

Final recommendations on the
future electoral arrangements
for Sevenoaks in Kent

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

May 2001

LOCAL GOVERNMENT COMMISSION FOR ENGLAND

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

Members of the Commission are:

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



Local Government Commission for England

9 May 2001

Dear Secretary of State

On 9 May 2000 the Commission began a periodic electoral review of Sevenoaks under the Local Government Act 1992. We published our draft recommendations in October 2000 and undertook an eight-week period of consultation.

We have now prepared our final recommendations in the light of the consultation. We have substantially confirmed our draft recommendations, although some modifications have been made (see paragraph 206-207) in the light of further evidence. This report sets out our final recommendations for changes to electoral arrangements in Sevenoaks.

We recommend that Sevenoaks District Council should be served by 54 councillors representing 26 wards, and that changes should be made to ward boundaries in order to improve electoral equality, having regard to the statutory criteria. We recommend that the Council should continue to hold whole council elections every four years.

The Local Government Act 2000, contains provisions relating to changes to local authority electoral arrangements. However, until such time as Orders are made implementing those arrangements we are obliged to conduct our work in accordance with current legislation, and to continue our current approach to periodic electoral reviews.

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

Yours sincerely

PROFESSOR MALCOLM GRANT
Chairman

SUMMARY

The Commission began a review of Sevenoaks on 9 May 2000. We published our draft recommendations for electoral arrangements on 17 October 2000, after which we undertook an eight-week period of consultation.

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

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

- **in 20 of the 32 wards the number of electors represented by each councillor varies by more than 10 per cent from the average for the district and 11 wards vary by more than 20 per cent from the average;**
- **by 2005, the number of electors per councillor is forecast to vary by more than 10 per cent from the average in 20 wards and by more than 20 per cent in 10 wards.**

Our main final recommendations for future electoral arrangements (Figures 1 and 2 and paragraphs (206-207) are that:

- **Sevenoaks District Council should have 54 councillors, one more than at present;**
- **there should be 26 wards, instead of 32 as at present;**
- **the boundaries of 27 of the existing wards should be modified and five wards should retain their existing boundaries;**
- **whole council elections should continue to take place every four years.**

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

- **In 24 of the proposed 26 wards the number of electors per councillor would vary by no more than 10 per cent from the district average.**
- **This improved level of electoral equality is forecast to continue, with the number of electors per councillor in only one ward, Halstead, Knockholt & Badger's Mount, is expected to vary by more than 10 per cent from the average for the district in 2005.**

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

- **revised warding arrangements for the parishes of Chiddingstone, Edenbridge, Sevenoaks, Shoreham and Swanley;**
- **an increase in the number of councillors serving Eynsford and Hartley parish councils.**

All further correspondence on these recommendations and the matters discussed in this report should be addressed to the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, who will not make an Order implementing the Commission's recommendations before 19 June 2001.

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

Figure 1: The Commission's Final Recommendations: Summary

Ward name	Number of councillors	Constituent areas	Map reference
1 Ash	3	Ash-cum-Ridley ward (part – the New Ash Green North, New Ash Green South and Ash parish wards of Ash-cum-Ridley parish)	Maps 2 & A6
2 Brasted, Chevening & Sundridge	3	Brasted ward (the parish of Brasted); Chevening ward (the parish of Chevening); Sundridge & Ide Hill ward (the parish of Sundridge)	Map 2
3 Cowden & Hever	1	Somerden ward (part – the parishes of Cowden and Hever)	Map 2
4 Crockenhill & Well Hill	1	Crockenhill ward (the parish of Crockenhill); Shoreham ward (part – the proposed Well Hill Hundreds parish ward of Shoreham parish)	Maps 2 & A2
5 Dunton Green & Riverhead	2	Dunton Green ward (the parish of Dunton Green); Riverhead ward (the parish of Riverhead)	Map 2 & Large Map
6 Edenbridge North & East	2	Edenbridge North ward; Edenbridge South ward (part)	Maps 2 & A4
7 Edenbridge South & West	2	Edenbridge South ward (part)	Maps 2 & A4
8 Eynsford	1	<i>Unchanged</i> (the parish of Eynsford)	Maps 2 & A2
9 Farningham, Horton Kirby & South Darenth	2	Farningham ward (the parish of Farningham); Horton Kirby ward (the parish of Horton Kirby and South Darenth)	Map 2
10 Halstead, Knockholt & Badgers Mount	2	<i>Unchanged</i> (the parishes of Halstead and Knockholt and the Badgers Mount parish ward of Shoreham parish)	Maps 2 & A2
11 Hartley & Hodsoll Street	3	Fawkham & Hartley ward (part – the parish of Hartley); Ash-cum-Ridley ward (part – the Hodsoll Street & Ridley parish ward of Ash-cum-Ridley parish)	Maps 2 & A6
12 Hextable	2	Hextable & Swanley Village ward (part – the proposed Hextable ward of Swanley parish)	Maps 2 & A3
13 Kemsing	2	<i>Unchanged</i> (the parish of Kemsing)	Map 2 & Large map
14 Leigh & Chiddingstone Causeway	1	Leigh ward (the parish of Leigh); Somerden ward (part – the proposed Chiddingstone Causeway parish ward of Chiddingstone parish)	Maps 2 & A5

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Constituent areas	Map reference
15	Otford & Shoreham	2	Otford ward (the parish of Otford); Shoreham ward (part – the Shoreham parish ward of Shoreham parish)	Maps 2 & A2
16	Penshurst, Fordcombe & Chiddingstone	1	Penshurst & Fordcombe ward (the parish of Penshurst); Somerden ward (part – the proposed Chiddingstone parish ward of Chiddingstone parish)	Maps 2 & A5
17	Seal & Weald	2	Seal ward (the parish of Seal); Sevenoaks Weald & Underriver ward (the parish of Sevenoaks Weald); Sevenoaks Wildernesse ward (part – the proposed Wildernesse parish ward of Sevenoaks parish)	Map 2 & Large map
18	Sevenoaks Eastern	2	Sevenoaks Wildernesse ward (part); Sevenoaks Northern ward (part); Sevenoaks Town & St John's ward (part)	Map 2 & Large map
19	Sevenoaks Kippington	2	Sevenoaks Kippington ward (part)	Map 2 & Large map
20	Sevenoaks Northern	2	Sevenoaks Northern ward (part); Sevenoaks Town & St John's ward (part)	Map 2 & Large map
21	Sevenoaks Town & St John's	3	Sevenoaks Town & St John's ward (part); Sevenoaks Kippington ward (part); Sevenoaks Wildernesse ward (part)	Map 2 & Large Map
22	Swanley Christchurch & Swanley Village	3	Swanley Christchurch ward (the Christchurch ward of Swanley parish); Hextable and Swanley Village ward (part – the Swanley Village ward of Swanley parish)	Maps 2 & A3
23	Swanley St Mary's	2	<i>Unchanged</i> (the St Mary's ward of Swanley parish)	Map 2
24	Swanley White Oak	3	Swanley White Oak ward; Hextable & Swanley Village ward (part)	Maps 2 & A3
25	Westerham & Crockham Hill	2	<i>Unchanged</i> (the parish of Westerham)	Map 2
26	West Kingsdown & Fawkham	3	West Kingsdown ward (the parish of West Kingsdown); Fawkham & Hartley ward (part – the parish of Fawkham)	Map 2

Notes: 1 The whole district is parished.

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

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

Figure 2: The Commission's Final Recommendations for Sevenoaks

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2000)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average (%)	Electorate (2005)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average (%)
1	Ash	3	4,969	1,656	4	4,969	1,656	3
2	Brasted, Chevening & Sundridge	3	4,856	1,619	1	4,896	1,632	2
3	Cowden & Hever	1	1,531	1,531	-4	1,531	1,531	-5
4	Crockenhill & Well Hill	1	1,505	1,505	-6	1,505	1,505	-6
5	Dunton Green & Riverhead	2	3,287	1,644	3	3,327	1,664	4
6	Edenbridge North & East	2	3,136	1,568	-2	3,258	1,629	2
7	Edenbridge South & West	2	2,990	1,495	-6	3,130	1,565	-2
8	Eynsford	1	1,447	1,447	-9	1,447	1,447	-10
9	Farningham, Horton Kirby & South Darenth	2	3,346	1,673	5	3,346	1,673	4
10	Halstead, Knockholt & Badgers Mount	2	2,671	1,336	-16	2,671	1,336	-17
11	Hartley & Hodsoil St	3	4,789	1,596	-3	4,789	1,596	-1
12	Hextable	2	3,382	1,691	6	3,382	1,691	5
13	Kemsing	2	3,214	1,607	1	3,214	1,607	0
14	Leigh & Chiddingstone Causeway	1	1,616	1,616	1	1,616	1,616	1
15	Otford & Shoreham	2	3,529	1,765	11	3,529	1,765	10
16	Penshurst, Fordcombe & Chiddingstone	1	1,750	1,750	10	1,750	1,750	9
17	Seal & Weald	2	3,173	1,587	-1	3,173	1,587	-1
18	Sevenoaks Eastern	2	2,939	1,470	-8	3,009	1,505	-6

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2000)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average (%)	Electorate (2005)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average (%)
19	Sevenoaks Kippington	2	3,138	1,569	-2	3,138	1,569	-2
20	Sevenoaks Northern	2	3,215	1,608	1	3,215	1,608	0
21	Sevenoaks Town & St John's	3	4,940	1,647	3	4,940	1,647	3
22	Swanley Christchurch & Swanley Village	3	4,551	1,517	-5	4,551	1,517	-5
23	Swanley St Mary's	2	3,382	1,691	6	3,382	1,691	5
24	Swanley White Oak	3	4,801	1,600	0	4,801	1,600	0
25	Westerham & Crockham Hill	2	3,282	1,641	3	3,282	1,641	2
26	West Kingsdown & Fawkham	3	4,769	1,590	0	4,794	1,598	0
	Totals	54	86,208	-	-	86,645	-	-
	Averages	-	-	1,596	-	-	1,605	-

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

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

1 INTRODUCTION

1 This report contains our final recommendations on the electoral arrangements for the district of Sevenoaks in Kent. We have now reviewed the 12 two-tier districts in Kent as part of our programme of periodic electoral reviews (PERs) of all 386 principal local authority areas in England. Our programme started in 1996 and is currently expected to be completed by 2004.

2 This was our first review of the electoral arrangements of Sevenoaks. The last such review was undertaken by our predecessor, the Local Government Boundary Commission (LGBC), which reported to the Secretary of State in June 1976 (Report No. 152). The electoral arrangements of Kent County Council were last reviewed in November 1980 (Report No. 402). We commenced a periodic electoral review of Medway in November 2000, and expect to commence a review of the County Council's electoral arrangements in 2002.

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

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

4 We are required to make recommendations to the Secretary of State on the number of councillors who should serve on the District Council, and the number, boundaries and names of wards. We can also make recommendations on the electoral arrangements for parish and town councils in the district.

5 We have also had regard to our *Guidance and Procedural Advice for Local Authorities and Other Interested Parties* (fourth edition published in December 2000), which sets out our approach to the reviews.

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

7 The broad objective of PERs is to achieve, so far as practicable, equality of representation across the district as a whole. Having regard to the statutory criteria, our aim is to achieve as low a level of electoral imbalance as is practicable. We will require particular justification for schemes which would result in, or retain, an electoral imbalance of over 10 per cent in any ward. Any imbalances of 20 per cent or more should only arise in the most exceptional circumstances, and will require the strongest justification.

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

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

10 This review was in four stages. Stage One began on 9 May 2000, when we wrote to Sevenoaks District Council inviting proposals for future electoral arrangements. We also notified Kent County Council, Kent Police Authority, the local authority associations, Kent Association of Parish Councils, parish and town councils in the district, the Members of Parliament with constituency interests in the district, the Members of the European Parliament for the South East Region, and the headquarters of the main political parties. We placed a notice in the local press, issued a press release and invited the District Council to publicise the review further. The closing date for receipt of representations, the end of Stage One, was 31 July 2000. At Stage Two we considered all the representations received during Stage One and prepared our draft recommendations.

11 Stage Three began on 17 October 2000 with the publication of our report, *Draft recommendations on the future electoral arrangements for Sevenoaks in Kent*, and ended on 11 December 2000. Comments were sought on our preliminary conclusions. In the light of representations received regarding our draft recommendations in the west of the district, we carried out a further period of consultation in relation to the most appropriate warding arrangements for the existing Brasted, Chevening and Sundridge & Ide Hill wards. On 8 February, we wrote to the District Council, the relevant parish councils and other interested parties outlining our draft recommendations and one alternative option and invited respondents to state a preference for one of the two options. Finally, during Stage Four we reconsidered our draft recommendations in the light of the Stage Three consultation and now publish our final recommendations.

2 CURRENT ELECTORAL ARRANGEMENTS

12 The district of Sevenoaks covers almost 37,000 hectares with a population of 108,828 at the 1991 census. The area is largely rural with three main towns: Swanley in the north, Edenbridge in the south-west and Sevenoaks, the main administrative and commercial centre in the middle. Along with these main towns there are some 30 villages and a large number of hamlets. Sevenoaks has excellent road and rail links connecting the district with London, which is only half an hour away by train. Consequently, there is a high proportion of commuters in Sevenoaks compared to other parts of Kent. The district is entirely parished and contains 29 parishes, of which three are town councils (Edenbridge, Sevenoaks and Swanley). The District Council is elected as a whole every four years.

13 Although a small growth in the number of properties is forecast over the next five years, the overall population is forecast to decline over the next ten years. The lack of development sites for housing and planning restrictions in the Green Belt mean that, in the main, new properties will be restricted to pockets of individual infill.

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

15 The electorate of the district is 86,208 (February 2000). At present, the Council has 53 members who are elected from 32 wards, 10 of which are relatively urban being within Sevenoaks, Edenbridge and Swanley with the remainder being predominantly rural. Four of the wards are each represented by three councillors, 13 are each represented by two councillors and 15 are single-member wards.

16 Since the last electoral review there has been an increase in the electorate in Sevenoaks district, with around 12 per cent more electors than two decades ago as a result of new housing developments. The most notable increases have been in Edenbridge, Ash-cum-Ridley and West Kingsdown wards.

