

Final recommendations on the future electoral arrangements for North Kesteven in Lincolnshire

Further electoral review

December 2005

Translations and other formats

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What is The Boundary Committee for England?

The Boundary Committee for England is a committee of The Electoral Commission, an independent body set up by Parliament under the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000. It is responsible for conducting reviews as directed by The Electoral Commission or the Secretary of State.

Members of the Committee are:

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

Archie Gall (Director)

When conducting reviews our aim is to ensure that the number of electors represented by each councillor in an area is as nearly as possible the same, taking into account local circumstances. We can recommend changes to ward boundaries, the number of councillors and ward names. We can also recommend changes to the electoral arrangements of parish and town councils.

Executive summary

The Boundary Committee for England is the body responsible for conducting electoral reviews of local authorities. A Further Electoral Review of North Kesteven is being undertaken to provide improved levels of electoral equality across the district. It aims to ensure that the number of voters represented by each district councillor is approximately the same. The Electoral Commission directed the Boundary Committee to undertake this review on 2 June 2004.

Current electoral arrangements

Under the existing arrangements, eight wards currently have electoral variances of more than 10% from the district average. The development that the District Council forecast during the last review was not realised in some areas, and in others, more development was undertaken than expected.

Every review is conducted in four stages:

Stage	Stage starts	Description
One	3 August 2004	Submission of proposals to us
Two	30 November 2004	Our analysis and deliberation
Three	17 May 2005	Publication of draft recommendations and consultation on them
Four	9 August 2005	Analysis of submissions received and formulation of final recommendations

Draft recommendations

During Stage One, we received 16 submissions, including three district-wide schemes. Our draft recommendations comprised proposals from the District Council, the Labour Party and Councillor Hudson as well as our own proposals. For much of the district, we did not receive any evidence to justify the proposals. Therefore in these cases we proposed wards which would provide good electoral equality. We recommended that the District Council should return 43 members, an increase of three. Under our draft recommendations, just one ward was projected to have a variance of more than 10% from the district average by 2008.

Responses to consultation

During Stage Three we received 34 submissions, all of which may be inspected at our offices and those of the District Council, as well as on our website. We received a submission from the District Council, four from political organisations, six from District Councillors, 13 from parish or town councils, two from town councillors and eight from local residents.

Analysis and final recommendations

Electorate figures

During the last review, a 9% increase in electorate was projected between 1996 and 2001. However, since 1996, there has been a 13% increase in the electorate of North Kesteven district. The Council provided electorate forecasts, projecting an increase in the electorate of approximately 11% over the five-year period from 2003 to 2008. During Stage Three, questions were raised in two submissions relating to the District Council's projected figures, particularly for Sleaford. These concerns were put to the District Council who stood by its projected electorate figures and provided evidence in support. We are therefore satisfied that the District Council's projected electorate figures provide the best available estimates.

Council size

We received support for our proposed council size of 43, an increase of three, during Stage Three. We are therefore adopting our draft recommendation for a council of 43 members as part of our final recommendations.

General analysis

In view of submissions received, we are proposing to move away from our draft recommendations in a number of areas. We are adopting Ruskington and Skellingthorpe wards based on parishes of the same names and an Eagle, Swinderby & Witham St Hughs ward. We are also proposing to amend the draft Ashby de La Launde, Bassingham & Brant Broughton, Cranwell & Osbournby, Heckington Rural, North Hykeham Forum, North Hykeham Memorial, North Hykeham Mill, Sleaford Central, Sleaford Quarrington and Sleaford Westholme wards. We consider that although some of these amendments will slightly worsen electoral equality, they will provide a better reflection of community identities.

What happens next?

All further correspondence on these final recommendations and the matters discussed in this report should be addressed to The Electoral Commission, which will not make an Order implementing them before 17 January 2006. The representations will be available for public access once the Order has been made.

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The Electoral Commission
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London SW1P 2HW**

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This address should only be used for this purpose.

The full report is available to download at www.boundarycommittee.org.uk.

Table 1: Final recommendations: Summary

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Constituent areas
1	Ashby de la Launde & Cranwell	2	Ashby de la Launde & Bloxholm parish, Brauncewell parish, Cranwell & Byard's Leap parish, Digby parish, Dorrington parish, Rowston parish, Scopwick parish and Temple Bruer with Temple High Grange parish
2	Bassingham & Brant Broughton	2	Aubourn Haddington & South Hykeham parish, Bassingham parish, Beckingham parish, Brant Broughton & Stragglethorpe parish, Carlton-le-Moorland parish, Norton Disney parish, Stapleford parish and Thurlby parish
3	Billinghay, Martin & North Kyme	2	Billinghay parish, Dogdyke parish, Martin parish, North Kyme parish, Timberland parish and Walcott parish
4	Bracebridge Heath & Waddington East	3	Bracebridge Heath parish and the proposed Waddington East parish ward of Waddington parish
5	Branston	2	Branston & Mere parish and Potter Hanworth parish
6	Cliff Villages	2	Boothby Graffoe parish, Coleby parish, Harmston parish, Leadenham parish Navenby parish, Welbourn parish and Wellingore parish
7	Eagle, Swinderby & Witham St Hughs	2	Doddington & Whisby parish, Eagle & Swinethorpe parish, North Scarle parish, Swinderby parish, Thorpe on the Hill parish and Witham St Hughs parish
8	Heckington Rural	2	Burton Pedwardine parish, Great Hale parish, Heckington parish, Helpringham parish and Little Hale parish
9	Heighington & Washingborough	3	Canwick parish, Heighington parish and Washingborough parish
10	Kirkby la Thorpe & South Kyme	1	Anwick parish, Asgarby & Howell parish, Ewerby & Evedon parish, Kirkby La Thorpe parish and South Kyme parish
11	Leasingham & Rauceby	1	Leasingham parish, North Rauceby parish, Roxholm parish and South Rauceby parish.
12	Metheringham	2	Blankney parish, Dunston parish, Metheringham parish and Nocton parish

Table 1 (continued): Final recommendations: Summary

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Constituent areas
13	North Hykeham Forum	1	The proposed Forum parish ward of North Hykeham parish
14	North Hykeham Memorial	1	The proposed Memorial parish ward of North Hykeham parish
15	North Hykeham Mill	2	The proposed Mill parish ward of North Hykeham parish
16	North Hykeham Moor	1	The proposed Moor parish ward of North Hykeham parish
17	North Hykeham Witham	1	The proposed Witham parish ward of North Hykeham parish
18	Osournby	1	Aswarby & Swarby parish, Aunsby & Dembleby parish, Culverthorpe & Kelby parish, Newton & Haceby parish, Osournby parish, Screddington parish, Silk Willoughby parish, Swaton parish, Threkingham parish, Walcot near Folkingham parish and Wilsford parish
19	Ruskington	2	Ruskington parish
20	Skellingthorpe	2	Skellingthorpe parish
21	Sleaford Castle	1	The proposed Castle parish ward of Sleaford parish
22	Sleaford Holdingham	1	(unchanged) Sleaford Holdingham parish ward of Sleaford parish
23	Sleaford Navigation	1	The proposed Navigation parish ward of Sleaford parish
24	Sleaford Quarrington & Mareham	3	The proposed parish ward of Quarrington and Mareham parish ward of Sleaford parish
25	Sleaford Westholme	1	The proposed Westholme parish ward of Sleaford parish
26	Waddington West	1	The proposed Waddington West parish ward of Waddington parish

Notes:

1. The whole district is parished.
2. The maps accompanying this report illustrate the proposed wards outlined above.
3. We have made a number of minor boundary amendments to ensure that existing ward boundaries adhere to ground detail. These changes do not affect any electors.

Table 2: Final recommendations for North Kesteven district

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2003)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2008)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
1	Ashby de la Launde & Cranwell	2	3,469	1,735	-1	3,571	1,786	-9
2	Bassingham & Brant Broughton	2	3,374	1,687	-4	3,759	1,880	-4
3	Billingham, Martin & North Kyme	2	3,584	1,792	2	3,964	1,982	1
4	Bracebridge Heath & Waddington East	3	6,184	2,061	18	6,589	2,196	12
5	Branston	2	3,768	1,884	7	3,846	1,923	-2
6	Cliff Villages	2	3,808	1,904	9	4,183	2,092	7
7	Eagle, Swinderby & Witham St Hughs	2	2,435	1,218	-31	4,272	2,136	9
8	Heckington Rural	2	4026	2,013	15	4,235	2,118	8
9	Heighington & Washingborough	3	5,385	1,795	2	5,495	1,832	-6
10	Kirkby la Thorpe & South Kyme	1	1,687	1,687	-4	1,962	1,962	0
11	Leasingham & Rauceby	1	1,771	1,771	1	1,790	1,790	-8

Table 2 (continued): Final recommendations for North Kesteven district

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2003)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2008)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
12	Metheringham	2	3,969	1,985	13	4,263	2,132	9
13	North Hykeham Forum	1	1,959	1,959	12	1,909	1,909	-2
14	North Hykeham Memorial	1	1,713	1,713	-2	1,796	1,796	-8
15	North Hykeham Mill	2	1,992	1,992	14	3,801	1,896	-3
16	North Hykeham Moor	1	1,929	1,929	10	1,926	1,926	-1
17	North Hykeham Witham	1	1,781	1,781	2	1,913	1,913	-2
18	Osbournby	1	1,783	1,783	2	1,831	1,831	-6
19	Ruskington	2	4,215	2,108	20	4,412	2,206	13
20	Skellingthorpe	2	2,720	1,360	-22	3,199	1,600	-18
21	Sleaford Castle	1	1,728	1,728	-1	2,067	2,067	6
22	Sleaford Holdingham	1	1,966	1,966	12	2,011	2,011	3
23	Sleaford Navigation	1	1,779	1,779	1	1,841	1,841	-6

Table 2 (continued): Final recommendations for North Kesteven district

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2003)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2008)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
24	Sleaford Quarrington & Mareham	3	4,466	1,489	-15	5,392	1,797	-8
25	Sleaford Westholme	1	1,899	1,899	8	1,952	1,952	0
26	Waddington West	1	2,032	2,032	16	2,056	2,056	5
	Totals	43	75,422	-	-	84,035	-	-
	Averages	-	-	1,754	-	-	1,954	-

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

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

1 Introduction

1 This report contains our final recommendations for the electoral arrangements for the district of North Kesteven.

2 At its meeting on 12 February 2004 The Electoral Commission agreed that the Boundary Committee should make on-going assessments of electoral variances in all local authorities where the five-year forecast period following a Periodic Electoral Review (PER) has elapsed. More specifically, it was agreed that there should be a closer scrutiny where either:

- 30% of wards in an authority had electoral variances of over 10% from the average; or
- any single ward had a variance of more than 30% from the average.

3 The intention of such scrutiny was to establish the reasons behind the continuing imbalances, to consider likely future trends, and to assess what action, if any, was appropriate to rectify the situation.

4 This is our first review of the electoral arrangements of North Kesteven. North Kesteven's last review was carried out by the Local Government Commission for England (LGCE), which reported to the Secretary of State in 1997. An electoral change Order implementing the new electoral arrangements was made on 21 September 1998 and the first elections under the new arrangements took place in May 1999.

5 In carrying out our work, the Boundary Committee has to work within a statutory framework.¹ This refers to the need to:

- reflect the identities and interests of local communities;
- secure effective and convenient local government; and
- achieve equality of representation.

In addition we are required to work within Schedule 11 to the Local Government Act 1972.

6 Details of the legislation under which the review of North Kesteven is being conducted are set out in a document entitled *Guidance and procedural advice for periodic electoral reviews* (published by The Electoral Commission in July 2002). This *Guidance* sets out the approach to the review and will be helpful in both understanding the approach taken by The Boundary Committee for England and in informing comments interested groups and individuals may wish to make about our recommendations.

7 Our task is to make recommendations to The Electoral Commission on the number of councillors who should serve on a council, and the number, boundaries and names of wards. We can also propose changes to the electoral arrangements for any parish and town councils in the district. We do not in these reviews consider changes to the external boundaries of areas.

¹ As set out in section 13(5) of the Local Government Act 1992 (as amended by SI 2001 No. 3962).

8 The broad objective of an electoral review is to achieve, as far as possible, equal representation across the district as a whole, i.e. that all councillors in the local authority represent similar numbers of electors. Schemes which would result in, or retain, an electoral imbalance of over 10% in any ward will have to be fully justified. Any imbalances of 20% or more should only arise in the most exceptional circumstances, and will require the strongest justification.

9 Electoral equality, in the sense of each elector in a local authority having a 'vote of equal weight' when it comes to the election of councillors, is a fundamental democratic principle. Accordingly, the objective of an electoral review is to ensure that the number of electors represented by each councillor is, as near as is possible, the same across a district. In practice, each councillor cannot represent exactly the same number of electors given geographic and other constraints, including the make up and distribution of communities. However, our aim in any review is to recommend wards that are as close to the district average as possible in terms of the number of electors per councillor, while also taking account of evidence in relation to community identity and effective and convenient local government.

10 We are not prescriptive about council size and acknowledge that there are valid reasons for variations between local authorities. However, we believe that any proposals relating to council size, whether these are for an increase, a reduction, or the retention of the existing size, should be supported by strong evidence and arguments. Indeed, we believe that consideration of the appropriate council size is the starting point for our reviews and whatever size of council is proposed to us should be developed and argued in the context of the authority's internal political management structures, put in place following the Local Government Act 2000. It should also reflect the changing role of councillors in the new structure.

11 As indicated in its *Guidance*, The Electoral Commission requires the decision on council size to be based on an overall view about what is right for the particular authority and not just by addressing any imbalances in small areas of the authority by simply adding or removing councillors from these areas. While we will consider ways of achieving the correct allocation of councillors between, say, a number of towns in an authority or between rural and urban areas, our starting point must always be that the recommended council size reflects the authority's optimum political management arrangements and best provides for convenient and effective local government and that there is evidence for this.

12 In addition, we do not accept that an increase or decrease in the electorate of the authority should automatically result in a consequent increase or decrease in the number of councillors. Similarly, we do not accept that changes should be made to the size of a council simply to make it more consistent with the size of neighbouring or similarly sized authorities; the circumstances of one authority may be very different from that of another. We will seek to ensure that our recommended council size recognises all the factors and achieves a good allocation of councillors across the district.

13 Where multi-member wards are proposed, we believe that the number of councillors to be returned from each ward should not exceed three, other than in very exceptional circumstances. Numbers in excess of three could result in an

unacceptable dilution of accountability to the electorate and we have not, to date, prescribed any wards with more than three councillors.

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

Table 3: Stages of the review

Stage	Stage starts	Description
One	3 August 2004	Submission of proposals to us
Two	30 November 2004	Our analysis and deliberation
Three	17 May 2005	Publication of draft recommendations and consultation on them
Four	9 August 2005	Analysis of submissions received and formulation of final recommendations

15 Stage One began on 3 August 2004, when we wrote to North Kesteven District Council inviting proposals for future electoral arrangements. We also notified Lincolnshire Police Authority, Lincolnshire Local Councils' Association, parish and town councils in the district, Members of Parliament with constituency interests in the district, Members of the European Parliament for the East Midlands Region and the headquarters of the main political parties. We placed a notice in the local press, issued a press release and invited North Kesteven District Council to publicise the review further. The closing date for receipt of representations, the end of Stage One, was 29 November 2004.

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

17 Stage Three began on 17 May 2005 with the publication of the report *Draft recommendations on the future electoral arrangements for North Kesteven in Lincolnshire*, and ended on 8 August 2005.

18 During Stage Four we reconsidered the draft recommendations in the light of the Stage Three consultation, decided whether to modify them, and now submit final recommendations to The Electoral Commission. It is now for the Commission to accept, modify or reject our final recommendations. If The Electoral Commission accepts the recommendations, with or without modification, it will make an electoral changes Order. The Electoral Commission will determine when any changes come into effect.

Equal opportunities

19 In preparing this report the Boundary Committee has had regard to:

- The general duty set out in section 71(1) of the Race Relations Act 1976 and the statutory Code of Practice on the Duty to Promote Race Equality (Commission for Racial Equality, May 2002), i.e. to have due regard to:
 - eliminate unlawful racial discrimination;
 - promote equality of opportunity; and
 - promote good relations between people of different racial groups.

National Parks, Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and the Broads

20 The Boundary Committee has also had regard to:

- Section 11A(2) of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949 (as inserted by section 62 of the Environment Act 1995). This states that, in exercising or performing any functions in relation to, or so as to affect, land in a National Park, any relevant authority shall have regard to the Park's purposes. If there is a conflict between those purposes, a relevant authority shall attach greater weight to the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage of the Park.
- Section 85 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000. This states that, in exercising or performing any functions in relation to, or so as to affect, land in an AONB, a relevant authority shall have regard to the purpose of the AONB.
- Section 17A of the Norfolk and Suffolk Broads Act (as inserted by section 97 Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000). This states that, in exercising or performing any functions in relation to, or so as to affect, land in the Broads, a relevant authority shall have regard to the purposes of the Broads.

2 Current electoral arrangements

21 The district of North Kesteven lies to the south of the City of Lincoln. It is largely rural in nature and includes the two small towns of Sleaford and North Hykeham as well as numerous villages and hamlets. It is fully parished, and has a population of 96,852 (2004).

22 Since the publication of the Local Government Commission for England's (LGCE) final recommendations in 1997, some of the expected development did not go ahead, most notably in Skellingthorpe ward, whilst significant unforeseen development has occurred in Sleaford and North Hykeham parishes. During the last review, the District Council projected that Skellingthorpe ward would experience an increase in electorate sufficient to improve its electoral variance from -21% to -8% by 2001. However, this development was not forthcoming and by 2004 the ward's variance had deteriorated to 28% fewer electors than the district average. Contrary to this, large housing developments have taken place on former military bases, a former hospital in Bassingham and North Hykeham Mill and Sleaford Quarrington wards, resulting in projected variances of 94%, 75% and 66% more than the district average by 2008 respectively.

