

LOCAL
GOVERNMENT
COMMISSION
FOR ENGLAND

FINAL
RECOMMENDATIONS
ON THE FUTURE
ELECTORAL
ARRANGEMENTS FOR
STEVENAGE
IN HERTFORDSHIRE

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

February 1998

LOCAL GOVERNMENT COMMISSION FOR ENGLAND

This report sets out the Commission's final recommendations on the electoral arrangements for Stevenage in Hertfordshire.

Members of the Commission are:

Professor Malcolm Grant (Chairman)

Helena Shovelton (Deputy Chairman)

Peter Brokenshire

Professor Michael Clarke

Robin Gray

Bob Scruton

David Thomas O.B.E

Adrian Stungo (Chief Executive)

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Local Government Commission for England

3 February 1998

Dear Secretary of State

On 10 December 1996 the Commission commenced a periodic electoral review of the borough of Stevenage under the Local Government Act 1992. We published our draft recommendations in August 1997 and undertook a nine-week period of consultation.

We have now prepared our final recommendations in the light of the consultation. We have confirmed our draft recommendations, with a number of minor boundary modifications (see paragraph 44). This report sets out our final recommendations for changes to electoral arrangements in Stevenage.

We recommend that Stevenage Borough Council should be served by 39 councillors, as at present, representing 13 wards, one fewer than at present, and that changes should be made to ward boundaries in order to improve electoral equality, having regard to the statutory criteria. We recommend that the Council should continue to be elected by thirds.

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

Yours sincerely

PROFESSOR MALCOLM GRANT
Chairman

SUMMARY

The Commission began a review of Stevenage on 10 December 1996. We published our draft recommendations for electoral arrangements on 13 August 1997, after which we undertook a nine-week period of consultation.

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

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

- **in 12 of the 14 wards, the number of electors represented by each councillor varies by more than 10 per cent from the average for the borough; in seven wards, the number varies by more than 20 per cent with one ward varying by more than 50 per cent;**
- **this electoral imbalance is expected to worsen by 2001, when the number of electors represented by each councillor is forecast to vary by more than 10 per cent from the average for the borough in 12 wards, by more than 20 per cent in 10 wards and by more than 50 per cent in three wards.**

Our main final recommendations for future electoral arrangements (Figure 1) are that:

- **Stevenage Borough Council should continue to be served by 39 councillors;**
- **there should be 13 wards, one fewer than at present;**
- **the boundaries of all existing wards should be modified;**
- **elections should continue to take place by thirds.**

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

- **In ten of the 13 wards the number of electors per councillor would vary by no more than 10 per cent from the borough average.**
- **By 2001 the number of electors per councillor is projected to vary by no more than 10 per cent from the average in all wards.**

All further correspondence on these recommendations and the matters discussed in this report should be addressed to the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, who will not make an order implementing the Commission's recommendations before 17 March 1998:

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

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

Ward name	Number of councillors	Constituent areas	Map reference
1 Bandley Hill	3	Bandley Hill ward (part); Mobbsbury ward (part)	Map 2 and large map
2 Bedwell	3	Bedwell Plash ward (part); Chells ward (part); Monkswood ward (part); Shephall ward (part)	Map 2 and large map
3 Chells	3	Chells ward (part); Mobbsbury ward (part)	Map 2 and large map
4 Longmeadow	3	Bandley Hill ward (part); Longmeadow ward (part)	Map 2 and large map
5 Manor	3	Chells ward (part); Martins Wood ward (part); Mobbsbury ward (part); St Nicholas ward (part)	Map 2 and large map
6 Martins Wood	3	Martins Wood ward (part); Mobbsbury ward (part); St Nicholas ward (part)	Map 2 and large map
7 Old Town	3	Bedwell Plash ward (part); Martins Wood ward (part); Old Stevenage ward (part); Pin Green ward (part); Symonds Green ward (part)	Map 2 and large map
8 Pin Green	3	Bedwell Plash ward (part); Martins Wood ward (part); Pin Green ward (part)	Map 2 and large map
9 Roebuck	3	Longmeadow ward (part); Monkswood ward (part); Roebuck ward	Map 2 and large map
10 St Nicholas	3	St Nicholas ward (part); Wellfield ward (part)	Map 2 and large map
11 Shephall	3	Bandley Hill ward (part); Shephall ward (part)	Map 2 and large map
12 Symonds Green	3	Monkswood ward (part); Symonds Green ward (part)	Map 2 and large map
13 Woodfield	3	Old Stevenage ward (part); Symonds Green ward (part); Wellfield ward (part)	Map 2 and large map

1. INTRODUCTION

1 This report contains our final recommendations on the electoral arrangements for the borough of Stevenage. We have now reviewed all the districts in Hertfordshire as part of our programme of periodic electoral reviews of all principal local authority areas in England.