17 At present, each councillor represents an average of 1,627 electors, which the District Council forecasts will increase to 1,635 by the year 2005 if the current number of councillors is maintained. However, due to demographic and other changes over the past two decades, the number of electors per councillor in 20 of the 32 wards varies by more than 10 per cent from the district average, 11 wards by more than 20 per cent and six wards by more than 30 per cent. The worst imbalance is in Somerden ward where the councillor represents 49 per cent more electors than the district average.

Map 1: Existing Wards in Sevenoaks

Figure 3: Existing Electoral Arrangements

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2000)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average (%)	Electorate (2005)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average (%)
1	Ash-cum-Ridley	3	5,361	1,787	10	5,361	1,787	9
2	Brasted	1	1,137	1,137	-30	1,137	1,137	-30
3	Chevening	1	2,260	2,260	39	2,300	2,300	41
4	Crockenhill	1	1,317	1,317	-19	1,317	1,317	-19
5	Dunton Green	1	1,481	1,481	-9	1,521	1,521	-7
6	Edenbridge North	2	2,448	1,224	-25	2,710	1,355	-17
7	Edenbridge South	2	3,678	1,839	13	3,678	1,839	12
8	Eynsford	1	1,447	1,447	-11	1,447	1,447	-11
9	Farningham	1	1,035	1,035	-36	1,035	1,035	-37
10	Fawkham & Hartley	3	4,842	1,614	-1	4,842	1,614	-1
11	Halstead, Knockholt & Badgers Mount	2	2,671	1,336	-18	2,671	1,336	-18
12	Hextable & Swanley Village	2	3,727	1,864	15	3,727	1,864	14
13	Horton Kirby & South Darent	1	2,311	2,311	42	2,311	2,311	41
14	Kemsing	2	3,214	1,607	-1	3,214	1,607	-2
15	Leigh	1	1,301	1,301	-20	1,301	1,301	-20
16	Otford	2	2,616	1,308	-20	2,616	1,308	-20
17	Penshurst & Fordcombe	1	1,166	1,166	-28	1,166	1,166	-29
18	Riverhead	1	1,806	1,806	11	1,806	1,806	10
19	Seal	1	1,653	1,653	2	1,653	1,653	1
20	Sevenoaks Kippington	2	3,664	1,832	13	3,664	1,832	12
21	Sevenoaks Northern	2	3,258	1,629	0	3,258	1,629	0

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2000)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average (%)	Electorate (2005)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average (%)
22	Sevenoaks Town & St John's	3	4,656	1,552	-5	4,656	1,552	-5
23	Sevenoaks Weald & Underriver	1	1,176	1,176	-28	1,176	1,176	-28
24	Sevenoaks Wildernesse	2	2,998	1,499	-8	3,068	1,534	-6
25	Shoreham	1	1,101	1,101	-32	1,101	1,101	-33
26	Somerden	1	2,430	2,430	49	2,430	2,430	49
27	Sundridge & Ide Hill	1	1,459	1,459	-10	1,459	1,459	-11
28	Swanley Christchurch	2	4,224	2,112	30	4,224	2,112	29
29	Swanley St Mary's	2	3,382	1,691	4	3,382	1,691	3
30	Swanley White Oak	3	4,783	1,594	-2	4,783	1,594	-2
31	Westerham & Crockham Hill	2	3,282	1,641	1	3,282	1,641	0
32	West Kingsdown	2	4,324	2,162	33	4,349	2,175	33
	Totals	53	86,208	-	-	86,645	-	-
	Averages	-	-	1,627	-	-	1,635	-

Source: Electorate figures are based on information provided by Sevenoaks 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 2000, electors in Shoreham ward were relatively over-represented by 32 per cent, while electors in Somerden ward were relatively under-represented by 49 per cent. Figures have been rounded to the nearest whole number.

3 DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS

18 During Stage One we received 28 representations, including district-wide schemes from Sevenoaks District Council, Sevenoaks District Labour Party and the Conservative Group on Sevenoaks District Council, and representations from Kent County Council, Sevenoaks Liberal Democrats, Sevenoaks Conservative Association, Edenbridge and District Labour Party, three town councils, five parish councils, 15 district councillors, local residents, a group of councillors representing the northern parishes of Sevenoaks, the Chairman of Edenbridge Town Council and a joint submission from a group comprising both councillors and 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 Sevenoaks in Kent*.

19 Our draft recommendations were based on the District Council's proposals, as they achieved a better reflection of community identity than other schemes submitted and had been consulted on locally. However, we moved away from the District Council's scheme in a number of areas in order to secure improved electoral equality in the north and north-eastern parts of the district. We proposed that:

- Sevenoaks District Council should be served by 54 councillors, compared with the current 53, representing 25 wards, seven fewer than at present;
- the boundaries of 28 of the existing wards should be modified, while four wards should retain their existing boundaries;
- there should be new warding arrangements for the parishes of Edenbridge, Sevenoaks, Shoreham and Swanley and an increase in the number of councillors representing the parishes of Eynsford and Hartley.

Draft Recommendation

Sevenoaks District Council should comprise 54 councillors serving 25 wards. The whole council should continue to be elected every four years.

20 Our proposals would have resulted in significant improvements in electoral equality, with the number of electors per councillor in 24 of the 25 wards varying by no more than 10 per cent from the district average. This level of electoral equality was forecast to remain the same by 2005, with only one ward, Halstead, Knockholt & Badger's Mount, varying by more than 10 per cent from the district average.

4 RESPONSES TO CONSULTATION

21 During the consultation on our draft recommendations report, 197 representations were received. A list of all respondents is available on request from the Commission. All representations may be inspected at the offices of Sevenoaks District Council and the Commission.

Sevenoaks District Council

22 The District Council welcomed our decision to base our draft recommendations on its scheme. However, it stated that it was disappointed that the Commission had not adopted its Stage One scheme entirely, arguing that “the District Council scheme was a complete package and it is disappointing to note, therefore that the Commission wishes to modify it in order to achieve a very minimal improvement to the electoral equality”. In particular, the Council objected to our revised Hartley & Hodsoll Street ward, Leigh, Chiddingstone, Penshurst & Fordcombe ward and Otford, Shoreham & Eynsford ward, stating that community links between the groups of parishes within these wards are limited. It also objected to our proposals in Edenbridge and the proposed Kippington ward and Wildernesse parish ward in Sevenoaks town, arguing that our efforts to improve electoral equality had not taken into account community identity and interest in these areas. The Council conceded that “it may be, for the sake of improving electoral equality, that a few alterations to the District Council’s scheme are possible”.

Kent County Council

23 The County Council “broadly supported” the Commission’s recommendations, with the exception of our draft proposal to divide Sundridge parish between two wards.

Parish & Town Councils

24 Sevenoaks Town Council opposed the proposal to include the eastern part of Sevenoaks town (Wildernesse parish ward) in the proposed Seal & Weald ward. They also objected to the allocation of a single councillor for this area. The Town Council opposed our proposed Kippington ward and the use of the centre of roads as ward boundaries.

25 Seal Parish Council supported a merger of Seal and Sevenoaks Weald parishes to form a new ward but did not endorse the inclusion of the Wildernesse area of Sevenoaks.

26 Edenbridge Town Council reiterated a preference for two two-member wards in the town of Edenbridge. It also commented that equality of representation is “complicated by the electors having the right to a multiple and variable number of votes”, contending that all residents of the town should have the opportunity to vote for the same number of district councillors at an election.

27 Dunton Green Parish Council argued that our proposed two-member Dunton Green & Riverhead ward would result in a “loss of local identity” for local communities while Riverhead Parish Council stated that our proposals “can only lead to confusion into future lines of

communication with our parishioners”. Both parishes supported the retention of the existing single-member Dunton Green and Riverhead wards.

28 Ash-cum-Ridley Parish Council opposed our proposed Ash, Hartley & Hodsoil Street, Fawkham & Hartley and West Kingsdown wards, generally arguing that our proposed wards combined parishes that did not share common ties. Fawkham Parish Council, West Kingsdown Parish Council and Hartley Parish Council also opposed our proposals affecting their parishes.

29 Sundridge Parish Council objected to the proposed single-member Brasted & Ide Hill ward and to the two-member Chevening & Sundridge ward as these proposals would split the parish of Sundridge. Chevening Parish Council stated that they “accepted” our draft recommendations for a two-member Chevening & Sundridge ward.

30 The Parish Councils of Eynsford, Otford and Shoreham all opposed the draft proposals for a three-member Eynsford, Otford & Shoreham ward. The general view of the Parish Councils was that there are limited community ties between Eynsford parish and the parishes of Otford and Shoreham. They argued that the parish of Eynsford shares more identity and interest with parishes to the north of the district whereas Otford and Shoreham parishes have stronger links with areas to the south. Crockenhill Parish Council supported the inclusion of the Well Hill area of Shoreham parish in a single-member Crockenhill & Well Hill ward but was of the view that the ward should be named Crockenhill & the Well Hill ward of Shoreham.

31 Swanley Town Council “approved” the Commission’s proposals for the parish of Swanley.

Political Organisations

32 We also received representations from eight political organisations. The Conservative Group stated that it was “pleased” that we had endorsed many of the Council’s draft proposals. However, it opposed our draft recommendations where we had not adopted the District Council’s original scheme except for the proposed single-member Brasted & Ide Hill ward and two-member Chevening & Sundridge ward. It proposed that these wards could be merged to form a three-member ward. Sevenoaks District Labour Party also supported some of our draft recommendations but contended that our draft proposals could better reflect the identities and interests of local communities in the north-east of the district, in the proposed Eynsford, Otford & Shoreham and Dunton Green & Riverhead wards. The Liberal Democrat Group of Councillors and Sevenoaks Liberal Democrats objected to our draft recommendations for a three-member Otford, Shoreham & Eynsford ward and to some of our proposals in Sevenoaks town. The Liberal Democrat Group of Councillors also objected to our proposed Dunton Green & Riverhead ward.

33 Edenbridge & District Labour Party supported our proposals for Edenbridge and reiterated its opposition to the Council’s proposed wards in this area. Tonbridge, Ealing and Malling Conservative Party opposed our draft proposals for Edenbridge and the proposed Penschurst, Fordcombe, Leigh & Chiddingstone ward. Sundridge & Ide Hill Branch Conservative Association objected to the proposals for a single-member Brasted & Ide Hill ward and for a two-member Chevening & Sundridge ward, as this would involve splitting Sundridge parish between two wards. Otford Branch Conservative Association opposed our proposed three-member Otford, Shoreham & Eynsford ward, instead supporting the Council’s original proposals.

Other representations

34 We received a further 171 representations from local residents, district councillors, town and parish councillors, Members of Parliament, residents associations, a rector, a church council, the chairman of a town council, the chairman of a parish council and The Right Honourable Lord Weatherill. These respondents addressed seven areas of the Commission's draft recommendations.

35 District Councillors Bailey, Bruce, Clark, Eames and Sandford, a parish councillor, the rector of the Anglican parish of Fawkham & Hartley, the Ridley Society and 17 residents opposed our proposed Hartley & Hodsoll Street and Fawkham & West Kingsdown wards, generally arguing that our proposed wards combined areas that did not share common identities or community links.

36 We also received some local support for our proposals from twelve local residents of Hartley, Hodsoll Street and New Ash Green. One resident argued that our proposals would facilitate the provision of electoral equality which the retention of the existing wards would not. Another resident argued that New Ash Green had "little or no affinity with Hodsoll Street" and stated that "to adjust the number of people being represented by each councillor would seem to be fairer for the residents of New Ash Green".

37 We also received opposition to our proposed two-member Dunton Green & Riverhead ward from District Councillor Watson and 58 residents. Councillor Watson argued that the two parishes are distinct areas, stating that the type of housing in each area is symptomatic of the differing natures of the two parishes. Despite the number of responses from residents, the majority did not provide any significant argumentation in support of their contention. However, several residents stated their concern that a Dunton Green & Riverhead ward could result in a lack of representation for Dunton Green because Riverhead has a larger electorate.

38 Our proposed Brasted & Ide Hill and Chevening & Sundridge wards were also opposed by District Councillor Dean, County Councillor Thornton, the chairman of Sundridge Parish Council, Michael Fallon MP, The Right Honourable Lord Weatherill, St Mary Sundridge with St Mary Ide Hill Parochial Church Council and 14 residents. The majority of respondents objected to these proposals as they divided the parish of Sundridge between two wards and argued that the revised wards combined areas with no common identity or interest. District Councillor Dean proposed that the parishes of Brasted, Chevening & Sundridge could be combined to form a three-member ward.

39 District Councillors Dibsall, Malan, Bovington, Gee and Young and five local residents objected to our proposed three-member Eynsford, Otford & Shoreham ward. The majority view of these respondents was that Eynsford parish has more common identity with parishes to the north whereas Otford and Shoreham parishes have identities and interests with parishes to the south. Respondents also argued that our proposal would create a geographically large ward and a number expressed their support for the Council's original proposal to create a single-member Eynsford ward and a two-member Otford & Shoreham ward.

40 Well Hill Residents Association supported our proposals to create a Well Hill parish ward in Shoreham parish, arguing that the interests of the electorate would be better served at parish level.

41 County Councillor Lake, District Councillors Cook & Spence, eight residents and the Right Honourable Sir J Stanley MP were all in opposition to our proposals for a two-member Penshurst, Fordcombe, Leigh & Chiddingstone ward, arguing that there would be no common identity or interest in the ward. The majority of respondents also supported the Council's original proposals for a single-member Leigh & Chiddingstone Causeway ward and a single-member Penshurst, Fordcombe & Chiddingstone ward.

42 We received opposition to our proposed Sevenoaks Wildernesse parish ward from District and Town Councillor Clayton, Town Councillors Purves and Walsh and a local resident. The councillors argued that our proposals would be detrimental to the level of representation at parish level while the resident argued that our proposal to transfer the Wildernesse parish ward from a Sevenoaks ward to Seal & Weald ward would combine part of an urban area with an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. The resident further contended that the electorate in this area could be confused because they would not know whether the Town or District Council was responsible for providing certain services. Another local resident proposed that the boundaries of Sevenoaks Northern, Sevenoaks Town & St John's and Sevenoaks Wildernesse wards should be amended in order to address an "anomaly" in the existing Sevenoaks Northern ward.