23 The Council presently has 40 members who are elected from 30 wards, 11 of which are relatively urban in North Hykeham and Sleaford and the remainder being predominantly rural. At present, each councillor represents an average of 1,886 electors, which the District Council forecasts will increase to 2,101 by the year 2008 if the present number of councillors is maintained (see Table 4 overleaf). However, due to overestimations and underestimations in electorate growth since the last electoral review, the number of electors per councillor in eight of the 30 wards varies by more than 10% from the district average, in two wards by more than 20% and in one ward by more than 30%. The worst imbalance is in Sleaford Quarrington ward, where the councillor represents 37% more electors than the district average.

24 Twenty-two of the existing wards are single-member wards, while six are represented by two members, and two by three members. The district is fully parished and comprises 75 parishes.

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

Table 4: Existing electoral arrangements in North Kesteven district

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2003)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2008)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
1	Ashby de la Launde	1	1,794	1,794	-5	1,884	1,884	-10
2	Bassingham	1	2,145	2,145	14	4,082	4,082	94
3	Billinghay	1	1,719	1,719	-9	2,010	2,010	-5
4	Bracebridge Heath & Waddington East	3	6,184	2,061	9	6,589	2,196	5
5	Branston & Mere	2	3,768	1,884	0	3,846	1,923	-8
6	Brant Broughton	1	1,999	1,999	6	2,234	2,234	6
7	Cliff Villages	2	3,808	1,904	1	4,183	2,092	0
8	Cranwell & Byard's Leap	1	1,675	1,675	-11	1,715	1,715	-18
9	Eagle & North Scarle	1	1,665	1,665	-12	1,757	1,757	-16
10	Heckington Rural	2	4,026	2,013	7	4,244	2,122	1
11	Heighington & Washingborough	3	5,385	1,795	-5	5,495	1,832	-13
12	Kyme	1	2,051	2,051	9	2,343	2,343	12

Table 4 (continued): Existing electoral arrangements in North Kesteven district

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2003)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2008)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
13	Leasingham & Roxholm	1	1,771	1,771	-6	1,804	1,804	-14
14	Martin	1	1,685	1,685	-11	1,790	1,790	-15
15	Metheringham	2	3,785	1,893	0	4,074	2,037	-3
16	North Hykeham Forum	1	1,931	1,931	2	1,907	1,907	-9
17	North Hykeham Memorial	1	1,827	1,827	-3	1,910	1,910	-9
18	North Hykeham Mill	1	1,975	1,975	5	3,675	3,675	75
19	North Hykeham Moor	1	1,890	1,890	0	1,887	1,887	-10
20	North Hykeham Witham	1	1,751	1,751	-7	1,845	1,845	-12
21	Osbournby	1	1,783	1,783	-5	1,831	1,831	-13
22	Ruskington	2	4,215	2,108	12	4,412	2,206	5
23	Skellingthorpe	2	2,720	1,360	-28	3,199	1,600	-24
24	Sleaford Castle	1	1,958	1,958	4	2,297	2,297	9

Table 4 (continued): Existing electoral arrangements in North Kesteven district

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2003)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2008)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
25	Sleaford Holdingham	1	1,966	1,966	4	2,011	2,011	-4
26	Sleaford Mareham	1	1,913	1,913	1	1,930	1,930	-8
27	Sleaford Navigation	1	1,518	1,518	-19	1,580	1,580	-25
28	Sleaford Quarrington	1	2,588	2,588	37	3,497	3,497	66
29	Sleaford Westholme	1	1,895	1,895	1	1,948	1,948	-7
30	Waddington West	1	2,032	2,032	8	2,056	2,056	-2
	Totals	40	75,422	-	-	84,035	-	-
	Averages		-	1,886	-	-	2,101	-

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

Note: The 'variance from average' column shows by how far, in percentage terms, the number of electors per councillor varies from the average for the district. The minus symbol (-) denotes a lower than average number of electors. For example, in 2003, electors in Sleaford Quarrington ward were relatively over-represented by 37%, while electors in Skellingthorpe ward were significantly under-represented by 28%. Figures have been rounded to the nearest whole number.

3 Draft recommendations

26 During Stage One, we received 16 submissions, including three district-wide schemes. The District Council, Sleaford and North Hykeham Constituency Labour Party (the Labour Party) and Councillor Hudson all submitted district-wide schemes. We also received six submissions from parish and town councils, two from district councillors, two from Sleaford town councillors and three from local residents. In the light of these representations and evidence available to us, we reached preliminary conclusions which were set out in our report, *Draft recommendations on the future electoral arrangements for North Kesteven in Lincolnshire*.

27 Our draft recommendations comprised proposals from the District Council, the Labour Party and Councillor Hudson as well as our own proposals. For much of the district, we did not receive any evidence to justify the proposals submitted, therefore in these cases we investigated various different options and proposed wards which would provide good electoral equality. We proposed that:

- North Kesteven District Council should be served by 43 councillors, three more than at present, representing 24 wards, six fewer than at present;
- the boundaries of 23 of the existing wards should be modified, while seven wards should retain their existing boundaries; and
- there should be new warding arrangements for Sleaford and North Hykeham Town Councils to reflect the changes to the two parishes' district ward boundaries. North Hykeham Town Council should comprise 18 councillors, two more than at present and Sleaford Town Council should retain 18 councillors.

28 Our draft recommendations would have resulted in significant improvements in electoral equality, with the number of electors per councillor in 16 of the 24 wards varying by no more than 10% from the district average. This level of electoral equality was forecast to improve further, with only one ward expected to vary by more than 10% from the average by 2008.

4 Responses to consultation

29 We received 34 representations during Stage Three, all of which may be inspected at both our offices and those of the District Council. Representations may also be viewed on our website at www.boundarycommittee.org.uk.

North Kesteven District Council

30 The District Council supported the proposed council size of 43 and put forward alternative wards for the north-west of the district and the area around Sleaford in order to better reflect community identity. The District Council reiterated many of its Stage One proposals. Its Stage Three proposals would result in six wards (out of 28) with variances of more than 10% from the average by 2008. It accepted the remainder of the draft recommendations, including those for the towns of North Hykeham and Sleaford. It opposed the draft recommendations for large rural wards and argued that such wards create problems in terms of maintaining community identities, delivering local services and acquiring candidates. The District Council maintained that ideally, single-member wards provide the best representation. It also put forward revised electoral arrangements for Ashby de la Launde & Bloxholm with Temple Bruer with Temple High Grange Parish Council.

Political groups

31 Sleaford & North Hykeham Local Liberal Democrats (the Liberal Democrats) proposed nine alternative rural wards, five of which would have variances of more than 10% from the average by 2008. They also put forward alternative warding arrangements for North Hykeham and Sleaford towns. The Liberal Democrats argued that their proposals would better reflect local communities and common interests. The Liberal Democrats contended that the forecast electorate figures used in the draft recommendations were not accurate. Due to these concerns they adjusted the total number of electors by 2008 and consequently the district average.

32 Sleaford & District Branch Labour Party expressed concerns regarding the draft recommendations for the allocation of town councillors in Sleaford and instead proposed to redistribute the 18 councillors so that Sleaford Quarrington ward would be represented by six councillors.

33 North Hykeham & District Labour Party supported the draft recommendations and for a number of wards included some comments outlining the reasons for their support.

34 Sleaford & North Hykeham Constituency Labour Party supported the draft recommendations.

Parish and town councils and parish meetings

35 We received 13 representations from parish and town councils and parish meetings.

36 Sleaford Town Council supported three of the draft wards for Sleaford and proposed to broadly retain the existing Sleaford Castle ward. It also submitted two

different options for the area in the south of the town, both broadly based on the two existing wards, which it argued would better reflect community identities. The Town Council also proposed that the Council should comprise 20 town councillors.

37 North Hykeham Town Council proposed an alternative boundary between North Hykeham Memorial and North Hykeham Mill wards and other minor amendments to improve the boundaries.

38 Skellingthorpe and Eagle & Swinethorpe parish councils opposed our draft three-member Eagle & Skellingthorpe ward. They argued that to better reflect community identities, Skellingthorpe parish should remain as a district ward despite the poor electoral equality.

39 Washingborough Parish Council expressed concerns regarding the draft recommendations for Skellingthorpe, Eagle, Osbournby and Cranwell areas, arguing that the villages in the proposed wards for these areas do not share links.

40 Burton Pedwardine Parish Meeting objected to the draft recommendation to transfer Burton Pedwardine village from Heckington Rural ward into Cranwell & Osbournby ward.

41 Carlton Le Moorland and Aubourn & Haddington parish councils both opposed the draft three-member Bassingham & Brant Broughton ward. They proposed that Witham St Hughs parish should comprise its own single-member district ward. The parish councils also argued that the existing single-member Bassingham (less Witham St Hughs parish) and Brant Broughton wards should be retained.

42 Ruskington and Leasingham & Roxholm parish councils opposed the draft Leasingham & Ruskington ward and Ruskington Parish Council argued that the existing two-member Ruskington ward be retained in order to better reflect community identity. Leasingham & Roxholm Parish Council also included a petition with 205 signatures objecting to the proposed Leasingham & Ruskington ward.

43 Coleby and Navenby parish councils both supported the draft recommendation for Cliff Villages ward. Branston & Mere Parish Council decided not to comment at this stage.

District councillors

44 We received six representations from District Councillors. District Councillors Rook and Woodman (representing Brant Broughton and Bassingham wards respectively) both opposed the draft three-member Bassingham & Brant Broughton ward. Each put forward their own alternative single-member wards.

45 District Councillor Robertson (representing Leasingham & Roxholm ward) objected to our Leasingham & Ruskington ward, stating that the villages of Leasingham and Ruskington have no community links.

46 District Councillor Hudson (representing Waddington West ward) did not support the District Council's response to the draft recommendations.

47 District Councillors Brighton (representing Heighington & Washingborough ward) and Powell (representing Billingham ward) both expressed concerns regarding multi-member wards. They both expressed a preference for single-member wards, arguing that such wards provide effective local representation.

Other representations

48 We received a further 10 representations from two town councillors and eight local residents.

49 North Hykeham Town Councillor Chadwick expressed concerns regarding multi-member wards. Sleaford Town Councillor Edwards supported the draft recommendations, although she expressed concerns about the proposed electoral arrangements for Sleaford parish. A local resident objected to the transfer of Burton Pedwardine parish to the draft Cranwell & Osbournby ward. He argued that Burton Pedwardine parish should remain in Heckington Rural ward.

50 A local resident objected to our proposal for a three-member Bassingham & Brant Broughton ward.

51 A Sleaford resident put forward a 21-member option for Sleaford Town Council in order to achieve equality of representation. Another local resident supported the draft recommendations for Sleaford parish, including the retention of 18 Town Councillors.

52 Four local residents supported the draft recommendations. In a joint representation, two local residents argued that an increase in the number of District Councillors would benefit the consistency and quality of how the Council deals with planning applications.

5 Analysis and final recommendations

53 We have now finalised our conclusions on the electoral arrangements for North Kesteven.

54 As described earlier, the prime aim in considering the most appropriate electoral arrangements for North Kesteven is to achieve electoral equality. In doing so we have regard to section 13(5) of the Local Government Act 1992 (as amended):

- the need to secure effective and convenient local government;
- reflect the identities and interests of local communities; and
- secure the matters in respect of equality of representation referred to in paragraph 3(2)(a) of Schedule 11 to the Local Government Act 1972.

55 Schedule 11 to the Local Government Act 1972 refers to the number of electors per councillor being 'as nearly as may be, the same in every ward of the district or borough'. In relation to Schedule 11, our recommendations are not intended to be based solely on existing electorate figures, but also on estimated changes in the number and distribution of local government electors likely to take place over the next five years. We must also have regard to the desirability of fixing clearly identifiable boundaries and to maintaining local ties.

56 In reality, the achievement of absolute electoral equality is unlikely to be attainable. There must be a degree of flexibility. However, our approach, in the context of the statutory criteria, is to keep variances to a minimum.

57 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 should also be taken into account and we aim to recommend a scheme which provides improved electoral equality over this period.

58 The recommendations do not affect county, district or parish external boundaries, local taxes, or result in changes to postcodes. Nor is there any evidence that these recommendations will have an adverse effect on house prices, or car and house insurance premiums. Our proposals do not take account of parliamentary boundaries, and we are not, therefore, able to take into account any representations which are based on these issues.

Electorate figures

59 As part of the last review of North Kesteven district, the District Council forecast an increase in the electorate of 9% between 1996 and 2001. However, since 1996, the district's electorate has increased by 13%. There has been significant growth in Basingham, Ruskington and Sleaford Quarrington wards but no substantial growth overall in Skellingthorpe ward. This has resulted in poor electoral equality across much of the district. The District Council submitted electorate forecasts for the year 2008, (which were published on our website), and which it adjusted at a later date (by just 292 electors) to take account of revised information and our queries. These

updated figures projected an increase in the electorate of approximately 11% from 75,422 to 84,035 over the five-year period from 2003 to 2008. The District Council expects most of the growth to be in Bassingham ward and North Hykeham and Sleaford towns. In order to prepare these forecasts, the Council estimated rates and locations of housing development with regard to planning applications, development plans, the expected rate of building over the five-year period and assumed occupancy rates. The Council also examined the planning permissions granted up to March 2004 and the 2003 Housing Land Availability study. It took into account developments expected to be completed by 2008, but did not include major developments or affordable housing schemes which would not be completed by 2008.

60 We recognise that forecasting electorates is difficult and, having considered the District Council's figures, accepted that they were the best estimates that could reasonably be made at that time.

61 During Stage Three we received comments from Sleaford & North Hykeham Liberal Democrats (the Liberal Democrats) and Sleaford Town Council on the Council's electoral forecasts. The Liberal Democrats contended that by 2008 the district will have approximately 700 more electors than the District Council predicted. They argued that there is 'significant under-registration' in areas of new housing and the Council's figure of 1.71 electors per dwelling was likely to be higher.

62 The Liberal Democrats questioned whether the housing development in the parish of Witham St Hughs will grow sufficiently to justify creating a ward based around Witham St Hughs parish and the allocation of an additional member for its area by 2008. They contended that the number of electors to be generated by new housing developments in Sleaford Navigation ward have been underestimated by up to 250 electors. The Liberal Democrats also stated that 700 additional houses are expected to be built in the Greylees area of Sleaford, generating 900 to 1000 electors by 2008.

63 Sleaford Town Council suggested that the District Council's projections for development in Sleaford had been underestimated. It estimated that new housing in the draft Sleaford Central ward would generate 100 additional electors before 2008.

64 These concerns were all put to the District Council. It responded, confirming that it stood by its projections for the district's electorate, and contended that it would be very unlikely to undercount the electors, especially by as much as 700. The District Council stated that it had in fact used an average of 1.73 electors per dwelling for its projections. It also argued that it is not realistic to apply different ratios to different types of dwellings as new developments include various sizes of housing and it would be impossible to establish a custom ratio for such diverse dwellings.

65 The District Council stated that the Witham St Hughs development is 'the fastest growing of the new sites in the district' and provided evidence of its 77 completions and 147 commencements, compared to the Greylees site which is much slower with just 47 commencements as of March 2005. As regards the Liberal Democrats' contention that up to 700 houses could be built in the Greylees development, the District Council responded that some sites still need planning approval. It stated that the possibility of increasing the density of properties may have led to predictions that the number of properties could reach 700, however this could not be confirmed at this stage. The District Council acknowledged that the number of properties may

increase slightly, but that it would be dangerous to make assumptions at this point. It confirmed that its projected electorate for Sleaford Navigation ward remained its best estimate, since the majority of the new developments have yet to be completed and those which have were already included in the projections.

66 The District Council stated that it stood by its projections for Sleaford as it had already taken account of the electors discussed by Sleaford Town Council.

67 The District Council contended that up to 300 new properties could be built in Skellingthorpe parish in the near future. The Liberal Democrats argued that there was no certainty about future housing growth in Skellingthorpe parish. We note there are currently no definite plans in place for these speculative new dwellings and the District Council has not included them in its forecast electorate. We also recognise that additional electors in Skellingthorpe parish would improve electoral equality under our final recommendations. In light of these points we are satisfied that the electorate figures for Skellingthorpe are acceptable.

68 We note the concerns expressed regarding the District Council's projected electorate figures. However, we try to avoid including forecast electors based on speculative development with no planning permission. We consider that the District Council has provided evidence that it has taken account of all the relevant development. We realise that forecasting electorates is difficult and have carefully considered the District Council's figures and all the available information. In view of the Council's response we are content that its figures still represent the best estimates that can reasonably be made at this time.

Council size

69 North Kesteven District Council presently has 40 members. During Stage One the District Council proposed a council of 42 members. It argued that 42 members would provide good electoral equality and allow community and representational links to be retained. It also stated that a council size of 42 would fit in with the Council's Committee and Executive political management system.

70 Councillor Hudson proposed a council size of 43, which he considered would create wards of a size acceptable to the electorate. Sleaford and North Hykeham Constituency Labour Party also proposed a council size of 43, stating 'this will neither greatly inconvenience the existing composition of the District Council nor place an unmanageable financial burden on the taxpayer'. Skellingthorpe Parish Council stated that it supported the District Council's proposal 'that the number of elected members be increased from the present 40 to 42 members'. A local resident stated that the current council size should not be increased.

