercise carried out by the Borough Council, arguing that, "This poll seems to have been a political device to change argued ideas and your recommended plans."

Political Organisations

26 Putnoe Liberal Democrats broadly supported our draft recommendations for Putnoe ward, stating that “within the constraints of the review, they accurately reflect the community of Putnoe using distinguishable boundaries formed by the bigger roads in the area”. However, they proposed that Nursery Gardens and Kimbolton Close be transferred from the neighbouring Brickhill ward, arguing that although they acknowledge our arguments for this proposal, Nursery Gardens and Willmers Close form “a pair of roads” which they believe should be united, together with Kimbolton Close, in a revised Putnoe ward.

27 Castle & Newnham Labour Party expressed support for our proposed Castle and Newnham wards, stating that the proposals are both “sensible and desirable”.

Parish Councils

28 We received representations from 14 parish and town councils together with a joint submission from Wilden and Cardington parish councils and a parish councillor. Biddenham Parish Council expressed support for our proposed Bromham ward, while Bletsoe Parish Council strongly opposed our proposed Clapham ward, arguing that “Bletsoe is a very small and scattered rural parish” and that, consequently, its concerns are quite different from those of a “large and rapidly growing conurbation such as Clapham”. In addition, it requested that it be associated with parishes such as Felmersham or Sharnbrook, “with which we have a long standing and proven relationship”.

29 Bromham Parish Council opposed our proposed Bromham ward. It argued that Bromham is completely separate from any other parish geographically and also from Biddenham. It therefore proposed that Bromham form a separate elected ward with two councillors. In addition, it requested an increase in the number of parish councillors from 13 to 14. Cople Parish Council strongly opposed our proposed Great Barford ward, while Eastcotts Parish Council expressed support for our proposed Eastcotts ward. However, it conveyed concern over the warding of the parish and the increase in parish councillors. It proposed alternative parish ward names and requested that its existing council size be retained. Elstow Parish Council opposed our proposed two-member Wilshamstead ward, arguing that the communities of Elstow and Wilstead are very separate and, as such, should form separate single-member wards. However, it did support our proposal to include the unparished Hillesden Avenue area within a revised Wilshamstead ward, and our proposal to increase the level of representation within the parish from seven to nine councillors.

30 Great Barford Parish Council opposed our proposed Great Barford ward, arguing that the area is “geographically too large for two councillors to service effectively, which will ultimately result in less rural representation”. Kempston Town Council reiterated the objections expressed by the Borough Council, detailed above, in relation to the proposed warding of Kempston Rural Parish Council and the allocation of parish councillors and names of proposed town wards within its town council area. Oakley Parish Council strongly supported our proposed retention of the existing Oakley ward, while Renhold Parish Council opposed our proposed Great Barford ward, which it argued encompasses a wide geographical area. It also opposed our proposed increase of parish councillors from nine to 13. Stevington Parish Council strongly supported our proposed Carlton ward, a view which was also expressed by Parish Councillor Pendlington (Stevington). Thurleigh Parish Council opposed our proposed Clapham ward, arguing that Clapham, which is largely urban in nature, would have nothing in common with the neighbouring rural areas. It stated a preference for the existing arrangements in this area to be retained. In a joint submission from Wilden and Cardington parish councils, opposition was expressed over our proposed two-member Great Barford ward; it was suggested that the ward be divided into two single-member wards, although no specific boundary was put forward.

31 Willington Parish Council opposed our proposed Great Barford ward, stating that the proposed ward would be quite unacceptable. It commented that “with two councillors and a much-enlarged ward, there would be a conflict of ideas”. Wilshamstead Parish Council opposed our proposed two-member Wilshamstead ward. It argued that the two parishes to be combined under this proposal have “no common links” and, as such, should be separated into two single-member wards as originally proposed by the Borough Council.

Other Representations

32 We received a further 14 representations from a Borough Councillor, Castle Residents’ Association and 12 local residents. Borough Councillor Davey (Castle ward) opposed our proposed Castle ward and expressed support for the alternative option put forward by Bedford & Kempston Conservative Association. Castle Residents’ Association also opposed our proposed Castle ward, arguing that Goldington Road is not “divisive” and that the proposed ward would be “unmanageably long”. They argued that the area of De Parys ward bounded by Polhill Avenue and Kimbolton Road is an “obvious addition to Castle ward” (as in the Conservatives’ submission). Six submissions were received from local residents expressing strong support for our proposed Carlton ward, with particular reference to Stevington parish. Two residents opposed our proposed two-member Wilshamstead ward and proposed that the parishes of Elstow and Wilshamstead form separate single-member wards. However, support was expressed for our proposed increase of representation for Elstow parish from seven to nine. Three submissions from local residents expressed concern at our proposed Great Barford ward, with specific concern expressed in relation to the size of the new ward and the linking of Renhold parish with Cople and Willington parishes.

33 A local resident expressed support for our proposed Cauldwell and Kingsbrook wards, with specific reference to the transfer of the areas surrounding Kathie Road to the proposed Kingsbrook ward. However, she opposed our proposed Goldington ward, arguing that it does not cover the area which is traditionally referred to as Goldington. She proposed that the ward be extended southwards to incorporate the Riverfield Drive Estate, Goldington Green Lower School, Bury Walk, as well as Goldington Green (road).

5 ANALYSIS AND FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS

34 As described earlier, our prime objective in considering the most appropriate electoral arrangements for Bedford 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 – the need to secure effective and convenient local government, and reflect the identities and interests of local communities – and Schedule 11 to the Local Government Act 1972, which refers to the number of electors per councillor being “as nearly as may be, the same in every ward of the district or borough”.

35 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.

36 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.

37 Our *Guidance* states that 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

38 At Stage One, the Borough Council submitted electorate forecasts for the year 2005, projecting an increase in the electorate of some 5 per cent from 108,473 to 113,440 over the five-year period from 2000 to 2005. It expected most of the growth to be in Wootton ward, although a significant amount was also expected in Bromham, Cauldwell and Wilshamstead wards. 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. During Stage One, the Council informed us of several significant errors which had occurred during the formulation of their proposals, resulting in modifications to the electorate totals for a number of proposed wards. This meant that the alternative proposals formulated by the Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats were based upon inaccurate information, leading to anomalies between the different sets of figures. A letter was sent by the Borough Council to the relevant political groups outlining this issue.

39 De Parys Liberal Democrats expressed concern at the Borough Council’s projected decrease of approximately 4 per cent in electorate in the urban area of the borough, arguing that, “this seems an unlikely scenario”. Oakley Parish Council argued that, given “the relatively youthful age structure of the village and housing land allocated within the village in the borough local plan”, it did not accept that the electorate of the parish would decrease over the five-year period from 2000 to 2005. The Parish Council anticipated that the electorate would in fact increase from 1852 to around 1940, and argued that the existing single-member Oakley ward could therefore be retained. The Borough Council addressed

the issues raised by Oakley Parish Council in their Stage One submission, confirming that the Working Group were satisfied with their original projected electorate figures. The Council stated that, “In particular, the Working Group noted that in general, throughout the borough, there was a forecast of reducing population/electorate owing to an increasing propensity for dwellings to be occupied by one person.”

40 Having given consideration to the Borough Council’s figures and the representations received at Stage One, we were content that the Council’s figures represented the best estimates that can reasonably be made at this time.

41 At Stage Three, Bromham Parish Council queried the 2005 electorate figure for Bromham parish, stating that it is still awaiting the result of the Local Plan Inquiry. It anticipated that there would be an additional 245 houses in Bromham; however, no electorate figures are available at this time.

42 Having examined the representations received at Stage Three, we note the views expressed by Bromham Parish Council; however, we do not feel that strong enough evidence has been provided to challenge the Council’s projected electorate figure in this area. We therefore remain satisfied that the Borough Council’s figures represent the best estimates that can be made at this time.

Council Size

43 As already explained, we start by assuming that the current council size facilitates effective and convenient local government, although we are willing to look carefully at arguments why this might not be the case.

44 Bedford Borough Council at present has 53 members. At Stage One, the Borough Council proposed a council of 54 members which provided for the allocation of 34 members in the urban area of Bedford town and Kempston and 20 in the remaining rural area. The Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats proposed retaining the existing council size of 53 members, with an allocation of 33 members for the urban area and 20 in the rural area. The Liberal Democrats argued that notwithstanding the introduction of new political management structures in Bedford, any reduction in council size would be impractical given the demanding workload that councillors have to undertake.

45 Bedfordshire County Councillor Gwynne Jones (Bromham Division) proposed a council size of 54, arguing that it would provide for a more appropriate balance between the rural and urban areas of the borough. A local resident strongly opposed the Council’s proposal to increase council size from 53 and proposed a significant reduction in council size to between 37 and 41. He argued that since the last review of the electoral arrangements in Bedford, a number of significant changes have taken place in the borough which have reduced the need for so many councillors on the Borough Council. In particular, he noted that the Council no longer administers its own housing stock and that urban community councils have provided a further tier of representation in Bedford town itself.

46 While council size is the starting point of any review, we concluded that the Borough Council’s proposals, which were based on a council size of 54, provided for better electoral equality than proposals based on a council size of 53. We also noted that the Council’s proposal for a council size of 54 provided for an appropriate allocation of councillors between the urban and rural areas of the borough. While we noted the concerns expressed by one resident, we were not persuaded by the evidence provided that such a significant decrease in council size provided for more convenient and effective local government than the current council size or any of the borough-wide schemes proposed. Moreover, we received no significant evidence as to the benefits which would accrue from a smaller

council size, and were not minded to put forward such a radical change that had not been subject to consultation and which had not achieved an element of cross-party support.

47 Having considered the size and distribution of the electorate, the geography and other characteristics of the area, together with the representations received, we concluded that the achievement of electoral equality and the statutory criteria would best be met by a council of 54 members.

48 At Stage Three, the Borough Council expressed support for our proposed council size, as did County Councillor Gwynne Jones who also supported our allocation of councillors between the urban and rural parts of the borough. The Conservatives reiterated their Stage One proposal for a council size of 53.

49 Having considered the representations received at Stage Three, we have decided to confirm our draft recommendation for a council size of 54 as final. We note that our proposed council size has received a degree of support, and as stated in our draft recommendations report, we consider that a council size of 54 would result in improved levels of electoral equality, while providing the correct allocation of councillors between the urban and rural parts of the borough.