43 We also received opposition to our draft proposals for Sevenoaks Kippington ward from District Councillor Broomby, Grassy Lane Residents Association, Oakhill Road Residents Association and two residents. The respondents contended that our proposals transferred part of the existing Kippington ward to a town ward which was distinct from the Kippington area and with which it did not share any common identity.

44 Councillor London stated that he supported our draft recommendations for Sevenoaks Kippington and Sevenoaks Town & St John's wards, arguing the transfer of a number of electors from Kippington to Town & St John's ward "makes better sense than other proposals".

45 Our draft recommendations for Edenbridge were opposed by District Councillors Davison and Deans, County Councillor Lake, the Right Honourable Sir J Stanley MP and 12 residents who all stated a preference for retaining two two-member wards in Edenbridge. The Chairman of Edenbridge Town Council and two local residents supported our draft proposals in Edenbridge and suggested a minor amendment to the number of town councillors representing each parish ward.

46 Town Councillor Williams and a group of councillors and residents supported our proposals for a single-member Edenbridge North ward but opposed a three-member Edenbridge South ward, stating a preference for single-member wards in this area. Town Councillor Pugh reiterated a preference for Edenbridge to be divided between four single-member wards but supported our draft recommendations if we were to reject this arrangement.

47 Parish Councillor Loney stated his support for the Commission's draft recommendations maintaining that the Commission had "produced recommendations that balance the whole picture against the special pleading for individual wards".

Further Consultation

48 In the light of representations received regarding our draft recommendations for Brasted & Ide Hill and Chevening & Sundridge wards, we carried out a further period of consultation on the most appropriate warding arrangements for the area. On 8 February 2001, we wrote to the District Council, the relevant parish councils and other interested parties outlining our draft recommendations and one alternative option. We invited respondents to state a preference for one of these two options by 12 March 2001. As part of this consultation we received 24 responses.

49 Kent County Council, County Councillor Thornton, Sundridge Parish Council, Sundridge & Ide Hill Branch Conservative Association, Michael Fallon MP, The Right Honourable Lord Weatherill and 15 local residents stated a preference for the alternative proposal to combine the parishes of Brasted, Chevening and Sundridge to form a three-member ward.

50 Sevenoaks District Council, Brasted Parish Council and Chevening Parish Council stated a preference for the draft recommendations for a single-member Brasted & Ide Hill ward and a two-member Chevening & Sundridge ward. However, the District Council stated that they would not be opposed to the alternative three-member ward.

5 ANALYSIS AND FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS

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

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

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

54 Our *Guidance* states that we accept that the achievement of absolute electoral equality for the authority as a whole is likely to be unattainable. However, we consider that, if electoral imbalances are to be kept to the minimum, such an objective should be the starting point in any review. We therefore strongly recommend that, in formulating electoral schemes, local authorities and other interested parties should start from the standpoint of absolute electoral equality and only then make adjustments to reflect relevant factors, such as community identity and interests. Regard must be had to five-year forecasts of changes in electorates and we would aim to recommend a scheme which provides improved electoral equality over this five year period.

Electorate Forecasts

55 At Stage One, the District Council submitted electorate forecasts for the year 2005, projecting an increase in the electorate of 0.4 per cent from 86,208 to 86,523 over the five-year period from 2000 to 2005. The Council estimated rates and locations of housing development with regard to structure and local plans, the expected rate of building over the five-year period and assumed occupancy rates. Advice from the District Council on the likely effect on electorates of changes to ward boundaries has been obtained.

56 At Stage One, four respondents notified us that Fort Halstead would be closing within the next five years and that it would be released for development. However, at the time that the electorate forecasts were made, planning permission had not been given to the site and we had not been notified that properties will be built and occupied by 2005. In our draft recommendations report we accepted that this is an inexact science and, having given consideration to the forecast electorates, we were satisfied that they represented the best estimates that could reasonably be made at the time.

57 In response to our draft recommendations report, Shoreham Parish Council argued that “possible developments at Fort Halstead also raises the issue of the accuracy of Sevenoaks District Council’s overall projections for electoral growth”. The Parish Council also questioned the lack of forecast growth in the electorate “particularly given the national policy regarding house building in the south east”.

58 The Chairman of Edenbridge Town Council questioned the forecast electorate in Edenbridge stating, “I disagree that the proposed Edenbridge South will only increase by 16”. He listed a number of sites which have been given planning permission in the proposed Edenbridge South ward.

59 District Councillor Gee contended that the forecast electorate for the existing Eynsford ward had not accounted for a number of minor developments that would bring the variance of the ward to within 10 per cent of the district average by 2005.

60 Sundridge Parish Council, St Mary Sundridge with St Mary Ide Hill Parochial Church Council and several local residents all contended that developments that are due to take place in the old Sundridge hospital have not been included in the District Council’s electorate forecasts.

61 We have contacted the District Council who have confirmed that their original electorate projections had accounted for all the developments within Eynsford. However, it notified us that a development in Edenbridge had been allocated to a site adjacent to Westways in the existing Edenbridge North ward which would take place before 2005. This development would increase the projected total electorate in the district to 86,645 (an increase of 122 electors). The Council also confirmed that although it had been fully aware of the plans to develop the site of the old Sundridge Hospital, there is no certainty over when developments are to proceed. The Council had therefore decided not to include this site in its electorate forecasts. In our draft recommendations report, we noted that, at the time that the electorate forecasts were made by the District Council, there had been no planning permission given to the Fort Halstead site and the Council had therefore been unable to include it in its projections.

62 We have carefully considered the calculations and we are persuaded that the District Council has calculated its electoral projections as accurately as possible given the information available including the revised electorate projections. We therefore remain satisfied that they represent the best forecasts that could have been made at this time.

Council Size

63 As already explained, the Commission’s starting point is to assume that the current council size facilitates effective and convenient local government, although we are willing to carefully look at arguments why this might not be the case.

64 Sevenoaks District Council currently has 53 members. The District Council proposed a council of 54 members, as although it was opposed to any dramatic changes in council size, members had conceded that a council size of 54 provided the best representation of the district.

65 At Stage One, the Labour Party proposed a district-wide scheme comprising a 55-member council, stating that it had tried to keep parish council areas within the same wards and had attempted to bring like communities together. Shoreham Parish Council also proposed a 55-member council arguing that it would not have an “adverse effect across the district”. We carefully considered both the 54 and 55 member schemes submitted during Stage One. Having considered the schemes from the Labour Party and Shoreham Parish Council, we noted that while a 55-member council gave good representation in some parts of the district, a 54-member council would give better representation to the district as a whole and would appear to have the majority of local support. We therefore based our draft recommendations on a council size of 54 members.

66 At Stage Three, the Chairman of Edenbridge Council stated that a council size of 54 is “satisfactory to represent the district”.

67 We note that our proposed 54-member council has not received opposition during Stage Three. Having considered the size and distribution of the electorate, the geography and other characteristics of the area, together with the representations received, we remain of the view that the achievement of electoral equality and the statutory criteria would best be met by a council of 54 members.

Electoral Arrangements

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

69 In view of the degree of consensus behind large elements of the Council’s proposals, and the consultation exercise which it undertook with interested parties, we concluded that we should base our recommendations on the District Council’s scheme, subject to some modifications. We considered that the District Council’s proposals provided the best reflection of community identities and interests across the district. However, we had reservations about the levels of electoral inequality that would persist in some areas of the district and consequently made amendments to its scheme in order to secure improved electoral equality in the wards of Otford, Shoreham, Eynsford, West Kingsdown, Ash-cum-Ridley, Fawkham & Hartley, Edenbridge and Sevenoaks.

70 During Stage Three we received a large volume of responses to our draft recommendations relating to seven specific areas of the district. The District Council supported our draft recommendations where we had endorsed its Stage One proposals but reiterated that its draft scheme was presented as a “complete” solution for the district. It therefore opposed our draft recommendations where we did not adopt its original proposals. The Council’s proposals have received a degree of local support as better representing community identity within these seven areas of the district, while our draft recommendations received considerable opposition. However there has been some measure of support for our draft proposals in the remainder of the district.

71 We have reviewed our draft recommendations in the light of further evidence and the representations received during Stage Three. The submissions received from political groups,

parish and town councils and other local interests have highlighted specific local issues, particularly in terms of local community identities and interests, and have been valuable in drawing up our final proposals. However, we remain of the opinion that the majority of our draft recommendations would provide the best balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria in the majority of the district and propose substantially confirming them as part of our final recommendations.

72 However, having given consideration to all the representations received, we propose adopting the District Council's original proposals affecting the current Eynsford, Otford and Shoreham wards and the proposed Leigh, Chiddingstone, Penshurst & Fordcombe ward. We are also proposing modifications to our draft recommendations in the towns of Edenbridge and Sevenoaks. For district warding purposes, the following areas, based on existing wards, are considered in turn:

- (a) Seal, Kemsing, Sevenoaks Kippington, Sevenoaks Northern, Sevenoaks Town & St John's, Sevenoaks Weald & Underriver and Sevenoaks Wildernesse;
- (b) Edenbridge North and Edenbridge South;
- (c) Hextable & Swanley Village, Swanley Christchurch, Swanley St Mary's and Swanley White Oak;
- (d) Ash-cum-Ridley, Farningham, Fawkham & Hartley, Horton Kirby and West Kingsdown;
- (e) Crockenhill, Eynsford, Halstead, Knockholt and Badgers Mount, Otford and Shoreham;
- (f) Brasted, Chevening, Dunton Green, Riverhead, Sundridge & Ide Hill and Westerham & Crockham Hill;
- (g) Leigh, Penshurst & Fordcombe and Somerden.

73 Details of our draft recommendations are set out in Figures 1 and 2, and illustrated on Map 2, in Appendix A and on the large map inserted at the back of this report.

Seal, Kemsing, Sevenoaks Kippington, Sevenoaks Northern, Sevenoaks Town & St John's, Sevenoaks Weald & Underriver and Sevenoaks Wildernesse wards

74 The town of Sevenoaks comprises a single parish which is currently divided into four wards. Sevenoaks Kippington, Sevenoaks Northern and Sevenoaks Wildernesse wards are each represented by two councillors and Sevenoaks Town & St John's ward is represented by three councillors. The town is surrounded on the eastern edge of the district by the more rural ward of Kemsing which is represented by two councillors and Seal and Sevenoaks Weald & Underriver wards which are each represented by one councillor. Under the current arrangements of a 53-member council, the number of electors per councillor in Sevenoaks Kippington and Sevenoaks Northern wards is 13 per cent above the district average and equal to the average respectively (12

per cent above and equal to the average by 2005). The number of electors per councillor in Sevenoaks Town & St John's and Sevenoaks Wildernesse wards is 5 per cent below the district average and 8 per cent below respectively (5 per cent below and 6 per cent below by 2005). In Kemsing, Seal and Sevenoaks Weald & Underriver wards, the number of electors per councillor is 1 per cent below, 2 per cent above and 28 per cent below the district average respectively (2 per cent below, 1 per cent above and 28 per cent below by 2005).

75 At Stage One the District Council proposed minor amendments to the existing wards in Sevenoaks town. It proposed that Filmer Lane, Pinehurst, Highlands Park and Ash Platt Road should be transferred from Sevenoaks Wildernesse ward to Sevenoaks Northern ward. It proposed that the properties on Bradbourne Vale Road in the existing Sevenoaks Town & St John's ward and those on London Road and Morewood Close in the existing Sevenoaks Kippington ward should be transferred to an amended Sevenoaks Northern ward. It proposed that properties on The Dene and part of Oak Lane (including Glebe Lane and Oakfields) should be transferred from Sevenoaks Kippington to Sevenoaks Town & St. John's ward reasoning that "this revised ward fits comfortably in the pattern of representation within the Parish of Sevenoaks". It proposed that Chartway move from Sevenoaks Town & St. John's ward to Sevenoaks Wildernesse ward. It also proposed that the existing Sevenoaks Weald & Underriver ward should merge with the current Seal ward to form a new Seal & Weald ward but proposed no change to the existing Kemsing ward. The Conservative Group submitted the same scheme for this area.

76 Under the District Council's scheme for a 54-member council, the number of electors per councillor in its proposed Kemsing, Seal & Weald and Sevenoaks Kippington wards would be 1 per cent above the district average, 11 per cent below and 8 per cent above respectively (equal to the average, 12 per cent below and 8 per cent above by 2005). The number of electors per councillor in its proposed Sevenoaks Northern, Sevenoaks Town & St John's and Sevenoaks Wildernesse wards would be 1 per cent below, 1 per cent below and equal to the district average respectively (1 per cent below, 1 per cent below and 2 per cent above by 2005).

77 The Labour Party also proposed that Kemsing ward should remain unchanged and that the existing Sevenoaks Weald & Underriver ward should merge with the current Seal ward to form a new Seal & Weald ward. It proposed one change to the existing Sevenoaks wards, arguing that "most of the town should be left alone with no changes" but stating that "the only exception is Sevenoaks Kippington ward which is too large". It therefore proposed that 610 electors be transferred to its proposed Chevening & Riverhead ward.

78 Under the Labour Party's scheme for a 55-member council, the number of electors per councillor in its proposed Kemsing, Seal & Weald and Sevenoaks Kippington wards would be 3 per cent above the district average, 10 per cent below and 2 per cent below respectively (2 per cent above, 10 per cent below and 3 per cent below by 2005). The number of electors per councillor in its proposed Sevenoaks Northern, Sevenoaks Town & St John's and Sevenoaks Wildernesse wards would be 4 per cent above the district average, 1 per cent below and 4 per cent below respectively (3 per cent above, 1 per cent below and 3 per cent below by 2005).

79 Sevenoaks Town Council objected to the transfer of Park Lane from Sevenoaks Wildernesse ward to Sevenoaks Town & St John's ward, arguing that this road forms part of the community with Vine Court and Hollybush Lane. It also objected to any part of Sevenoaks Northern ward

being included in Otford ward, as the two wards are separated by a motorway, an industrial estate and fields.