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

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

3 We have also had regard to our *Guidance and Procedural Advice for Local Authorities and Other Interested Parties* (published in March 1996 and supplemented in September 1996), which sets out our approach to the reviews.

4 This review was in four stages. Stage One began on 10 December 1996, when we wrote to Stevenage Borough Council inviting proposals for future electoral arrangements. Our letter was copied to Hertfordshire County Council, the Hertfordshire Police Authority, the local authority associations, the Member of Parliament and the Member of the European Parliament with constituency interests in the borough, and the headquarters of the main political parties. At the start of the review and following the publication of our draft recommendations, we published a notice in the local press, issued a press release and invited the Borough Council to publicise the review more widely. The closing date for receipt of representations was 10 March 1997. At Stage Two we considered all the representations received during Stage One and prepared our draft recommendations.

5 Stage Three began on 13 August 1997 with the publication of our report, *Draft Recommendations on the Future Electoral Arrangements for Stevenage in Hertfordshire*, and ended on 14 October 1997. Comments were sought on our preliminary conclusions. Finally, during Stage Four we reconsidered our draft recommendations in the light of the Stage Three consultation and now publish our final recommendations.

2. CURRENT ELECTORAL ARRANGEMENTS

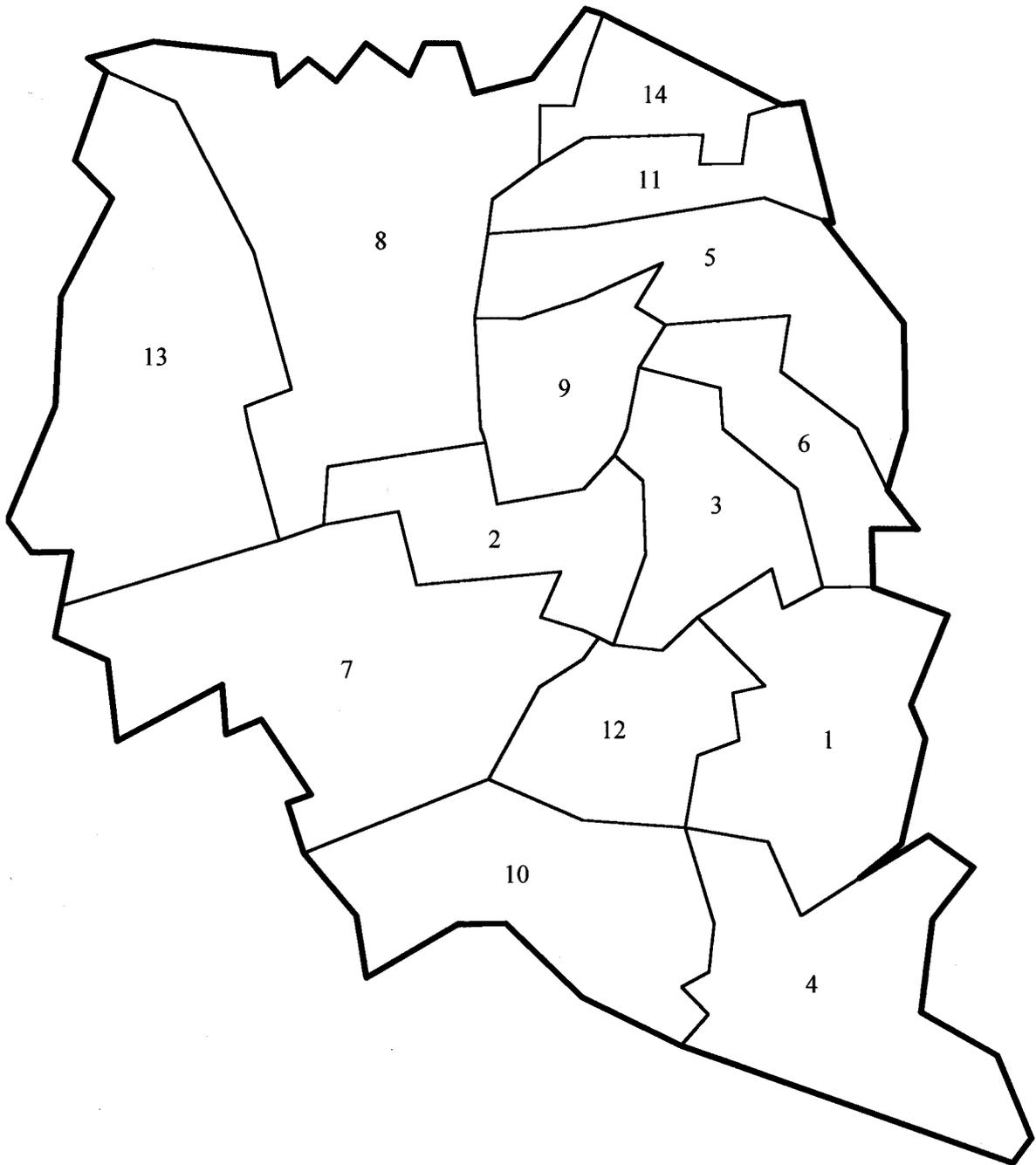
⁶ Stevenage was designated Britain's first New Town in 1946, and has developed as a coherent urban area, originally based on six self-contained residential neighbourhoods. The borough covers around 2,600 hectares and has a population of just over 75,000. It has good transport links; the East Coast main railway line passes through the town and the A1 trunk road passes through the west of the borough. Stevenage is entirely unparished.