Parish Administrative Boundaries

50 During the course of this review, a number of parish boundary anomalies have been identified. However, we have no power to recommend changes to parish administrative boundaries as part of this PER. Under the provisions of the Local Government and Rating Act 1997, borough councils may undertake reviews of the parish arrangements in their areas and make recommendations to the Secretary of State. Now that we have completed our PER of Bedford Borough Council, we believe that there would be considerable benefit in Bedford Borough Council conducting such a review.

51 At Stage Three, we also received a number of representations from parish councils opposing our proposed warding of their parish but who supported part of their parish being included in a different borough ward. It is open to us to propose that whole parishes, or parish wards, should be located in a different borough ward from their present ward. However, we can only propose dividing a parish between different borough wards if we divide that parish into parish wards. Therefore, in the case of Bedford Borough Council, a number of urban overspill areas currently located in rural parishes are proposed to form part of wards which also include the urban area of Bedford town. In order to facilitate this, which has achieved support from both Borough Council and Parish Council level, parish wards have had to be created. This issue is discussed in more detail in our *Guidance*.

Electoral Arrangements

52 In view of the degree of consensus behind large elements of the Borough Council's proposals, and the consultation exercise which it undertook with interested parties, we were content to base our draft recommendations on the Borough Council's scheme. We considered that the Council's scheme provided a better balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria than the current arrangements or other schemes submitted at Stage One. However, to improve electoral equality further and having regard to local community identities and interests, we decided to move away from the Borough Council's proposals in a number of areas, based on proposals made by the Conservatives, together with some of our own proposals.

53 In response to our draft recommendations, we received broad support for our proposals, specifically in relation to the western part of the borough. A number of respondents expressed

opposition in relation to our proposed Great Barford ward, a view which had also been conveyed at Stage One. In relation to our proposals for the urban areas of Bedford and Kempston, broad support was also received. However, the Conservatives opposed our draft recommendations in the central part of the town, broadly reiterating their Stage One proposals, while the Liberal Democrats opposed part of our proposals for the northern part of the town.

54 At Stage Three, the Borough Council broadly supported our draft recommendations however; it commented on our proposals for a number of wards, proposing alternative borough and town warding arrangements in some areas.

55 We have reviewed our draft recommendations in the light of further evidence and the representations received during Stage Three. For borough warding purposes, the following areas, based on existing wards, are considered in turn:

The rural area

- (1) Bromham, Kempston Rural and Wootton wards;
- (2) Carlton, Clapham, Felmersham and Oakley wards;
- (3) Harrold, Riseley and Sharnbrook wards;
- (4) Great Barford, Renhold and Roxton wards;
- (5) Eastcotts and Wilshamstead wards;

The urban area

- (6) Brickhill, De Parys and Putnoe wards;
- (7) Castle, Harpur and Queen's Park wards;
- (8) Goldington and Newnham wards;
- (9) Cauldwell and Kingsbrook wards;
- (10) Kempston East and Kempston West wards.

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

The Rural Area

Bromham, Kempston Rural and Wootton wards

57 The existing wards of Bromham, Kempston Rural and Wootton are situated in the south-western corner of the borough. Bromham ward is currently represented by two councillors and contains the parishes of Biddenham and Bromham. Kempston Rural ward is currently represented by a single councillor and contains the parishes of Kempston Rural, Stagsden and Turvey. Wootton ward is currently represented by two councillors and contains the parishes of Stewartby and Wootton. Under existing arrangements all three wards have high levels of electoral inequality, with Bromham and Kempston Rural wards having 35 per cent and 8 per cent more electors per councillor than the borough average respectively (64 per cent and 23 per cent more than the average by 2005). Wootton ward has 2 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the borough average at present, deteriorating to 34 per cent more than the average by 2005.

58 At Stage One, the Borough Council proposed combining Biddenham and Stagsden parishes with Kempston Rural parish, less the proposed development site, to form a new two-member Biddenham ward. The remaining part of Kempston Rural parish would be incorporated in the urban area of

Kempston, as detailed below. Turvey parish would be combined with Carlton & Chellington parish from the existing Carlton ward and Felmersham parish from the existing Felmersham ward to form a new single-member Turvey ward. Bromham parish would be combined with the neighbouring parish of Stevington from the existing Carlton ward to form a new two-member Bromham ward. The Council proposed that the boundaries of the existing Wootton ward should remain unchanged, while increasing its level of representation from two to three members in order to address the high level of under-representation which would occur in five years' time.

59 Under the Borough Council's proposals, Bromham and Turvey wards would have 1 per cent and 9 per cent more electors per councillor than the borough average (1 per cent fewer and 1 per cent more than the average respectively by 2005). Biddenham and Wootton wards would have 18 per cent fewer and 33 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the borough average respectively (11 per cent more and 9 per cent fewer than the average by 2005).

60 We received 13 further representations in relation to this area. Bedfordshire County Council noted that Councillor Gershon (Harrold Division) had expressed concerns in relation to the Council's proposals in the west of the borough, arguing that Felmersham parish should remain with its natural neighbouring parishes of Clapham, Bletsoe and Milton Ernest. Councillor Gershon also argued that Pavenham parish shares no affinity with Oakley, and that Stevington parish should remain with Carlton and Pavenham. Councillor Brandon (Carlton Ward), strongly opposed dividing the villages of Pavenham and Stevington between borough wards, arguing that "they have no relation to Oakley and Bromham whatsoever". Councillor Brandon put forward an alternative proposal for a revised Carlton ward, comprising the parishes of Carlton & Chellington, Felmersham, Pavenham and Stevington. Carlton & Chellington Parish Council objected to the inclusion of the parish in the proposed Turvey ward and argued that it would be more appropriate to expand the existing Carlton ward to incorporate Felmersham parish. Stevington Parish Council strongly opposed the Council's proposed Bromham ward, arguing that Bromham is completely different to Stevington, with the two areas having nothing in common. It requested that Stevington remain part of a rural ward, and proposed an alternative ward comprising Carlton & Chellington, Felmersham, Pavenham and Stevington parishes. Councillor Pendlington (Stevington Parish Council) also expressed opposition to the Council's proposed Bromham ward.

61 Pavenham Parish Council objected to the inclusion of the parish in the Council's proposed Oakley ward, arguing that the two villages are of a different nature and share few community ties. It stated that the considerable expansion of Oakley over the past few years had created a more urbanised village. It also proposed expanding the existing Carlton ward to include Felmersham parish, arguing that both Carlton & Chellington and Pavenham parishes have close links with Felmersham. In addition, opposition was also expressed to the proposed ward name of Oakley.

62 We also received representations from seven local residents opposing the Council's proposed Bromham ward. They argued that Stevington shares no community links with Bromham, which is considered to be "an expanding suburb of Bedford", and that Stevington has more in common with its neighbouring rural villages. Support was expressed for the retention of the existing warding arrangements in this area. Another local resident argued that Biddenham parish should be "aggregated with Bedford for electoral purposes rather than with parishes the other side of the bypass and river".

63 Having considered the representations received at Stage One, we put forward the Council's proposed three-member Wootton ward as part of our draft recommendations, which we considered provided for a suitable balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria. We were not, however, persuaded to put forward the Council's proposed Bromham ward. We noted the strong

opposition expressed in relation to the Council's proposals, and considered that this issue of local community ties should be addressed. We noted the views expressed by a number of respondents that Stevington has little affinity with the more urban neighbouring village of Bromham, and we considered that Felmersham parish has similar characteristics to the neighbouring parishes of Carlton & Chellington, Pavenham and Stevington. Based on these conclusions, we proposed retaining the existing Bromham ward, and combining Stevington parish with the neighbouring parishes of Carlton & Chellington, Felmersham and Pavenham in a revised single-member Carlton ward. Bromham ward would be represented by three councillors, one more than at present. While we recognised that Bromham ward would have a relatively high level of electoral inequality, we considered that our proposals provided for the most appropriate balance between electoral equality and community identities and interests in this area. We proposed creating a revised single-member Turvey ward, comprising the parishes of Kempston Rural (less the Kempston Hardwick area), Stagsden and Turvey, and retaining the existing Oakley ward, discussed in more detail below. We considered that these proposals provided for a better balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria than those put forward by the Borough Council.

64 Under our draft recommendations Carlton and Turvey wards would have 18 per cent and 8 per cent more electors per councillor than the borough average respectively (7 per cent and 3 per cent more than the average by 2005). Bromham and Wootton wards would have 8 per cent and 33 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the borough average respectively (11 per cent more and 9 per cent fewer than the average by 2005). The proposed warding arrangements for Kempston Rural parish are detailed later in the report.

65 At Stage Three, the Borough Council expressed support for our proposed Bromham, Carlton and Wootton wards. It broadly supported our proposed Turvey ward; however, it expressed concern at the proposed warding of Kempston Rural parish, which is discussed in more detail below. Biddenham Parish Council expressed support for our proposed Bromham ward, while Bromham Parish Council opposed our proposed Bromham ward, arguing that Bromham is completely separate from any other parish geographically and also from Biddenham. It therefore proposed that Bromham form a separate ward with two councillors. Stevington Parish Council strongly supported our proposed Carlton ward, a view which was also expressed by Parish Councillor Pendlington (Stevington). Six submissions were received from local residents, all expressing strong support for our proposed Carlton ward, with particular reference to Stevington parish. Finally, County Councillor Gwynne Jones expressed support for our proposed Bromham ward.

66 Having carefully considered the representations received at Stage Three, we note that our proposals have received a significant level of support and therefore propose confirming our draft recommendations for this area as final. We note the views expressed by Bromham Parish Council in relation to their preference for becoming a separate two-member ward. However, under this proposal, a two-member Bromham ward would contain 12 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the borough average by 2005, and a single-member Biddenham ward would contain 58 per cent more electors per councillor by 2005. We consider that these levels of electoral equality are unacceptable and have not been persuaded by the evidence provided that Bromham and Biddenham parishes should not be combined to form a single borough ward. Issues arising from the consequential warding of Kempston Rural Parish Council will be discussed in more detail later.