80 Having considered the representations received at Stage One, we proposed basing our draft recommendations on the Council's scheme for the town of Sevenoaks as we considered that it provided the best balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria. We considered the Labour Party's scheme but we were unable to consider any one area in isolation. Its proposal to transfer electors from Sevenoaks Kippington ward to its proposed Chevening & Riverhead ward would also result in an electoral imbalance in our proposed Chevening & Sundridge ward. We considered that our recommendations for Sevenoaks Kippington ward, based on the District Council's proposals, would better address this imbalance. We further proposed extending the boundary of Sevenoaks Town & St John's ward southwards to include Grassy Lane, Oak Avenue, Fiennes Way, Soleoak Drive and Wellmeade Drive from Sevenoaks Kippington ward.

81 We proposed amendments to the District Council's proposed boundaries to improve electoral equality in the proposed Seal & Weald ward and to utilise clearer and more easily identifiable boundaries in Sevenoaks Wildernesse, Town & St John's and Northern wards. We noted that our proposals for Sevenoaks would not involve the transfer of Park Lane from Sevenoaks Wildernesse ward to Sevenoaks Town & St John's ward or the transfer of electors from Sevenoaks Northern ward to Otford ward.

82 We proposed drawing the boundary between Sevenoaks Town & St John's ward and Sevenoaks East ward along the centre of St John's Hill and Dartford Road and along the centre of Seal Road between Sevenoaks Wildernesse ward and Sevenoaks Northern ward. In order to provide clearer boundaries, we also proposed that the properties on Wildernesse Avenue, Woodland Rise, Parkfield and Blackhall Lane that fall within the parish of Sevenoaks should be included in the new Seal & Weald ward, thereby uniting the roads of Wildernesse Avenue, Woodland Rise and Parkfield within a single ward. In the light of our recommendation to remove Wildernesse Avenue from the existing Wildernesse ward, we proposed that this ward be named Sevenoaks East ward.

83 Under our draft recommendations for a 54-member council, the number of electors per councillor in Kemsing, Seal & Weald and Sevenoaks East wards would be 1 per cent above the district average, 1 per cent below and 8 per cent below respectively (equal to the average, 1 per cent below and 6 per cent below by 2005). The number of electors per councillor in Sevenoaks Kippington, Sevenoaks Northern and Sevenoaks Town & St John's wards would be 2 per cent above the district average, 2 per cent above and 1 per cent below respectively (2 per cent above, 2 per cent above and 1 per cent below by 2005).

84 At Stage Three, the District Council objected to our proposal to "hive off" part of Sevenoaks town to the proposed Seal & Weald ward contending that "it would be wrong to breach the boundary between an urban parish and a rural parish". While the Council acknowledged that its proposals would result in a higher electoral variance in Seal & Weald ward than under our draft recommendations, it stated "the District Council nevertheless commends its proposals for this area on the grounds of convenient and effective local government and recognition of community ties". The District Council also opposed the "arbitrary line" between the Sevenoaks Kippington ward and the Sevenoaks Town & St John's ward arguing that "even in an urban area some consideration has to be given to community links". It further objected to "the Commission's

desire to see boundaries drawn along the centre of main roads” arguing that our proposals “disregard the obvious geographical links that exist in reality”. The Council therefore requested that its original proposals be considered for a second time. It also stated that “consideration should be given to naming what remains of the former Wildernesse ward “Sevenoaks Eastern”; this would reduce the chance of confusion with the Sevenoaks East County Electoral Division”.

85 Sevenoaks Town Council, The Conservative Group, Seal Parish Council, District & Town Councillor Clayton, Town Councillors Purves and Walsh and a local resident also opposed the creation of a Wildernesse parish ward to be included in the proposed Seal & Weald ward. Seal Parish Council supported the combined ward of Seal parish with Sevenoaks Weald parish but did not support the inclusion of the Wildernesse estate, arguing that it is “a very different development area” and has greater links with Sevenoaks town. Sevenoaks Town Council, Councillors Clayton, Purves and Walshe contended that our draft recommendations would be detrimental to the representation of the electorate at parish level. A local resident argued that the electorate in the area “could easily be confused by the division in the Sevenoaks Local Plan between urban and rural areas”.

86 The Commission’s proposed boundary between Sevenoaks Kippington and Sevenoaks Town & St John’s wards was also opposed by Sevenoaks Town Council, Sevenoaks District Labour Party, District Councillor Broomby, Grassy Lane Residents Association, Oakhill Road Residents Association and two local residents. Councillor Broomby argued that our proposals used a boundary that is “very contrived and certainly not easily recognised”. A resident argued that while Town & St John’s ward comprises the whole of Sevenoaks town centre, Kippington ward is “semi-rural”.

87 Sevenoaks Town Council, Sevenoaks Liberal Democrats, District and Town Councillor Clayton also opposed the use of the centre of main roads as boundaries between wards. Councillor Clayton argued that in doing so, our proposals would “break links of community interest”, while Sevenoaks Town Council stated that boundaries in our draft proposals have been drawn “through areas of common interest”. Sevenoaks Liberal Democrats argued that our draft proposals “ignore community concerns with no perceptible advantage in electoral equality”.

88 County Councillor London supported our draft recommendations for Sevenoaks Kippington and Town & St John’s wards. Sevenoaks District Labour Party stated that although it “fully supported” our proposals for Kemsing and Seal & Weald ward, it considered that Sevenoaks town should have been “left almost untouched”. It proposed that the proposed boundary between Sevenoaks Kippington and Sevenoaks Northern ward be amended so that it remain as the railway line, contending that Morewood Close has “no road connections” with the remainder of Sevenoaks Northern ward.

89 A resident urged us to consider a “gross long standing anomaly” in the existing Sevenoaks Northern ward. The resident argued that the northern and southern parts of the ward are separated by a gap of over half a mile and argued that as a consequence, the electorate at either side of the gap had little in common.

90 We have given careful consideration to the views received in this area and have noted the local opposition to our proposed Wildernesse parish ward and to the proposed Sevenoaks Kippington and Sevenoaks Town & St John's wards. A number of respondents expressed concern that our proposed Wildernesse parish ward would not provide for equal representation at parish level. However, while we acknowledge these concerns, there is no statutory criterion for equality of the councillor:elector ratio within civil parishes. We considered the District Council's argument that our proposal to transfer the Wildernesse parish ward to the proposed Seal & Weald ward would breach the boundary between an urban and a rural parish. However, given that part of the Wildernesse estate currently lies within Seal parish, we are not persuaded by such an argument and remain of the view that our proposals would not adversely affect the statutory criteria in this area. We also note that our proposals would considerably improve electoral equality in the proposed Seal & Weald ward and therefore propose confirming our draft recommendations for Seal & Weald ward as final. We also propose endorsing the Council's proposal to rename the current Sevenoaks Wildernesse ward as Sevenoaks Eastern ward. In the absence of any further support for or opposition to our proposed Kemsing ward, we propose confirming our draft recommendations as final.

91 We note the local opposition to our proposal to amend the boundary between Sevenoaks Kippington and Sevenoaks Town & St John's ward and have reconsidered our draft recommendations for this area. We considered the respondents' views that the Kippington area is distinct from the town centre and that there is no common identity between the two areas. We also note that respondents argued that Grassy Lane and the roads leading from it form an integral part of the Kippington community. In the light of representations received at Stage Three, we are persuaded that the District Council's original proposed boundary between these two wards (which would run behind the properties on the west side of The Dene and then follow the boundary of the land north of Wellmeade drive) would better reflect community interest and identity in this area and would also secure good electoral equality given our revised boundaries elsewhere in the town. In addition, we concur with Sevenoaks District Labour Party's view that the proposed boundary between Sevenoaks Kippington ward and Sevenoaks Northern ward would isolate the Morewood Close/London Road area from the remainder of Sevenoaks Northern ward. We therefore propose amending the boundary so that it runs along the railway line, as under the existing arrangements.

92 We considered the resident's contention that an anomaly exists in the proposed Sevenoaks Northern ward as a result of a sizeable gap between the two halves of the ward. While we acknowledge that such a gap exists, we have not received any further opposition to the proposed Sevenoaks Northern ward and therefore remain of the view that our proposed ward best meets the statutory criteria.

93 We note that some respondents opposed our draft proposals to draw ward boundaries along the centre of main roads in Sevenoaks. However, we do not agree with the view that in doing so, there would be "no perceptible advantage in electoral equality". While we acknowledge the nature of the concerns expressed, we note that our proposals would provide for good electoral equality in all Sevenoaks wards and are not persuaded that they would detrimentally affect other statutory criteria.

94 Our final recommendations for our proposed Kemsing, Seal & Weald and Sevenoaks Eastern wards would provide the same levels of electoral equality as under our draft recommendations. The number of electors per councillor in our proposed Sevenoaks Kippington, Sevenoaks Northern and Sevenoaks Town & St John's ward would be 2 per cent below the district average, 1 per cent above and 3 per cent above respectively (2 per cent below, equal to the average and 3 per cent above by 2005). These wards are illustrated on the large map at the back of the report.

Edenbridge North and Edenbridge South wards

95 The town of Edenbridge comprises a single parish which is currently divided into two wards, Edenbridge North and Edenbridge South, each of which is represented by two councillors. Under the current arrangements, the number of electors per councillor in Edenbridge North and Edenbridge South wards is 25 per cent below the district average and 13 per cent above respectively (17 per cent below and 12 per cent above by 2005).

96 At Stage One, the District Council proposed that the boundary between the two wards be amended to incorporate the Stangrove Estate in Edenbridge North ward. The remainder of the existing Edenbridge South ward and the area to the south of the River Eden would form the new Edenbridge South ward. Both the Council's proposed wards would be represented by two councillors. This scheme was also put forward by Edenbridge Town Council. The Conservative Group proposed amendments to the existing ward boundaries in Edenbridge town but did not provide detailed mapping or argumentation in support of its proposals.

97 Under the District Council's 54-member scheme, the number of electors per councillor in its proposed Edenbridge North and Edenbridge South wards would be 1 per cent below the district average and 7 per cent below respectively (3 per cent above and 8 per cent below by 2005).

98 The Chairman of Edenbridge Town Council, the Labour Party and a local resident also proposed an Edenbridge North ward and an Edenbridge South ward. However, they proposed creating a single-member Edenbridge North ward, incorporating the area to the north of the Redhill – Tonbridge railway line west of Station Road and north of the Uckfield railway line. They proposed a new Edenbridge South ward to the south of this area, to be represented by three councillors.

99 Councillor Pughe and a group of councillors and residents proposed that Edenbridge town be divided into four wards. They proposed creating a single-member North ward to the north of the Redhill – Tonbridge railway line, east of Station Road and north of the Uckfield railway line. They proposed that the area to the south of this boundary be divided into an East, a West and a South ward, each to be represented by one councillor.

100 Councillor Williams proposed similar boundaries to those put forward by Councillor Pughe and the group of councillors and residents but proposed that the West and South wards be combined to form a two-member ward rather than two single-member wards.

101 Having considered the representations received at Stage One, we considered that the District Council's scheme resulted in a relatively higher level of electoral inequality in Edenbridge South ward and did not use the best available boundaries. While we recognised that the proposals put forward by Councillor Pughe, Councillor Williams and a group of councillors and residents

would result in reasonable levels of electoral equality, we noted that they did not use the most easily identifiable boundaries in the town. We therefore adopted the proposals of the chairman of Edenbridge Town Council, the Labour Party and a resident as they utilised identifiable boundaries and provided good levels of electoral equality. Under our draft recommendations, the number of electors per councillor in Edenbridge North and Edenbridge South wards would be 3 per cent below the district average and 4 per cent below respectively (4 per cent below and 2 per cent below by 2005).

102 At Stage Three we received a number of responses in opposition to our draft recommendations. The District Council objected to our draft recommendations arguing that we had devised the proposed ward boundaries “for the sole reason of electoral equality”. The Council further contended that our recommendations “have the effect of isolating the Spitals Cross Estate from the remainder of the South ward” and argued that they would also split this area “from its near neighbour, Marlpit Hill”. The Council reiterated its support for Edenbridge to comprise two two-member wards, arguing that this arrangement is “well supported locally”. However, in order to improve the electoral equality in its draft scheme, the Council proposed an amendment to its original proposal so that the road “Westways” and an adjacent development site be included in its proposed Edenbridge South ward. As mentioned earlier, the Council notified us that this site would result in an increase of 122 to the projected 2005 electorate.

103 Our draft proposals for Edenbridge were also opposed by Edenbridge Town Council, District Councillor Davison, District Councillor Deans, Tonbridge, Edenbridge & Malling Conservative Association, The Right Honourable Sir J Stanley MP and 12 residents. Edenbridge Town Council reiterated a preference for Edenbridge to be divided into two two-member wards, stating, “it is understood that it is advantageous that the boundaries are easily recognisable but it was felt that this can be achieved by other means than using the railway lines”.

104 In response to our draft recommendations, Councillor Davison argued that people living on the edge of the town “consider themselves Edenbridge people in equal measure to those in the centre”. Councillor Davison described our proposed Edenbridge North ward as an “illusory rural ward” while stating that our proposed Edenbridge South ward is of an urban nature and “will disenfranchise those on the southern edge”. Councillor Davison also argued, “in contradiction to the Commission’s own requirements on public consultation, the recommended draft proposal was the subject of no consultation and was not put to either the district or the town”. Councillor Deans objected to the fact that the Commission had given “undue weight” to the proposals of “quite minor unrepresentative groups...over the democratically agreed proposals which have been presented on behalf of elected representatives of the community, following consultation”. He argued that our proposals would “isolate” the northern ward and “disenfranchise” its residents.

105 Tonbridge, Edenbridge & Malling Conservative Association argued that our draft proposals “will create a community imbalance” and that residents in the proposed single-member Edenbridge North ward “might feel excluded from the Town community”.

106 A local resident supported the Stage One submission put forward by the District Council and Edenbridge Town Council arguing that it recognised “the need to maintain the democratic right of Marlpit Hill to elect TWO district councillors”. The resident also argued that “cutting off an arbitrary slice of the northern section of the town will divide a united community”. Another

local resident contended that a single-member ward comprising the Marlpit Hill area would be “contrary to the excellent community spirit which the town has been trying, successfully to promote for the past many years”. Another resident stated that our recommendations for Edenbridge are “radical and needlessly divisive” and argued that they “could spoil years of social bonding”.