71 We considered that we had received insufficient evidence on which to base a decision in relation to council size and therefore we wrote to the respondents above who had referred to council size in their submissions, requesting additional evidence to back up their proposals. We received responses from the District Council, the Labour Party, Councillor Hudson, Skellingthorpe District Council and a local resident. The District Council argued that a minor increase of two councillors would not encroach on the internal management structure, yet would ensure that the electorate is adequately and equally represented. The District Council provided details of the workload of two members. It suggested that two additional members would help to

ease the future scrutiny workload. It concluded that the current council size of 40 'is working well and a marginal increase to 42 [would] enable the same effective performance to continue'.

72 Councillor Hudson argued that a 'medium size' council of 43 members would result in the 'right level of workload for councillors', good size committees and reasonable costs. He maintained that the new political management system has created a larger workload for councillors than the previous committee system. Councillor Hudson concluded that a council size of 43 would provide the best balance between members' workload, the size of rural and urban wards, membership of committees and costs.

73 The Labour Party claimed that the overview and scrutiny system 'was not working in the best interests of the people'. Skellingthorpe Parish Council stated it had 'no further evidence' to support the proposed increase in council size to 42. The local resident who had previously proposed to retain the existing council size of 40, put forward proposals for 37 single-member wards. However, we were unable to consider these proposals since the deadline for submissions had passed and we had only requested additional information specifically relating to council size.

74 Having carefully considered these representations, we considered that the evidence received was not precise enough to enable us to make a thorough analysis of the impact of council sizes of 40, 42 or 43 on the political management structure. However, we noted that with the exception of the local resident, all the respondents supported a small increase in council size. We further noted that respondents put forward various brief arguments that an increase in council size would reflect the increase in the electorate and the workload of councillors, provide good representation and allow the political management structure to continue to work effectively.

75 Having accepted the evidence provided in support of increasing the council size by two or three, we examined the impact different council sizes would have on the allocation of councillors for different parts of the district, including the towns and the rural area. We noted that, if the external Sleaford Town Council boundary were retained, council sizes of 40 and 42 would not allow for the correct allocation of councillors between the towns and the rural area. We further noted that the District Council's proposal, based on a council size of 42, for a new Sleaford parish ward would only contain 35 electors (under 2003 figures). We were concerned that this was an insufficient number of electors for one town councillor to represent, and would not provide effective and convenient local government. While we recognised that the area's electorate is due to increase in the near future, it would currently comprise inadequate numbers of electors for a district or parish ward. We therefore did not pursue this proposal.

76 Consequently, we decided to create wards within Sleaford town boundaries, meaning that Sleaford was entitled to an additional seventh councillor. Therefore, council sizes of 40 and 42 would not provide the correct distribution of councillors throughout the district in terms of electoral equality. We noted the consensus between the District Council, Labour Party and Councillor Hudson that the council size should be increased in view of the rural nature of the district and councillors' increased workload. However, in view of the lack of specific evidence provided for the proposed council sizes, and the issues relating to the appropriate distribution of councillors within urban areas, we did not adopt a council size of 40 or 42. We

consequently recommended a council size of 43, which would provide the correct allocation for the district. Having examined the best allocation of councillors for the district, together with the responses received, we concluded that a council of 43 members would best meet the statutory criteria.

77 At Stage Three the District Council recommended that the 'proposals for a council size of 43 members be accepted'. Sleaford & North Hykeham Local Liberal Democrats stated that they approved of 'The Boundary Committee for England's preference for 43 members of NKDC for the next local elections'. It argued that in view of the rapid house building in Sleaford, North Hykeham and Witham St Hughs, each of these areas would eventually generate sufficient electors for an additional district councillor. However, it should be noted that the expected increase in electorate was not a consideration in formulating our proposal to increase the council size.

78 Sleaford Town Council noted that a council size of 43 members had been proposed 'in accordance' with its views. Sleaford & North Hykeham Constituency Labour Party and four local residents lent their support to the draft recommendation for a 43-member district council.

79 Therefore, in view of the support received for the proposed council size of 43, we are adopting our draft recommendation for a council size of 43 for North Kesteven District Council as part of our final recommendations.

Electoral equality

80 Electoral equality, in the sense of each elector in a local authority having a vote of equal weight when it comes to the election of councillors, is a fundamental democratic principle. The Electoral Commission expects the Boundary Committee's recommendations to provide for high levels of electoral equality, with variances normally well below 10%. However, when making recommendations we will not simply aim for electoral variances of under 10%. Where no justification is provided for specific ward proposals we will look to improve electoral equality, seeking to ensure that each councillor represents as close to the same number of electors as is possible, providing this can be achieved without compromising the reflection of the identities and interests of local communities and securing effective and convenient local government. We take the view that any proposals that would result in, or retain, electoral imbalances of over 10% from the district average in any ward will have to be fully justified, and evidence provided which would justify such imbalances in terms of community identity or effective and convenient local government. We will rarely recommend wards with electoral variances of 20% or more, and any such variances proposed by local interested parties will require the strongest justification in terms of the other two statutory criteria.

81 The district average is calculated by dividing the total electorate of the district, 84,035 (2008), by the total number of councillors representing them on the council, 43, under our final proposals. Therefore, the projected average number of electors per councillor by 2008 under our final recommendations is 1,954.

82 Under our final recommendations, the electoral equality across the district would deteriorate when compared to our draft recommendations. Under our final recommendations, three wards would have variances of more than 10% compared to

one ward under our draft recommendations. This decline in electoral equality is predominantly due to amendments we are proposing as a result of the improved evidence of community identity received during Stage Three. Previously, the lack of evidence received during Stage One had led to us adopt proposals which achieved good electoral equality. We consider that our final recommendations would provide a better reflection of community identities.

83 We acknowledge that our proposed Skellingthorpe and Ruskington wards would have electoral variances of 18% fewer and 13% more electors than the district average respectively by 2008. However, in view of the evidence provided we consider that these wards would provide a good reflection of Skellingthorpe parish's distinct character compared to neighbouring more rural villages and vice versa. We consider that the variance of 13% of the proposed Ruskington ward can be justified given the strong evidence arguing that the large village of Ruskington should not be linked with the smaller and dissimilar Leasingham & Roxholm parish.

General analysis

84 Our draft recommendations were a mixture of the District Council, the Labour Party and Councillor Hudson's proposals as well as our own proposals. As noted above, for much of the district we did not receive any evidence to justify the proposals, therefore we investigated various different options and proposed wards which would provide an improved level of electoral equality. We tried to take account of submissions regarding community identity where possible. However, in a number of areas, due to a lack of strong evidence received we recommended wards based on electoral equality, and welcomed new evidence of community identity during Stage Three.

85 We attempted to avoid combining rural and urban areas in the same wards and did not recommend any new parish warding in rural areas. We noted concerns expressed regarding multi-member wards, however, we did not receive any compelling evidence to suggest that single-member wards would provide a better reflection of community identity. We therefore proposed to reduce the number of single-member wards from 22 to 11, to increase the number of two-member wards from six to seven and three-member wards from two to six.

86 During Stage Three, the main area of contention was our proposed rural multi-member wards. Respondents opposed our proposals for these wards, arguing that they would not reflect community identities or provide effective representation. These concerns predominantly related to the north-west of the district and parishes surrounding Sleaford. In view of evidence received we are moving away from our draft recommendations for Skellingthorpe and Ruskington parishes. In both cases, this results in a reduction in electoral equality, however, we have been persuaded that our final recommendations would significantly improve the reflection of community identity. We also received objections to some of our proposals for the two towns of North Hykeham and Sleaford in the district. In the light of these submissions and the evidence they contained, we are proposing to move away from our draft recommendations in a number of areas. We consider that these amendments will better reflect community identities, overriding the consequent reduction in electoral equality.

87 We have noted a number of anomalies in the external administrative boundaries in the north-west of the district, as a result of the expansion of Lincoln. Therefore a review of local authority external boundaries in the near future should be welcomed, since we have no powers to make such amendments as part of this review.

Warding arrangements

88 For district warding purposes, the following areas, based on existing wards, are considered in turn:

- a Bassingham, Brant Broughton, Cliff Villages, Eagle & North Scarle and Skellingthorpe wards (page 35)
- b The five wards of North Hykeham parish (page 44)
- c Bracebridge Heath & Waddington East, Branston & Mere, Heighington & Washingborough and Waddington West wards (page 48)
- d Ashby de la Launde, Billingham, Martin and Metheringham wards (page 51)
- e The six wards of Sleaford parish (page 53)
- f Cranwell & Byard’s Leap, Heckington Rural, Kyme, Leasingham & Roxholm, Osbournby and Ruskington wards (page 58)

89 Details of our final recommendations are set out in Tables 1 and 2, and illustrated on the large maps accompanying this report.

Bassingham, Brant Broughton, Cliff Villages, Eagle & North Scarle and Skellingthorpe wards

90 The above five wards are located in the north-west of the district and the whole area is parished. Table 5 (below) outlines the constituent areas of each ward. Table 4 (on page 20) outlines the existing electoral variances for 2003 and also the variances that the wards are forecast to have by 2008 if the existing arrangements remained in place.

Table 5: Existing arrangements

Name of ward	Constituent areas	Councillors
Bassingham	Aubourn & Haddington, Bassingham, Thurlby parishes and part of Witham St Hughs parish	1
Brant Broughton	Beckingham, Brant Broughton & Stragglethorpe, Carlton-le-Moorland, Norton Disney, Stapleford and Swinderby parishes and part of Witham St Hughs parish	1
Cliff Villages	Boothby Graffoe, Coleby, Harmston, Leadenham, Navenby, Welbourne and Wellingore parishes	2

Table 5 (continued): Existing arrangements

Name of ward	Constituent areas	Councillors
Eagle & North Scarle	Doddington & Whisby, Eagle & Swinethorpe, North Scarle and Thorpe on the Hill parishes	1
Skellingthorpe	Skellingthorpe parish	2

91 During Stage One we received eight representations regarding this area. The District Council proposed that the existing five wards be broadly retained (taking the creation of a new parish of Witham St Hughs from part of Swinderby and Thurlby parishes into account). The District Council argued that the links between district and parish councillors in Cliff Villages and Brant Broughton wards should be maintained.

92 The District Council provided evidence in support of its proposal to retain the existing single-member Eagle & North Scarle ward, which would have an electoral variance 11% below the district average by 2008. The District Council and Skellingthorpe Parish Council submitted very similar evidence in support of retaining the existing two-member Skellingthorpe ward, which would have an electoral variance 18% below the district average by 2008. They described some of the history and geography of Skellingthorpe, as well as its population trends, employment, housing, transport, education and leisure facilities. The Parish Council argued that there is nothing that links Skellingthorpe with neighbouring parishes in the district. Skellingthorpe Parish Council therefore concluded that Skellingthorpe ward should be retained.

93 District Councillor Watson, Sleaford Town Councillor Edwards and a local resident expressed concerns about the District Council's proposal to retain the existing Skellingthorpe ward.

94 The Labour Party and Councillor Hudson both proposed three-member Eagle and Moorland wards and to retain the existing Cliff Villages ward. They only offered very limited evidence for their proposals. Carlton le Moorland Parish Council (currently within Brant Broughton ward) noted the District Council's proposals and considered that 'there were no significant implications' for its parish.

95 We carefully considered all representations received at Stage One. We noted the consensus between the District Council, the Labour Party and Councillor Hudson to retain the existing Cliff Villages ward. We investigated the possibility of improving the ward's 7% electoral variance (by 2008) by transferring a parish into another ward. However, we were reluctant to do so, having noted the evidence received in opposition to the District Council's proposal to transfer Leadenham parish into another ward. Having visited the area and noted the excellent road links between all the constituent parishes, we concurred with the District Council that the existing Cliff Villages ward reflects community identity and therefore should be retained. We therefore proposed retaining the existing Cliff Villages ward as part of our draft recommendations.

96 To the west of Cliff Villages ward, the District Council proposed to broadly retain the existing Bassingham, Brant Broughton, Eagle & North Scarle and Skellingthorpe wards. The Labour Party and Councillor Hudson proposed to broadly combine these

wards into new three-member Moorland and Eagle wards. We noted that the Labour Party and Councillor Hudson's proposals would provide better electoral equality than the District Council's proposals for this area. We concurred with comments that this area is entitled to an additional councillor. In the absence of any community identity evidence, we considered other evidence and factors to produce our recommendations.

97 We investigated options to improve electoral equality and create single-member wards in this area. In the light of our decision to retain Cliff Villages ward, we adopted Moorland ward as part of our draft recommendations in view of the good electoral equality it would provide. However, we proposed to name the ward Bassingham & Brant Broughton in order to reflect the two largest settlements in the ward. This corresponds with our approach to naming our proposed new wards elsewhere in the district.

98 We noted the poor electoral equality of the existing two-member Skellingthorpe ward and the considerably improved electoral equality of the Labour Party and Councillor Hudson's proposed alternative Eagle ward. The District Council and Skellingthorpe Parish Council provided some evidence in support of the existing Skellingthorpe ward. Comments were also received voicing concern regarding the potential poor electoral equality of the District Council's proposed Skellingthorpe ward. We considered that insufficient evidence was received to justify retaining a ward containing 18% fewer electors than the district average by 2008. We visited the area and noted the road link between Skellingthorpe and other parishes in the district. We requested additional evidence as to why Skellingthorpe parish should form a ward on its own and not be linked with other areas.

99 We investigated a number of different options to try to take account of the District Council and Skellingthorpe Parish Council's comments and improve electoral equality. However, the Labour Party and Councillor Hudson's proposals offered the best overall electoral equality. We acknowledged the location of Skellingthorpe parish on the edge of the district, close to Lincoln, with which it shares many links, and the District Council and Parish Council's catalogue of amenities within the parish. However, in view of the poor electoral equality of Skellingthorpe ward, we did not consider that this provided persuasive enough evidence or arguments to justify its retention. We therefore proposed to adopt the Labour Party's Eagle ward as part of our draft recommendations and welcomed any additional evidence during Stage Three. We proposed to name this ward Eagle & Skellingthorpe in order to recognise the two settlements at either end of the ward.

100 Under our draft recommendations the proposed Bassingham & Brant Broughton, Cliff Villages and Eagle & Skellingthorpe wards had 3% fewer, 7% more and 5% fewer electors per councillor than the district average by 2008.

101 During Stage Three we received 13 representations for this area. The District Council opposed the draft recommendation for a three-member Eagle & Skellingthorpe ward and maintained that the existing two-member Skellingthorpe ward should be retained, which would have an electoral variance of 18% below the district average by 2008. The District Council also proposed retaining the existing Eagle & North Scarle ward which would have an electoral variance of 11% below the district average by 2008. It stated that the draft proposal to link Skellingthorpe with the five nearby parishes of Doddington & Whisby, Eagle & Swinethorpe, North

Scarle, Swinderby and Thorpe on the Hill, is 'very tenuous'. Adding that 'there are no community links whatsoever' between Skellingthorpe and the above parishes and Skellingthorpe 'looks to Lincoln for most of its services'. It further argued that the parishes of Doddington & Whisby, Eagle & Swinethorpe, North Scarle and Thorpe on the Hill share 'a number of common themes/topics and concerns including issues of sustainability' and have joint working groups. It stated that 'the parishes are also connected together in the same parochial church group and share the common facilities such as youth clubs and interest groups'. It contended that this area falls under the example used in The Guidance and that a degree of imbalance in electoral equality is occasionally unavoidable 'in a ward which is at the edge of a district, separated by natural features from the rest of the area' (para 3.16 of The Guidance). Therefore it argued that Skellingthorpe should be treated as 'a special case, being on the edge of the District, where alternative options do not exist'.

102 The District Council argued that the draft Eagle & Skellingthorpe ward could result in 'adverse community effects on representation, because Skellingthorpe, the largest parish by far, could elect all three representatives who would have little or no knowledge of concerns or problems in the four villages to the south'. The District Council suggested that this ward would lead to confusion for all involved. The District Council and Skellingthorpe Parish Council also argued that land in Skellingthorpe may be released for the development of 300 residential properties in the near future.

103 The District Council expressed concerns regarding the draft three-member Bassingham & Brant Broughton ward, claiming that it links communities 'in a very tenuous way'. It argued that the rapidly growing parish of Witham St Hughs, within this ward, 'has little or no connection with the small hamlets that lie some distance to the south' in the existing Brant Broughton ward. The District Council argued that it would be difficult to represent 'such a diverse area' of new and much more mature villages, particularly for an Independent candidate. It considered that the new village of Witham St Hughs would have different problems compared to the more established villages and so should be kept separate to ensure cohesion and good community representation. However, it noted that the development in Witham St Hughs parish is unlikely to reach its full potential for another five years or so and therefore should remain as part of Bassingham ward for the time being. It therefore proposed to retain the existing Bassingham ward (with an additional councillor) and single-member Brant Broughton ward.

104 The Liberal Democrats objected to the draft three-member Eagle & Skellingthorpe ward and questioned the merits of achieving electoral equality 'in an area of intense diversity of communities and geography'. They stated that 'Skellingthorpe parish is the most geographically isolated and remote from the rest of the district' and discussed the options and merits of placing Skellingthorpe parish in a ward with Doddington & Whisby and Thorpe on the Hill parishes. They noted that Skellingthorpe parish's only neighbour, Doddington & Whisby parish, 'is composed of several small hamlets scattered over an area that is one and half times more extensive than Skellingthorpe itself'. However, placing these two parishes in a ward would result in an electoral variance of 12% below the district average by 2008 and the Liberal Democrats remarked that 'there is no certainty about future housing growth in either parish to improve the arithmetical solution'. They noted that Thorpe on the Hill parish could be included in such a ward to improve the electoral equality. However, this would have a knock-on effect on the options and subsequent electoral

equality for the remainder of this area. For example, the existing Eagle & North Scarle ward would have an electoral variance of 45% below the district average.