67 Under our final recommendations, the number of electors per councillor in the proposed Bromham, Carlton, Turvey and Wootton wards, as illustrated on Map 2, would be the same as under our draft recommendations.

Carlton, Clapham, Felmersham and Oakley wards

68 The existing wards of Carlton, Clapham, Felmersham and Oakley are situated in the central and western part of the borough. Carlton ward is currently represented by a single councillor and contains the parishes of Carlton & Chellington, Pavenham and Stevington. Clapham ward is currently represented by two councillors and is coterminous with Clapham parish. Felmersham ward is currently represented by a single councillor and contains the parishes of Bletsoe, Felmersham, Milton Ernest and Thurleigh. Oakley ward is currently represented by a single councillor and is coterminous with Oakley parish. Under existing arrangements, all four wards have relatively high levels of electoral inequality with Carlton, Clapham, Felmersham and Oakley wards having 14 per cent, 32 per cent, 6 per cent and 9 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the borough average respectively (22 per cent, 26 per cent, 13 per cent and 16 per cent fewer than the average by 2005).

69 At Stage One, the Borough Council proposed combining Carlton & Chellington, Turvey and Felmersham parishes in a new single-member Turvey ward, as detailed above. Stevington parish would be combined with Bromham parish from the existing Bromham ward, in a revised two-member Bromham ward, also detailed above. Under the Council's proposals, the remaining part of Carlton ward, Pavenham parish, would be combined with Oakley parish to form an enlarged single-member Oakley ward. The parishes of Bletsoe, Milton Ernest and Thurleigh, currently in Felmersham ward, would be combined with Clapham parish to form a revised and enlarged two-member Clapham ward. As part of the Council's own consultation exercise, Clapham Parish Council requested that Clapham ward retain two councillors.

70 Under the Borough Council's proposals, Clapham and Oakley wards would have 3 per cent and 21 per cent more electors per councillor than the borough average respectively (6 per cent more and 12 per cent more than the average by 2005).

71 We received a further 11 representations in relation to this area. As detailed above, Bedfordshire County Council (Councillor Gershon), Councillor Brandon, Carlton & Chellington Parish Council, Stevington Parish Council, Stevington Parish Councillor Pendlington and six local residents all opposed the Council's proposed amalgamation of Bromham and Stevington parishes in a proposed Bromham ward. Bletsoe Parish Council opposed the Council's proposed Clapham ward, arguing that the parish has little in common with the "overspill" area of Bedford, and requested that the existing links with other rural parishes be retained. Pavenham Parish Council strongly opposed the Council's proposed Oakley ward, as detailed above, while Oakley Parish Council supported the retention of the existing Oakley ward.

72 Having considered the representations received in relation to this area, we proposed broadly basing our draft recommendations on the Borough Council's proposals. However, as discussed previously, we concurred with the strong views expressed in relation to the Council's proposed Bromham ward and therefore proposed revised Bromham, Turvey and Carlton wards, as detailed above. We considered that there was some merit in the argument that Pavenham and Oakley should not be combined in a single borough ward. While we noted that retaining the existing Oakley ward would result in a relatively high level of electoral inequality, we considered that Oakley was a much larger settlement than Pavenham, and that the two areas share few community ties. We proposed instead retaining Pavenham parish within a revised Carlton ward, as detailed above, and retaining the existing Oakley ward. We noted the concerns expressed in relation to the Council's proposed Clapham ward. However, the high levels of electoral inequality in this area needed to be addressed, and we considered that the existing arrangements could not be retained. We considered that the Council's proposed

Clapham ward provided the most appropriate balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria in this area, and were content to put it forward as part of our draft recommendations.

73 Under our draft recommendations, Clapham ward would have 3 per cent more electors per councillor than the borough average (6 per cent more by 2005). Oakley ward would have 8 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the average (14 per cent fewer by 2005).

74 At Stage Three, the Borough Council expressed support for our proposed Carlton, Clapham and Oakley wards. As detailed above, Stevington Parish Council, Parish Councillor Pendlington (Stevington) and six submissions from local residents, all expressed strong support for our proposed Carlton ward, with particular reference to Stevington parish. Bletsoe Parish Council strongly opposed our proposed Clapham ward, arguing that “Bletsoe is a very small and scattered rural parish” and that, consequently, its concerns are quite different from those of a “large and rapidly growing conurbation such as Clapham”. In addition, it requested that it be associated with parishes such as Felmersham or Sharnbrook, “with which we have a long standing and proven relationship”. Oakley Parish Council strongly supported our proposed retention of the existing Oakley ward, while Thurleigh Parish Council opposed our proposed Clapham ward, arguing that Clapham, which is largely urban in nature, would have nothing in common with the rural areas. It stated a preference for the existing arrangements in this area to be retained. Finally, County Councillor Gwynne Jones expressed support for our proposed Oakley ward.

75 Having considered the representations received at Stage Three, we note that our proposals have received a degree of local support and propose confirming our draft recommendations for this area as final. We note the concerns expressed by Bletsoe and Thurleigh parish councils in relation to our proposed Clapham ward. However, we have not been persuaded that the parishes of Bletsoe and Thurleigh would be adversely affected if they were to be combined with Clapham. We note that, due to the configuration of parishes in this area, alternative options are limited, with any possible alternatives having a negative impact on the electoral equality of surrounding wards, which have received an element of local support at Stage Three.

76 Under our final recommendations the number of electors per councillor in the proposed Clapham and Oakley wards as illustrated on Map 2, would be the same as under our draft recommendations.

Harrold, Riseley and Sharnbrook wards

77 The existing wards of Harrold, Riseley and Sharnbrook are situated in the north-west of the borough, and all three wards are currently each represented by a single councillor. Harrold ward contains the parishes of Harrold, Odell, Podington and Wymington, while Riseley ward contains the parishes of Bolnhurst & Keysoe, Dean & Shelton, Pertenhall, Riseley and Swineshead. Sharnbrook ward contains the parishes of Knotting & Souldrop, Melchbourn & Yelden and Sharnbrook. At present, Harrold, Riseley and Sharnbrook wards have 4 per cent, 7 per cent and 3 per cent more electors per councillor than the borough average respectively (1 per cent more, 2 per cent fewer and 2 per cent more than the average by 2005).

78 At Stage One, the Borough Council proposed retaining the existing warding arrangements for Harrold, Riseley and Sharnbrook wards without amendment. As part of the Council’s own consultation exercise, Bolnhurst & Keysoe Parish Council expressed support for the Council’s proposed Riseley ward. Under the Borough Council’s proposals, Harrold, Riseley and Sharnbrook wards would have 6 per cent, 9 per cent and 5 per cent more electors per councillor than the borough average respectively (3 per cent more, equal to the average and 3 per cent more than the average respectively by 2005).

79 We received one further representation in relation to this area. Riseley Parish Council requested that the existing single-member Riseley ward be retained.

80 Having considered the representations received in relation to this area we endorsed the Borough Council's proposals. The existing arrangements provide for reasonable levels of electoral equality, both now and in 2005, and the Council's proposals would maintain existing community ties.

81 Under our draft recommendations, Harrold, Riseley and Sharnbrook wards would have 6 per cent, 9 per cent and 5 per cent more electors per councillor than the borough average respectively (3 per cent more, equal to the average and 3 per cent more than the average by 2005).

82 At Stage Three, the Borough Council expressed support for our proposed Harrold, Riseley and Sharnbrook wards. No further views were expressed in relation to this area.

83 In light of the local support, and in the absence of any opposition being expressed, we propose confirming our draft recommendations for Harrold, Riseley and Sharnbrook wards as final.

84 Under our final recommendations, the number of electors per councillor for the proposed Harrold Riseley and Sharnbrook wards, as illustrated on Map 2, would be the same as under our draft recommendations.

Great Barford, Renhold and Roxton wards

85 The existing wards of Great Barford, Renhold and Roxton are situated in the east of the borough and are each currently represented by a single councillor. At present, Great Barford ward comprises the parishes of Great Barford and Willington, Renhold ward comprises the parishes of Ravensden, Renhold and Wilden, while Roxton ward contains the five parishes of Colmworth, Little Barford, Little Staughton, Roxton and Staploe. Under the existing arrangements, Great Barford, Renhold and Roxton wards have 2 per cent, 3 per cent and 5 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the borough average respectively (6 per cent fewer, 9 per cent more and 13 per cent fewer than the borough average by 2005).

86 At Stage One, the Borough Council proposed transferring Wilden parish from Renhold ward to a revised single-member Roxton ward. Ravensden parish and Renhold parish, less the development area to the east of Norse Road, would be combined with the current Great Barford ward and Cople parish, currently in Eastcotts ward, to form a revised two-member Great Barford ward. The remaining part of Renhold parish would be transferred to the urban area of Bedford town, as detailed below. As part of the Council's own consultation exercise, Renhold Parish Council stated that they had "no comment on or objection to" the Council's proposed Great Barford ward. Great Barford Parish Council opposed the Council's proposed Great Barford ward, arguing that it would cover a large geographical area resulting in ineffective representation. Support was expressed for the existing warding arrangements.

87 Under the Borough Council's proposals, Great Barford and Roxton wards would have 3 per cent and 13 per cent more electors per councillor than the borough average respectively (equal to the average and 4 per cent more than the average by 2005).

88 We received three further representations in relation to this area. Cople Parish Council opposed the Council's proposed Great Barford ward, arguing that the parishes of Great Barford and Renhold are geographically distinct from Cople and Wilmington parishes and are separated by the River Great Ouse. The parish council stated that the River Great Ouse forms a significant boundary to community

links in the east of the borough, and argued that Renhold and Ravensden parishes have stronger ties with parishes to their north. Little Staughton Parish Council expressed concern that the Council's proposed Roxton ward would cover a geographically large area comprising a large number of parishes. Ravensden Parish Council also opposed the Council's proposed Great Barford ward, arguing that the new ward is geographically large and that the parishes to be combined are divided by the A421 Bedford Bypass and the River Great Ouse.