107 We received some support for our draft recommendations in Edenbridge. Councillor Williams supported the Commission’s proposed single-member Edenbridge North ward but expressed disappointment that we had not endorsed his Stage One proposal. Although stating that he believed our draft proposals to be “preferable” to those submitted by the District Council, Councillor Williams maintained that his proposed boundaries were easily identifiable and that they should be accepted by the Commission. Town Councillor Pughe was also disappointed that we had not endorsed his Stage One proposal that Edenbridge should comprise four single-member wards. Councillor Pughe argued, “I still think the concept of having one councillor responsible to their own electorate in their own ward should carry a great deal of weight in terms of democratic responsibility and clarity”. However, he also stated a preference for the Commission’s proposals over the Council’s proposals, contending that “the Commission is right to look at the natural boundaries and obvious groupings in Edenbridge” while stating “if the one ward, one councillor idea is to be thwarted we should at least show a regard for the logical affinities of Edenbridge”.

108 The Chairman of Edenbridge Town Council endorsed our draft recommendations, stating, “The Local Government Commission proposal is the best for electoral equality and for clear boundaries” and argued that the District Council’s proposal is “nonsensical for clear boundaries”. He stated that the Spitals Cross area has some affinity with the town centre as Spitals Cross residents use it for shopping and leisure, arguing that they “use the area to the south more than the area to the north”. Edenbridge & District Labour Party stated that our draft recommendations “meet the statutory criteria ... having identifiable physical boundaries with these areas and the number of councillors per elector variance is minimal”. It also argued that the District Council’s proposal to transfer Stangrove estate to the north “splits the community bounded by Station Road, Stangrove Park, the railway line and Crouch House Road”. It contended that “the natural progression from this area is to the town centre in the South ward”.

109 A local resident supported our draft recommendations for Edenbridge stating that “the area of Stangrove Park is not a community that aligns with the Marlpit Hill area”. He also stated that our draft recommendations would have the advantage of grouping areas with common identities. A resident of the Stangrove Estate objected to the District Council’s proposal to transfer the area to the Edenbridge North ward, stating that this would be detrimental to the community identity. The resident supported the Commission’s recommendations arguing that they give “specific representation to the people of Edenbridge”.

110 The group of councillors and residents resubmitted a proposal for Edenbridge to comprise four single-member wards but suggested a minor amendment to their original proposal in order to use more identifiable boundaries. The group supported our proposed single-member North ward but proposed that the our three-member South ward be divided between three single-member wards. The group proposed a single-member East ward comprising the Spitals Cross estate and the area to south of the Redhill-Tonbridge railway line, east of High Street to the River

Eden. They also proposed a single-member West ward comprising the area to the south of the Redhill-Tonbridge railway line west of High Street to the north of Lingfield Road and a single-member South ward comprising the area to the south of the West and East wards to the parish boundary. The Group argued that single-member wards would be suitable in Edenbridge and would enable the electorate to become more familiar with their councillor and contended that small communities such as Marsh Green or the Spitals Cross Estate “would be lost within a massive three-member ward”.

111 Having considered the representations received in this area, we note that the majority of respondents have expressed a preference for Edenbridge to be divided between two two-member wards in order to maintain the “balance” of representation across the town. We are persuaded that this arrangement would better reflect local communities, command support locally and would enable the town to retain a “united” identity. We have therefore sought to devise revised warding arrangements for two two-member wards which would provide good electoral equality, easily identifiable boundaries without adverse affect on local community identity. We have reviewed the District Council’s draft proposals and its alternative proposals, both of which propose dividing the town between two two-member wards. However, we continue to have reservations about its proposed boundary between the North and South wards. We remain of the view that it not easily identifiable and therefore would not be the best reflection of community identity and interest in the area. Moreover, we consider that the alternative proposal to transfer “Westways” and the adjacent development site to the proposed South ward would cause further confusion to the electorate, given that the Stangrove Estate would form part of the North ward; we note that residents in the Stangrove Estate have no direct road access to the north of the Uckfield railway line.

112 In the absence of any other proposals for two two-member wards in Edenbridge, we have considered the proposal put forward by a group of councillors and local residents for four single-member wards. We recognise the merit of this proposal as we consider that it accurately reflects the identities of the communities within Edenbridge. However, as already stated, we have been persuaded that two two-member wards would better reflect the identity of Edenbridge as a whole. We therefore propose combining the group of councillors and residents’ North and East wards and South and West wards to form two two-member wards. We note that these wards would provide good electoral equality and are of the view that they would combine areas that have common interests while using easily identifiable boundaries. We also consider that such a proposal would reinforce the community identity of the town as a whole. Although we recognise that residents on the Spitals Cross Estate are separated from the town by the Eden Valley school grounds, we have noted the argument that the town has a single identity. We consider that this area does have some affinity with residents on the east side of High Street as this area constitutes part of the town centre which residents of Spitals Cross use for services in the town. In order to better reflect the identity of each ward, we propose naming the wards Edenbridge North & East and Edenbridge South & West ward. Under our final recommendations, the number of electors per councillor in these wards would be 2 per cent below the district average and 6 per cent below respectively (2 per cent above and 2 per cent below by 2005). These wards are shown on map A4 in Appendix A of the report.

Hextable & Swanley Village, Swanley Christchurch, Swanley St Mary's and Swanley White Oak wards.

113 The town of Swanley comprises a single parish and is currently divided into four wards. Swanley Christchurch, Swanley St Mary's and Hextable & Swanley Village wards are each represented by two councillors and Swanley White Oak ward is represented by three councillors. Under the current arrangements, the number of electors per councillor in Hextable & Swanley Village and Swanley Christchurch wards is 15 per cent above and 30 per cent above the district average respectively (14 per cent above and 29 per cent above by 2005). The number of electors per councillor in Swanley St Mary's and Swanley White Oak wards is 4 per cent above and 2 per cent below the district average respectively (3 per cent above and 2 per cent below by 2005).

114 At Stage One, the District Council proposed that the Swanley Village parish ward of the existing Hextable & Swanley Village district ward merge with the current Swanley Christchurch district ward to become a new three-member Swanley Christchurch & Swanley Village district ward. It argued that the addition of the Swanley Village parish ward to the existing Swanley Christchurch district ward would bring this proposed three-member ward closer to the district average. This would result in a new two-member Hextable ward with improved electoral equality. It also proposed transferring a small number of properties from Leydenhatch Lane in the existing Hextable & Swanley Village ward to Swanley White Oak ward "where they properly belong". It proposed no change to Swanley St Mary's ward. The Conservative Group submitted the same scheme for this area.

115 The Labour Party proposed the same warding arrangements for Swanley Town as the District Council. This arrangement was also supported by Swanley Town Council.

116 Having considered the proposals for Swanley Town we were content to endorse the scheme put forward by the District Council and the Labour Party as we considered that it was well supported, utilised easily identifiable boundaries and provided reasonable electoral equality.

117 Under our draft recommendations, the number of electors per councillor in the proposed Hextable and Swanley Christchurch & Swanley Village wards would be 6 per cent above the district average and 5 per cent below respectively. The number of electors per councillor in Swanley St Mary's and Swanley White Oak wards would be 6 per cent above the district average and equal to the average respectively. These levels of electoral equality are forecast to remain the same in all four wards by 2005.

118 At Stage Three, Swanley Town Council stated that it "approved" the Commission's proposals in Swanley. Sevenoaks District Labour Party also supported our proposals for these wards. In the absence of any opposition to our draft proposals in this area or any further comments, we remain of the view that they would secure the best balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria and we propose confirming our draft recommendations as final. Our final recommendations for Swanley Christchurch & Swanley Village and Swanley Whiteoak wards would provide the same levels of electoral equality as under our draft recommendations. Due to the increase in the projected electorate for Edenbridge North ward in 2005, and consequently the district as a whole, the electoral variance for Hextable and Swanley St Mary's wards has altered slightly from our draft recommendations. Under our final recommendations,

Hextable and Swanley St Mary's wards would both have electoral variances of 6 per cent above the district average (both five per cent above by 2005). These wards are illustrated on Map A3 in Appendix A of the report.

Ash-cum-Ridley, Farningham, Fawkham & Hartley, Horton Kirby and West Kingsdown wards

119 The existing wards of Ash-cum-Ridley, Farningham, Fawkham & Hartley, Horton Kirby and West Kingsdown are located in the north and north-east of the district. Farningham ward (comprising the parish of Farningham) and Horton Kirby ward (comprising the parish of Horton Kirby & South Darenth) are each represented by one councillor. West Kingsdown ward (comprising the parish of West Kingsdown) is represented by two councillors while Fawkham & Hartley ward (comprising the parishes of Fawkham and Hartley) and Ash-cum-Ridley ward (comprising the parish of Ash-cum-Ridley) are each represented by three councillors. Under the current arrangements, the number of electors per councillor in Ash-cum-Ridley, Farningham and Fawkham & Hartley wards is 10 per cent above the district average, 36 per cent below and 1 per cent below respectively (9 per cent above, 37 per cent below and 1 per cent below by 2005). The number of electors per councillor in Horton Kirby and West Kingsdown wards is 42 per cent above the district average and 33 per cent above respectively (41 per cent above and 33 per cent above by 2005).

120 At Stage One, the District Council proposed that Farningham and Horton Kirby wards should merge to form the new two-member ward of Farningham, Horton Kirby and South Darenth. It also proposed that Fawkham & Hartley, West Kingsdown and Ash-cum-Ridley wards retain their existing warding arrangements as it "preferred to keep parishes whole". It argued that the representations made to the council during its consultation exercise supported the retention of coterminosity between parish and district ward boundaries. Consequently, it contended that "there are no serious alternatives" to retaining the existing ward of Fawkham & Hartley. The Conservative Group submitted the same scheme for this area.

121 Under the District Council's scheme for a 54-member council, the number of electors per councillor in its proposed Farningham, Horton Kirby & South Darenth and West Kingsdown wards would be 5 per cent above the district average and 10 per cent below respectively (4 per cent above and 10 per cent below by 2005). The number of electors per councillor in its proposed Ash and Fawkham & Hartley wards would be 12 per cent above the district average and 1 per cent above respectively. This is forecast to remain the same by 2005.

122 The Labour Party also proposed that Farningham ward should merge with Horton Kirby ward and that Fawkham & Hartley ward should retain its existing arrangements. It proposed that the Ash parish ward of Ash-cum-Ridley parish merge with the Knatts Valley and West Kingsdown East parish wards of West Kingsdown parish to form a new single-member Ash & Knatts Valley ward. It also proposed that the New Ash Green North East, New Ash Green South West and Hodsoll Street wards of Ash-cum-Ridley parish form a three-member New Ash Green & Hodsoll Street ward.

123 Under the Labour Party's scheme for a 55-member council the number of electors per councillor in its proposed Ash & Knatts Valley, Fawkham & Hartley and New Ash Green &

Hodsoll Street wards would be 4 per cent below the district average, 3 per cent above and 7 per cent above respectively (5 per cent below, 3 per cent above and 6 per cent above by 2005).

124 The Conservative Group argued that there was a strong case for retaining the existing Ash-cum-Ridley district ward because of its position at the north-east edge of the district and “the community’s successful integration since the building of New Ash Green 30 years ago”.

125 Councillor Bruce opposed any proposal to separate Ash parish ward from the remainder of Ash parish in order to combine it with West Kingsdown parish. He argued that such a proposal would “ignore the identity and interests of Ash Village” and contended that “residents of Ash would find it strange and incomprehensible to be excised from their namesake parish”. West Kingsdown Parish Council supported the District Council’s proposal to allocate an additional councillor to the existing West Kingsdown ward, arguing that “West Kingsdown is large enough to support three councillors”.

126 A resident proposed an alternative configuration for Fawkham & Hartley, West Kingsdown and Ash-cum-Ridley wards, arguing that the Council’s proposal was “unsatisfactory”. He suggested that West Kingsdown ward should be combined with Fawkham parish, that New Ash Green North, New Ash Green South and Ash wards of Ash-cum-Ridley parish form a three-member ward and that Hartley parish be combined with the Hodsoll Street & Ridley parish ward of Ash-cum-Ridley parish. He contended that the majority of Fawkham’s population lives nearer to West Kingsdown and that Ash-cum-Ridley and Hartley parishes are now more closely involved due to “the major joint venture of the land known to New Ash Green as Northfield”.

127 Another resident objected to a joint ward comprising Farningham parish and Horton Kirby & South Darenth parish, arguing that the two parishes were in different parliamentary constituencies and that any merger would cause confusion to the electorate.

128 Having carefully considered the representations received at Stage One, we were content to endorse the proposal of the District Council and the Labour Party to merge Farningham and Horton Kirby wards to form a two-member ward. We considered that this proposal provided good electoral equality and did not adversely affect community interests in the two wards. We were sympathetic to the concerns expressed in support of retaining the existing warding arrangements for Ash-cum-Ridley, Fawkham & Hartley and West Kingsdown wards. Nevertheless, we were of the view that maintaining the current boundaries would be inconsistent with our aim of achieving electoral equality and that the current electoral inequality should be addressed. We therefore proposed adopting the scheme of the resident who proposed that West Kingsdown parish be linked with Fawkham parish to form a three-member ward, that Hartley parish should merge with the Hodsoll Street & Ridley ward of Ash-cum-Ridley parish to form a three-member ward and that the remainder of Ash-cum-Ridley parish (the parish wards of New Ash Green North, New Ash Green South and Ash) should form a three-member ward. Having visited the area, we did not consider that this warding arrangement would have an adverse affect on community ties. However, we welcomed views on this proposal during Stage Three of the review.

129 Under our draft recommendations, the number of electors per councillor in Ash and Farningham, Horton Kirby & South Darenth wards would be 4 per cent above the district average and 5 per cent above respectively (3 per cent above and 4 per cent above by 2005). The number

of electors in Hartley & Hodsoll Street and West Kingsdown & Fawkham wards would be equal to the average both initially and in 2005.

130 At Stage Three, our proposed Ash, Hartley & Hodsoll Street and West Kingsdown & Fawkham wards were opposed by Sevenoaks District Council, Sevenoaks District Labour Party, the Conservative Group, District Councillors Bailey, Bruce, Clark, Eames and Sandeford, Ash-cum-Ridley Parish Council, Fawkham Parish Council, West Kingsdown Parish Council, Hartley Parish Council, the rector of the Anglican parish of Fawkham & Hartley, the Ridley Society and 17 residents.