⁷ Stevenage Borough Council has 39 councillors elected from 14 wards (Map 1 and Figure 2). Twelve wards are each represented by three councillors, with one ward being represented by two councillors and one single-member ward. The Council is elected by thirds. The electorate of the borough is 57,255 (February 1996) and each councillor represents an average of 1,468 electors. The Borough Council forecasts that the electorate will increase by more than 6 per cent to 61,002 by the year 2001, which would increase the average number of electors per councillor to 1,564 (Figure 2).

⁸ To compare levels of electoral inequality between wards, the extent to which the number of electors per councillor in each ward (the councillor:elector ratio) varies from the average for the borough in percentage terms has been calculated. In the report, this calculation may also be described as 'electoral variance'.

⁹ Since the last electoral review was completed in 1976 by our predecessor, the Local Government Boundary Commission (LGBC), changes in population and electorate have been unevenly spread across the borough. As a result, in 12 of the 14 wards the number of electors per councillor varies by more than 10 per cent from the average and in seven wards it varies by more than 20 per cent. The most significant electoral imbalance is in Martins Wood ward, where the three councillors each represent an average of 2,318 electors, 58 per cent more electors than the borough average of 1,468.

Map 1:
Existing Wards in Stevenage



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Key to Wards

- | | | |
|-----------------|-----------------|------------------|
| 1 Bandle Hill | 6 Mobbsbury | 11 St Nicholas |
| 2 Bedwell Plash | 7 Monkswood | 12 Shephall |
| 3 Chells | 8 Old Stevenage | 13 Symonds Green |
| 4 Longmeadow | 9 Pin Green | 14 Wellfield |
| 5 Martins Wood | 10 Roebuck | |

Figure 2:
Existing Electoral Arrangements

Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (1996)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2001)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
1 Bandle Hill	3	5,965	1,988	35	6,269	2,090	34
2 Bedwell Plash	3	3,727	1,242	-15	3,745	1,248	-20
3 Chells	2	3,284	1,642	12	3,294	1,647	5
4 Longmeadow	3	4,887	1,629	11	4,903	1,634	4
5 Martins Wood	3	6,954	2,318	58	8,351	2,784	78
6 Mobbsbury	3	3,120	1,040	-29	3,173	1,058	-32
7 Monkswood	3	2,274	758	-48	2,274	758	-52
8 Old Stevenage	3	5,587	1,862	27	6,152	2,051	31
9 Pin Green	3	3,568	1,189	-19	3,570	1,190	-24
10 Roebuck	3	3,988	1,329	-9	4,143	1,381	-12
11 St Nicholas	3	3,505	1,168	-20	3,516	1,172	-25
12 Shephall	3	3,177	1,059	-28	3,177	1,059	-32
13 Symonds Green	3	5,600	1,867	27	5,945	1,982	27
14 Wellfield	1	1,619	1,619	10	2,490	2,490	59
Totals	39	57,255	—	—	61,002	—	—
Averages	—	—	1,468	—	—	1,564	—

Source: Electorate figures are based on Stevenage 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. For example, in 1996, electors in Monkswood ward were relatively over-represented by 48 per cent, while electors in Martins Wood ward were relatively under-represented by 58 per cent. Figures have been rounded to the nearest whole number.

3. DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS

10 During Stage One we received representations from Stevenage Borough Council and the Stevenage Conservative Association. In the light of these representations and the evidence available to us, we reached preliminary conclusions which were set out in the report, *Draft Recommendations on the Future Electoral Arrangements for Stevenage in Hertfordshire*. We proposed:

- (a) that Stevenage Borough Council should continue to be served by 39 councillors;
- (b) there should be 13 wards, one fewer than at present;
- (c) that the boundaries of all 14 wards should be modified.

Draft Recommendation

Stevenage Borough Council should comprise 39 councillors, serving 13 wards. Elections should continue to be held by thirds.

11 Our proposals would have resulted in significant improvements in electoral equality, with the number of electors per councillor in 10 of the 13 wards varying by no more than 10 per cent from the borough average. This level of electoral equality was expected to improve during the period to 2001, by which time all wards were expected to vary by less than 10 per cent.

4. RESPONSES TO CONSULTATION

¹² During the consultation on our draft recommendations report, seven representations were received. A list of respondents is available from us on request.

Stevenage Borough Council

¹³ The Council welcomed our draft recommendations, which were based entirely on its own Stage One submission. It asked that we recommend a slight modification to the mapping of the boundary between the proposed Martins Wood and Pin Green wards, which would then bring the proposed boundary into line with the electorate figures that the Council had submitted for the wards. It also expressed its hope “that the new electoral arrangements are able to be implemented in time for the 1998 Borough Council elections”.

Stevenage Conservative Association

¹⁴ The Association acknowledged that the existing electoral arrangements resulted in substantial levels of electoral inequality and proposed the creation of 39 single-member wards covering the borough, as detailed in its Stage One submission. It stated that its submission had been developed following a local canvass and argued that smaller wards supported local ties and interests and enabled each of the small neighbourhood communities to be individually represented. It added that one of its proposed wards, Gorsedell, could initially be included in another ward until the electorate in that area had reached a viable level.

Stevenage Liberal Democrats

¹⁵ The Stevenage Liberal Democrats opposed our draft recommendation that the present Mobbsbury ward (the only ward in the borough presently with an opposition councillor) should be disbanded. The submission acknowledged that the present ward is significantly over-represented, but preferred that an area to the west of The White Way (currently in Martins Wood ward) be added to Mobbsbury ward in order that it could retain its

present three borough councillors. It added that if we were still minded to disband Mobbsbury ward, it would prefer that the new Manor ward did not include electors in the area around Valerian Way. It also suggested a number of other possible ward boundary alterations and expressed the view that any changes to the electoral arrangements of the borough should not be implemented before 1999, in order to give councillors and electors time to adjust to the new arrangements.

Other Representations

¹⁶ We received a further four representations in response to our draft recommendations, all from local residents. All four supported the principle of single-member wards for the borough, one also expressing opposition to our proposal to place parts of the current Old Stevenage and Wellfield wards together in a new ward.

5. ANALYSIS AND FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS

17 As indicated previously, our prime objective in considering the most appropriate electoral arrangements for Stevenage is to achieve electoral equality, having regard to the statutory criteria set out in the Local Government Act 1992 and Schedule 11 to the Local Government Act 1972, which refers to the ratio of electors to councillors being “as nearly as may be, the same in every ward of the district or borough”.

18 However, our function is not merely arithmetical. First, our recommendations are not intended to be based solely on existing electorate figures, but also on assumptions as to changes in the number and distribution of local government electors likely to take place within the ensuing five years. Second, we must have regard to the desirability of fixing identifiable boundaries, and to maintaining local ties which might otherwise be broken. Third, we must consider the need to secure effective and convenient local government, and reflect the interests and identities of local communities.

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

20 In our March 1996 *Guidance* we expressed the view that “proposals for changes in electoral arrangements should therefore be based on variations in each ward of no more than plus or minus 10 per cent from the average councillor:elector ratio for the authority, having regard to five-year forecasts of changes in electorates. Imbalances in excess of plus or minus 20 per cent may be acceptable, but only in highly exceptional circumstances ... and will have to be justified in full”. However, as emphasised in our September 1996 supplement to the *Guidance*, while we accept that absolute equality of representation is likely to be unattainable, we consider that, if electoral imbalances are to be kept

to the minimum, such equality should be the starting point in any electoral review.