89 Having considered the representations received at Stage One, we endorsed the Borough Council's proposals for Great Barford and Roxton wards without amendment. We noted the concerns expressed by parishes in relation to community identities in the proposed wards. However, we considered a number of alternative options for the warding arrangements in this area, and were unable to find a more appropriate balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria than the Council's proposals. While we accepted that the River Great Ouse forms a physical boundary in the east of the borough, we were content that the small rural parishes which would comprise the proposed Great Barford ward shared a degree of community interest. We were not persuaded that Cople is sufficiently separate and distinct from the remaining parishes of the proposed Great Barford ward to justify retaining Cople within the single-member Eastcotts ward, given the significant inequalities which would have resulted.

90 Under our draft recommendations, Great Barford and Roxton wards would have 3 per cent and 13 per cent more electors per councillor than the borough average respectively (equal to the average and 4 per cent more than the average by 2005).

91 At Stage Three, the Borough Council expressed support for our proposed Roxton ward. In accordance with the wishes of Cardington Parish Council, it proposed that the parish be transferred from the proposed Eastcotts ward to the proposed Great Barford ward, discussed in more detail below. Cople Parish Council strongly opposed our proposed Great Barford ward, as did Great Barford Parish Council, which argued that the area is "geographically too large for two councillors to service effectively, which will ultimately result in less rural representation". Renhold Parish Council opposed our proposed Great Barford ward, which it argued encompasses a wide geographical area. In a joint submission from Wilden and Cardington parish councils, opposition was expressed to our proposed two-member Great Barford ward; it was suggested that the ward be divided into two single-member wards, although no specific boundary was put forward. Willington Parish Council opposed our proposed Great Barford ward, stating that the proposed ward would be quite unacceptable. It commented that "with two councillors and a much-enlarged ward, there would be a conflict of ideas". Three submissions from local residents expressed concern at our proposed Great Barford ward, with specific concern expressed in relation to the size of the new ward and the linking of Renhold parish with Cople and Willington parishes.

92 Having carefully considered the representations received at Stage Three, we propose confirming our draft recommendations for this area as final. We note the strong opposition expressed by a number of parish councils and local residents with regard to our proposed Great Barford ward. However, as stated in our draft recommendations report, due to the configuration of the parishes in this area, we have been unable to determine any alternative options which would provide for acceptable levels of electoral equality. Based on this conclusion and in the absence of any viable alternatives being put forward at Stage Three, we are content that our proposals provide for the best possible balance between electoral equality and community identity. Issues arising from the consequential warding of Renhold Parish Council will be discussed in more detail later.

93 Under our final recommendations, the number of electors per councillor for the proposed Great Barford and Roxton wards as illustrated on Map 2 and the large map at the back of the report, would be

the same as under our draft recommendations.

Eastcotts and Wilshamstead wards

94 The existing wards of Eastcotts and Wilshamstead are situated in the south-eastern corner of the borough and are each represented by a single councillor. Eastcotts ward contains the parishes of Eastcotts, Cardington and Cople, while Wilshamstead ward contains the parishes of Elstow and Wilshamstead. At present, Eastcotts and Wilshamstead wards have significantly high levels of electoral inequality, containing 45 per cent, and 52 per cent more electors per councillor than the borough average respectively (53 per cent and 101 per cent more than the average by 2005).

95 At Stage One, the Borough Council proposed transferring Cople parish from Eastcotts ward to a new two-member Great Barford ward, as detailed above. Cardington parish and Eastcotts parish, less the area to the north of the A421 Bedford Bypass, would be combined to form a revised single-member Eastcotts ward. The remaining part of Eastcotts parish, comprising Meadowsweet Drive and adjoining residential roads, would be transferred to the urban area of Bedford town, as discussed in more detail below. The Council proposed dividing the existing Wilshamstead ward to form a single-member Elstow ward and a new single-member Wilshamstead ward. It also proposed uniting the Hillesden Avenue area, which is partly in Cauldwell ward at present, within the new Elstow ward. This change would affect approximately 35 electors. As part of the Council's own consultation exercise, Wilshamstead Parish Council expressed support for the Council's proposed single-member Elstow and Wilshamstead wards. Cauldwell & Kingsbrook Urban Community Council (UCC), proposed transferring the part of Elstow parish to the north of West End and Progress Way, comprising Hillesden Avenue and adjacent roads, to a revised Cauldwell ward, arguing that the area forms part of the Bedford urban overspill, rather than a rural parish.

96 Under the Borough Council's proposals Eastcotts, Elstow and Wilshamstead wards would have 6 per cent, 37 per cent and 7 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the borough average respectively (5 per cent more, 7 per cent fewer and 13 per cent more than the average by 2005).

97 We received three further representations in relation to this area. Bedford County Councillor Payne (Great Barford and Wilstead Division) supported the Council's proposed Elstow and Wilshamstead wards, and also expressed support for the proposals to include the Meadowsweet Drive area within the Bedford town area. Elstow Parish Council also expressed support for the Council's proposed Elstow ward, while a local resident expressed support for the proposal to include the Meadowsweet Drive area within the Bedford town area and also proposed uniting the West End and Progress Way area within Cauldwell ward.

98 Having considered the representations received at Stage One, we largely endorsed the Borough Council's proposals for this area, subject to one amendment. We were not persuaded that the Council's proposal to divide the current Wilshamstead ward between two new wards would better reflect local community identities and interests than the existing arrangements. While we noted that there was some support for the proposed single-member Elstow and Wilshamstead wards, we did not consider that the two parishes are sufficiently separate and distinct to justify the relatively high levels of electoral inequality which would have resulted from the Council's proposals. We proposed a revised two-member Wilshamstead ward, comprising Wilshamstead parish, together with Elstow parish and the Hillesden Avenue area from the adjacent unparished area.

99 We considered that the Borough Council's proposal to transfer the Meadowsweet Drive area from Eastcotts parish to an urban Bedford ward had some merit, and were content to put it forward as part of our draft recommendations. We considered that the A421 Bedford Bypass formed a significant barrier between the Meadowsweet Drive area and the central community area of Eastcotts parish and we considered that the Meadowsweet Drive area forms part of Bedford rather than part of Eastcotts. Similarly, we were content to adopt the proposal to unite the Hillesden Avenue area within the proposed Wilshamstead ward as part of our draft proposals. We were not, however, persuaded that the proposal to transfer the West End and Progress Way area from Elstow parish to a proposed Cauldwell ward, as proposed by a local resident, would better reflect local community identities and interests than the existing arrangements. The proposed warding arrangements for Eastcotts Parish Council are detailed later in the report, and are illustrated on the large map inserted inside the back cover of this report.

100 Under our draft recommendations, Eastcotts and Wilshamstead wards would have 6 per cent and 22 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the borough average respectively (5 per cent and 3 per cent more than the average by 2005).

101 At Stage Three, the Borough Council proposed that Cardington parish be transferred from the proposed Eastcotts ward to the proposed Great Barford ward, in accordance with the Parish Council's wishes. In addition, it reiterated its Stage One proposal to divide the existing Wilshamstead ward into two single-member wards, Elstow and Wilshamstead. It argued that separate single-member wards should be created based on the separate parishes, stating that, "The parishes have separate local community interests and the number of electors in each reasonably comply with the criteria for two single-member wards." Eastcotts Parish Council expressed support for our proposed Eastcotts ward, while Elstow Parish Council opposed our proposed two-member Wilshamstead ward, arguing that the communities of Elstow and Wilstead are very separate and, as such, should form separate single-member wards. However, it did support our proposal to include the unparished Hillesden Avenue area within the proposed Wilshamstead ward. Wilshamstead Parish Council opposed our proposed two-member Wilshamstead ward, arguing that the two parishes to be combined under this proposal have "no common links" and, as such, should be separated into two single-member wards as originally proposed by the Borough Council. Finally, two residents opposed our proposed two-member Wilshamstead ward and proposed that the parishes of Elstow and Wilshamstead form separate single-member wards.

102 Having carefully considered the representations received at Stage Three, we propose confirming our draft recommendations for this area as final. We have not been persuaded that there is sufficient justification to transfer Cardington parish from the proposed Eastcotts ward to the proposed Great Barford ward. No strong argumentation was provided in relation to this proposal and we note that the geographical area covered by the proposed Great Barford ward would be increased if it was to include Cardington ward, which has been an area of concern within this review. We note the support expressed in relation to the separation of the proposed two-member Wilshamstead ward into two single-member wards. However, we have not been persuaded that there is strong enough justification to create wards containing 13 per cent more and 7 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the borough average by 2005, when our proposed two-member ward would contain 3 per cent more electors per councillor than the average. We also consider that the settlements of Elstow and Wilstead are linked by the A6 (Wilstead Road), and as such, we consider that the two areas would not be adversely affected if they were to be combined in a single borough ward. Issues arising from the consequential warding of Eastcotts Parish Council will be discussed in more detail later

103 Under our final recommendations, the number of electors per councillor for Eastcotts and Wilshamstead wards, as illustrated on Map 2 and the large map at the back of the report, would be the

same as under our draft recommendations.

The Urban Area

Brickhill, De Parys and Putnoe wards

104 The existing wards of Brickhill, De Parys and Putnoe are situated in the north and centre of the unparished town of Bedford. All three wards are each currently represented by three councillors. Under existing arrangements, Brickhill, De Parys and Putnoe wards have 6 per cent, 5 per cent and 12 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the borough average respectively (15 per cent, 13 per cent and 21 per cent fewer than the average respectively by 2005).

105 At Stage One, the Borough Council proposed an enlarged three-member Brickhill ward, arguing that its proposals “would improve the comprehensiveness of Brickhill in community terms”. It proposed retaining the existing boundary between Brickhill and Putnoe ward, and enlarging the ward southwards to include the part of De Parys ward to the north of the cemetery and Bedford Park. The existing western boundary of Brickhill ward, which follows the John Bunyan Trail, would also be retained. The Council proposed a revised two-member De Parys ward which would retain its existing southern boundary and incorporate the De Montfort University campus in the east, currently situated in Newnham ward. The eastern boundary of the proposed De Parys ward would run to the rear of properties on the north side of Polhill Avenue and Ellis Road until it meets Kimbolton Road. In the west, the boundary of De Parys ward would be amended to follow the rear of properties on the eastern side of Foster Hill Road. Also, the Council proposed a revised three-member Putnoe ward, comprising the existing Putnoe ward, the part of De Parys ward to the north of Polhill Avenue and Ellis Road, as detailed above, and the part of Goldington ward to the west of Church Lane and north of properties on the north side of Putnoe Street. Also, properties on the west side of Haylands Way, currently in De Parys and Putnoe wards, would be united within a revised Goldington ward, as detailed below.