131 The District Council stated that it was “particularly disappointed that the Commission should prefer an unsupported proposal from one individual...rather than the reasoned views of the elected representatives at all three levels of local government”. It further contended that “it is simply not the case that Hodsoll Street & Ridley ward has close ties with Hartley” and that Hodsoll Street residents look to New Ash Green rather than Hartley as their local centre. The Council continued that “the blending of 30 years of New Ash Green with its rural neighbours may be damaged by, what will be perceived as an arbitrary split”. The Council also argued that there is no support, bar a resident, for the joining of Fawkham with West Kingsdown. It contended that the ties between the two parishes are “very thin” which it argued is “in stark contrast to the numerous and varied links between Fawkham and Hartley”.

132 In a joint submission, Councillors Bailey, Eames and Sandeford stated, “people do not understand why the long historic relationship between Fawkham and Hartley should be broken....particularly as this ward meets your criteria of +/- 1 per cent variance from the average”. Councillor Clark expressed disappointment that we had considered “that the aim of electoral equality should be paramount”. Councillor Clark also contended that the Hartley & Hodsoll Street ward does not reflect convenient and effective local government and was of the view that it would be difficult for Hartley councillors to properly represent Ridley and Hodsoll Street concerns. Councillor Bruce argued that it is the addition of an extra councillor to the current total which causes the electoral inequality in the current Ash-cum-Ridley ward to rise above 10 per cent. He also argued that “the fact that there is a joint venture between Ash-cum-Ridley and Hartley parish councils is not a good reason for combining Ridley and Hodsoll Street with Hartley”.

133 The Conservative Group argued that our proposal to join Fawkham parish with West Kingsdown parish is “a numerical convenience which ignores the differences between rural Fawkham and far more urban West Kingsdown”. It also argued that “Hodsoll Street is geographically remote from Hartley with very poor road connections and no community ties”. Sevenoaks District Labour Party considered that its original proposals better reflect local community ties in the area, arguing that Hartley & Hodsoll Street and West Kingsdown & Fawkham are separated “by a large area of countryside”.

134 Ash-cum-Ridley Parish Council considered that our draft recommendations “do not reflect the identities of local communities”, arguing that high electoral imbalances should be accepted in this area because they had been put forward for Halstead, Knockholt & Badgers Mount ward. It argued that “Fawkham and Hartley parishes have been in the same district ward for many years and have other ties”, also stating that “they form one ecclesiastical parish”. The Parish Council contended that the main area population in the Hodsoll Street ward “is remote from Hartley and

therefore has no link or ties with Hartley”. The Parish Council also argued that Fawkham & Hartley parishes were in a different parliamentary constituency from the parishes of West Kingsdown and Ash. A number of other respondents also expressed this concern. Hartley Parish Council argued that our draft proposals would “sever local ties” between Fawkham and Hartley parishes and that they shared many common links including schools, societies and clubs. It reasoned that because of this common interest, the two parishes form “an ideal unit of local government for the purpose of representation at district council level” but argued that “this cannot be said of Hartley and Hodsoll Street, where there are no areas of common interest”.

135 West Kingsdown Parish Council stated that it would prefer to retain the existing ward but we note that in a Stage One submission to the District Council, it proposed a three-member West Kingsdown & Fawkham ward as an alternative option, reasoning that “West Kingsdown has close links with Fawkham”.

136 A local resident described our proposed Hartley & Hodsoll Street ward as “impracticable and unworkable” and argued that the road linking the two areas is “tortuous”. The resident also argued that Hartley and Hodsoll Street are “the complete antithesis with different parochial church councils, different parliamentary voting areas and no communicating bus or public services”. The resident concluded by stating, “I cannot find a single activity in common between these two villages”.

137 Despite the level of opposition to our draft recommendations in this area, we received contrasting views from a number of local residents who expressed support for the proposed wards. One local resident argued that Hartley and Hodsoll Street have “broadly” similar interests as they both look to Gravesend and Dartford for their services. The resident argued that Hodsoll Street does not have much in common with New Ash Green as Hodsoll Street’s only public transport links are with Gravesend and Stansted. He also contended that New Ash Green is a small town whereas “Hartley is more rural and has a greater sympathy for rural issues which would be important for Hodsoll Street”. In support of the proposed West Kingsdown & Fawkham ward, the resident stated that Brands Hatch is a “matter of concern” for the two parishes.

138 Another resident expressed support for our draft recommendations stating that children from Hodsoll Street travel to school in Hartley. The resident argued that the ecclesiastical parish merger of Fawkham and Hartley was originally opposed by Fawkham parish council and local councillors. The resident also considered that both Hartley and Hodsoll Street have much in common as “a largely rural area” and was of the opinion that our draft recommendations “are a logical step to equate District representation for the wards”. Another resident supported the Hodsoll Street and Hartley merger arguing that Hodsoll Street is a rural area and is currently poorly represented and “dominated” by being joined with more urban New Ash Green. Another local resident stated that our draft recommendations “would not only re-balance the number of electorate per ward...but would allow the rearrangement to be carried out sympathetically with the general nature of the area”.

139 A resident of New Ash Green argued that “there would appear to be little or no affinity to Hodsoll Street” while another resident stated, “whilst looking on a map may not show that Hartley and Hodsoll Street are closely linked, I believe that anyone with local knowledge would be able to see a logical and natural connection”.

140 We have given careful consideration to the representations received at Stage Three. On balance, we are not persuaded that there is sufficient evidence to warrant perpetuating electoral inequality in this area. While we acknowledge that some respondents object to our draft proposals on the grounds of community interest and identity, the current levels of electoral inequality have not been addressed and alternative configurations have not be put forward. We have also received local submissions from residents of Ash, Hartley and Hodsoll Street supporting our draft proposals and giving evidence that there is common identity and interest in our proposed wards. We are not persuaded that being part of the same ecclesiastical parish represents a strong argument for common community identity.

141 It has also been argued that ward boundaries should reflect parliamentary boundaries; however, we are not required to have regard to parliamentary constituency boundaries in formulating recommendations for district warding arrangements. Indeed, any new district ward boundaries will be taken into account by the Parliamentary Boundary Commission as part of its current Fifth General Review of Parliamentary Constituencies.

142 Having reviewed our draft recommendations for this area, we remain of the view that they provide the best balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria. We therefore propose putting them forward as part of our final recommendations. Our final recommendations for Ash, Farningham, Horton Kirby & South Darenth and West Kingsdown & Fawkham wards would provide the same levels of electoral equality as under our draft recommendations. Due to the increase in the projected electorate for Edenbridge North ward in 2005, and consequently the district as a whole, the electoral variance for Hartley & Hodsoll Street ward has altered slightly from our draft recommendations. Under our final recommendations, the number of electors per councillor in Hartley & Hodsoll Street ward would be equal to the average (1 per cent below the by 2005). These wards are shown on Map A6 in Appendix A of the report.

Crockenhill, Eynsford, Halstead, Knockholt & Badgers Mount, Otford and Shoreham wards

143 These wards are situated towards the north-west of the district. Crockenhill ward (comprising the parish of Crockenhill), Eynsford ward (comprising the parish of Eynsford) and Shoreham ward (comprising the Shoreham parish ward of Shoreham parish) are each represented by a single councillor while Otford ward (comprising the parish of Otford) and Halstead, Knockholt & Badgers Mount ward (comprising the parishes of Halstead and Knockholt and the Badgers Mount parish ward of Shoreham parish) are both represented by two councillors. Under the existing arrangements, the number of electors per councillor in Crockenhill, Eynsford and Halstead, Knockholt & Badgers Mount wards is 19 per cent below, 11 per cent below and 18 per cent below the district average respectively. The level of electoral equality in these wards is projected to remain the same by 2005. The number of electors per councillor in Otford and Shoreham wards is 20 per cent below and 32 per cent below the district average respectively (20 per cent below and 33 per cent below by 2005).

144 At Stage One, the District Council proposed that Otford and Shoreham wards merge to form a two-member ward and that a new Well Hill parish ward be created in Shoreham parish. The Council proposed that this new parish ward be linked to Crockenhill parish to reduce the current level of over representation. It also proposed that the existing arrangements for Halstead,

Knockholt & Badgers Mount ward be retained, arguing that alternative warding arrangements were unpopular at the consultation stage and had an adverse affect on electoral equality in surrounding wards. The Council proposed that Eynsford ward remain as a single-member ward as it retains a reasonable level of electoral equality under a 54-member council. The Conservative Group submitted the same scheme for this area.

145 Under the District Council's scheme for a 54-member council the number of electors per councillor in its proposed Crockenhill & Well Hill and Eynsford wards would be 4 per cent below the district average and 9 per cent below respectively (5 per cent below and 10 per cent below by 2005). The number of electors per councillor in its proposed Halstead, Knockholt & Badgers Mount and Otford & Shoreham wards would be 16 per cent below the district average and 10 per cent above respectively (17 per cent below and 9 per cent above by 2005).

146 The Labour Party also proposed that Eynsford ward should remain as a single-member ward and that Crockenhill ward should merge with the Well Hill area of Shoreham parish. It proposed that Otford and Shoreham wards should form a two-member ward but proposed including the Badgers Mount ward of Shoreham Parish and the East Hill ward of West Kingsdown parish. It argued that "all the communities are similar in nature and there are very good road connections between the three communities". It also proposed that the parishes of Halstead and Knockholt remain in a two-member ward but proposed including the Sundridge parish ward of Sundridge parish to form a new two-member Halstead, Knockholt & Sundridge ward.

147 Under the Labour Party's scheme for a 55-member council, the number of electors per councillor in its proposed Crockenhill & Well Hill and Eynsford wards would be 4 per cent below the district average and 8 per cent below respectively (3 per cent below and 8 per cent below by 2005). The number of electors per councillor in Halstead, Knockholt & Sundridge and Otford & Shoreham wards would be 1 per cent below the district average and 9 per cent below respectively. This level of electoral equality is forecast to remain the same by 2005.

148 Shoreham Parish Council objected to being merged with the parish of Otford and proposed instead that the existing Shoreham ward be combined with the East Hill parish ward of West Kingsdown parish, that Otford ward be expanded to include a small part of Sevenoaks North ward and that Crockenhill ward be merged with Eynsford ward. It also proposed that the parish of Halstead and Badgers Mount parish ward form a two-member ward but did not suggest alternative warding arrangements for the parish of Knockholt.

149 Otford Parish Council stated its preference for maintaining a two-member ward for the parish of Otford but stated that it would be prepared to accept a merger with Shoreham ward as "Otford and Shoreham are seen as rural communities with much in common and the two parishes should be able to work together to achieve mutually desirable objectives".

150 Crockenhill Parish Council opposed combining Crockenhill parish with Eynsford ward and the East Hill parish ward of West Kingsdown parish, arguing that this area is "bisected by the M25" and "does not have any natural affiliation or transport links." It supported retaining the status quo but emphasised that the addition of the Well Hill area of Shoreham parish would bring the Crockenhill ward within 10 per cent of the district average.

151 Having considered the views of the respondents at Stage One, we were content to endorse the District Council's proposal subject to one modification. While we recognised that the Labour Party's proposal for these wards would result in reasonable levels of electoral equality, we were of the view that the Council's scheme better reflected community identity and interest in the area. We considered the scheme of Shoreham Parish Council but due to the resulting levels of electoral inequality, we had reservations about the proposal. We also noted that this scheme did not propose warding arrangements for Knockholt parish and that the inclusion of this parish in surrounding wards would adversely affect the resulting levels of electoral equality across the area as a whole.

152 We therefore proposed combining the existing wards of Eynsford, Otford and the Shoreham ward of Shoreham parish to form a three-member ward as we considered that the electoral inequality that would result from the District Council's scheme should be addressed. We noted that there are good communication links between the three wards and that a merger would appear to reflect community identities reasonably. However, we welcomed views on such a proposal at Stage Three. While we recognised that the District Council's proposal would result in a high electoral variance in Halstead, Knockholt & Badgers Mount ward, we noted that the pattern of development within these wards and its position at the edge of the district restricted the number of available options. Consequently, we were unable to devise a warding arrangement which would not adversely affect electoral equality elsewhere in the district. Although we proposed endorsing the District Council's proposal for Halstead, Knockholt & Badgers Mount, we welcomed alternative views during Stage Three.

153 Under our draft recommendations, the number of electors per councillor in Crockenhill & Well Hill, Halstead, Knockholt & Badgers Mount and Otford, Shoreham & Eynsford wards would be 4 per cent below the district average, 16 per cent below and 3 per cent above respectively (5 per cent below, 17 per cent below and 3 per cent above by 2005).

154 At Stage Three, the District Council objected to our draft recommendations for a three-member Otford, Shoreham & Eynsford ward. The Council disagreed with our assertion that this ward "would appear to reflect community identities reasonably" stating "there is no doubting that Eynsford gravitates northwards to its near neighbour Farningham" while contending that "in contrast Otford in particular, has close links with Sevenoaks". The Council further contended that if a three-member ward were to be endorsed, electors would "lose interest in local affairs that appear to them to be no longer local". The District Council also suggested that the boundary of the proposed Crockenhill & Well Hill ward could be further extended to improve electoral equality in this ward and its proposed Otford & Shoreham ward. However, it reasoned that "this is not an ideal solution but is a vastly better option than the very large three-member rural ward recommended by the Commission". The Council commented that there is local support for naming the new Well Hill parish ward "The Well Hill Hundreds" and it supported this proposal.

155 Our proposed three-member ward was also opposed by Eynsford Parish Council, Otford Parish Council, Shoreham Parish Council, the Liberal Democrat Group of District Councillors, Sevenoaks District Labour Party, the Conservative Group, Sevenoaks Liberal Democrats, District Councillors Bovington, Malan, Gee, Dibsall and Young and five local residents.