Electorate Projections

21 During Stage One, the Borough Council submitted electorate forecasts for the period 1996 to 2001, projecting an increase in the electorate of more than 6 per cent over the five-year period, from 57,255 to 61,002. The Council estimated rates and locations of housing development with regard to structure and local plans, the expected rate of building over the five-year period and assumed occupancy rates. Advice has been obtained from the Borough Council on the likely effect on electorates of ward boundary changes. In our draft recommendations report we accepted that this is an inexact science and, having given consideration to projected electorates, were content that they represented the best estimates that could reasonably be made at the time.

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

Council Size

23 Our March 1996 *Guidance* indicated that we would normally expect the number of councillors serving a borough or district council to be in the range of 30 to 60.

24 Stevenage Borough Council is at present served by 39 councillors. The Council proposed no change to the council size during Stage One. In our draft recommendations report we considered the size and distribution of the electorate, the geography and other characteristics of the area, together with the representations received. We concluded that the statutory criteria and the achievement of electoral equality would best be met by retaining a council size of 39 members. In their Stage Three submissions both the Borough Council and the Stevenage Conservative

Association reiterated their support for a 39-member council size. We remain of the view that this is the appropriate council size for the borough of Stevenage.

Electoral Arrangements

25 During Stage One we heard arguments in support of single- and multi-member wards and are aware that both have merits and disadvantages. The Borough Council argued that multi-member wards were already in place in much of the borough and had proved successful. The Stevenage Conservative Association argued for single-member wards, contending that they provided more accountability and reduced confusion for the electorate. We noted that in Stevenage the practice of three-member wards is well-established – 12 of the 14 wards are currently represented by three councillors. We also noted that the Council had undertaken a local consultation exercise before formulating its preliminary proposals. In the light of these factors, our preliminary conclusion was for the continuation of multi-member wards for the borough but we invited further evidence during Stage Three.

26 In their Stage Three submissions the Borough Council and the Stevenage Conservative Association reiterated their support for multi- and single-member wards respectively. The Liberal Democrats supported the creation of an enlarged three-member Mobbsbury ward, while we also received four submissions from local residents supporting a system of single-member wards for the borough. It is clear from the representations received that both systems have some degree of support locally. However, we would not wish to impose a system of single-member wards in areas where there is a history of multi-member wards unless we considered such warding proposals to be clearly superior to any proposal for multi-member wards.

27 Having considered the submissions received during Stage Three we are not convinced that substantial new evidence has been put forward to persuade us to move away from the principle of multi-member wards for Stevenage. We therefore confirm as final our draft recommendation that Stevenage Borough Council should be divided into 13 three-member wards. The following areas, based on existing wards, are considered in turn:

- (a) Old Stevenage, St Nicholas, Symonds Green and Wellfield wards;
- (b) Chells, Martins Wood, Mobbsbury and Pin Green wards;
- (c) Bandle Hill, Longmeadow and Shephall wards; and
- (d) Bedwell Plash, Monkwood and Roebuck wards.

Old Stevenage, St Nicholas, Symonds Green and Wellfield wards

28 At present electors in the wards of Old Stevenage, Symonds Green and Wellfield are relatively under-represented, varying from the average number of electors per councillor by 27 per cent, 27 per cent and 10 per cent respectively. Electors in St Nicholas ward, however, are relatively over-represented by 20 per cent. As part of our draft recommendations we proposed that the area be re-warded, transferring part of the existing Symonds Green ward – the electors on both sides of Fairview Road and those electors east of the railway line in the vicinity of Julians Road and Orchard Road – to a new Old Town ward. We also proposed that Norton Green and the area to the north of Six Hills Way in Monkwood ward should be transferred to Symonds Green ward. This reduction in the number of electors in Symonds Green ward would result in the number of electors per councillor in that ward becoming almost equal to the average for the borough, both initially and in 2001.

29 These draft recommendations would have led to the number of electors per councillor in the proposed Old Town ward being 6 per cent above the average (2 per cent above by 2001); 4 per cent above the average in St Nicholas ward (2 per cent below by 2001); and 34 per cent below the average in the proposed Woodfield ward, but becoming 8 per cent below the average by 2001 due to significant growth forecast in the area. We considered that, given the good degree of electoral equality that would result, especially under the 2001 figures, such warding provided the most appropriate electoral arrangements for the area.

30 As stated above, we received submissions from the Borough Council and the Stevenage Conservative Association which proposed warding arrangements for the borough as a whole. We also received a submission from a resident of Wellfield

ward, opposing the creation of a new Woodfield ward covering part of the current Wellfield and Old Stevenage wards on the grounds that these were different and distinct areas.