106 Under the Borough Council’s proposals, the revised Brickhill, De Parys and Putnoe wards would have 8 per cent, 5 per cent and 12 per cent more electors per councillor than the borough average respectively (2 per cent fewer, 7 per cent more and 1 per cent more than the average by 2005).

107 Bedford & Kempston Conservative Association (‘the Conservatives’) proposed broadly similar warding arrangements to the Borough Council for this area. They proposed a revised three-member Brickhill ward comprising the existing Brickhill ward, the Nursery Gardens and Kimbolton Close area from the existing Putnoe ward, and the part of De Parys ward to the north of the cemetery and Bedford Park, including Ellis Road and part of Kimbolton Road. The Conservatives proposed a revised three-member Putnoe ward comprising the existing Putnoe ward less the Nursery Gardens and Kimbolton Close area, the part of De Parys ward to the north of Polhill Avenue and Ellis Road and the part of Goldington ward to the west of Church Lane and north of Putnoe Street. The Conservatives also proposed uniting both sides of Haylands Way within a revised Goldington ward.

108 The Conservatives proposed radically different warding arrangements to the Borough Council in relation to De Parys ward. They proposed dividing the current De Parys ward to form a new two-member Bedford Park ward, comprising the part of De Parys ward to the west of Kimbolton Road and the part of the existing Harpur ward to the north-east of Clapham Road and Tavistock Road. The remaining part of De Parys ward, including properties on the west side of Kimbolton Road and properties on the north side of Polhill Avenue, would form part of a revised three-member Castle ward, as detailed below. The Conservatives argued that the current De Parys ward covers a large area between the former Texas Instruments site and the Polhill university site, which “forms no urban community”.

North East Bedfordshire Conservative Association expressed support for the Conservatives' proposals.

109 Under the Conservatives' proposals, the revised Brickhill and Putnoe wards and new Bedford Park ward would have 9 per cent, 7 per cent and 20 per cent more electors per councillor than the borough average respectively (1 per cent fewer, 3 per cent fewer and 14 per cent more than the average by 2005).

110 De Parys Liberal Democrats ('the Liberal Democrats') proposed a revised three-member Brickhill ward, comprising the whole of the existing ward together with the part of Putnoe ward to the north-west of Putnoe Lane and west of Brecon Way. A revised three-member De Parys ward would comprise the existing ward, less Eagle Gardens, Goldcrest Way, Foster Hill Road and the west side of De Parys Avenue, plus the part of the existing Putnoe ward to the south of Putnoe Lane and Queen's Drive and the De Montfort University campus currently in Newnham ward. The De Parys Avenue area, Foster Hill Road area, Eagle Gardens and Goldcrest Way would be transferred to a revised three-member Harpur ward, as detailed below. The remaining part of Putnoe ward would be combined with the part of the existing Goldington ward to the north of Queen's Drive, west of Church Lane and north of Needwood Road and Hundson Road to form a revised three-member Putnoe ward.

111 Under the Liberal Democrats' proposals, Brickhill, De Parys and Putnoe wards would have 14 per cent, 2 per cent and 19 per cent more electors per councillor than the borough average respectively (2 per cent more, equal to the average and 6 per cent more than the average by 2005).

112 Having considered the representations received at Stage One, we largely based our draft recommendations for this area on the Borough Council's proposals, subject to three minor amendments, which provided for improved levels of electoral equality and, we considered, better reflected the identities and interests of the local community. We proposed that Ellis Road, Nursery Gardens and Kimbolton Road should be included in the revised Brickhill ward, as proposed by the Conservatives. We were not, however, persuaded that the Conservatives' proposals for the remaining part of this area reflected local community identities and interests. In particular, we considered that the Conservatives' proposed Bedford Park and Castle wards united distinct and separate communities either side of Foster Hill Road and Goldington Road respectively, two main arterial roads in the town which we considered form significant community boundaries in this area. Similarly, in relation to the Liberal Democrats' proposals, we noted that to the north of the cemetery, their proposed Brickhill ward united distinct communities either side of Kimbolton Road. The Liberal Democrats' revised Goldington ward would also breach Goldington Road.

113 Under our draft recommendations, the proposed Brickhill, De Parys and Putnoe wards would contain 12 per cent, 3 per cent and 10 per cent more electors per councillor than the borough average respectively (1 per cent more, 5 per cent more and equal to the borough average by 2005).

114 At Stage Three, the Borough Council reiterated its Stage One proposals for Brickhill, De Parys and Putnoe wards. It proposed that the Nursery Gardens and Kimbolton Close area should form part of Putnoe ward, and that Ellis Road and part of Kimbolton Road should form part of De Parys ward. It argued that the electorate from the roads affected had been consulted on our draft recommendations and that the majority view was that the Council's proposals should be adopted in this area.

115 The Conservatives commented on our draft recommendations in relation to the urban areas of Bedford and Kempston. They strongly opposed our proposed wards in the town centre area of Bedford and reiterated their Stage One proposals, stating that there is a need for two wards for central Bedford.

They expressed support for our proposed Brickhill, De Parys and Putnoe wards and questioned the consultation exercise carried out by the Borough Council, arguing that “This poll seems to have been a political device to change argued ideas and your recommended plans.”

116 Putnoe Liberal Democrats broadly supported our draft recommendations for Putnoe ward stating that “within the constraints of the review, they accurately reflect the community of Putnoe using distinguishable boundaries formed by the bigger roads in the area”. However, they proposed that Nursery Gardens and Kimbolton Close be transferred from the neighbouring Brickhill ward, arguing that although they acknowledge our arguments for this proposal, Nursery Gardens and Willmers Close form “a pair of roads” which they believe should be united, together with Kimbolton Close, in a revised Putnoe ward.

117 Having carefully considered the representations received at Stage Three, we propose confirming our draft recommendations for this area as final. We note that our proposals have received a degree of local support and provide for improved levels of electoral equality. We have not been persuaded by the Conservatives’ proposals for the north-eastern part of Bedford, which broadly reiterated their Stage One proposals. As stated in our draft recommendations report, we were not persuaded by the Conservatives’ proposal to divide the current De Parys ward between their proposed Bedford Park and Castle wards. We still consider that this proposal would not adequately reflect the identities and interests of the community to the south of Bedford Park. However, we recognise the support expressed by the Conservatives for our proposals to transfer Nursery Gardens and Kimbolton Close and the Ellis Road area to Brickhill ward, and propose confirming this as final. We have not been persuaded by the evidence supplied by the Borough Council and Putnoe Liberal Democrats that these roads should be transferred to Putnoe and De Parys wards respectively. We consider that these roads’ main access is served from Kimbolton Road and that, as such, our proposals are in the best interests of the local community, and provide for effective and convenient local government.

118 Under our final recommendations, the number of electors per councillor in the proposed Brickhill, De Parys and Putnoe wards, as illustrated on the large map at the back of the report, would be the same as under our draft recommendations.

Castle, Harpur and Queen’s Park wards

119 The existing wards of Castle, Harpur and Queen’s Park are situated in the centre of the borough and form part of the unparished town of Bedford. All three wards are currently each represented by three councillors. Under the existing arrangements, Castle and Harpur wards have 24 per cent and 1 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the borough average respectively (30 per cent fewer and 8 per cent fewer than the average by 2005). Queen’s Park ward has 5 per cent more electors per councillor than the borough average (2 per cent fewer by 2005).

120 At Stage One, the Borough Council proposed broadly retaining the existing three-member Harpur ward with two minor amendments. It proposed incorporating part of Castle ward to the north of Dame Alice Street and Bromham Road and those properties on the east side of Foster Hill Road (currently in De Parys ward) in a revised Harpur ward. The Council proposed a revised three-member Castle ward comprising the current Castle ward less the area to the north of Dame Alice Street and Bromham Road, and incorporating the part of Queen’s Park ward to the east of the London to Leicester railway line. The eastern boundary would also be modified to follow the rear of properties on the west side of Newnham Avenue. The southern boundary, following the River Great Ouse, would be retained. The remaining part of Queen’s Park ward to the west of the London to Leicester railway line would be represented by two councillors, one fewer than at present. As part of the Council’s own consultation

process, Queen's Park Workers Forum expressed concern in relation to the Council's proposed Queen's Park ward, arguing that the proposal may lead to "loss of identity for the Midland Road area".

121 Under the Borough Council's proposals, Castle, Harpur and Queen's Park wards would have 2 per cent, 4 per cent and 18 per cent more electors per councillor than the borough average respectively (5 per cent fewer, 3 per cent fewer and 10 per cent more than the average respectively by 2005).

122 Bedford & Kempston Conservative Association ('the Conservatives') proposed a revised three-member Castle ward, comprising the part of the existing De Parys ward to the east of Kimbolton Road as detailed above, together with the part of the existing Castle ward to the east of the High Street, less the properties on the east side of Newnham Avenue. Newnham Avenue would form part of a revised two-member Newnham ward, detailed below. The remaining part of Castle ward would be combined with the part of the existing Harpur ward to the south of Clapham Road and Tavistock Road and the part of the existing Queen's Park ward to the east of the London to Leicester railway line to form a new two-member Midland ward. The remaining part of Queen's Park ward, to the west of the railway line, would form a revised two-member Queen's Park ward, identical to that proposed by the Borough Council. Support for these proposals was expressed by North East Bedfordshire Conservative Association.

123 Under the Conservatives' proposals, Castle, Midland and Queen's Park wards would have 10 per cent, 16 per cent and 15 per cent more electors per councillor than the borough average respectively (2 per cent, 6 per cent and 8 per cent more than the average respectively by 2005).

124 De Parys Liberal Democrats ('the Liberal Democrats') also proposed a revised two-member Queen's Park ward identical to that put forward by the Borough Council and the Conservatives. They proposed a revised three-member Harpur ward comprising the existing ward plus the De Parys Avenue, Foster Hill Road, Eagle Gardens and Goldcrest Way areas from the existing De Parys ward, as detailed above. The Liberal Democrats' proposed three-member Castle ward would comprise the existing ward together with the part of the existing Queen's Park ward to the east of the London to Leicester railway line and those properties on the east side of Newnham Avenue (currently in Newnham ward).