156 Eynsford Parish Council argued that there would be very little community identity in the proposed ward and supported the Council's view that Eynsford has greater affinity to Farningham and Swanley whereas Otford and Shoreham look towards Sevenoaks. This view was supported by the majority of respondents. The Parish Council also supported the retention of a single-member Eynsford ward. Shoreham Parish Council objected to our proposal to divide Shoreham parish between three district wards, arguing that this would not reflect the identities and interests of local communities or provide for effective and convenient local government. The Parish Council suggested that Shoreham parish could form a single-member ward with Halstead & Knockholt parishes consequently being linked with Sundridge parish ward. It also opposed the creation of a three-member Otford, Shoreham & Eynsford ward, arguing that the problems facing the parishes of Otford & Shoreham "are dissimilar in the extreme". The Parish Council submitted three alternative options for this area which would reduce the total number of district councillors to 53. It also supported the creation of a Well Hill parish ward.

157 District Councillor Young contended "while I realise in numbers Otford cannot support two councillors any longer, we would rather go along with the proposal of Sevenoaks District Council" in combining Otford parish with the proposed Shoreham parish ward of Shoreham parish. District Councillor Bovington did not support the Council's original proposal for a two-member Otford & Shoreham ward and was therefore opposed to the proposals for a three-member ward with the inclusion of Eynsford parish. Local residents also expressed a preference for the Council's proposals over the creation of a three-member ward. One local resident contended that our draft recommendations could result in "a greater chasm between elector and local government than now exists". Another resident argued that Eynsford parish and Otford & Shoreham parishes "look in opposite ways for hospital, police and town support".

158 Crockenhill Parish Council and Well Hill Residents Association supported our proposals to combine Crockenhill parish in a ward with the Well Hill parish ward of Shoreham parish. Well Hill Residents Association maintained that the interests of the Well Hill community would be better served at parish level. However, it put forward a minor modification to the proposed ward, contending that the lower part of Cockerhurst Road, Shacklands Road and Castle Farm Road are not essentially part of the Well Hill Community. The Residents Association also stated its support for the new parish ward to be named "The Well Hill Hundreds". Councillor Dibsall contended that residents in Castle Road, Shacklands Road and the lower part of Redmans Lane look to Eynsford and Shoreham and "have no affinity with Crockenhill which is entirely different in character".

159 In opposition to the proposal to divide the parish of Sundridge between two wards, Sundridge Parish Council proposed linking Chevening with Halstead, Knockholt & Badgers Mount in a 3-member ward.

160 We have carefully considered the representations received and have noted the level of local opposition to our proposals for a three-member Otford, Shoreham & Eynsford ward. We also note that there has been some degree of support for the Council's proposals to retain a single-member Eynsford ward and a two-member Otford & Shoreham ward. We considered Shoreham Parish Council's opposition to the division of Shoreham parish between three wards and have considered its alternative proposals for this area. However, we note that these alternatives would result in a significant deterioration in electoral equality in at least two other wards. As the alternative

schemes put forward by Shoreham Parish Council would result in a higher level of over-representation, it suggested that the number of district councillors could be reduced to 53. However, as mentioned earlier, we remain of the view that representation for the district as a whole would be best met by a council size of 54.

161 We have therefore given further consideration to the Council's proposed single-member Eynsford ward and two-member Otford & Shoreham ward. While we recognise that our draft proposals provide good electoral equality, we have been persuaded that the Council's proposals would represent a better balance between electoral equality and community identity and interest. We considered the Council's alternative proposal to extend the boundary of the Crockenhill & Well Hill ward. However, we concur with the view of Well Hill Residents Association that residents on the east side of the railway line have more affinity with Shoreham parish than with the Well Hill area. We therefore propose amending the southern boundary of the proposed Crockenhill & Well Hill ward so that it runs along the centre of the M25. We consider that this would represent a more easily identifiable boundary and a better reflection of local community identity and interests and note that it would not significantly affect electoral equality. In the light of the support for the proposed Well Hill parish ward to be named "the Well Hill Hundreds" we also propose putting this forward as part of our final recommendations. We considered the proposals of Sundridge Parish Council to form a three-member ward comprising the parishes of Chevening, Halstead, Knockholt and the Badgers Mount parish ward of Shoreham parish but note that this would adversely affect electoral equality in surrounding wards.

162 We recognise that a number of respondents have argued that the proposed Halstead, Knockholt & Badgers Mount ward has set a "precedent" of electoral inequality in the remainder of the district. However, we consider that this degree of imbalance is unavoidable in this area in order to attain a good balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria across the district as a whole. We therefore propose confirming this ward as final.

163 As part of our final recommendations, we also propose adopting the District Council's proposed single-member Eynsford ward. We propose endorsing the Council's proposed two-member Otford & Shoreham ward with a minor amendment to its boundary with the Crockenhill & Well Hill ward. Under our final recommendations, the number of electors per councillor in the proposed Crockenhill & Well Hill ward, Eynsford ward and Otford & Shoreham wards would be 6 per cent below the district average, 9 per cent below and 11 per cent above the district average respectively (6 per cent below, 10 per cent below and 10 per cent above by 2005). Due to the increase in the projected electorate for Edenbridge North ward in 2005, and consequently the district as a whole, the electoral variance for Halstead, Knockholt & Badger's Mount ward has altered slightly from our draft recommendations. Under our final recommendations, the number of electors per councillor in this ward would be 16 per cent below the district average (17 per cent below by 2005). These wards are illustrated on Maps 2 and A2 in Appendix A.

Brasted, Chevening, Dunton Green, Riverhead , Sundridge & Ide Hill and Westerham & Crockham Hill wards

164 These wards are located in the centre of the district. Brasted ward (comprising the parish of Brasted), Chevening ward (comprising the parish of Chevening), Dunton Green ward (comprising the parish of Dunton Green), Riverhead ward (comprising the parish of Riverhead)

and Sundridge & Ide Hill ward (comprising the parish of Sundridge) are each represented by a single councillor. Westerham & Crockham Hill ward (comprising the parish of Westerham) is represented by two councillors. Under the existing arrangements, the number of electors per councillor in Brasted, Chevening, Dunton Green and Riverhead wards is 30 per cent below the district average, 39 per cent above, 9 per cent below and 11 per cent above respectively (30 per cent below, 41 per cent above, 7 per cent below and 10 per cent above by 2005). The number of electors per councillor in Sundridge & Ide Hill and Westerham & Crockham Hill wards is 10 per cent below the district average and 1 per cent above respectively (11 per cent below and equal to the average by 2005).

165 At Stage One, the District Council proposed combining Brasted ward with the Ide Hill parish ward of Sundridge parish to form a single-member ward and combining Chevening ward with the Sundridge parish ward of Sundridge parish to form a two-member ward. It proposed that Dunton Green and Riverhead wards should merge to form a two-member Dunton Green & Riverhead ward arguing that “these two communities are very close to one another and, therefore, have much in common”. It also proposed retaining the existing warding arrangements in Westerham & Crockham Hill ward. The Conservative Group submitted the same scheme for this area.

166 Under the District Council’s scheme for a 54 member council, the number of electors per councillor in Brasted & Ide Hill, Chevening & Sundridge, Dunton Green & Riverhead and Westerham & Crockham Hill wards would be 4 per cent above, equal to the average, 3 per cent above and 3 per cent above the district average respectively (4 per cent above, 1 per cent above, 4 per cent above and 2 per cent above by 2005).

167 The Labour Party also proposed that Westerham & Crockham Hill ward should remain as a two-member ward and that Brasted ward should be combined with the Ide Hill parish ward of Sundridge parish. It proposed that the Sundridge parish ward of Sundridge parish merge with the parishes of Knockholt and Halstead and that Chevening parish ward should merge with Riverhead ward. Consequently, Dunton Green ward would remain as a single-member ward, as under the existing arrangements.

168 Under the Labour Party’s scheme for a 55-member council, the number of electors in its proposed Brasted & Ide Hill and Chevening & Riverhead wards would be 6 per cent above the district average and 1 per cent below respectively. This level of electoral equality is forecast to remain the same by 2005. The number of electors per councillor in its proposed Dunton Green and Westerham & Crockham Hill wards would be 6 per cent below the district average and 5 per cent above respectively (3 per cent below and 4 per cent above by 2005).

169 At Stage One, several respondents opposed combining Dunton Green ward with Riverhead ward. Councillor Dibsall, Councillor Watson and Councillor Walshe stated their opposition to such a proposal arguing that the two communities have little in common. Councillor Watson argued that “democracy has to be seen to be done”, contending that the residents of both communities opposed a merger. He also stated that “these two wards can remain as single-member wards without affecting the remaining recommendations”.

170 A resident proposed alternative arrangements for Westerham & Crockham Hill, Brasted, Sundridge & Ide Hill and Chevening wards. The resident proposed combining the communities in the Valley and those on the Hill, suggesting that the two areas each have common interests due to their geographical locations but did not submit detailed proposals.

171 We noted the proposals of the Labour Party but are unable to consider any area in isolation and noted that the implementation of its scheme in this area would have a detrimental effect on electoral equality and community interest and identity in the remainder of the district. We also noted the proposal of the resident to combine the communities on the Hill and those in the Valley. Although we considered that this proposal reflects the geographical distinctions in the area, we were unable to endorse such a warding arrangement due to the lack of substantive evidence and detail in support of this proposal.

172 After due consideration of the evidence received, we proposed endorsing the District Council's proposals in their entirety for these six wards. We considered that the District Council's scheme represented the best balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria. While we had some sympathy with the proposal to retain the existing arrangements for Dunton Green and Riverhead wards, we remained of the view that the resulting electoral inequality should be addressed. On balance, we considered that the District Council's proposals would not adversely affect the statutory criteria and put them forward for consultation.

173 In the light of our decision to adopt the District Council's proposals without modification, our draft recommendations would provide the same levels of equality as under the District Council's scheme.

174 At Stage Three, the District Council did not comment on the proposed wards in this area. We received 62 responses opposing our draft recommendations for a two-member Dunton Green & Riverhead ward from District Councillor Watson, Sevenoaks District Labour Party, Dunton Green Parish Council, Riverhead Parish Council and 58 residents.

175 Sevenoaks District Labour Party stated that the two parishes have "totally separate identities and interests and should form two single-member wards". Dunton Green Parish Council argued that if the two parishes were merged "there would be a loss of local identity" commenting that "it would be difficult to find two adjacent parishes so different". Riverhead Parish Council contended that our proposals would not achieve the aim of improving electoral equality without disrupting local communities and stated that they can "only introduce some confusion into future lines of communication with our parishioners". The Parish Council further stated that "Riverhead is pre-eminent to Dunton Green by total numbers of residents, by geographic area and location, transport, commercial activity, shopping and leisure facilities, and education establishments" and thus argued that all references to the ward should therefore be amended to read Riverhead & Dunton Green. Councillor Watson contended that the two parishes are "of such distinct and differing character" arguing that the boundary between the two parishes is "the shortest in the district". He also expressed concern that if both councillors lived in one of the wards "they would have very little contact with residents of the other parish and little understanding of local concerns".

176 Fifty-eight residents (50 of whom reside in Dunton Green) objected to this ward. Despite the number of responses, the majority of respondents did not provide any significant argumentation in support of their opposition. A local resident argued that our proposals would “weaken local democracy” and that the electorate place value on a local councillor which “transcends normal party allegiances”. He further stated that the proposal would “make the Council less responsive to the views and concerns of electors”. Several residents stated concern that a Dunton Green & Riverhead ward could result in a lack of representation for Dunton Green because Riverhead has a larger electorate. A resident stated, “a great deal could be lost in the future due to a lack of attention to our needs”. Another resident contended that “we much prefer to be represented by someone we know and who lives in our village”.

177 In light of the responses received, we have given further consideration to our draft recommendations for these wards. We note that there is a considerable amount of local opposition to our draft recommendations in this area and that respondents have expressed concern that they could lose their local councillor under our proposed Dunton Green & Riverhead ward. However, we have not been persuaded that our proposals would adversely affect local community identity and interest in the area or that they would “weaken local democracy”. Moreover, we do not accept that our proposals would prevent the electorate from receiving local representation. We therefore remain of the view that the current electoral inequality in Riverhead ward should be addressed. In the absence of any alternative proposals that would provide for good levels of electoral equality, we propose that the two-member Dunton Green & Riverhead ward should be adopted as part of our final recommendations. The level of electoral equality for these wards would be the same as under our draft recommendations.

178 At Stage Three, we also received opposition to our proposed single-member Brasted & Ide Hill ward and to our single-member Chevening & Sundridge ward from Kent County Council, County Councillor Thornton, District Councillor Dean, Sundridge & Ide Hill Branch Conservative Association, Mr Michael Fallon MP, The Right Honourable Lord Weatherill, St Mary Sundridge with St Mary Ide Hill Parochial Church Council, Sundridge Parish Council and the chairman of Sundridge Parish Council.

179 Kent County Council stated that it had reservations that a rural parish should be divided and combined with different district wards. District Councillor Dean stated a preference to retain the existing Brasted ward although he conceded that the current ward was over-represented. Councillor Dean stated “that this process is something like a jigsaw puzzle and that changes in one area can of course impact on other areas” but contended that he would be opposed to merging Brasted parish with that of Westerham to form a three-member ward. Having carefully studied other possible arrangements in the area, Councillor Dean put forward a three-member ward comprising the parishes of Brasted, Chevening and Sundridge, noting that there is not another option that would not “throw the whole process into the melting pot again”. The Conservative Group also proposed this arrangement noting that “this would have no knock on effects on other wards but would have the advantage of maintaining the integrity of the Ide Hill/Sundridge parish”.

180 Sundridge Parish Council argued that the two villages of Sundridge and Ide Hill have “very close ties” and although it acknowledged that Sundridge has some affinity with Brasted, it contended that it has “never had any synergy with Chevening”. The Parish Council argued that

the draft proposals do not reflect the interests and identities of local communities and do not secure effective and convenient local government. As an alternative to the draft proposals, it proposed that Chevening merge with the existing ward of Halstead, Knockholt & Badgers Mount and that Sundridge parish form a single-member ward. It also proposed that the parishes of Brasted and Westerham form a three-member ward. The Right Honourable Lord Weatherill contended that the villages of Sundridge & Ide Hill “have always worked closely on local issues” and argued that “to breach this link would be quite disastrous”. St Mary with Ide Hill Parochial Church Council objected to our draft recommendations in this area as it argued that the two villages of Sundridge & Ide Hill “has been a single community for much of the last 1000 years”. Michael Fallon MP argued that to combine Sundridge parish ward with the parish of Chevening “would destroy everything we have created here”. He further contended that “if the problem is Brasted’s shortage of electors, then Brasted should be incorporated elsewhere”.