31 The proposed Woodfield ward would cover that part of the current Old Stevenage ward lying to the north of Martins Way as well as part of the current Wellfield ward. While these areas are geographically distinct, the forecast development in the existing Wellfield area would create an enlarged residential area in the north-eastern corner of the borough. We consider that the proposed boundary along Martins Way is an effective boundary for the proposed Old Town ward and that in order to ensure good electoral equality in the area as a whole, the two areas of development – that part of the current Old Stevenage ward north of Martins Way and the area in the north-eastern corner of the borough – should be placed together in a three-member borough ward.

32 Having received no other submissions on these specific wards and given the good levels of electoral equality that would result, we wish to confirm our draft recommendations as final, subject to a minor boundary modification detailed in paragraph 44.

Chells, Martins Wood, Mobbsbury and Pin Green wards

33 The wards of Chells and Martins Wood are currently under-represented (by 12 per cent and 58 per cent respectively) while the wards of Mobbsbury and Pin Green are over-represented (by 29 per cent and 19 per cent respectively). In our draft recommendations we proposed the creation of a new Manor ward, covering parts of the current Mobbsbury and Martins Wood wards. We also proposed a number of boundary modifications between these wards, including the transfer of an area currently in Bedwell Plash ward to Pin Green ward, and a realignment of the boundary between the wards of Bandle Hill and Chells, the latter also gaining an additional (third) councillor.

34 In response to these proposals we received a submission from the Stevenage Liberal Democrats who objected to the division of Mobbsbury ward. It proposed the retention of the Mobbsbury area in a single ward but with the addition of electors living to the west of The White Way (currently in Martins Wood ward). This would improve electoral equality in Mobbsbury ward but would leave Martins Wood under-represented. Such warding would also not

address the electoral imbalances in the wards of Chells and Pin Green, unless the boundary between the two wards were to be substantially modified.

35 The Stevenage Liberal Democrats also put forward a second preference if we were to continue with the basis of the draft recommendations in this area. It proposed that electors north of Fairlands Way should not be included in a new Manor ward, given that the ward would then cross an arterial road. We are aware that Fairlands Way makes an identifiable boundary, but such a proposal would have a deleterious effect on electoral equality unless we were to substantially alter our draft recommendations elsewhere.

36 As part of its Stage Three submission the Borough Council proposed that an area around Pollard Gardens be transferred from Martins Wood ward to the proposed Pin Green ward. It explained that the electorate figures given in Stage One assumed this modification, which had been omitted from the mapping in its initial submission. Following consultations with Ordnance Survey we are also putting forward a minor modification to the proposed northern boundary of Manor ward to ensure that the industrial development to the north east of Martins Wood is included in its entirety in Manor ward.

37 These warding arrangements would result in the number of electors per councillor being 6 per cent above the borough average in Chells ward (equalling the average in 2001); 15 per cent below the average in Manor ward (becoming 5 per cent above the average in 2001 due to forecast growth); 3 per cent above the average in Martins Wood ward (2 per cent in 2001); and 7 per cent above the average in Pin Green ward (equalling the average in 2001).

Bandle Hill, Longmeadow and Shephall wards

38 The wards of Bandle Hill and Longmeadow are currently under-represented, by 35 per cent and 11 per cent respectively, while Shephall ward is currently over-represented by 28 per cent. In our draft recommendations we proposed the transfer of some areas currently in Bandle Hill ward to the ward of Shephall and parts of Longmeadow ward to Roebuck ward.

39 We did not receive any submissions relating specifically to these wards apart from the Conservative Association's scheme for the borough as a whole.

40 Having concluded that multi-member warding arrangements should continue in Stevenage we confirm in principle our draft recommendations for the wards of Bandley Hill, Longmeadow and Shephall. However, we propose a minor modification to the boundary between Bandley Hill and Shephall wards so that the boundary would run around the athletics track south of Woodcock Road, crossing Gresley Way as proposed in the draft recommendations, but would then run in a south easterly direction along a path to Broadwater Lane. This modification would not affect any electors, but would provide a more identifiable boundary. These recommendations would result in the number of electors per councillor being 4 per cent above the average in Bandley Hill ward (3 per cent above in 2001), 2 per cent above the average in Longmeadow ward (4 per cent below in 2001) and 3 per cent above the average in Shephall ward (2 per cent below the average in 2001).