105 The Liberal Democrats therefore put forward four alternative wards to take account of the different types of communities and geographical diversity of this area, (detailed in Table 6).

Table 6: Sleaford & North Hykeham Local Liberal Democrats' Stage Three proposals

Name of ward	Constituent areas	Councillors
Bassingham & South Hykeham	Aubourn & Haddington, Bassingham, South Hykeham and Thurlby parishes	1
Brant Broughton	Beckingham, Brant Broughton & Stragglethorpe, Carlton-le-Moorland, Norton Disney and Stapleford parishes	1
Eagle, Swinderby & Witham St Hughs	Eagle & Swinethorpe, North Scarle, Swinderby, Thorpe on the Hill and Witham St Hughs parishes	2
Skellingthorpe & Whisby	Doddington & Whisby and Skellingthorpe parishes	2

106 They expressed doubt that Witham St Hughs parish would achieve a large enough electorate by 2008 to justify the allocation of its own district councillor, even with the addition of Swinderby parish. In view of this, the Liberal Democrats considered that its proposed two-member Eagle, Swinderby & Witham St Hughs ward would be more acceptable.

107 The Liberal Democrats stated that the existing single-member Bassingham & Brant Broughton wards should be broadly retained, less Witham St Hughs and Swinderby parishes. They maintained that combining their proposed Bassingham & South Hykeham and Brant Broughton wards into a two-member ward would negatively impact on councillor workload and quality of representation of this sparsely populated rural area. They argued that parishes around Bassingham parish form a coherent group of predominantly new dwellings and all look towards Lincoln, while those parishes around Brant Broughton parish comprise more traditional villages, looking towards Newark. They contended that no other parish could logically be added to their proposed Brant Broughton ward, which would have an electoral variance of 19% below the district average by 2008.

108 District Councillor Rook (representing Brant Broughton ward) opposed the draft Bassingham & Brant Broughton and Eagle & Skellingthorpe wards. Instead he proposed single-member Bassingham and Brant Broughton wards broadly based on the same parishes as the Liberal Democrats' Bassingham & South Hykeham and Brant Broughton wards. In relation to his single-member Bassingham and Brant Broughton wards, Councillor Rook highlighted the shared concerns and services within each ward and the lack of links between the two wards. He also stated that Swinderby parish does not look to Skellingthorpe parish for any services or facilities.

109 He also put forward a single-member Swinderby ward, comprising Swinderby and Witham St Hughs parishes, which would have a variance of 29% by 2008. Councillor Rook argued that the latter two parishes 'share common sustainable communities interests of the highest importance to their residents, in that both lie on the main fault-line for gravel extraction of the Trent Basin'. He maintained that these parishes form a natural unit and should be in the same ward so that they can work together for a common response to shared issues. In addition, he also raised the concern that the projected development in Witham St Hughs parish may not occur immediately and so linking it with Swinderby parish guards against this.

110 District Councillor Woodman (representing Bassingham ward) stated that Bassingham ward contained the whole of Witham St Hughs parish. She also put forward her objections to the draft Bassingham & Brant Broughton ward, arguing that Bassingham village is the hub of the existing Bassingham ward, providing services and facilities to surrounding parishes. Councillor Woodman maintained that Bassingham ward has 'little or no contact with Brant Broughton, Stragglethorpe, Beckingham and Stapleford [parishes]'. She also stated that the majority of primary schoolchildren living in the existing Bassingham and Brant Broughton wards attend school within their ward. She also argued that it is easier for a district councillor to represent a smaller number of people. Therefore, she proposed that the current single-member Bassingham ward should be broadly retained, less Witham St Hughs parish, which should form a single-member ward on its own. She suggested that this would provide superior warding arrangements compared to the draft three-member Bassingham & Brant Broughton ward, as the 'geographical spread' of this ward would be too much to afford effective representation.

111 Carlton Le Moorland and Aubourn & Haddington parish councils both opposed the draft three-member Bassingham & Brant Broughton ward. They argued that broadly retaining the existing single-member Bassingham and Brant Broughton wards would best serve their parishes, while Witham St Hughs should have its own councillor to represent its rapidly increasing electorate. A Brant Broughton resident also expressed concerns in relation to the draft Bassingham & Brant Broughton ward, arguing that this ward would be inappropriate since it would contain communities with different interests. The resident suggested that councillors representing this three-member ward would be unlikely to have 'intimate knowledge' of the area and its people's needs. He therefore supported retaining single-member wards for this area.

112 Skellingthorpe Parish Council put forward a similar argument to the District Council in its opposition to the draft Eagle & Skellingthorpe ward. It reiterated its Stage One argument that Skellingthorpe parish 'should be considered as a "special case" given its geographical position and its lack of community identity with any neighbouring parishes'. The Parish Council submitted a list of village-based activities administered and utilised by Skellingthorpe residents. It contended that the 'large' draft three-member Eagle & Skellingthorpe ward would discourage people from getting involved in politics, going against the current central government drive to encourage participation. It suggested that such a ward would favour candidates from major political parties over independents and would be 'heavily weighted' in favour of those candidates from Skellingthorpe parish, since it contains many more electors than the more rural parishes. It questioned how a 'Skellingthorpe based electoral representative [would] know about the problems of Eagle or Swinderby, or vice versa' and suggested that this would lead to a reduction in political or community involvement.

113 Skellingthorpe Parish Council acknowledged the importance of electoral equality but considered that in view of the growth in electorate across the District, another electoral review is likely in the near future. Therefore, it argued it would 'make sense to leave the Skellingthorpe situation as "status quo" until a clearer picture emerges'.

114 Eagle & Swinethorpe Parish Council stated that it largely agreed with the views of Skellingthorpe Parish Council. It considered that it has 'little or no interaction with Skellingthorpe' whereas it frequently meets with parish councillors from North Scarle, Thorpe on the Hill and Doddington & Whisby, with which it shares common problems. Like the District Council and Skellingthorpe Parish Council, Eagle & Swinethorpe Parish Council contended that it would be possible for all three members to be Skellingthorpe residents. This it claimed, could cause concern for electors in the smaller constituent parishes, who would be unlikely to know Skellingthorpe-based councillors or feel that they were aware of issues in their area. Eagle & Swinethorpe Parish Council maintained that retaining 'a cohesive community of four parishes that knows and trusts its district council representative is far more important than numerical variations in electoral equality'. Washingborough Parish Council stated that its members did not support the draft Eagle & Skellingthorpe ward and argued that Eagle parish has close links with North Scarle, Swinderby and Thorpe on the Hill parishes but not with Skellingthorpe.

115 North Hykeham & District Labour Party supported the draft recommendations for Cliff Villages ward and three-member Eagle & Skellingthorpe and Bassingham & Brant Broughton wards. It contended that the Bassingham & Brant Broughton ward would 'provide an effective way of covering a large rural area, so that there should be improved access to a councillor'.

116 District Councillor Hudson (representing Waddington West ward) suggested that the A46 dual carriageway road forms a significant boundary which acts 'to separate communities either side of the road'.

117 Coleby and Navenby parish councils both supported the draft recommendation to retain Cliff Villages ward. Coleby Parish Council argued that the parishes in this ward have 'strong community links and common concerns'. Branston & Mere Parish Council stated that it had objected unsuccessfully in the past to being linked with the distant Cliff Villages ward. Therefore it decided not to make any comment at this stage.

118 We carefully considered all representations received during Stage Three. We note the support received for the draft recommendation to retain the existing Cliff Villages ward and therefore are proposing to confirm this ward as part of our final recommendations.

119 We note the objections to the three-member Eagle & Skellingthorpe ward and have considered alternatives. The Liberal Democrats provided the only new alternative proposal for Skellingthorpe parish during Stage Three. We note that their proposal for a Skellingthorpe & Whisby ward would slightly improve the electoral equality to -12% by 2008 compared to -18% under the existing arrangements. However, they did not include any evidence of communities to support this proposal, which appeared to be for the benefit of electoral equality rather than improving the reflection of community identity. We consider that it would not reflect community identities to add any rural parishes to form a ward with Skellingthorpe parish simply

to achieve a slight improvement in electoral equality, particularly as our draft recommendations would provide much high levels of electoral equality. We judge that combining the very rural Doddington & Whisby parish with the more urban Skellingthorpe parish would be unlikely to create a cohesive ward. Nor would it resolve the concerns about the disparities between Skellingthorpe and the neighbouring rural parishes, raised during Stage Three in relation to the draft Eagle & Skellingthorpe ward. We therefore concluded that adding the neighbouring rural parish may well disenfranchise the rural parish (of Doddington & Whisby). In addition, in terms of electoral equality, our draft recommendations are better and in light of representations from other respondents, we have not been persuaded that the Liberal Democrats' proposal would reflect the communities. In view of this we do not propose to adopt the Liberal Democrats' Skellingthorpe & Whisby ward.

120 In our draft recommendations report we invited additional evidence during Stage Three on Skellingthorpe parish's links with neighbouring parishes. As detailed above, we received comments from the District Council, the Liberal Democrats and Skellingthorpe, Eagle & Swinethorpe and Washingborough parish councils in opposition to Eagle & Skellingthorpe ward. We consider that they have produced strong arguments to demonstrate that Skellingthorpe parish and the neighbouring rural parishes do not share community links. During a visit to the area, we noted the contrasting nature of the predominantly urban Skellingthorpe parish and the nearby rural parishes. The submissions received at Stage One did not provide evidence that these parishes could not be linked in a ward. However, we consider such evidence has been provided at Stage Three. We have therefore been persuaded that the nearby rural parishes are sufficiently distinct from Skellingthorpe parish to concur that it would not be beneficial for the rural parishes or Skellingthorpe parish to form a ward together.

121 On the basis of this argument we consider there to be a strong case for Skellingthorpe parish comprising a ward in its own right. We note the District Council, Skellingthorpe Parish Council and Eagle & Swinethorpe Parish Council's proposal to retain the existing Skellingthorpe ward with a variance of -18% by 2008. We have therefore been persuaded to retain the existing two-member Skellingthorpe ward as part of our final recommendations. We acknowledge the ward's high electoral variance (-18% by 2008), but consider that this is acceptable in light of its location, isolated on the edge of the district, and the much improved reflection of community identity it will provide.

122 As a footnote to Skellingthorpe's isolated location, it should be noted that we consider some of the external administrative boundaries in this area of the district to be incongruous. Over time, the suburbs and influence of Lincoln City have clearly expanded and spilled into North Kesteven. This has contributed to the isolation of Skellingthorpe parish from much of the district, located on what could be described as a peninsula in terms of the surrounding boundaries. We have no powers to amend the external boundaries of local authorities under this review, but we are of the view that such a review in the near future would be welcomed.

123 Having decided to move away from the draft three-member Eagle & Skellingthorpe ward, we investigated a number of options in the remainder of the area. This included a ward comprising the draft Eagle & Skellingthorpe ward less Skellingthorpe parish (21% by 2008). We also considered placing Eagle & Swinethorpe, North Scarle and Thorpe on the Hill parishes (-23% by 2008) in a ward

and noted with the addition of Swinderby parish, such a ward would have a variance of 9% more than the district average by 2008. However, we do not propose to adopt these alternative wards due to their high levels of electoral inequality.

124 We note that decisions made for one area of this part of the district have implications for the remainder. This is due to the nature of the external boundaries in this area, only allowing a limited number of options for combinations of parishes. We note the concerns of Eagle & Swinethorpe and Washingborough parish councils regarding the draft Eagle & Skellingthorpe ward and the District Council's proposal to retain that the existing Eagle & North Scarle ward (11% below the district average by 2008). We judge that the District Council's principal reason for supporting this ward was based around its objections to linking Skellingthorpe parish with the rural parishes. We consider that no detailed argument was provided as to why Eagle & North Scarle ward would provide the best option. We therefore conclude that insufficient evidence was received to justify this level of electoral inequality and therefore do not propose adopting this ward.

125 We note Councillor Woodman and Carlton Le Moorland and Aubourn & Haddington parish councils' proposal to form a ward based on Witham St Hughs parish. Councillor Woodman also stated that Bassingham ward contained the whole of Witham St Hughs parish. However, the current Bassingham ward does not contain the whole of the new Witham St Hughs parish as the ward boundaries were not adjusted when the new parish was created from parts of different wards. We took note of the District Council, Liberal Democrat and Councillor Rook's concerns that the electorate of the parish would not reach its forecast until the end of the five-year period. Thus the ward would be significantly over-represented for a number of years, with 87% fewer electors than the district average in 2003 (just 258 electors). We acknowledge that the electoral equality is forecast to improve over five years. However, we consider the ward would initially contain too few electors for one district councillor to represent and it would not provide for effective local government. Therefore we are not adopting Councillor Woodman and Carlton Le Moorland and Aubourn & Haddington parish councils' proposal, since we cannot currently justify allocating a district councillor to this parish in terms of equality of representation.

126 We note the comments of Councillor Rook regarding the links between Swinderby and Witham St Hughs parishes as well as his proposal to place these two parishes in the same ward. However, we do not propose to endorse Councillor Rook's Swinderby ward in view of its poor electoral equality (29% by 2008). The Liberal Democrats also included Swinderby and Witham St Hughs parishes in a two-member Eagle, Swinderby & Witham St Hughs ward. We judged the Liberal Democrats' proposal for a two-member Eagle, Swinderby & Witham St Hughs ward (3% by 2008) to be more appropriate, providing better electoral equality than the other proposals received. It would also recognise the links between Swinderby and Witham St Hughs parishes, which we acknowledge as a result of our visit to the area. However, given our decision not to adopt the Liberal Democrats' Skellingthorpe & Whisby ward, the parish of Doddington & Whisby would also have to be included, resulting in a variance of 9% above the district average by 2008. In view of this good electoral equality and reflection of community identity, we are proposing to adopt an Eagle, Swinderby & Witham St Hughs ward, comprising Doddington & Whisby, Eagle & Swinethorpe, North Scarle, Swinderby, Thorpe on the Hill and Witham St Hughs parishes as part of our final recommendations.

127 We noted the District Council's proposal to retain the existing Bassingham ward (with an additional councillor) and single-member Brant Broughton ward which would have variances of 4% and 14% respectively by 2008. The Liberal Democrats, Councillor Woodman and Carlton Le Moorland and Aubourn & Haddington parish councils broadly proposed the same two wards as single-member wards, less Swinderby and Witham St Hughs parishes respectively (11% and -19% by 2008). We do not consider the community identity evidence received during Stage Three sufficient to adopt the various proposed two- and single-member wards with such poor electoral variances.

128 Instead, we are adopting our own two-member Bassingham & Brant Broughton ward based on the draft recommendation for a three-member ward of the same name, less Witham St Hughs parish. We acknowledge the Liberal Democrats' concerns about such a ward, in terms of its impact on councillor workload in representing a sparsely populated rural ward. However, we consider this insufficient evidence against adopting this ward and in view of our proposals elsewhere we regard our two-member Bassingham & Brant Broughton ward as the best available option. The latter ward would also provide good electoral equality of 4% below the district average by 2008.

129 Tables 1 and 2 (on pages 9 and 12, respectively) provide details of the constituent parts and electoral variances of our final recommendations for Bassingham & Brant Broughton, Cliff Villages, Eagle, Swinderby & Witham St Hughs and Skellingthorpe wards. Our final recommendations are shown on the maps accompanying this report.

The five wards of North Hykeham parish

130 North Hykeham is an urban parish situated in the north of the district and divided into five town council wards based on district wards of the same names. The parish comprises the district wards of North Hykeham Forum, North Hykeham Memorial, North Hykeham Mill, North Hykeham Moor and North Hykeham Witham. Table 4 (page 20) outlines the existing electoral variances for 2003 and also the variances that the wards are forecast to have by 2008, if the existing arrangements remained in place.

131 During Stage One we received five representations in relation to North Hykeham town. The District Council proposed six single-member wards, including an additional ward, and proposed to broadly retain four of the existing wards, namely North Hykeham Forum, North Hykeham Memorial, North Hykeham Moor and North Hykeham Witham. It recommended a minor amendment to the boundary between North Hykeham Forum and North Hykeham Witham wards. The District Council also proposed to transfer small areas between North Hykeham Mill and North Hykeham Witham wards and between North Hykeham Moor and North Hykeham Memorial wards. It put forward a new North Hykeham Mill ward, less Chapel Farm and Grange Farm. The remainder of the existing North Hykeham Memorial ward, and a small part of North Hykeham Moor ward, would comprise the District Council's North Hykeham Memorial ward.

132 The Labour Party also proposed six single-member wards for North Hykeham town. Its North Hykeham Forum, North Hykeham Moor and North Hykeham Witham wards were identical to the District Council's. The Labour Party's North Hykeham

Memorial, North Hykeham Mill and North Hykeham Grange wards differed slightly from the District Council's equivalent North Hykeham Memorial, North Hykeham Mill and North Hykeham Chapel Farm wards. The Labour Party proposed simply to divide the existing North Hykeham Mill ward, retaining the boundary with North Hykeham Memorial ward along Newark Road. This new North Hykeham Grange ward would have an electoral variance 88% below the district average.

133 North Hykeham Town Council proposed that it should be allocated an additional town councillor and new North Hykeham Chapel Farm ward be created around the new development. It argued that this would provide good electoral equality and reflect community identity, however it did not put forward exact ward boundaries. Councillor Hudson did not submit specific proposals for warding arrangements in North Hykeham, but merely proposed that the town should be allocated six district councillors. A local resident considered that, in view of the increased electorate in North Hykeham, it should be allocated an additional ward and district councillor.