125 Under the Liberal Democrats' proposals, Castle, Harpur and Queen's Park wards would have 5 per cent, 6 per cent and 15 per cent more electors per councillor than the borough average respectively (3 per cent fewer, 4 per cent fewer and 7 per cent more than the average respectively by 2005).

126 Rutland Road Church opposed the proposal to transfer the Midland Road area to the east of the London to Leicester railway line from Queen's Park ward to the neighbouring proposed Castle ward. It argued that this area is an integral part of the Queen's Park community, and that "a number of projects take place across the geographical boundary of the railway line". A local resident opposed the Council's proposed Castle ward, arguing that, "The proposed boundaries for Castle ward do not achieve a Town Centre ward but reflect a desire to gerrymander boundaries for political advantage."

127 Having considered the representations received at Stage One, we based our draft recommendations for this area on the Borough Council's proposals, which we considered would best reflect community ties in the area while providing for improved levels of electoral equality. We were not persuaded by the Conservatives' proposal to divide the current De Parys ward between their proposed Bedford Park and Castle wards, which we considered would not adequately reflect the identities and interests of the community to the south of Bedford Park. Similarly, we considered that the Conservatives' proposed Midland ward would result in the division of the commercial town centre area. We noted that there was broad consensus between the Borough Council and the Liberal Democrats in

this area and that all three political parties submitted identical proposals for a revised Queen's Park ward. While we noted the concerns expressed locally in relation to the transfer of the Midland Road area from Queen's Park ward to a revised Castle ward, we noted that at Stage One, the proposed Queen's Park ward received cross-party support, and concurred with the view that the London to Leicester railway line provides for a strong boundary between the two wards. We adopted the Borough Council's proposals for the purpose of our draft recommendations, but welcomed further views in relation to the boundary between the proposed Queen's Park and Castle wards from interested parties at Stage Three.

128 Under our draft recommendations, the proposed Castle, Harpur and Queen's Park wards would have 2 per cent, 4 per cent and 18 per cent more electors per councillor than the borough average respectively (5 per cent fewer, 3 per cent fewer and 10 per cent more than the average by 2005).

129 At Stage Three, the Borough Council expressed support for our proposed Castle, Harpur and Queen's Park wards. Support was also expressed for our proposed Castle ward by Castle & Newnham Labour Party. The Conservatives supported our proposed Queen's Park ward, however they reiterated their Stage One proposals which would result in a revised Castle ward and a new Midland ward. Castle Residents' Association also opposed our proposed Castle ward, arguing that Goldington Road is not "divisive" and that the proposed ward would be "unmanageably long". They argued that the area of De Parys ward bounded by Polhill Avenue and Kimbolton Road (as in the Conservatives' submission), is an "obvious addition to Castle ward". This view was also expressed by Councillor Davey (Castle ward).

130 Having considered the representations received at Stage Three, we propose confirming our draft recommendations for this area as final. We have not been persuaded by the Conservatives' proposals for the north-eastern part of Bedford, which broadly reiterated their Stage One proposals. As stated above, we have not been persuaded by the Conservatives' proposal to divide the current De Parys ward between their proposed Bedford Park and Castle wards. In addition, we have not been persuaded that the Conservatives' proposed Castle ward, supported by Castle Residents' Association and Councillor Davey, would provide for a better balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria than our proposed Castle ward, which utilises strong boundaries such as Goldington Road and the London to Leicester railway line.

131 Under our final recommendations, the number of electors per councillor in the proposed Castle, Harpur and Queen's Park wards, as illustrated on the large map at the back of the report, would be the same as under our draft recommendations.

Goldington and Newnham wards

132 The existing wards of Goldington and Newnham are situated in the centre of the borough and form part of the unparished town of Bedford. Goldington ward is currently represented by three councillors while Newnham ward is currently represented by two councillors. Under existing arrangements, Goldington ward has 13 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the borough average (16 per cent fewer by 2005), while Newnham ward has 27 per cent more electors per councillor than the borough average (19 per cent more by 2005).

133 At Stage One, the Borough Council proposed a revised three-member Goldington ward comprising the existing Goldington ward, less the area to the west of Church Lane and north of Putnoe Street, plus the part of Newnham ward to the north of the A428 Goldington Road and the De Montfort

University site. This new ward would also incorporate the new residential development to the east of Norse Road, currently located in Renhold ward. The Council argued that this new development, although located in a rural ward, has a more natural geographic relationship with the urban area of Bedford. The remaining part of Newnham ward, including those properties on the north side of Goldington Road, would be combined with those properties on the west side of Newnham Avenue and the Priory Country Park area to the north of the River Great Ouse (currently in Kingsbrook ward), in a revised two-member Newnham ward. The Council argued that, by incorporating the properties on both sides of Newnham Avenue and Goldington Road in the same ward, its proposals brought together existing communities of interest.

134 Under the Borough Council's proposals, the revised Goldington and Newnham wards would have 4 per cent more and 3 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the borough average respectively (2 per cent fewer and 9 per cent fewer than the average respectively by 2005).

135 Bedford & Kempston Conservative Association ('the Conservatives') proposed revised three-member Goldington and two-member Newnham wards similar to those put forward by the Borough Council, subject to minor variations. They proposed that the Pearmain Close and Bury Walk areas form part of the revised Newnham ward, and that the De Montfort University campus site off Polhill Avenue become part of Goldington ward rather than being transferred to the neighbouring De Parys ward. In addition, they proposed that the boundary between the proposed Putnoe and Goldington wards should follow the rear of properties on the west side of Church Lane. Support for these proposals was expressed by North East Bedfordshire Conservative Association.

136 Under the Conservatives' proposals, Goldington and Newnham wards would have 4 per cent more and 2 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the borough average respectively (5 per cent more and 9 per cent fewer than the average respectively by 2005).

137 De Parys Liberal Democrats ('the Liberal Democrats') proposed a revised three-member Goldington ward comprising the whole of the existing Newnham ward less the De Montfort University campus site and the east side of Newnham Avenue, the part of the existing Goldington ward to the south of Queen's Drive, Needwood Road and Hudson Road, together with the new development area currently located in Renhold ward. The proposed Goldington ward would also include the Priory Country Park area to the north of the River Great Ouse, currently in Kingsbrook ward. Under the Liberal Democrats' proposals, Newnham ward would no longer exist, while Goldington ward would have 8 per cent more electors per councillor than the borough average (4 per cent more by 2005).

138 Having considered the representations received at Stage One, we based our draft recommendations for this area on the Borough Council's proposals, subject to one minor amendment. We proposed including Bury Walk and part of the adjacent industrial estate in the revised Newnham ward, as proposed by the Conservatives. We considered that this amendment provided for improved levels of electoral equality while uniting Bury Walk with Goldington Road, from which it is accessed. We considered that the Liberal Democrats' proposed Goldington ward would cover a large geographical area while uniting separate and distinct communities either side of the A428 Goldington Road and we were not persuaded that their proposals would have appropriately reflected local community identities and interests in this area. We considered that the Council's and the Conservatives' proposals utilised strong boundaries such as the River Great Ouse and Goldington Road and provided for reasonable levels of electoral equality, both initially and in five years' time.

139 Under our draft recommendations, the proposed Goldington and Newnham wards would have 3 per cent more and 1 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the borough average respectively (3 per

cent and 8 per cent fewer than the average by 2005).

140 At Stage Three, the Borough Council expressed support for our proposed Goldington and Newnham wards, while Castle & Newnham Labour Party expressed support for our proposed Newnham ward. However, a local resident opposed our proposed Goldington ward, arguing that it does not cover the area which is traditionally referred to as Goldington. She proposed that the ward be extended southwards to incorporate the Riverfield Drive Estate, Goldington Green Lower School, Bury Walk, as well as Goldington Green (road).

141 Having considered the representations received at Stage Three, we have decided to confirm our draft recommendations for Goldington and Newnham wards as final. We note that our proposals have received a degree of local support and have not been persuaded that the alternative proposals submitted for Goldington ward would better reflect the local community than our draft recommendations. We have not been persuaded that the ward should be extended southwards to incorporate the Riverfield Drive Estate, Goldington Green Lower School, Bury Walk, as well as Goldington Green (road). We consider that Goldington Road forms a strong boundary between the proposed Goldington and Newnham wards and that the Riverfield Drive area has better links with the area to its west, than with the area north of Goldington Road. We also note that our proposed Newnham ward has received support from the Borough Council and Castle & Newnham Labour Party and such a modification to Goldington ward would have a significant impact on our proposed Newnham ward.

142 Under our final recommendations, the number of electors per councillor in the proposed Goldington and Newnham wards would be the same as under our draft recommendations.

Cauldwell and Kingsbrook wards

143 The existing wards of Cauldwell and Kingsbrook are situated in the centre of the borough and form part of the unparished town of Bedford. Both wards are currently represented by three councillors. Under existing arrangements, Cauldwell ward has 3 per cent more electors per councillor than the borough average (16 per cent more by 2005), while Kingsbrook ward has 20 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the borough average (26 per cent fewer by 2005).

144 At Stage One, the Borough Council proposed a revised three-member Kingsbrook ward comprising the current Kingsbrook ward less the area to the north of the River Great Ouse, as detailed above, and including the part of Cauldwell ward to the east of the former Bedford to Shefford railway line. In addition, the Council proposed that the new Meadowsweet Drive development, currently situated in Eastcotts ward, be incorporated within the revised Kingsbrook ward, arguing that the development area is directly adjacent to the urban area of Bedford and “is separated by the A421 Bedford Southern Bypass from the rural area”. The remaining part of Cauldwell ward, less the Whitbread Avenue and Stafford Road area, would be combined with the part of Kempston East ward to the east of the London to Leicester railway line, to form a revised three-member Cauldwell ward. The Council also proposed a minor amendment to the southern boundary of Cauldwell ward resulting in the transfer of 35 electors in the north end of Hillesden Avenue to the neighbouring Wilshamstead ward, as detailed above. As part of the Council’s own consultation exercise, Cauldwell and Kingsbrook UCC expressed concern in relation to the Council’s proposal to transfer the Whitbread Avenue area to a proposed Kempston North ward, and objected to the proposed transfer of roads to the west of London Road from Cauldwell ward to Kingsbrook ward. They also argued that the area surrounding Progress Way and West End would be better served in the urban area of Cauldwell rather than in Wilshamstead ward, as detailed above.