Bedwell Plash, Monkwood and Roebuck wards

41 The wards of Bedwell Plash, Monkwood and Roebuck are all currently over-represented, by 15 per cent, 48 per cent and 9 per cent respectively. In our draft recommendations we proposed a reduction in the number of wards covering this area, with the disbandment Monkwood ward. The two modified wards of Bedwell and Roebuck would between them cover the majority of the current Monkwood ward, with the rest of the ward being transferred to Symonds Green. Parts of the current Bedwell Plash and Chells wards would also be transferred to the new Bedwell ward.

42 We did not receive any submissions relating specifically to these wards. Having concluded that multi-member warding arrangements should continue in Stevenage we confirm our draft recommendations for the wards of Bedwell Plash, Monkwood and Roebuck wards, resulting in the area being mostly covered by two new wards, Bedwell and Roebuck. These recommendations would result in the number of electors per councillor being 12 per cent above the average in Bedwell ward (5 per cent above in 2001) and 2 per cent above the average in Roebuck ward (1 per cent below the average in 2001).

Electoral Cycle

43 In our draft recommendations report, we proposed that the present system of elections by thirds in Stevenage be retained. At Stage Three the Borough Council expressed its support for the draft recommendations. The Stevenage Conservative Association argued that with a single-member ward structure elections could be held either by thirds or on a whole-council basis. It did not, however, state a preference for either system. We did not receive any other representations on this issue, and in the light of representations we confirm our draft recommendation as final.

Conclusions

44 Having carefully considered all the evidence and representations we have received in response to our consultation report, we have decided to substantially confirm our draft recommendations, with a number of minor boundary modifications:

- (i) the boundary between the proposed Martins Wood and Pin Green wards should be modified to include the area around Pollard Gardens in the proposed Pin Green ward;
- (ii) the boundary between the proposed Bandley Hill and Shephall wards should be modified to run along the path at the southern end of the two wards;
- (iii) the boundary between the proposed Manor and Martins Wood wards should be modified to include an industrial area north east of Martins Wood in Manor ward; and
- (iv) the boundary between the proposed Woodfield and St Nicholas wards should run along the northern curtilage of Wellfield wood.

45 Figure 3 (opposite) shows the impact of our final recommendations on electoral equality, comparing them with the current arrangements, based on 1996 and 2001 electorate figures.

46 As Figure 3 shows, our recommendations would result in a reduction in the number of wards where the number of electors per councillor varies by more than 10 per cent from the borough