134 We carefully considered all representations received during Stage One. We noted the broad consensus between the majority of the proposals received for North Hykeham and the reasonable electoral equality of the District Council's proposals. However, the Labour Party's proposed North Hykeham Grange ward would initially contain 88% fewer electors than the district average, before new development is completed. This ward would comprise just 207 electors, which we considered too few to be represented by one district councillor, therefore it was necessary to combine it with another area in order to provide a ward of a suitable size to justify representation on the District Council prior to the development being completed. We proposed to create a two-member North Hykeham Memorial ward broadly comprising the District Council's proposed North Hykeham Memorial and North Hykeham Chapel Farm wards.

135 We did not propose to transfer a small area from North Hykeham Forum ward into North Hykeham Witham ward as per the District Council and Labour Party's proposal. We considered this joint proposal to be inconsistent with the remainder of the boundary in this area, which follows Lincoln Road. We judged that it would better reflect community identity to adhere to the existing boundary between North Hykeham Witham and North Hykeham Forum wards. Our proposed North Hykeham Witham ward would also improve the electoral equality of the jointly proposed North Hykeham Witham ward from 6% fewer electors than the district average to 2% fewer than the district average by 2008.

136 We also proposed to create a number of boundary amendments to various wards in order to improve electoral equality, improve the reflection of community identities and provide clearer boundaries. These amendments included adjusting the existing boundary between North Hykeham Memorial and North Hykeham Moor ward to transfer Haze Lane, Jaguar Drive, Cresta Close, Sunbeam Avenue and Lotus Court from North Hykeham Moor ward into North Hykeham Memorial ward.

137 We proposed to broadly adopt the remainder of the District Council and Labour Party's proposals for North Hykeham, with two amendments to improve electoral equality and the reflection of community identity, as well as providing more easily identifiable boundaries. Our draft proposals for five district wards covering North Hykeham parish would retain the existing ward names. We considered that these wards would ensure good electoral equality, use strong boundaries and provide a

good reflection of community identity. As part of our draft proposals, five new North Hykeham parish wards would be created, based on our proposed new wards, as detailed in the 'Parish and town council electoral arrangements' section (page 65).

138 Under our draft recommendations the proposed North Hykeham Forum, North Hykeham Memorial, North Hykeham Mill, North Hykeham Moor, and North Hykeham Witham wards would contain 5%, 4%, 3%, 1% and 2% fewer electors per councillor respectively than the district average by 2008.

139 During Stage Three we received five representations in relation to North Hykeham. North Hykeham Town Council expressed disappointment that its Stage One proposals had not been adopted. It argued that the draft two-member Memorial ward is 'rather short sighted' since it would be logical to include all of the new development in the same ward. It therefore proposed retaining the existing boundary along Newark Road between North Hykeham Memorial and North Hykeham Mill wards. North Hykeham Memorial ward would contain 21% fewer electors than the district average by 2008. The Town Council's proposed North Hykeham Mill ward would be represented by two district councillors and North Hykeham Memorial by just one. It envisaged this two-member ward as a temporary arrangement 'until such time as a separate ward, as proposed by this Council, can be formed'. North Hykeham Town Council argued that the Jaguar Drive area is 'physically more aligned with Mill Moor Estate'. Therefore its proposed North Hykeham Mill ward contained the Jaguar Drive area, which had been transferred to North Hykeham Memorial ward from North Hykeham Moor ward under the draft recommendations. This two-member North Hykeham Mill ward would also comprise the whole of the new housing development between Mill Lane and Newark Road and would have an electoral variance of 5% above the district average by 2008.

140 The Town Council stated that it preferred ward boundaries to 'follow natural boundaries where possible and should not split different sides of a road'. Accordingly it put forward some boundary amendments to adhere to these preferences. It proposed that the boundary along Meadow Lane between North Hykeham Mill and North Hykeham Witham wards should be retained 'as it is not worth changing'. In order to tidy up the boundary between North Hykeham Forum and North Hykeham Memorial wards, North Hykeham Town Council recommended the boundary should run along Richmond Drive and along the lakeside road to Colne Close. To avoid splitting roads, it proposed that the boundary between North Hykeham Forum and North Hykeham Moor wards be moved east to Broadway and Rowan Road.

141 The District Council noted North Hykeham Town Council's proposals for amendments to North Hykeham ward boundaries, detailed above. However, it claimed that although 'these adjustments are laudable to help tidy up some boundaries, it is not possible to make these changes without going outside the district ward average size by more than 10%'. The District Council argued that while it may be possible to allow such variances in certain circumstances, 'this cannot realistically be supported in the more densely populated and cohesive areas like North Hykeham'. It therefore accepted the draft recommendations for six members for North Hykeham and associated wards.

142 The Liberal Democrats supported the draft recommendations allocating six district councillors to North Hykeham parish and a two-member ward covering an area forecast to contain additional electors as a result of new housing developments.

The Liberal Democrats also supported North Hykeham Town Council's views on North Hykeham ward boundaries, including its proposal to allocate North Hykeham Mill ward two members instead of North Hykeham Memorial ward. The Liberal Democrats argued this would be consistent with its recommendations for the growing Witham St Hughs and Sleaford parishes.

143 Similarly, North Hykeham & District Labour Party also supported the draft recommendations allocating six district councillors to North Hykeham parish. In view of the development in the south of the town it supported the two-member North Hykeham Memorial ward. A North Hykeham Town Councillor maintained that the District Council and Town Council's Stage One proposals are preferable to the draft recommendations. The Town Councillor opposed the idea of two-member wards.

144 We have carefully considered the Stage Three representations, including the proposal put forward by North Hykeham Town Council to retain the existing boundary between North Hykeham Mill and North Hykeham Witham wards along Meadow Lane. However, we judge that it did not put forward any persuasive evidence in support of its proposal to convince us to move away from our draft recommendation. We also looked into North Hykeham Town Council's proposal to move the boundary between North Hykeham Forum and North Hykeham Moor wards to Broadway to avoid splitting a road between the two wards. However, this proposal would result in an electoral imbalance of 21% in North Hykeham Forum ward and 15% in North Hykeham Moor ward by 2008. In view of this relatively poor electoral equality and the lack of supporting community identity evidence, we do not propose to adopt this proposal. We have decided to endorse the draft recommendations for North Hykeham Moor and North Hykeham Witham wards. We consider that these wards would provide for good levels of electoral equality.

145 We are proposing to move away from our draft recommendations in the remaining three North Hykeham wards. North Hykeham Town Council, supported by the Liberal Democrats, put forward an alternative proposal for a single-member North Hykeham Memorial ward and two-member North Hykeham Mill ward. We broadly concur with North Hykeham Town Council's argument that the current ward boundary of Newark Road would provide a strong boundary, although the boundary does move away from the road near the parish boundary. This proposal would allow the whole of the new housing development to be included in a two-member North Hykeham Mill ward. In addition, we visited the area and noted the good road access to this housing development from the north and south. Therefore, we have been persuaded that allocating two members to North Hykeham Mill ward would improve upon our draft recommendations, ensuring that the latter ward contains the whole of the new development, keeping communities together. However, we note that under the Town Council's proposals, North Hykeham Memorial ward would have an electoral variance of 21% and North Hykeham Mill ward would have an electoral variance of 5% compared to the district average by 2008.

146 In view of this poor electoral equality for North Hykeham Memorial ward, we investigated an alternative option to transfer the Jaguar Drive area, (comprising Cresta Close, Sunbeam Avenue, Haze Lane, Nene Park, Avondale and Astral Way) from the draft North Hykeham Mill ward into a single-member North Hykeham Memorial ward. This is based on part of our draft recommendations and would significantly improve the variance of North Hykeham Memorial ward to 8% below the district average by 2008. We acknowledge that this would move part of the boundary

away from Newark Road, but we note that it moves away from this road elsewhere and the only access for the Jaguar Drive area is from Newark Road. With the addition of this amendment, we therefore propose to broadly adopt the Town Council's proposals for a single-member North Hykeham Memorial ward and a two-member North Hykeham Mill ward as part of our final recommendations.

147 Having visited the area, we are also adopting North Hykeham Town Council's proposals to transfer the south-east corner of North Hykeham Memorial ward, containing just 43 electors, to North Hykeham Forum ward. The amended boundary would run along Richmond Drive and east along the stream to meet the draft recommendations boundary between Colne Close and Bure Close. We consider that this would produce a strong boundary. This amendment would not impact on the electoral equality of the two wards concerned.

148 As referred to in the above section detailing our final recommendations for Skellingthorpe ward, we have noted a number of anomalies in the external administrative boundaries in the far north of the district. As a result of the expansion of Lincoln City, there is no discernable break in the urban development between North Hykeham parish and Lincoln City. In view of this, it could be argued that a review of external administrative boundaries in North Kesteven should be welcomed.

149 Tables 1 and 2 (pages 9 and 12) provide details of the constituent parts and electoral variances of our final recommendations for North Hykeham Forum, North Hykeham Memorial, North Hykeham Mill, North Hykeham Moor and North Hykeham Witham. Our final recommendations are shown on the maps accompanying this report.

Bracebridge Heath & Waddington East, Branston & Mere, Heighington & Washingborough and Waddington West wards

150 The above four wards are situated in the north-east of the district and the whole area is parished. Table 7 (below) outlines the constituent areas of each ward. Table 4 (page 20) outlines the existing electoral variances for 2003 and also the variances that they would be forecast to have by 2008 if the existing arrangements remained in place.

Table 7: Existing arrangements

Name of ward	Constituent areas	Councillors
Branston & Mere	Branston & Mere and Potter Hanworth parishes	2
Bracebridge Heath & Waddington East	Bracebridge Heath parish and the Waddington East parish ward of the parish of Waddington	3
Heighington & Washingborough	Canwick, Heighington and Washingborough parishes	3
Waddington West	Waddington West parish ward of the parish of Waddington	1

151 During Stage One we received four representations regarding this area. The District Council proposed to retain the existing wards. However, it renamed Branston & Mere ward as Branston ward. It noted that 'the lower section of Waddington parish is very much a separate community [from the upper section] and so it is appropriate that it has a separate member representing the interest of the area'.

152 Councillor Hudson put forward identical ward boundaries to that of the District Council based on the existing wards. However, he proposed alternative names for these four wards. Councillor Hudson noted that the total electorate of his proposed Heath ward would vary by more than 10% from the district average by 2008. However an alternative ward linking Bracebridge Heath parish and Waddington West parish would allow better electoral equality but 'is open to interpretation as a detached ward'.

153 The Labour Party proposed two of the same wards as the District Council and Councillor Hudson, but used a number of slightly different ward names. It also put forward alternative Heath and Fens Central wards, the former comprising Waddington West ward and Bracebridge Heath parish. Its Fens Central ward would contain Dunston, Metheringham and Nocton parishes and Waddington East parish ward of Bracebridge Heath & Waddington East ward. The Labour Party did not produce any evidence in support of its proposals for these wards. Washingborough Parish Council stated that it would favour the retention of the existing arrangements for the three-member Heighington & Washingborough ward.

154 We carefully considered all representations received during Stage One. We noted the consensus between the District Council, Labour Party and Councillor Hudson's proposals to retain the boundaries of the existing Branston & Mere and Heighington & Washingborough wards. We considered that these two wards would provide good electoral equality and therefore, in view of this and the local support received for them, proposed to adopt them as part of our draft recommendations. Under our proposals, Branston & Mere ward would be renamed Branston ward, as proposed by the District Council, to reflect the name of the largest settlement in this ward.

155 We considered the Labour Party's proposals for new Heath and Fens Central wards. However, in view of our proposal for a Metheringham ward detailed below, we were unable to adopt its Fens Central ward. We also had concerns about its impact on electoral equality and community identity and therefore did not adopt this ward as part of our draft recommendations. We noted that the Labour Party's proposed Heath ward would be detached, denoting that the component parts would not be linked together but would be separated by part of another ward. We did not adopt this ward, as we considered it would not provide convenient and effective local government.

156 We then examined the District Council and Councillor Hudson's proposals to retain the existing wards in the Bracebridge Heath and Waddington area. We investigated alternative warding arrangements to improve the electoral equality of the existing Bracebridge Heath & Waddington East ward, which would contain 12% more electors than the district average by 2008. However, we were unable to identify suitable alternative ward boundaries that would not arbitrarily divide the villages of Waddington East and Waddington West. We noted the agreement between the District Council and Councillor Hudson regarding the boundaries of the existing wards. We also noted the District Council's comment that Waddington West parish ward contains a separate community from the remainder of Waddington and so

should have its own member to represent it. We concluded that it would be inappropriate to place Waddington West parish ward in a district ward with neighbouring areas. We consider that each ward should not be represented by more than three district councillors, other than in very exceptional circumstances. In view of this restraint and our reluctance to arbitrarily divide the Waddington villages, we did not propose any amendments to the existing arrangements in the Waddington area.

157 We therefore decided to adopt the District Council and Councillor Hudson's proposals, using the existing ward names of Bracebridge Heath & Waddington East and Waddington West, which reflect the constituent parts of the two wards. We considered that these wards would reflect community identity and provide convenient and effective local government.

158 Under our draft recommendations the proposed Branston and Heighington & Washingborough wards would contain 2% and 6% fewer electors than the district average by 2008. Bracebridge Heath & Waddington East and Waddington West wards would contain 12% and 5% more electors than the district average by 2008.

159 During Stage Three, we received four representations in relation to this area. The District Council accepted the draft recommendations for Bracebridge Heath & Waddington East, Branston, Heighington & Washingborough and Waddington West wards and did not put forward any alternative proposals for this area. North Hykeham & District Labour Party noted that under the draft recommendations, no changes were proposed for these four wards. It also suggested a future revised four-member Bracebridge Heath & Waddington East ward, based on the completion of the Lincoln by-pass.

160 Washingborough Parish Council stated that it was content with the draft recommendations for its area. District Councillor Hudson (representing Waddington West ward) noted that he had not received any representations regarding the draft recommendations from Waddington parish or any resident. He also noted that the draft recommendations met with 'general approval' when presented at meetings.

161 In view of the support received for these four wards we are confirming them all as part of our final recommendations. We note North Hykeham & District Labour Party's comments on future warding arrangements for Bracebridge Heath & Waddington East ward. However, we cannot take such speculation into account when formulating our recommendations and it should be noted that we generally try to avoid recommending four-member district wards. We consider that wards with four or more members could dilute accountability to the electorate and provide ineffective local government.

162 Tables 1 and 2 (pages 9 and 12) provide details of the constituent parts and electoral variances of our final recommendations for Bracebridge Heath & Waddington East, Branston, Heighington & Washingborough and Waddington West wards. Our final recommendations are shown on the maps accompanying this report.

Ashby de la Launde, Billingham, Martin and Metheringham wards

163 The above four wards are located in the north-east of the district and the whole area is parished. Table 8 (below) outlines the constituent areas of each ward. Table 4 (page 20) outlines the existing electoral variances for 2003 and also the variances that they would be forecast to have by 2008 if the existing arrangements remained in place.

Table 8: Existing arrangements

Name of ward	Constituent areas	Councillors
Ashby de la Launde	Ashby de la Launde & Bloxholm, Digby, Dorrington, Rowston and Scopwick parishes	1
Billingham	Billingham and Dogdyke parishes	1
Martin	Blankney, Martin, Timberland and Walcott parishes	1
Metheringham	Dunston, Metheringham and Nocton parishes	2

164 During Stage One we received six representations regarding this area. The District Council proposed to retain the existing Ashby de la Launde and Metheringham wards. The District Council proposed to transfer Dogdyke parish from Billingham ward into Martin ward and to transfer North Kyme parish into a single-member ward with Billingham parish. All of the District Council's wards for this part of the district would have electoral variances within 10% of the district average by 2008.

165 As detailed earlier, the Labour Party proposed a three-member Fens Central ward. It also recommended a three-member Fens South ward, which Councillor Hudson supported. Councillor Hudson submitted almost identical proposals to the Labour Party. However, under his proposals Fens Central ward would not include Waddington East parish ward of Waddington parish and thus would be based on the same boundaries as the existing Metheringham ward, which the District Council also proposed to retain. Councillor Hudson argued that his and the Labour Party's proposed Fens South ward would retain Dogdyke parish's 'link to Billingham [parish]'. Dogdyke Parish Council expressed concern that the District Council's proposal to transfer its parish into Martin ward would isolate it and not reflect its community identity links with Billingham ward.

166 Nocton Parish Council stated that the existing Metheringham ward should be retained, as it provides it with good representation. A Metheringham resident put forward a proposal to transfer the hamlet of Blankney into Metheringham ward since the constituent parishes 'form a geographical and historical whole' and share historical links.

167 We carefully considered all representations received at Stage One. As stated earlier (in paragraph 155), we did not adopt the Labour Party's proposed Fens

Central ward, as we considered that it would not reflect community identity. The Labour Party did not provide any evidence of shared community identity between Waddington East parish ward of Waddington parish and the existing Metheringham ward. Having visited the area and taken the road links into consideration, we were not convinced that the proposed Fens Central ward would provide convenient and effective local government or mirror community links.

168 We noted the consensus between the District Council, Councillor Hudson and Nocton Parish Council to retain the existing Metheringham ward. We did not propose to rename it Fens Central in view of our decision not to adopt the series of proposed Fens ward names, but to retain the ward names which reflect communities within the wards. We also noted the view of a Metheringham resident that Blankney hamlet should be part of Metheringham ward in order to reflect community identity. Having visited the area and noted the proximity and good road links between Blankney and Metheringham parishes, we proposed to transfer Blankney parish into Metheringham ward. We acknowledged that this would worsen electoral equality from 4% (under a council size of 43) to 9% more than the district average by 2008. However, we considered that in view of the improvement in the reflection of community identity, this electoral variance was acceptable.