145 Under the Borough Council's proposals, Cauldwell and Kingsbrook wards would have 10 per cent fewer and 5 per cent more electors per councillor than the borough average respectively (2 per cent fewer and 4 per cent more than the average respectively by 2005).

146 Bedford & Kempston Conservative Association ('the Conservatives') proposed broadly similar proposals to the Borough Council in relation to the revised three-member Cauldwell and Kingsbrook wards, with two exceptions. They proposed that the St Leonard's area to the north of Elstow Road should be retained within the revised Cauldwell ward. The Conservatives also proposed retaining the existing western and southern boundaries of Cauldwell ward. Support for these proposals was expressed by North East Bedfordshire Conservative Association.

147 Under the Conservatives' proposals, Cauldwell and Kingsbrook wards would have 11 per cent fewer and 2 per cent more electors per councillor than the borough average respectively (2 per cent fewer and equal to the average respectively by 2005).

148 We received one further representation in relation to this area. A local resident expressed support for the inclusion of the Meadowsweet Drive development in a revised Kingsbrook ward. While he supported including the area to the west of London Road between Harrowden Road and St John's Station in Kingsbrook ward, he objected to the inclusion of the St Leonard's area, arguing that this area shares more community interest with Cauldwell ward. He also proposed uniting the West End and Progress Way area within Cauldwell ward, as detailed above.

149 Having considered the representations received at Stage One, we proposed basing our draft recommendations for this area on the Borough Council's proposals, subject to one modification. We concurred with the views expressed by the Conservatives and a local resident that the St Leonard's area should remain part of Cauldwell ward. We considered that this modification better reflected community ties in the area than the proposals put forward by the Borough Council, and provided for improved levels of electoral equality. While we noted the concerns expressed in relation to the transfer of the Whitbread Avenue area to the proposed Kempston North ward, we concurred with the view that the London to Leicester railway line formed a strong boundary between Bedford and Kempston. We also noted the concerns expressed in relation to the Progress Way area but considered that this area has better transport and community links with the rural area of Elstow than with the urban area of Cauldwell, as previously discussed.

150 Under our draft recommendations, the proposed Cauldwell and Kingsbrook wards would have 9 per cent fewer and 4 per cent more electors per councillor than the borough average respectively (equal to the average and 2 per cent more than the average by 2005).

151 At Stage Three, the Borough Council proposed a minor amendment to correct an anomaly to the boundary between our proposed Cauldwell and Kingsbrook wards, which currently results in the John Bunyan Upper School and Community College being divided between the two wards. However, this also forms a parish boundary and, as previously discussed, cannot be amended as part of this review. A local resident expressed support for our proposed Cauldwell and Kingsbrook wards, with specific reference to the transfer of the area surrounding Kathie Road to the proposed Kingsbrook ward.

152 Having carefully considered the representations received at Stage Three, we have decided to confirm our draft recommendations for Cauldwell and Kingsbrook wards as final. We note that our proposals have been broadly supported and that no alternative proposals have come forward at Stage Three. In relation to the Council's proposed boundary change between the two wards, we suggest that such an anomaly be addressed as part of a parish review, as discussed earlier.

153 Under our final recommendations, the number of electors for the proposed Cauldwell and Kingsbrook wards would be the same as under our draft recommendations.

Kempston East and Kempston West wards

154 The existing wards of Kempston East and Kempston West are situated in the centre of the borough, with both wards currently each represented by three councillors. Kempston East ward is coterminous with East ward of Kempston town, while Kempston West ward is coterminous with West ward of Kempston town. Under existing arrangements, Kempston East and Kempston West wards have 20 per cent and 7 per cent more electors per councillor than the borough average respectively (10 per cent more and 6 per cent more than the average respectively by 2005).

155 At Stage One, the Borough Council proposed three wards in this area. A revised two-member Kempston East ward would comprise the part of the current Kempston East ward to the west of the London to Leicester railway line and north of Elstow Road, including those properties on the south side of Elstow Road, together with the part of Kempston West ward to the south of Bedford Road and east of St John's Street and part of the existing Cauldwell ward surrounding the industrial estate. The new two-member Kempston North ward would comprise the part of the existing Kempston West ward to the north of Bedford Road, the High Street and Cemetery Road, and the part of Cauldwell ward to the west of the railway line and north of Bedford Road. The remaining parts of the existing Kempston West and Kempston East wards to the south of Elstow Road and St John's Street would be combined to form a new three-member Kempston South ward. The Council also proposed incorporating part of the existing Kempston Rural ward, to the east of the Keeley Green area, within its proposed Kempston South ward. It noted that, while this area contains few electors at present, it is forecast to contain approximately 400 more electors by 2005, as a result of housing developments which are expected to be completed during the next five years.

156 Under the Borough Council's proposals, Kempston East, Kempston North and Kempston South wards would have 8 per cent more, 1 per cent more and 9 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the borough average respectively (equal to the average, 11 per cent fewer and 2 per cent fewer than the average respectively by 2005).

157 Bedford & Kempston Conservative Association ('the Conservatives') proposed three wards in the Kempston area. They proposed a new two-member Kempston North ward comprising the part of the existing Kempston East ward to the north of Bedford Road and east of Manor Drive, together with part of the existing Kempston East ward bounded by Bunyan Road, Elstow Road and Margetts Road. The remaining part of Kempston East ward would form a revised three-member Kempston East ward, while the remaining part of the existing Kempston West ward, together with the future development area situated in Kempston Rural ward, would form a revised two-member Kempston West ward. Support for these proposals was expressed by North East Bedfordshire Conservative Association.

158 Under the Conservatives' proposals, Kempston East, Kempston North and Kempston West wards would have equal to, 5 per cent more and 14 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the borough average respectively (9 per cent fewer, 5 per cent fewer and equal to the average respectively by 2005).

159 Kempston Town Council expressed support for the existing warding arrangements for the Kempston area, and requested that they be retained. It argued that "historically the area has been divided into two wards due to the original village being in the west and the new development in the east". In addition, they considered that the new development area proposed to be incorporated in the

new Kempston South ward would be more rural than urban in nature.

160 Having considered the representations received at Stage One, we based our draft recommendations on the Borough Council's proposals for this area, subject to one amendment. We considered that these proposals utilised strong boundaries in the Kempston area, and provided for improved levels of electoral equality, while reflecting the identities and interests of the local community. However, we proposed an amendment in relation to the Council's proposed Kempston South ward. The Council proposed that a future development area located in Kempston Rural ward be incorporated in a new Kempston South ward. However, the area in question contains no electors at present, and could not therefore form a parish ward. We therefore proposed that a larger area of Kempston Rural parish be combined with Kempston South ward so that the area contained a sufficient number of electors for a parish ward to be created. We proposed that the Kempston Hardwick area of Kempston Rural parish, to the east of Green End Road, Ibbett Close and Wootton Road be incorporated in the new Kempston South ward.

161 While we recognised that under our proposals the proposed Kempston North ward would have a relatively high electoral variance, we considered that strong boundaries in the area such as the River Great Ouse and Bedford Road had, to a certain extent, limited modifications to the boundaries to improve electoral equality. We considered that alternative options proposed in this area would utilise less clearly identifiable boundaries, and would not reflect local community identities and interests. We also noted that the proposal to transfer the proposed development area to Kempston South ward would provide for an improved level of electoral inequality in the proposed Turvey ward.

162 We also noted the concerns expressed by Kempston Town Council. However, based on a council size of 54, the Kempston area is entitled to a total of seven councillors, one more than at present. As our *Guidance* makes clear, we consider that borough wards should not be represented by more than three councillors. As such, we were unable to recommend the retention of the existing arrangements.

163 We considered that the remainder of the Borough Council's proposals utilised strong boundaries and concluded that, on balance, its scheme better reflected the identities and interests of the local community than the alternative proposal submitted by the Conservatives. Under our draft recommendations, Kempston East, Kempston North and Kempston South wards would have 8 per cent more, 1 per cent more and 8 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the borough average respectively (equal to the average, 11 per cent fewer and 1 per cent fewer than the average by 2005).

164 At Stage Three, the Borough Council reiterated its Stage One proposal for the Kempston area, arguing that the southern boundary of the proposed Kempston South ward should follow the proposed line of the Kempston By Pass. It argued that the electorate of Kempston Hardwick, which, under our proposals would form part of Kempston South ward, have "limited, if any" community of interest with the Kempston South area. These views were also expressed by Kempston Town Council.

165 Having considered the representations received at Stage Three, we propose confirming our draft recommendations for Kempston East, Kempston North and Kempston South wards as final. While we note the concerns expressed by the Borough Council and Kempston Town Council, we are unable to utilise the proposed line of the Kempston By Pass as a boundary. As detailed in our draft recommendations report, the preferred boundary would result in the creation of a parish ward within Kempston Rural parish which would contain no electors and follow the line of a proposed road which is not yet built and which could therefore not be tied to ground detail. This issue has been discussed with the Borough Council, which has been made aware of the limitations within our remit with regards to

parish issues, and the need for identifiable boundaries. We advised that the parish boundaries in this area should be revised as part of a forthcoming parish review. Issues arising from the consequential warding of Kempston Town Council will be discussed in more detail later.

166 Under our final recommendations, the number of electors per councillor in the proposed Kempston East, Kempston North and Kempston South wards as illustrated on Map 2 and the large map at the back of the report, would be the same as under our draft recommendations.

Electoral Cycle

167 At Stage One, we received one representation regarding the Borough Council's electoral cycle. De Parys Liberal Democrats proposed retaining the current system of elections by thirds, which would give residents living in three-member wards "the opportunity to have their say on the performance of their councils and councillors each year". In addition, they stated that maintaining the current system of annual elections "helps the process of encouraging people to vote".

168 We considered the representations received and concluded that there appeared to be a majority view that the present electoral cycle should be retained, and we therefore proposed no change to the current electoral cycle of elections by thirds for the Borough Council.