Figure 3:
Comparison of Current and Recommended Electoral Arrangements

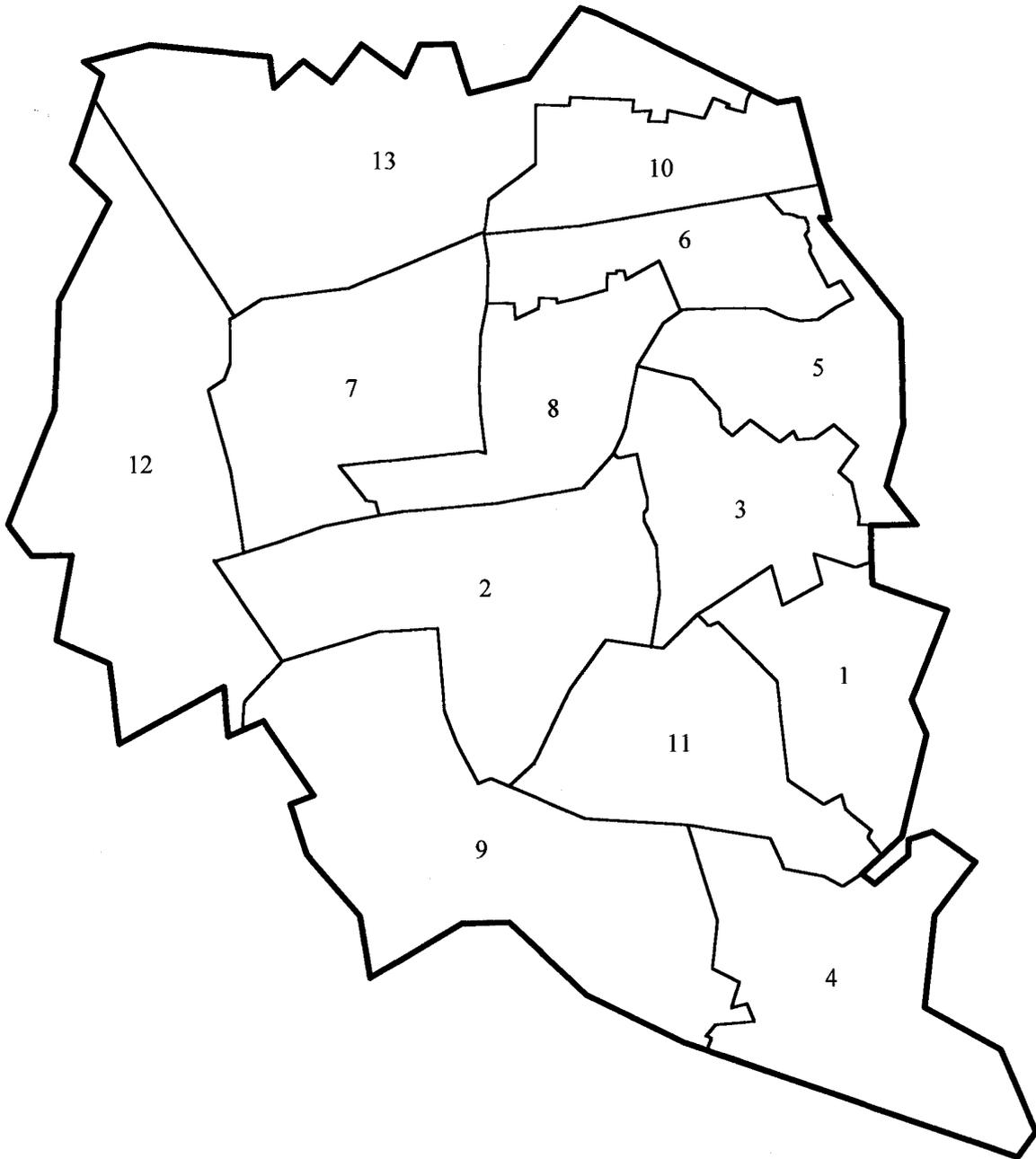
	1996 electorate		2001 projected electorate	
	Current arrangements	Final recommendations	Current arrangements	Final recommendations
Number of councillors	39	39	39	39
Number of wards	14	13	14	13
Average number of electors per councillor	1,468	1,468	1,564	1,564
Number of wards with a variance more than 10 per cent from the average	12	3	12	0
Number of wards with a variance more than 20 per cent from the average	7	1	10	0

average from 12 to three, and a further reduction to zero in 2001. Under these proposals, the average number of electors per councillor would remain at 1,468 initially and 1,564 by 2001. We conclude that our recommendations would best meet the need for electoral equality, having regard to the statutory criteria.

Final Recommendation

Stevenage Borough Council should comprise 39 councillors serving 13 wards, as detailed and named in Figures 1 and 4 and illustrated in Map 2 and the large map at the back of this report. The Council should continue to be elected by thirds.

Map 2:
The Commission's Final Recommendations for Stevenage



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Key to Wards

- | | | |
|---------------|----------------|------------------|
| 1 Bandle Hill | 6 Martins Wood | 11 Shephall |
| 2 Bedwell | 7 Old Town | 12 Symonds Green |
| 3 Chells | 8 Pin Green | 13 Woodfield |
| 4 Longmeadow | 9 Roebuck | |
| 5 Manor | 10 St Nicholas | |

Figure 4:
The Commission's Final Recommendations for Stevenage

Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (1996)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2001)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
1 Bandley Hill	3	4,584	1,528	4	4,850	1,617	3
2 Bedwell	3	4,940	1,647	12	4,948	1,649	5
3 Chells	3	4,681	1,560	6	4,697	1,566	0
4 Longmeadow	3	4,491	1,497	2	4,499	1,500	-4
5 Manor	3	3,724	1,241	-15	4,911	1,637	5
6 Martins Wood	3	4,540	1,513	3	4,797	1,599	2
7 Old Town	3	4,678	1,559	6	4,768	1,589	2
8 Pin Green	3	4,698	1,566	7	4,700	1,567	0
9 Roebuck	3	4,482	1,494	2	4,645	1,548	-1
10 St Nicholas	3	4,585	1,528	4	4,585	1,528	-2
11 Shephall	3	4,558	1,519	3	4,596	1,532	-2
12 Symonds Green	3	4,392	1,464	0	4,700	1,567	0
13 Woodfield	3	2,902	967	-34	4,306	1,435	-8
Totals	39	57,255	—	—	61,002	—	—
Averages	—	—	1,468	—	—	1,564	—

Source: Electorate figures are based on Stevenage 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.

6. NEXT STEPS

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

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

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

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