169 The Labour Party and Councillor Hudson both proposed a three-member Fens South ward, which would have an electoral variance of 8% more than the district average by 2008. We noted that this proposal took into consideration concerns regarding the District Council's proposal to transfer Dogdyke parish; however, this would not provide as good electoral equality as the District Council's proposals for this area.

170 During a visit to the area, we noted the clear links between Dogdyke and Billingham parishes. We therefore investigated alternative options to see if it would be possible to create wards with both good electoral equality and a good reflection of community identity. We found that combining Billingham, Dogdyke, North Kyme, Martin, Timberland and Walcott parishes in a two-member ward would result in an electoral variance of 1% more than the district average by 2008. In view of the excellent electoral equality such a ward would provide, as well as the reflection of community links between Dogdyke and Billingham parishes, we proposed to adopt a new Billingham & Martin ward as part of our draft recommendations.

171 We noted the District Council's proposal to retain the existing Ashby de la Launde ward. Since we did not receive any comments regarding community identity in this area, we looked to try to improve electoral equality. One option to transfer Temple Bruer with Temple High Grange parish into Ashby de la Launde ward would improve the electoral variance from 4% fewer electors than the district average to 2% fewer by 2008. We noted that the Labour Party also proposed to place Temple Bruer with Temple High Grange parish in its Fens South ward, which would include the existing Ashby de la Launde ward. In view of this, we proposed to transfer Temple Bruer with Temple High Grange parish into Ashby de la Launde ward.

172 During Stage Three, we received three representations in relation to this area. The District Council accepted the draft recommendations for Ashby de la Launde, Billingham, Martin and Metheringham wards and did not put forward any alternative proposals for district wards in this area. However, the District Council did submit proposals for new parish electoral arrangements, which are detailed in the 'Parish and town council electoral arrangements' section (page 65). The Liberal Democrats

put forward two alternative ward names to reflect the communities with the largest electorates within each ward. They proposed to rename the draft Billingham & Martin ward as Billingham, Martin & North Kyme, and Ashby de la Launde ward as Digby & Scopwick.

173 North Hykeham & District Labour Party supported the draft recommendations to transfer Blankney parish into Metheringham ward, and to include North Kyme parish in a ward with Billingham parish.

174 We carefully considered all representations received during Stage Three in relation to this area. We propose transferring the parishes of Brauncewell and Cranwell & Byard's Leap into Ashby de la Launde ward as a result of our revised recommendations in the Ruskington area to the south-west, detailed below in paragraph 220. We note that the existing Cranwell & Byard's Leap ward, comprising Brauncewell and Cranwell & Byard's Leap parishes, would have an electoral variance of 16% below the district average by 2008. Adding the latter ward to the existing Leasingham & Roxholm ward to create a two-member ward would result in an electoral variance 12% below the district average by 2008. We therefore investigated alternative wards in order to improve the electoral equality, while attempting to reflect community identities. We found that transferring Brauncewell and Cranwell & Byard's Leap parishes into Ashby de la Launde ward provided improved electoral equality overall compared to alternative options. We also note the road links between these two parishes and the existing Ashby de la Launde ward, indicating that it would be possible to place them in the same ward. In view of this and the Liberal Democrats' comments relating to the strong links between the parishes of Brauncewell and Cranwell & Byard's Leap, we have therefore decided to place them in the same ward. The proposed two-member Ashby de la Launde ward would have an electoral variance of 9% below the district average by 2008.

175 In view of the support received for the draft proposals for Metheringham and Billingham & Martin wards, we are confirming these wards as part of our final recommendations. However, we are adopting the Liberal Democrats' alternative ward name of Billingham, Martin & North Kyme for Billingham & Martin ward. We consider that this would recognise the main settlements in the ward and be consistent with the neighbouring Kirkby la Thorpe & South Kyme ward. We are not adopting its proposed ward name for Ashby de la Launde ward since we are proposing to amend that particular ward as detailed above.

176 Tables 1 and 2 (pages 9 and 12) provide details of the constituent parts and electoral variances of our final recommendations for Ashby de la Launde, Billingham, Martin & North Kyme and Metheringham wards. Our final recommendations are shown on the maps accompanying this report.

The six wards of Sleaford parish

177 Sleaford is a parish situated in the south of the district and divided into six town council parish wards based on district wards of the same name. The parish comprises the single-member district wards of Sleaford Castle, Sleaford Holdingham, Sleaford Mareham, Sleaford Quarrington, Sleaford Navigation and Sleaford Westholme. Table 4 (page 20) outlines the existing electoral variances for 2003 and also the variances that they would be forecast to have by 2008 if the existing arrangements remained in place.

178 During Stage One we received nine representations regarding Sleaford parish. The District Council proposed six single-member wards for Sleaford, including the retention of Sleaford Holdingham and Sleaford Mareham wards. It put forward some new ward names and a number of amendments to the four remaining existing Sleaford wards in order to provide electoral equality and take account of housing development. The District Council proposed single-member Sleaford Quarrington, Sleaford St Botolph's, Sleaford Central and Sleaford Westholme wards.

179 Taking account of the new development at the former Rauceby Hospital site in Sleaford Quarrington ward on the edge of Sleaford parish, Sleaford would be entitled to an additional councillor by 2008. The District Council therefore proposed to transfer the new development into its neighbouring Leasingham & Cranwell ward in order to provide good electoral equality for the remainder of Sleaford and avoid substantial amendments to the town's ward boundaries. The District Council proposed to transfer part of the existing Sleaford Quarrington ward into its more rural Leasingham & Cranwell ward, which would have an electoral variance of 13% more than the district average by 2008. This proposal would create a new parish ward, which the District Council proposed to name Greylees, as detailed in the 'Parish and town council electoral arrangements' section, at the end of the report.

180 The District Council argued that the Rauceby Hospital development will be relatively isolated from the remainder of Sleaford and therefore its community will not share the same concerns. It acknowledged that the electorate within this area will look to Sleaford for most services but in the long term expected it to become a more self-contained community. However, it concluded that achieving electoral equality was the main driving force of this proposal.

181 Two local residents (in a joint submission) and the Labour Party submitted identical proposals for seven single-member district wards in Sleaford, all within Sleaford parish boundary. Their proposals included five wards with identical boundaries to the District Council's proposals for Sleaford plus an alternative Sleaford Quarrington West ward. This ward would incorporate the new development at the former Rauceby Hospital site and would be based on the same boundaries as the District Council's proposed Greylees parish ward.

182 District Councillor Watson, Sleaford Town Councillors Edwards and Hayes and a Sleaford resident all opposed the District Council's proposal to transfer part of Sleaford parish into its proposed Leasingham & Cranwell ward. They all noted the significant increase in the electorate of Sleaford town and therefore argued that it should be allocated seven district councillors. Sleaford Town Councillor Hayes and a Sleaford resident contended that it would not reflect community identity to include part of Sleaford parish in a rural parish. Councillor Hudson and a Metheringham resident did not submit specific proposals for Sleaford but stated that the town should be allocated seven district councillors.

183 We carefully considered all submissions received during Stage One. We noted that the key issue in relation to Sleaford parish was whether to transfer part of the parish into a neighbouring rural ward, thus determining how many district councillors were allocated to the town. Under the District Council's proposals, six single-member Sleaford wards would be created and the new Rauceby Hospital development on the edge of the parish would be transferred into its Leasingham & Cranwell ward. Conversely, the Labour Party's proposals would retain the external parish boundary and allocate the parish seven district councillors.

184 We noted that the District Council and Labour Party's proposals would create a new Greylees parish ward and a new Quarrington West district ward respectively, both initially containing just 35 electors. As stated in the 'Council size' section (page 31), we were concerned that this was an insufficient number of electors for one town councillor to represent in a parish of 13,263, and that this would not provide effective and convenient local government. The Labour Party's Quarrington West ward would initially contain 98% fewer electors than the district average and 53% fewer by 2008.

185 In view of this poor electoral equality and comments received from the Labour Party, District Councillor Watson, Sleaford Town Councillors Edwards and Hayes and a Sleaford resident in opposition to the District Council's proposal to transfer part of Sleaford parish into a rural ward, we did not propose to breach the Sleaford parish boundary. We took the view that to do so would not reflect community identity or provide convenient and effective local government. Under our proposed council size of 43, we noted that Sleaford parish as a whole was entitled to seven district councillors. In view of the lack of proposals received during Stage One which were actually based on seven Sleaford district councillors while also providing good electoral equality, we did not pursue these proposals and instead generated our own proposals for Sleaford.

186 We explored various options and attempted to use ground features such as railways, roads and rivers as boundaries; however, this did not produce good electoral equality. We therefore adapted the Sleaford proposals we had received. The principal departure from these was in the south-west of the town, where we proposed a three-member Sleaford Quarrington ward which would contain 3% fewer electors than the district average by 2008. This ward would comprise the existing Sleaford Quarrington ward, and parts of Sleaford Castle and Sleaford Mareham wards. We acknowledged that our proposed three-member Sleaford Quarrington ward would cover a relatively large urban area and be slightly irregularly shaped. However, having investigated numerous options, we considered that this would provide the best electoral equality and ward boundaries that we could identify.

187 The other proposed ward that significantly differed from the proposals submitted was our proposed Sleaford Central ward, which amalgamated areas from other wards in order to provide electoral equality. This ward includes parts of the existing Sleaford Castle and Sleaford Mareham wards; the area to the east of our proposed Sleaford Quarrington ward. We acknowledged that this ward, comprising parts of two existing wards comprising much of the town centre as well as the edge of the town, may not provide the best arrangement. However, we considered that in view of the good electoral equality it would provide by 2008 (1% fewer electors than the district average), our proposed Sleaford Central ward provided the best option we could identify at that stage.

188 We proposed some minor amendments to the District Council and Labour Party's proposed Sleaford Central/Navigation and Sleaford Westholme wards to achieve better levels of electoral equality. We also proposed retaining the existing Sleaford Holdingham ward in view of its good electoral equality and the support received. All our proposed Sleaford wards would have electoral variances within 10% of the district average by 2008. As part of our proposals, five new Sleaford parish wards will be created, based on our proposed new wards, as detailed in the 'Parish and town electoral arrangements' section (page 65). We welcomed comments on our proposals during Stage Three.

189 During Stage Three, we received six representations in relation to Sleaford parish. The District Council stated that it had resolved to 'accept' the draft recommendations for seven district councillors for Sleaford, although it would prefer seven single-member wards in order to better reflect community identities. The Liberal Democrats noted what had occurred during the previous electoral review in relation to the process of generating suitable wards for Sleaford. They maintained that during the last review the wards were based on locally understood neighbourhoods although the boundary between Sleaford Navigation and Sleaford Castle wards should have followed Southgate instead of Carre Street. Along with Sleaford Town Council, they supported the draft recommendations for Sleaford Holdingham, Sleaford Navigation and Sleaford Westholme wards as they would provide good electoral equality and reflect community identities. Sleaford Town Council noted that the boundaries of the proposed Sleaford Holdingham, Sleaford Navigation and Sleaford Westholme wards work well and are largely run along main roads. However, the Liberal Democrats put forward a minor amendment to Sleaford Westholme ward's boundary as described below.

190 The Liberal Democrats and Sleaford Town Council opposed the draft recommendations for Sleaford Central and Sleaford Quarrington wards. They maintained that the existing Sleaford Castle and Sleaford Mareham wards would provide equally as good arrangements as the three other Sleaford wards that they supported. They advocated broadly retaining the existing Sleaford Castle ward, but endorsed the draft recommendation to amend the eastern boundary of Sleaford Castle ward so that it would run along Southgate instead of Carre Street.

191 The Liberal Democrats' minor amendment to Sleaford Westholme ward would transfer the area north of West Banks from Sleaford Castle ward into Sleaford Westholme ward. It was argued by the Liberal Democrats that the draft Sleaford Central ward is 'geographically inept' and fails to make use of the railway line which forms a clear boundary. They further contended that Sleaford Central ward would include central Sleaford as well as greenfield countryside and would divide Southfields estate between two wards. The Liberal Democrats argued that the existing Sleaford Castle ward is a viable ward as 'there is a clear common community of interest shared by the two polling districts' (TA1 and TA2) residents'. The Liberal Democrats maintained that these residents used the same schools, play areas, churches and clubs as well as sharing the same concerns regarding traffic on King Edward Street and Grantham Road. Similarly, Sleaford Town Council argued that existing Sleaford Castle ward should broadly be retained as 'the definition of the drafted Central ward is not easily agreed or sensible on the ground' and much of it comprises areas not central to the town. This ward would have an electoral variance of 4% more than the district average by 2008.

192 The draft Sleaford Central ward would contain approximately half of the existing Sleaford Mareham ward, and Sleaford Quarrington ward would contain the other half. The Liberal Democrats and Sleaford Town Council argued that it is possible to retain the existing wards. The existing single-member Sleaford Mareham ward has good electoral equality (1% below the district average by 2008). The Liberal Democrats argued that the ward's electors, 'share the same needs and shortages: no shops, no more land for recreation, no nearby schools and remoteness from the town centre'. The Liberal Democrats further argued that the part of Sleaford Castle ward transferred to Sleaford Central ward has very different problems and amenities compared to the Mareham area.

193 The Liberal Democrats and Sleaford Town Council objected to the draft recommendations to create a three-member Sleaford Quarrington ward. Instead, they both advocated creating a two-member Sleaford Quarrington & Greylees ward based on the existing ward boundaries, which would have a variance of 9% below the district average by 2008. The Liberal Democrats argued that this would create arrangements consistent with its proposals for the other development areas of North Hykeham and Witham St Hughs.

194 In addition to putting forward the same proposal as the Liberal Democrats for a two-member Sleaford Quarrington ward, the Town Council submitted a second option. It proposed a three-member Quarrington ward comprising the existing Sleaford Mareham and Sleaford Quarrington wards which would have a variance of 3% fewer electors per councillor by 2008. The Liberal Democrats also raised some concerns regarding the forecast electorate for Sleaford and Town Council electoral arrangements which are addressed in the 'Electorate figures' (page 29) and 'Parish and town council electoral arrangements' (page 65) sections respectively.

195 A Sleaford resident wrote in response to the draft recommendations and a press article relating to Sleaford Town Council's comments on the Town Council's electoral arrangements. He supported the draft recommendations for Sleaford town district wards and the importance attached to electoral equality. His reservations about the draft recommendation to increase the members of Sleaford Town Council are detailed in the 'Parish and town council electoral arrangements' section. This also sets out the proposals received for the electoral arrangements of Sleaford Town Council from Sleaford & District Branch Labour Party, Sleaford Town Council and a Sleaford resident.

196 We carefully considered all representations received during Stage Three. We note the support for the draft Sleaford Holdingham and Sleaford Navigation wards from the District Council, Liberal Democrats and Sleaford Town Council. We are therefore confirming these two wards as part of our final recommendations. We also note the broad support for Sleaford Westholme ward, although the Liberal Democrats put forward a minor amendment to its boundary with the existing Sleaford Castle ward. They proposed that the boundary should run along West Banks in place of West Gate. In view of our recommendations for the remainder of Sleaford and the improvements to electoral equality this amendment would allow, we are adopting it as part of our final recommendations. Our proposed Sleaford Westholme ward would vary by less than 1% from the district average by 2008.

197 We noted the concerns raised by the Liberal Democrats and Sleaford Town Council regarding the draft three-member Sleaford Quarrington ward and single-member Sleaford Central ward. They submitted alternative warding arrangements based around the existing single-member Sleaford Castle, Sleaford Mareham and Sleaford Quarrington wards. We consider that these proposals provide good alternatives to our draft recommendations for this area, securing improvements to community identities and providing stronger boundaries. We note their argument that the current Sleaford Castle ward provides a good reflection of community identity, and having visited the area, we concur that this ward should be broadly retained. We looked at improving the electoral equality of the ward and as stated in paragraph 194, we are adopting the Liberal Democrats' proposal for a minor amendment to the ward's northern boundary. We also noted that the current boundary with Sleaford Quarrington ward near St Boltolph's Primary School runs through properties and are

therefore proposing to realign the boundary to tie it to clearer ground features. We propose that the boundary should run along the eastern perimeter of the school, the backs of the houses along Victory Way and the perimeter of 42 Sheldrake Road to the existing boundary. Our proposed Sleaford Castle ward would have an electoral variance of 6% more than the district average by 2008.

198 We acknowledge that the existing Sleaford Mareham ward endorsed by the Liberal Democrats and Sleaford Town Council would have good electoral equality (1% below the district average by 2008), and would contain a discrete part of the town. However, we noted the Town Council and Liberal Democrats' similar proposals for neighbouring two-member Sleaford wards based on the existing Sleaford Quarrington ward (9% below the district average by 2008) would not provide as good electoral equality compared to the Town Council's alternative three-member Sleaford Quarrington ward. This ward would comprise Sleaford Mareham and Sleaford Quarrington wards and contain 3% fewer electors than the district average by 2008. Subject to the amendment to the boundary with Sleaford Castle ward described above, we consider their proposals secure a better reflection of community identities compared to the draft recommendations. This three-member ward would also secure good electoral equality and strong boundaries and therefore we are adopting it as part of our final recommendations. We also propose naming it Sleaford Quarrington & Mareham ward to reflect the two constituent areas. As part of our proposals, six Sleaford parish wards will be created, as detailed in the 'Parish and town electoral arrangements' section (page 65).