169 At Stage Three, the Borough Council expressed support for our proposal to retain the existing electoral cycle of elections by thirds for the Borough Council. No further comments were received to the contrary, and we are therefore confirming our draft recommendation as final.

Conclusions

170 Having carefully considered all the representations and evidence received in response to our draft recommendations report, we have decided to confirm our proposals for Bedford Borough Council's borough wards in their entirety however; we propose several amendments to parish and town electoral arrangements as detailed in the Parish and Town Council Electoral Arrangements section below.

171 We conclude that, in Bedford:

- there should be an increase in council size from 53 to 54;
- there should be 26 wards, one fewer than at present;
- the boundaries of 21 of the existing wards should be modified;
- elections should continue to be held by thirds.

172 Table 4 shows the impact of our final recommendations on electoral equality, comparing them with the current arrangements, based on 2000 and 2005 electorate figures.

Table 4: Comparison of Current and Recommended Electoral Arrangements

	2000 electorate		2005 forecast electorate	
	Current arrangements	Final recommendations	Current arrangements	Final recommendations
Number of councillors	53	54	53	54
Number of wards	27	26	27	26
Average number of electors per councillor	2,047	2,009	2,140	2,101
Number of wards with a variance more than 10 per cent from the average	11	6	18	3
Number of wards with a variance more than 20 per cent from the average	6	2	10	0

173 As shown in Table 4, our final recommendations for Bedford Borough Council would result in a reduction in the number of wards varying by more than 10 per cent from the borough average from 11 to six. By 2005, only three wards are forecast to vary by more than 10 per cent from the average for the borough. We conclude that our recommendations would best meet the need for electoral equality, having regard to the statutory criteria.

Final Recommendation

Bedford Borough Council should comprise 54 councillors serving 26 wards, as detailed and named in Tables 1 and 2, and illustrated on Map 2 and on the large map inside the back cover. The Council should continue to hold elections by thirds.

Parish and Town Council Electoral Arrangements

174 When reviewing 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 borough wards, it must also be divided into parish wards, so that each parish ward lies wholly within a single ward of the borough. Accordingly, in our draft recommendations report, we proposed consequential warding arrangements for the parishes of Eastcotts, Kempston Rural and Renhold and the town of Kempston to reflect the proposed borough wards. At the request of Elstow Parish Council, we also proposed increasing the number of councillors representing the parish. In our final recommendations report, we also propose an increase in the number of parish councillors representing Bromham Parish Council, at the request of the parish councils.

175 The parish of Eastcotts is currently served by 15 councillors and is not warded. In our draft recommendations, for borough warding purposes, we adopted the Borough Council's proposal to incorporate the new development area surrounding Meadowsweet Drive in a revised Kingsbrook ward, with the remainder of the parish forming part of a revised Eastcotts ward. The Borough Council proposed that the part of Eastcotts parish to be transferred to Kingsbrook ward should be named North ward and should return four councillors, while the remaining part of the parish should be named South

ward and should return 15 councillors. For the purpose of consultation we were content to put forward the Council's proposals for this area.

176 At Stage Three, the Borough Council expressed support for our proposed warding of Eastcotts parish. It also proposed a minor amendment to correct an anomaly to the boundary between our proposed Cauldwell and Kingsbrook wards, which forms part of the western boundary of Eastcotts parish. However, as already discussed, as this forms a parish boundary it cannot be amended as part of this review. Eastcotts Parish Council supported the incorporation of the Meadowsweet Drive area in a revised Kingsbrook ward however; they opposed the consequential warding of the parish and the proposed increase in the number of parish councillors. In addition, they proposed that our proposed parish ward names be changed from South parish ward to Rural parish ward and from North parish ward to Urban parish ward.

177 Having considered all the evidence received, and in light of the confirmation of our proposed borough wards in the area, we confirm our draft recommendation for the warding of Eastcotts parish as final, subject to three amendments. In accordance with the Parish Council's wishes, we propose reducing the proposed number of parish councillors from 19 to 15 in order that the existing number be retained. We also propose renaming our proposed parish wards as put forward by the Parish Council at Stage Three. We have been unable to consider the proposal that Eastcotts Parish Council remain unwarded. As detailed earlier, if a parish is to be divided between different borough wards then it has also to be divided into parish wards.

Final Recommendation

Eastcotts Parish Council should comprise 15 councillors, as at present, representing two wards: Urban ward (returning three councillors) and Rural ward (returning twelve councillors). The boundary between the two parish wards should reflect the proposed borough ward boundary, as illustrated and named on the large map at the back of the report.

178 The parish of Kempston Rural is currently served by 13 councillors and is not warded. In our draft recommendations, for borough warding purposes, we proposed that the Kempston Hardwick area of the parish form part of a new Kempston South ward, with the remainder of the parish forming part of a new Turvey ward. In order to reflect the proposed borough wards, we proposed consequential warding arrangements for Kempston Rural Parish Council. We proposed that the area transferred to Kempston South ward should be named Hardwick ward and should return four councillors, while the remaining part of the parish should be named Rural ward and should return nine councillors.

179 At Stage Three, the Borough Council opposed our proposed warding of Kempston Rural Parish Council, arguing that the area to be combined in the proposed Kempston South ward (the Kempston Hardwick area), has no community of interest with the Kempston South area. They reiterated their Stage One proposal, which would result in Kempston Rural parish not being warded. This view was also expressed by Kempston Town Council.

180 Having considered all the evidence received, and in the light of the confirmation of our proposed borough wards in the area, we confirm our draft recommendation for the warding of Kempston Rural parish as final. As discussed earlier, we have been unable to adhere to the wishes expressed at Stage Three, due to the restrictions within which we have to work with regard to parish councils. While we acknowledge that the communities of Kempston Hardwick and Kempston South have limited

communities of interest, we have been unable to identify any other possible alternatives which would provide for acceptable levels of electoral equality. We suggest that this issue is addressed as part of a forthcoming parish review.

Final Recommendation

Kempston Rural Parish Council should comprise 13 councillors, as at present, representing two wards: Hardwick ward (returning four councillors) and Rural ward (returning nine councillors). The boundary between the two parish wards should reflect the proposed borough ward boundary, as illustrated and named on the large map at the back of this report.

181 The parish of Renhold is currently represented by nine councillors and is not warded. In our draft recommendations report, for borough warding purposes, we proposed adopting the Borough Council’s proposal to transfer the development area to the east of Norse Road to a revised Goldington ward. The Borough Council proposed that the part of Renhold parish to be transferred to Goldington ward should be named South West ward and return four councillors, while the remaining part of the parish should be named Renhold North ward and should return nine councillors. For the purpose of consultation we were content to put forward the Council’s proposals for this area.

182 At Stage Three, the Borough Council supported our proposed warding of Renhold parish. Renhold Parish Council opposed our proposed increase of parish councillors from nine to 13, arguing that it does not consider it to be necessary as “it has already been agreed that the additional area is to be transferred to the Borough at the next boundary change”.

183 Having considered all the evidence received, and in the light of the confirmation of our proposed borough wards in the area, we confirm our draft recommendation for the warding of Renhold parish as final, subject to one amendment. In accordance with the Parish Council’s wishes, we propose reducing our proposed number of parish councillors from 13 to nine, resulting in the existing council size being retained.

Final Recommendation

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

184 Kempston Town Council is currently served by 12 councillors representing two wards, East and West, each returning six councillors. In our draft recommendations, for borough warding purposes, we proposed adopting the Borough Council’s proposed Kempston East, Kempston North and Kempston South wards. We also proposed transferring part of Kempston East ward to a revised Cauldwell ward. As a result, we proposed consequential warding arrangements for Kempston Town Council, with the creation of four new parish wards. We proposed that the part of Kempston transferred to a revised Cauldwell ward should be named East ward and should return one councillor. The area coterminous with Kempston East ward should be named Central ward and should return three councillors. The area

coterminous with Kempston North ward should be named North ward and should return three councillors. The area which forms part of Kempston South ward should be named South ward and should return five councillors.

185 At Stage Three, the Borough Council and Kempston Town Council both proposed modifications to our proposed warding arrangements for Kempston Town Council. They proposed that the proposed Central, North and South wards should each return four councillors, while the proposed East ward should return one councillor. They also proposed that our proposed Central ward be renamed East ward and that our proposed East ward be named Amphill Road ward.

186 Having considered all the evidence received, and in light of the confirmation of our proposed borough wards in the area, we confirm our draft recommendation for the warding of Kempston Town Council as final, subject to the amendments proposed by the Borough Council and the Town Council.

Final Recommendation

Kempston Town Council should comprise 13 councillors, one more than at present, representing four wards: Amphill Road ward (returning one councillor), East ward (returning four councillors), North ward (returning four councillors) and South ward (returning four councillors). The boundary between the four parish wards should reflect the proposed borough ward boundaries, as illustrated and named on the large map at the back of this report.

187 Elstow Parish Council is currently represented by seven councillors and is not warded. During Stage One, the parish requested that its level of representation be increased from seven to nine councillors, in order to reflect the increase in its electorate. We were content to put forward the Parish Council's proposal for the purpose of consultation, and we welcomed further views at Stage Three.

188 At Stage Three, the Borough Council, Elstow Parish Council and two local residents all supported our proposed increase in parish councillors for Elstow Parish Council. In light of the support expressed at Stage Three, and in the absence of any views to the contrary, we propose confirming our draft recommendations for Elstow Parish Council as final.

Final Recommendation

Elstow Parish Council should comprise nine parish councillors, two more than at present.

189 Bromham Parish Council is currently represented by 13 councillors and is not warded. During Stage Three, the parish requested that its level of representation be increased from 13 to 14 in order to reflect the increase in its population and enable a more effective allocation of councillor responsibilities. Having considered the representation received, we are content to adopt this proposal as part of our final recommendations.

Final Recommendation

Bromham Parish Council should comprise 14 parish councillors, one more than at present.

190 In our draft recommendations report we proposed that there should be no change to the electoral cycle of parish councils in the borough, and are confirming this as final.

Final Recommendation

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

Map 2: Final Recommendations for Bedford

6 WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

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

192 It is now up to the Secretary of State 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 18 September 2001.

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

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