199 Tables 1 and 2 (pages 9 and 12) provide details of the constituent parts and electoral variances of our final recommendations for Sleaford Castle, Sleaford Holdingham, Sleaford Navigation, Sleaford Quarrington & Mareham and Sleaford Westholme wards. Our final recommendations are shown on the maps accompanying this report.

Cranwell & Byard's Leap, Heckington Rural, Kyme, Leasingham & Roxholm, Osbournby and Ruskington wards

200 The above six wards are located in the south of the district. Table 9 (below) outlines the constituent areas of each ward. Table 4 (page 20) outlines the existing electoral variances for 2003 and also the variances that they would be forecast to have by 2008 if the existing arrangements remained in place.

Table 9: Existing arrangements

Name of ward	Constituent areas	Councillors
Cranwell & Byard's Leap	Brauncewell, Cranwell & Byard's Leap and Temple Bruer with Temple High Grange parishes	1
Heckington Rural	Burton Pedwardine, Great Hale, Heckington, Helpringham and Little Hale parishes	2
Kyme	Anwick, Asgarby & Howell, Ewerby & Evedon, Kirkby la Thorpe, North Kyme and South Kyme parishes	1
Leasingham & Roxholm	Leasingham, North Rauceby, Roxholm and South Rauceby parishes	1
Osbournby	Aswarby & Swarby, Aunsby & Dembleby, Culverthorpe & Kelby, Osbournby, Newton & Haceby, Silk Willoughby, Threekingham, Screddington, Swaton, Walcot near Folkingham and Wilsford parishes	1
Ruskington	Ruskington parish	2

201 During Stage One we received three representations regarding this area. The District Council proposed to retain the existing Heckington Rural, Osbournby and Ruskington wards. It proposed a provisionally named Kyme ward, comprising the existing Kyme ward, less North Kyme parish. It stated that this amendment would allow for good levels of electoral equality and a good reflection of community links.

202 As detailed earlier, the District Council recommended combining Cranwell & Byard's Leap and Leasingham & Roxholm wards and part of the new development in Sleaford Quarrington ward into a new two-member Leasingham & Cranwell ward. Its proposal would create a new parish ward, as detailed in the 'Parish and town electoral arrangements' section.

203 The Labour Party and Councillor Hudson put forward three alternative multi-member wards in this area: Cranwell/Temple, Heckington and Ruskington. Neither the Labour Party nor Councillor Hudson provided any detailed evidence in support of their proposals for this area.

204 We carefully considered all representations received at Stage One. In view of our decision to retain the external Sleaford parish boundaries, as detailed in paragraph 183, we did not adopt the District Council's proposed Leasingham & Cranwell ward. In addition, we noted the District Council's comments that Leasingham and Cranwell villages share similar concerns. However, the projected poor electoral equality and lack of substantial community identity evidence helped to form our decision not to adopt these two wards. We did not receive any other representations regarding this area, apart from the objections to including part of

Sleaford town in the District Council's proposed two-member Leasingham & Cranwell ward, detailed in paragraph 180. We therefore explored alternative warding arrangements in order to provide improved electoral equality.

205 We noted that the Labour Party and Councillor Hudson's proposals for new Cranwell/Temple and Ruskington wards would provide significantly better electoral equality than the District Council's proposals. In view of the better electoral equality that the Labour Party and Councillor Hudson's proposal for this area would provide, our decision to retain Sleaford Town Council boundaries and the absence of any community identity evidence, we proposed to broadly adopt their Cranwell ward. We proposed some minor amendments to improve electoral equality. We named this ward Cranwell & Osbournby after two of the larger villages situated at either end of the ward. Our two-member Cranwell & Osbournby ward would have an electoral variance of 2% more than the district average by 2008. We acknowledged that this ward would cover a relatively large area; however, in view of the very good electoral equality it would provide and the local support for this ward, we considered that it was the best option at that time.

206 Having decided to adopt our Cranwell & Osbournby ward, we were unable to consider other proposals received for much of the remainder of the areas. We therefore broadly adopted the Labour Party's alternative three-member Ruskington ward, less Anwick parish which was transferred to Kirkby la Thorpe & South Kyme ward, and which improved the ward's electoral equality. We named this ward Leasingham & Ruskington. In view of its excellent electoral equality, we adopted the District Council's provisionally named Kyme ward and renamed it Kirkby la Thorpe & South Kyme in order to reflect the inclusion of South Kyme parish. South of this ward, we adopted the District Council's Heckington Rural ward, less the parish of Burton Pedwardine, in view of our proposals elsewhere and its reasonable electoral equality.

207 Our draft recommendations for Cranwell & Osbournby, Heckington Rural, Kirkby la Thorpe and Leasingham & Ruskington wards would result in electoral variances of 2% more, 6% more, equal to, and 1% below the district average by 2008 respectively.

208 During Stage Three, we received nine representations in relation to this area. The District Council accepted the draft recommendations for Kirkby la Thorpe & South Kyme ward. The District Council opposed the draft Cranwell & Osbournby ward, arguing that since it would contain 16 parishes covering a large area, this would make it 'very difficult to represent'. It commented that Cranwell and Osbournby parishes 'are over 10 miles apart and also on the opposite sides of the town in Sleaford [and] there are no culture and community links between these two areas'. As the largest settlement in the proposed ward, the District Council argued that Cranwell would be likely to dominate the ward and may provide both candidates. It also stated that the two areas of Cranwell and Osbournby are 'incompatible' since Cranwell contains a Royal Airforce base which produces different concerns, such as a fluctuating population, compared to the farming community of Osbournby and its surrounding parishes. Instead, it proposed that the existing Osbournby ward should be broadly retained, with the addition of Burton Pedwardine parish.

209 The District Council also objected to the draft three-member Leasingham & Ruskington ward. It stated that placing the villages of Ruskington & Leasingham in the same ward was 'unrealistic' since the two villages 'are quite diverse in character'.

The District Council argued that Ruskington is a small growing town which is 'very much a self-contained community' with numerous facilities and clubs. Conversely, it maintained that Leasingham 'is a dormitory village of Sleaford that is virtually all residential, with no commercial premises' and has 'close ties' with nearby North Rauceby and South Rauceby parishes. It provided a list of clubs, organisations and other facilities in both Leasingham and Ruskington villages. In place of the draft Leasingham & Ruskington ward, the District Council proposed that the existing Ruskington ward, which would contain 13% more electors per councillor than the district average by 2008, be retained. It also proposed a new two-member Cranwell & Leasingham ward comprising Brauncewell, Cranwell & Byard's Leap, Leasingham, North Rauceby, Roxholm and South Rauceby parishes. This ward would have an electoral variance of 16% below the district average by 2008.

210 The Liberal Democrats also opposed the draft Cranwell & Osbournby ward, arguing that it would cover a large area which would be difficult to represent. They argued that such a large ward would 'create an impossible workload' for the two councillors responsible for representing numerous parishes with differing concerns and therefore advocated retaining the existing single-member wards. The Liberal Democrats discussed different options to better reflect community identity and provide good electoral equality. This included a single-member ward comprising Brauncewell, Cranwell, North Rauceby and South Rauceby parishes. Having investigated various alternatives, the Liberal Democrats noted the distribution of the electorate and concluded that one or more wards in this area would have to have a variance of more than 10% from the district average. The Liberal Democrats proposed retaining the existing Cranwell ward comprising Brauncewell and Cranwell & Byard's Leap parishes which would have a variance of 16% below the district average by 2008. They argued that these two parishes 'are inseparable given the access through Cranwell to the Brauncewell section of RAF Cranwell'.

211 The Liberal Democrats proposed to retain the existing Leasingham & Roxholm ward but to rename it Leasingham & Rauceby ward. They also opposed the draft recommendation to transfer Burton Pedwardine parish from Heckington Rural into Cranwell & Osbournby ward, arguing that this would increase the councillor's workload and break the 'close links' the parish has with Heckington Rural ward. Therefore, they proposed that the existing single-member Osbournby ward be retained but be renamed Osbournby & Wilsford.

212 The Liberal Democrats objected to the draft Leasingham & Ruskington ward. They argued that 'the distinctive size and character of Ruskington and its population has to be taken into account' and it should therefore form its own two-member ward. They stated that Ruskington is the most urbanised village in the district and is 'relatively compact and yet densely populated', so proposed retaining the existing Ruskington ward based on the parish of the same name. This ward would have 13% more electors than the district average by 2008. The Liberal Democrats supported the draft Ashby de La Launde ward and the recommendation to include Temple Bruer with Temple High Grange parish within this ward.

213 District Councillor Robertson (representing Leasingham & Roxholm ward) objected to the draft Leasingham & Ruskington ward which he argued is 'at odds' with the current concerns regarding voter apathy. He argued that this ward does not take account of 'the difference between the communities which could result in disfranchising the smaller villages and hamlets served'. Councillor Robertson

contended that Ruskington is on the verge of becoming a small town, with four times the population of Leasingham. The latter village, he argued is 'the quintessential English village' with a pub, post office, two shops and village hall, forming 'an integrated community with no ties nor common purpose with Ruskington'. He added that there is no bus service between Leasingham and Ruskington. Councillor Robertson suggested that it was possible, as Ruskington is the largest settlement in the proposed ward, that Ruskington residents could supply all three of the ward members and this could cause Leasingham electors to feel that their voices are not adequately represented.

214 Councillor Robertson therefore put forward a proposal for a two-member ward comprising Cranwell & Byard's Leap, Leasingham, North Rauceby and South Rauceby parishes. He acknowledged that similar arguments to those levelled against a Ruskington/Leasingham ward could be applied to his proposed ward for Cranwell and the Raucebys, but 'the difference is that there is a commonality between the [latter] villages'.

215 Washingborough Parish Council argued that placing the villages of Cranwell and Osbournby in the same ward 'is totally unacceptable as they not even near together and it would be a very disjointed ward'. Councillor Brighton (representing Heighington & Washingborough ward) cited the existing single-member Osbournby ward as an example of a ward where a large number of constituent parishes impacts negatively on the councillor's workload and the effectiveness of their representation. She stated that the councillor has to represent more than 10 parish councils, resulting in numerous evening meetings and extensive travel for the member concerned.

216 Ruskington and Leasingham & Roxholm parish councils also opposed the draft Leasingham & Ruskington ward. They both argued that the villages of Leasingham and Ruskington have very little in common and the current warding arrangements should be maintained. Ruskington Parish Council contended that the draft recommendations for its parish only had regard for electoral equality, and not community identity or effective and convenient local government. It outlined the numerous amenities available in the village, including sports facilities, shops, churches and clubs. Ruskington Parish Council contended that the proposed three-member ward would be likely to dilute local representation, should all three councillors come from just one of the two villages. It argued that the communities of Leasingham and Ruskington are dissimilar in terms of size of electorate, dispersal of population, geographical size and amenities and that they are not closely linked.

217 Leasingham & Roxholm Parish Council argued that although Leasingham and Ruskington are geographically close, they 'have very little else in common' and due to their differing character and sizes, have different requirements in terms of 'community representation and resources'. It concurred with Ruskington Parish Council, describing the disparity between the two villages in terms of numbers of shops, businesses, facilities and clubs. Leasingham Parish Council noted that unlike Ruskington, it has no medical or police facilities, no secondary school, and few sporting or social facilities. It therefore argued that 'the two villages are completely independent with their own distinct identity and it follows that the resources and support required from the local District Council are therefore going to be very different'. Leasingham Parish Council also expressed concern that representation for Leasingham could be imbalanced in favour of councillors from Ruskington, leading to

Leasingham electors being awarded less influence and priority. The Parish Council called a public meeting which resolved to back up its objections with a petition which collected 205 signatures.

218 Burton Pedwardine Parish Meeting objected to the draft recommendation to transfer its parish from Heckington Rural ward into Cranwell & Osbournby ward. It argued that villagers from Burton Pedwardine have many connections with nearby Heckington village, using its school and shop and participating in its social activities. In contrast, it maintained that its village does not share any such links with Osbournby or Cranwell. The Parish Meeting argued that this proposal would be a 'retrograde step' in terms of participation in local democracy and confidence in effective representation, and would deter people from voting. A local resident also opposed this proposal for Burton Pedwardine parish and maintained that it should remain in Heckington Rural ward. He argued that Cranwell and Osbournby are a long way away from the village of Burton Pedwardine, whose inhabitants have always looked to Heckington and Helpringham for amenities such as schools.

219 We carefully considered all representations received during Stage Three. We note the support received from the District Council for Kirkby la Thorpe & South Kyme ward. We did not receive any other comments regarding this ward therefore we propose to confirm it under our final recommendations. We have also examined the concerns of the District Council, Liberal Democrats, Councillor Robertson, Ruskington Parish Council and Leasingham & Roxholm Parish Council regarding our draft three-member Leasingham & Ruskington ward.

220 The District Council, the Liberal Democrats and Leasingham & Roxholm and Ruskington parish councils objected to the draft Leasingham & Ruskington ward in terms of the contrast between the villages of Leasingham and Ruskington. They detailed the differences between each village in relation to their amenities and requirements. We consider this evidence to be persuasive and highlighted a clear disparity between Leasingham & Ruskington villages based on the evidence received. Following our visit to the area we would concur that placing them in the same ward would not reflect community identities or be conducive to providing convenient and effective local government. We agree that Ruskington differs greatly from Leasingham in terms of size, general character, levels of facilities and the needs of its electorate. The two villages do not appear to share any strong community or road links. Therefore in view of the evidence received we consider there to be sufficient differences between the communities to warrant an electoral variance of 12% by 2008. We did not adopt this ward as part of our draft recommendations as we considered we had received insufficient evidence to justify the resulting electoral inequality. In light of further evidence received at Stage Three, we are proposing to move away from our draft Leasingham & Ruskington ward and adopt the existing Ruskington ward as part of our final recommendations. We consider that our proposed Ruskington ward would reflect community identities and allow for effective local government.

221 Adopting the existing Ruskington ward has a knock-on effect on the Leasingham area and the two-member Cranwell & Osbournby ward. We note the District Council, Liberal Democrats, and Burton Pedwardine and Washingborough parish councils' objections to the latter ward. In view of the objections received against the draft two-member Cranwell & Osbournby ward and our intention to move away from the draft recommendations for the Ruskington parish area, we are

proposing to modify Cranwell & Osbournby ward. We note that the existing Osbournby ward was supported by the Liberal Democrats and broadly supported by the District Council. We consider that this ward would better reflect community identity and provide good electoral equality with a variance of 6% below the district average by 2008. We are therefore adopting the existing single-member Osbournby ward as part of our final recommendations.

222 Adopting the Osbournby ward would also allow the retention of the existing Leasingham & Roxholm ward (as proposed by the Liberal Democrats). We do not propose to adopt the District Council's Cranwell & Leasingham ward which would have an electoral variance of 12% below the district average by 2008. We consider that unlike Ruskington ward, there is insufficient evidence to justify such a variance in this case. We are not of the view that Leasingham should be linked with Cranwell & Byard's Leap parish, as no evidence has been provided to support this proposal. Similarly we are not proposing to adopt Councillor Robertson's alternative ward comprising Cranwell & Byard's Leap, Leasingham, North Rauceby and South Rauceby parishes since this would contain 18% fewer electors than the district average by 2008. We do not consider there to be sufficient evidence to justify such high electoral inequality. We propose adopting the existing Leasingham & Roxholm ward as part of our final recommendations in view of its good electoral equality and the support from the District Council, the Liberal Democrats and Councillor Robertson in favour of reflecting the links between these parishes. However, we propose naming the ward Leasingham & Rauceby to reflect the two main villages within it.

223 We note the District Council's support for the draft recommendation to include Burton Pedwardine in Osbournby ward. However, we consider that Burton Pedwardine Parish Meeting and a local resident put forward a strong argument to persuade us that Burton Pedwardine parish has community links with Heckington and Helpringham villages and so should be included in Heckington Rural ward as under the existing arrangements. Consequently, we are adopting the existing Heckington Rural ward as part of our final recommendations as we consider it would reflect community identity and provide acceptable electoral equality (9% more than the district average by 2008).

224 Tables 1 and 2 (pages 9 and 12) provide details of the constituent parts and electoral variances of our final recommendations for Heckington Rural, Kirkby La Thorpe & South Kyme, Leasingham & Rauceby, Osbournby and Ruskington wards. Our final recommendations are shown on the maps accompanying this report.

Conclusions

225 Table 10 shows the impact of our final recommendations on electoral equality, comparing them with the current arrangements based on 2003 and 2008 electorate figures.

Table 10: Comparison of current and recommended electoral arrangements

	Current arrangements		Final recommendations	
	2003	2008	2003	2008
Number of councillors	40	40	43	43
Number of wards	30	30	26	26
Average number of electors per councillor	1,886	2,101	1,754	1,954
Number of wards with a variance more than 10% from the average	8	13	11	3
Number of wards with a variance more than 20% from the average	2	5	3	0

226 As shown in Table 10, our final recommendations for North Kesteven District Council would result in an initial increase in the number of wards with an electoral variance of more than 10% from eight to 11. However, by 2008 just three wards are forecast to have an electoral variance of more than 10%. We propose to increase the current council size of 40 by three members and are recommending a council size of 43 members.

Final recommendation:
 North Kesteven District Council should comprise 43 councillors serving 26 wards, as detailed and named in Tables 1 and 2, and illustrated on the large maps accompanying this report.

Parish and town council electoral arrangements

227 As part of an FER the Boundary Committee can make recommendations for new electoral arrangements for parishes. Where there is no impact on the district council’s electoral arrangements, the Committee will generally be content to put forward for consideration proposals from parish and town councils for changes to parish electoral arrangements in FERs. However, the Boundary Committee will usually wish to see a degree of consensus between the district council and the parish council concerned. Proposals should be supported by evidence, illustrating why changes to parish electoral arrangements are required. The Boundary Committee

cannot recommend changes to the external boundaries of parishes as part of an FER.

228 Responsibility for reviewing and implementing changes to the electoral arrangements of existing parishes, outside of an electoral review conducted by the Boundary Committee, lies with district councils.² If a district council wishes to make an Order amending the electoral arrangements of a parish that has been subject to an electoral arrangements Order made by either the Secretary of State or The Electoral Commission within the past five years, the consent of the Commission is required.

229 When reviewing electoral arrangements, we are required to comply as far as possible with the rules set out in Schedule 11 to the 1972 Act. The Schedule provides that if a parish is to be divided between different district wards it must also be divided into parish wards, so that each parish ward lies wholly within a single ward of the district. Accordingly, we propose consequential warding arrangements for the parishes of North Hykeham and Sleaford to reflect the proposed district wards.

230 During Stage One we received proposals for revised parish council electoral arrangements for North Hykeham parish from the District Council and North Hykeham Town Council. The parish of North Hykeham is currently served by 16 councillors representing five parish wards of Forum, Memorial, Mill, Moor and Witham. Each parish ward is represented by three town councillors, except Forum, which is represented by four town councillors. The District Council and North Hykeham Town Council proposed that North Hykeham Town Council should be represented by 18 town councillors. North Hykeham Town Council also put forward interim arrangements based on the current 16 town councillors, until a new ward could be created.

231 Under our draft recommendations we adopted the District Council and North Hykeham Town Council's proposals to increase the total of its members by two. We did not adopt North Hykeham Town Council's interim proposals for its electoral arrangements as part of our draft recommendations as this went beyond our remit. Therefore, we recommended an increase in the size of North Hykeham Town Council from 16 to 18. We amended the parish wards in North Hykeham in order to reflect our proposed district ward boundaries. We broadly based the allocation of town councillors to each town ward on electoral equality and welcomed any comments on these recommendations during Stage Three.

232 Under our draft recommendations we proposed that North Hykeham Town Council should comprise 18 councillors, two more than at present. These town councillors would represent five wards: North Hykeham Forum (returning three councillors), North Hykeham Memorial (returning six councillors), North Hykeham Mill (returning three councillors), North Hykeham Moor (returning three councillors) and North Hykeham Witham (returning three councillors).

233 At Stage Three we received two representations regarding the draft recommendations for North Hykeham Town Council's electoral arrangements. The Liberal Democrats maintained that the town council wards should 'be adjusted to obtain near electoral equality within North Hykeham'. They argued that should North

² Such reviews must be conducted in accordance with section 17 of the Local Government and Rating Act 1997.

Hykeham Mill ward form a two-member district ward, its corresponding parish ward should be allocated four or five town councillors and the remaining wards each be allocated three town councillors.

234 We are confirming the total number of North Hykeham town councillors as 18, representing parish wards based on district ward boundaries, since we have not received any specific alternatives. However, in the light of comments received and our intention to move away from some of our draft recommendations for district wards in North Hykeham, we are proposing to amend our draft recommendations for North Hykeham Town Council's electoral arrangements.

235 In view of our final recommendations allocating two members to North Hykeham Mill district ward, we are amending our recommendations for North Hykeham Town Council parish wards and electoral arrangements. We are proposing to allocate six town councillors to North Hykeham Mill parish ward and just three to North Hykeham Memorial parish ward. The remaining three parish wards are also be coterminous with the proposed district ward boundaries and each would return three town councillors.

Final recommendation:

North Hykeham Town Council should comprise 18 parish councillors, instead of the current 16, representing five wards: North Hykeham Forum (returning three councillors), North Hykeham Memorial (returning three councillors), North Hykeham Mill (returning six councillors), North Hykeham Moor (returning three councillors) and North Hykeham Witham (returning three councillors). The parish ward boundaries should reflect the proposed district ward boundaries, as illustrated and named on Map 2.

236 The parish of Sleaford is currently served by 18 councillors representing the six parish wards of Castle, Holdingham, Mareham, Navigation, Quarrington and Westholme. Each parish ward is represented by three town councillors.

237 During Stage One, the District Council proposed seven parish wards and proposed to increase the number of town councillors to 19. In view of its proposals to transfer part of Sleaford parish into a new rural ward, it put forward a proposal to create a new Greylees parish ward. This parish ward was based on the part of the existing Sleaford Quarrington ward containing the Rauceby Hospital development. District Councillor Watson, Sleaford Town Councillors Edwards and Hayes and a Sleaford resident opposed the District Council's proposal to transfer part of Sleaford parish into a ward with other parishes. They argued that this would not reflect community identity.

238 As stated previously, we did not adopt the District Council's proposals for Sleaford Town Council in light of our concern regarding the small number of electors (35) its proposed Greylees parish ward would contain and the provision of the correct distribution of town councillors under a council size of 43. We subsequently produced our own proposals for 18 town councillors, representing five Sleaford parish wards, based on our five proposed district wards. We endeavoured to allocate each parish ward the most suitable number of town councillors in terms of how many electors each ward contains. We welcomed comments on our recommendations for Sleaford Town Council during Stage Three.

239 During Stage Three we received five representations regarding Sleaford Town Council's electoral arrangements, four of which put forward different proposals relating to the number and distribution of Sleaford Town Councillors. A Sleaford resident expressed concerns regarding the draft recommendations for Sleaford Town Council. The Liberal Democrats, Sleaford & District Branch Labour Party, Sleaford Town Council and another local resident concurred that, based on the existing Castle, Holdingham, Navigation and Westholme parish wards, each should be represented by three town councillors. However, they held different views about the optimum number of town councillors for Quarrington parish ward.

240 The Liberal Democrats argued that the boundaries of Sleaford's district wards should continue to be used for the Town Council's parish wards. They considered a town council comprising 14 members of five two-member wards and one four-member ward. However, they concluded that 14 town councillors would be insufficient to represent a town of more than 13,000 electors. They therefore proposed that the Town Council comprise 20 or 21 councillors. The Liberal Democrats proposed that their proposed Sleaford Quarrington & Greylees ward be represented by five or six town councillors depending on the number of electors in the ward by the time of the 2007 local elections. If this total exceeds 3,600, they argued that the ward should be allocated a sixth town councillor. They argued that the remaining parish wards should be allocated three members each.

241 Sleaford & District Branch Labour Party supported the draft recommendations 'that Sleaford Town Council should comprise 18 councillors serving five wards in order to retain the former Rauceby Hospital site within the boundaries of Sleaford'. However, it expressed concern regarding the draft recommendation to allocate Quarrington parish ward eight town councillors. Sleaford & District Branch Labour Party members considered an eight-member Quarrington parish ward would be likely to cause 'electoral imbalance and dominate future town council decision-making'. They therefore proposed that Sleaford Town Council should comprise 18 councillors, with Quarrington parish ward represented by six town councillors.

242 Sleaford Town Council also expressed concerns regarding potential imbalances resulting from the draft recommendations for Sleaford Town Council. It contended that the Town Council should comprise 20 members, including five members allotted to Quarrington parish ward.

243 A Sleaford resident objected to the draft recommendations for Sleaford Town Council 'on the grounds that they do not achieve the broader objective of equal representation across the electoral area'. He stated that he had investigated an alternative idea for a 14-member town council, with six members for Quarrington parish ward and two members for the other four parish wards. However, he 'concluded that this option might encounter acute transitional imbalances' and therefore put forward a proposal for a 21-member Sleaford Town Council. He argued that Quarrington parish ward should be represented by nine town councillors which 'would allow for greater flexibility for future warding'.

244 Another resident of Sleaford expressed doubts regarding town council size 'which has an invidious tendency to creep upwards; certainly I can see no valid case for any increase in the size of Sleaford Town Council, which is already quite big enough'. He suggested that there is also some confusion locally between the village of Quarrington and the ecclesiastical parish of Quarrington & Old Sleaford.

245 We note the proposals for differing numbers and allocations of Sleaford town councillors and the lack of consensus. We also note that none of the proposals provide any justification for an increase in the number of town councillors, other than in terms of achieving good electoral equality. They do not outline, for example, any benefits this would provide for the town's electorate. Therefore, we do not consider that we have received sufficient evidence to persuade us to move away from our draft recommendations for 18 town councillors distributed according to broad equality of representation. We are consequently confirming our draft recommendation that Sleaford Town Council should have a total of 18 members.

246 However, in view of our final recommendations for amended Sleaford district wards, we are accordingly proposing to adjust the majority of the parish ward names and boundaries to match these wards. An exception to this is our proposal to divide Sleaford Quarrington district ward into two parish wards. Under this proposal we are retaining the existing Quarrington and Mareham parish wards in order to provide effective local representation. In addition, we have again sought to achieve equality of representation in each parish ward, based on the 2008 forecast electorate.

Final recommendation:

Sleaford Town Council should comprise 18 councillors, as at present, representing six wards: Castle and Holdingham (both returning three councillors each), Mareham (returning three councillors) Navigation (returning two councillors), Quarrington (returning four councillors) and Westholme (returning three councillors). The parish ward boundaries should reflect the proposed district ward boundaries in the area, as illustrated and named on Map 3.

247 During Stage Three, the District Council proposed revised electoral arrangements for Ashby de La Launde & Bloxholm with Temple Bruer with Temple High Grange Parish Council. Under the draft recommendations Temple Bruer with Temple High Grange parish would be transferred from Cranwell & Byard's Leap district ward into Ashby de La Launde district ward. Following consultation with the Parish Council of Ashby de La Launde & Bloxholm with Temple Bruer with Temple High Grange, the District Council put forward proposals for amendments to parish warding arrangements. It proposed that, what it understands to be the parish ward of Temple Bruer with Temple High Grange of Ashby de la Launde & Bloxholm parish, be abolished so that Ashby de la Launde & Bloxholm parish would no longer be warded. The District Council also proposed to reduce the parish's number of parish councillors from nine to seven in view of the difficulties the Parish Council has had in attracting sufficient numbers of candidates to fill all the available seats.

248 However, according to our records and those of Ordnance Survey, Temple Bruer with Temple High Grange is a parish in its own right and not a parish ward of another parish. We have not been able to obtain any official documentation in support of the District Council's assertion that Temple Bruer with Temple High Grange is a parish ward. Thus we believe that Temple Bruer with Temple High Grange is a parish and so are unable to comply with this proposal as under the terms of a Further Electoral Review, external parish boundaries cannot be altered. We are therefore not adopting this proposal but note that a parish review may be carried out at a later date by the District Council under the Local Government & Ratings Act 1997.

249 We are therefore confirming the current parish warding arrangements for the Parish Council of Ashby de La Launde & Bloxholm with Temple Bruer with Temple High Grange as part of our final recommendations. However, in light of the agreement between the District Council and Ashby de La Launde & Bloxholm with Temple Bruer with Temple High Grange Parish Councils' we are proposing to reduce the number of parish councillors by two, to seven.

Final recommendations:

Ashby de La Launde & Bloxholm with Temple Bruer with Temple High Grange Parish Council should comprise seven councillors, instead of the current nine.

250 Witham St Hughs parish is currently represented by seven parish councillors and is not divided into parish wards. We are confirming the current electoral arrangements for Witham St Hughs parish as part of our final recommendations.

Final recommendations:

Witham St Hughs Parish Council should comprise seven councillors, as at present.

251 A minor amendment has been made to the boundary between Waddington East and Waddington West parish wards of Waddington parish, to tie it to ground detail. This will not affect Waddington Parish Council's electoral arrangements.

Final recommendations:

Waddington Parish Council should comprise the same number of councillors as at present, representing two wards; Waddington East and Waddington West.

6 What happens next?

252 Having completed our review of electoral arrangements in North Kesteven and submitted our final recommendations to The Electoral Commission, we have fulfilled our statutory obligation.³

253 It is now up to The Electoral Commission to decide whether or not 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 17 January 2006, and The Electoral Commission will normally consider all written representations on the conduct of the review made to them by that date.

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

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

Fax: 020 7271 0505

Email: implementation@electoralcommission.org.uk

³ Under the Local Government Act 1992 (as amended by SI No. 2001/3962).

7 Mapping

Final recommendations for North Kesteven:

The following maps illustrate our proposed ward boundaries for the district of North Kesteven.

Sheet 1, Map 1 illustrates in outline form the proposed wards for North Kesteven District Council, including constituent parishes.

Sheet 2, Map 2 illustrates the proposed boundaries in North Hykeham town and Waddington parish.

Sheet 3, Map 3 illustrates the proposed boundaries in Sleaford town.

Appendix A

Glossary and abbreviations

AONB (Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty)	A landscape whose distinctive character and natural beauty are so outstanding that it is in the nation's interest to safeguard it
Boundary Committee	The Boundary Committee for England is a committee of The Electoral Commission, responsible for undertaking electoral reviews
Constituent areas	The geographical areas that make up any one ward, expressed in parishes or existing wards, or parts of either
Consultation	An opportunity for interested parties to comment and make proposals at key stages during the review
Council size	The number of councillors elected to serve a council
Order (or electoral change Order)	A legal document which implements changes to the electoral arrangements of a local authority
The Electoral Commission	An independent body that was set up by the UK Parliament. Its mission is to foster public confidence and participation by promoting integrity, involvement and effectiveness in the democratic process
Electoral equality	A measure of ensuring that every person's vote is of equal worth
Electoral imbalance	Where there is a large difference between the number of electors represented by a councillor and the average for the district
Electorate	People in the authority who are registered to vote in local government elections
FER (Further Electoral Review)	A further review of the electoral arrangements of a local authority following significant shifts in the electorate since the last Periodic Electoral Review conducted between 1996 and 2004
Multi-member ward	A ward represented by more than one councillor and usually not more than three councillors

National Park	<p>The twelve National Parks in England and Wales were designated under the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act of 1949 and will soon be joined by the new designation of the South Downs. The definition of a National Park is:</p> <p>'an extensive area of beautiful and relatively wild country in which, for the nation's benefit and by appropriate national decision and action:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the characteristic landscape beauty is strictly preserved; - access and facilities for open-air enjoyment are amply provided; - wildlife and buildings and places of architectural and historic interest are suitably protected; - established farming use is effectively maintained'
Number of electors per councillor	The total number of electors in a local authority divided by the number of councillors
Over-represented	Where there are fewer electors per councillor in a ward than the average the electors can be described as being over-represented
Parish	A specific and defined area of land within a single district enclosed within a parish boundary. There are over 10,000 parishes in England, which provide the first tier of representation to their local residents
Parish council	A body elected by residents of the parish who are on the electoral register, which serves and represents the area defined by the parish boundaries
Parish electoral arrangements	The total number of parish councillors; the number, names and boundaries of parish wards; and the number of councillors for each ward
Parish ward	A particular area of a parish, defined for electoral, administrative and representational purposes. Eligible electors vote in whichever parish ward they live for candidate or candidates they wish to represent them on the parish council

PER (Periodic Electoral Review)	A review of the electoral arrangements of all local authorities in England, undertaken periodically. The last programme of PERs was undertaken between 1996 and 2004 by The Boundary Committee for England and its predecessor, the now-defunct Local Government Commission for England
Political management arrangements	The Local Government Act 2000 enabled local authorities to modernise their decision-making process. Councils could choose from three broad categories; a directly elected mayor and cabinet; a cabinet with a leader; or a directly elected mayor and council manager. Whichever of the categories it adopted became the new political management structure for the council
Under-represented	Where there are more electors per councillor in a ward than the average the electors can be described as being under-represented
Variance (or electoral variance)	How far the number of electors per councillor in a ward varies in percentage terms from the district average
Ward	A specific area of a district or borough, defined for electoral, administrative and representational purposes. Eligible electors vote in whichever ward they are registered for the candidate or candidates they wish to represent them on the district council

Appendix B

Code of practice on written consultation

The Cabinet Office's November 2000 *Code of Practice on Written Consultation*, available at www.cabinet-office.gov.uk/regulation/Consultation/Code.htm, requires all Government Departments and Agencies to adhere to certain criteria, set out below, on the conduct of public consultations. Public bodies, such as The Boundary Committee for England, are encouraged to follow the Code.

The Code of Practice applies to consultation documents published after 1 January 2001, which should reproduce the criteria, give explanations of any departures, and confirm that the criteria have otherwise been followed.

Table B1: The Boundary Committee for England's compliance with Code criteria

Criteria	Compliance/departure
Timing of consultation should be built into the planning process for a policy (including legislation) or service from the start, so that it has the best prospect of improving the proposals concerned, and so that sufficient time is left for it at each stage.	We comply with this requirement.
It should be clear who is being consulted, about what questions, in what timescale and for what purpose.	We comply with this requirement.
A consultation document should be as simple and concise as possible. It should include a summary, in two pages at most, of the main questions it seeks views on. It should make it as easy as possible for readers to respond, make contact or complain.	We comply with this requirement.
Documents should be made widely available, with the fullest use of electronic means (though not to the exclusion of others), and effectively drawn to the attention of all interested groups and individuals.	We comply with this requirement.
Sufficient time should be allowed for considered responses from all groups with an interest. Twelve weeks should be the standard minimum period for a consultation.	We consult on draft recommendations for a minimum of eight weeks, but may extend the period if consultations take place over holiday periods.
Responses should be carefully and open-mindedly analysed, and the results made widely available, with an account of the views expressed, and reasons for decisions finally taken.	We comply with this requirement.
Departments should monitor and evaluate consultations, designating a consultation coordinator who will ensure the lessons are disseminated.	We comply with this requirement.