181 A local resident argued that our proposals “take no account of the fact that Ide Hill is, and always has been, an integral part of Sundridge”. The resident stated, “I appreciate that the general objective is to attain, as far as possible, equality of representation. But surely this can be achieved without such a disastrous mutilation”. The resident proposed a ward combining the whole of Sundridge parish with Brasted ward, contending that our draft proposals would be “totally unacceptable and would cause friction, resentment and generally unsatisfactory local government at both parish and district level”. Another resident stated, “I note the criteria required to achieve equal electoral representation but to upturn successful, efficient and harmonious local government for mathematical convenience, would be sheer folly”. The resident argued that our proposals would contradict the Commission’s statutory criteria.

182 Chevening Parish Council “accepted” our draft recommendations that we should combine Chevening parish with the parish ward of Sundridge.

183 Having carefully considered the representations received regarding the proposed Brasted & Ide Hill ward and Chevening & Sundridge ward, we noted that they had aroused particular opposition from local communities and interested parties in Sundridge parish in view of the fact that the parish of Sundridge would be divided between two wards. We considered this opposition and concurred with Councillor Dean’s and The Conservative Group’s assertion that, other than a three-member Brasted, Chevening & Sundridge ward, alternative arrangements in this area would adversely affect electoral equality and community identity in surrounding wards. We considered Sundridge Parish Council’s alternative proposals for warding arrangements in this area and noted that they would involve warding Brasted parish with Westerham parish and Chevening parish with the proposed Halstead, Knockholt & Badgers Mount ward. However, several respondents have stated that they would be opposed to a merger of Brasted and Westerham parishes and we noted that this proposal did not receive any other local support. We were therefore not persuaded that such an arrangement would better reflect community identity and interest in this area. We considered the proposal to merge Chevening parish with the proposed ward of Halstead, Knockholt & Badgers Mount but were concerned that this would not reflect the interests of Chevening parish due to the boundaries of the M25 and the A21.

184 We also considered a resident’s proposal to combine the whole parishes of Brasted and Sundridge to form a two-member ward. However, we noted that such a proposal would result in

an electoral variance of 19 per cent below the district average. This proposal would also adversely affect the statutory criteria in surrounding wards.

185 Given the local opposition to the parish of Sundridge being divided between two wards, we were minded to agree that the three-member Brasted, Chevening & Sundridge ward would provide for a better balance between electoral equality and reflecting local communities. However, in the absence of further support for this proposal at Stage Three, we undertook further consultation with the District Council, the parishes and respondents concerned to obtain views as to whether it would be supported locally and requesting that respondents state a preference for the draft proposals or a proposed three-member ward.

186 Following our further consultation process, during which we contacted 26 interested parties, we received 24 responses. Three respondents, including the District Council, stated a preference for our draft proposals although the Council stated that “it would not be opposed to the Commission’s alternative proposal”. Brasted Parish Council, while expressing a preference for the draft proposals, stated that it would be “satisfied” with a two-member ward combining the whole parishes of Brasted & Sundridge. However, as mentioned earlier, due to the electoral inequality that would result, we have not been persuaded to adopt this proposal.

187 The remainder of respondents expressed a preference for a three-member ward comprising the parishes of Brasted, Chevening and Sundridge. We are therefore of the opinion that such a three-member ward would better reflect the identities of all three parishes than our draft recommendations. We also note that this ward would result in a good level of electoral equality and would seem to outweigh any negative effects on other statutory criteria and therefore propose adopting a three-member Brasted, Chevening & Sundridge ward as part of our final recommendations. The number of electors per councillor in this ward would be 1 per cent above the district average initially and 2 per cent above by 2005. These wards are illustrated on Map 2 in Appendix A at the back of the report. In the light of our proposed three-member Brasted, Chevening & Sundridge ward, we propose confirming our proposed two-member Westerham & Crockham Hill ward as final. Under the revised electorate figures, the number of electors per councillor in this ward would be 3 per cent above the district average initially and 2 per cent above by 2005.

Leigh, Penshurst & Fordcombe and Somerden wards.

188 Leigh ward (comprising the parish of Leigh), Penshurst & Fordcombe ward (comprising the parish of Penshurst) and Somerden ward (comprising the parishes of Chiddingstone, Cowden and Hever) are situated in the south of the district and are each represented by one councillor. Under the existing arrangements, the number of electors per councillor in Leigh, Penshurst & Fordcombe and Somerden wards is 20 per cent below the district average, 28 per cent below and 49 per cent above respectively (20 per cent below, 29 per cent below and 49 per cent above by 2005).

189 At Stage One, the District Council stated that the “preference for one-member wards in rural areas ... has taken precedence over the aim to keep parishes whole”. Consequently, it proposed creating a new parish ward of Chiddingstone Causeway in Chiddingstone parish and combining it in a ward with Leigh parish to form a single-member Leigh & Chiddingstone Causeway ward.

It also proposed a single-member ward comprising the parishes of Cowden and Hever and another single-member ward comprising the parish of Penshurst and the Chiddingstone ward of Chiddingstone parish. The Conservative Group submitted the same scheme for this area.

190 Under the District Council's 54-member scheme, the number of electors per councillor in its proposed Cowden & Hever, Leigh & Chiddingstone Causeway and Penshurst, Fordcombe & Chiddingstone wards would be 4 per cent below the district average, 1 per cent above and 10 per cent above respectively (4 per cent below, 1 per cent above and 9 per cent above by 2005).

191 The Labour Party also proposed a single-member ward comprising the parishes of Cowden and Hever but proposed a two-member ward comprising the parishes of Penshurst, Leigh and Chiddingstone, arguing that there are good road connections and similar interests among the electorate.

192 Having considered the representations received at Stage One, we had some reservations about the electoral inequality which would result from the Council's proposed Penshurst, Fordcombe & Chiddingstone ward. We therefore endorsed the Labour Party's scheme for this area as part of our draft recommendations, as the improvements in electoral equality seemed to outweigh any adverse effect on the statutory criteria.

193 Under our draft recommendations, the number of electors per councillor in the single-member Cowden & Hever and two-member Penshurst, Fordcombe, Leigh and Chiddingstone wards would be 4 per cent below the district average and 5 per cent above respectively (4 per cent below and 5 per cent above by 2005).

194 At Stage Three, the District Council reiterated a preference for its original proposal of a single-member Leigh & Chiddingstone Causeway ward and a single-member Penshurst, Fordcombe & Chiddingstone ward, contending that this was "in keeping with the District Council's philosophy of avoiding, wherever possible, geographically large multi-member rural wards". It further contended that "there is no natural relationship between the two areas that the Commission wishes to merge" and that there are "poor road and transport links". Although the District Council maintained a preference for its original proposal, it put forward an amendment for the Commission to consider as a "feasible" alternative. The Council suggested that the boundary of its proposed Leigh & Chiddingstone Causeway ward could be extended to the Chiddingstone/Hever parish boundary. This alternative was also proposed by Councillor Cook.

195 Our proposed two-member Penshurst, Fordcombe, Leigh & Chiddingstone ward was also opposed by County Councillor Lake, District Councillors Cook and Spence, the Right Honourable Sir J Stanley MP and eight residents.

196 District Councillor Cook stated that the Commission's proposed ward would create a ward comprising "an extremely large geographical and disparate area". Councillor Cook also argued that communications between the proposed ward would be "poor" and that "there is little or no evidence of any natural relationship between the communities". Councillor Cook supported the District Council's original proposals in this area arguing that there are "strong current and historical connections between Leigh and Chiddingstone Causeway in terms of their physical, social and economic links". County Councillor Lake supported Councillor Cook's proposals.

stating “her suggestions take account of the existing bonds which exist between the various communities in this area”.

197 District Councillor Spence opposed the Commission’s proposed ward for similar reasons, arguing that “there is little or no evidence of any natural affinity among the villages”. He maintained support for the District Council’s original proposals. Local residents also supported the view that there are limited communication links within our proposed ward and that the District Council’s proposals would better reflect the interests and identities of local communities. One resident argued that “the affinity between Leigh, Charcott and Chiddingstone Causeway is indisputable whereas Chiddingstone, Chiddingstone Hoath and Peshurst look more to Bidborough and Tunbridge Wells”. Another resident contended that the District Council’s proposals “would create two distinct logical geographical units and give each an identity which is so crucial for effective village life and local government representation”.

198 We have given careful consideration to the view received at Stage Three and have noted the opposition to our draft proposals for this area. In view of this opposition and the scope of the argumentation received, we have been persuaded that we should move away from our draft recommendations. We have noted the local consensus that our draft proposals would combine areas with limited communications links and that respondents expressed a preference for the District Council’s original proposals over our draft recommendations. We note that the Council’s original proposals would result in slightly worse electoral equality in the proposed single-member Peshurst, Fordcombe & Chiddingstone ward (although electoral equality would improve in the proposed Leigh & Chiddingstone Causeway ward). However, we have been persuaded that the Council’s draft recommendations would better reflect the identities and interests of local communities and would not result in a significant deterioration in electoral equality. We considered the Council’s alternative proposal to extend the boundary of the proposed Leigh & Chiddingstone Causeway ward to the Chiddingstone/Hever parish boundary. However, we note the Bow Beech reservoir would act as a distinct physical boundary between one side of the ward and the other and that residents on the west side of the reservoir have better links with areas to the south. We therefore propose endorsing the Council’s original proposal for a single-member Leigh & Chiddingstone Causeway ward and a single-member Peshurst, Fordcombe & Chiddingstone ward as part of our final recommendations.

199 We did not receive any representations at Stage Three relating to our proposed Cowden & Hever ward. We therefore propose confirming this ward as final.

200 Under our final recommendations, the number of electors per councillor in our proposed Cowden & Hever and Leigh & Chiddingstone Causeway ward would be 4 per cent below the district average and 1 per cent above the district average respectively (5 per cent below and 1 per cent above by 2005). The number of electors per councillor in our proposed Peshurst, Fordcombe & Chiddingstone ward would be 10 per cent above the district average initially and 9 per cent above by 2005. These wards are illustrated on Map A5 in Appendix A of the report.

Electoral Cycle

201 At Stage One, we received two representations regarding the District Council’s electoral cycle. The District Council itself stated, “it appears that the Government is no longer favouring

a specific structure of electoral cycles for local authorities” concluding that “members, therefore, recommend that the existing four yearly elections for the whole council should continue ...”

202 A resident stated that we should “consider the question of frequency of elections” contending that the current electoral cycle “appears to be out of step with the Government White Paper on the subject.”

203 We carefully considered the views expressed at Stage One and concluded that the consensus was that the present electoral cycle should be retained. We therefore proposed no change to the current electoral cycle of whole-council elections for the District Council.

204 In response to our draft recommendations report, the Chairman of Edenbridge Town Council, District Councillor Deans and a local resident stated their support for the retention of whole council elections.

205 At Stage Three no further comments were received to the contrary, and we confirm our draft recommendation as final.

Conclusions

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

- We propose adopting the District Council’s proposed single-member Leigh & Chiddingstone Causeway ward, single-member Penshurst, Fordcombe & Chiddingstone ward, single-member Eynsford ward and two-member Otford & Shoreham ward.
- We propose minor amendments to our draft proposals in the towns of Edenbridge and Sevenoaks.
- We propose combining the parishes of Brasted, Chevening & Sundridge to form a three-member Brasted, Chevening & Sundridge ward.

207 We conclude that, in Sevenoaks:

- there should be an increase in council size from 53 to 54;
- there should be 26 wards, 6 fewer than at present;
- the boundaries of 27 of the existing wards should be modified;
- the Council should continue to hold whole-council elections every four years.

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

Figure 4: Comparison of Current and Recommended Electoral Arrangements

	2000 electorate		2005 forecast electorate	
	Current arrangements	Final recommendations	Current arrangements	Final recommendations
Number of councillors	53	54	53	54
Number of wards	32	26	32	26
Average number of electors per councillor	1,627	1,596	1,635	1,605
Number of wards with a variance more than 10 per cent from the average	20	2	20	1
Number of wards with a variance more than 20 per cent from the average	11	0	10	0

209 As Figure 4 shows, our recommendations would result in a reduction in the number of wards with an electoral variance of more than 10 per cent from 20 to two, with no wards varying by more than 20 per cent from the district average. This level of electoral equality would improve further in 2005, with only one ward, Halstead, Knockholt & Badger’s Mount, varying by more than 10 per cent from the average, at 17 per cent. We conclude that our recommendations would best meet the need for electoral equality, having regard to the statutory criteria.

Final Recommendation
 Sevenoaks District Council should comprise 54 councillors serving 26 wards, as detailed and named in Figures 1 and 2, and illustrated on Map 2 and in Appendix A including the large map inside the back cover. The Council should continue to hold whole-council elections every four years.

Parish and Town Council Electoral Arrangements

210 In undertaking reviews of electoral arrangements, we are required to comply as far as possible with the provisions set out in Schedule 11 to the 1972 Act. The Schedule provides that if a parish is to be divided between different district wards it must also be divided into parish wards, so that each parish ward lies wholly within a single ward of the district. Accordingly, we propose consequential warding arrangements for the parishes of Chiddingstone, Edenbridge, Eynsford, Hartley, Shoreham, Sevenoaks and Swanley.

211 The parish of Chiddingstone is currently served by nine parish councillors representing a single ward. In order to reflect our final recommendations for Leigh & Chiddingstone Causeway and Penshurst, Fordcombe & Chiddingstone district wards, we propose that Chiddingstone parish should comprise two new parish wards. We propose that Chiddingstone ward be represented by

6 parish councillors and that Chiddingstone Causeway ward be represented by 3 parish councillors.

Final Recommendation
Chiddingstone Parish Council should comprise 9 parish councillors, as at present, representing two wards: Chiddingstone parish ward (returning six councillors) and Chiddingstone Causeway parish ward (returning three councillors). The parish ward boundaries should reflect the proposed district ward boundaries in the area as illustrated on Map A5 in Appendix A.

212 The parish of Edenbridge is currently served by 15 councillors representing two wards. Edenbridge North is currently served by six councillors and Edenbridge South is served by nine councillors. At Stage One, the District Council proposed reallocating the number of town councillors to reflect their proposed boundary changes between the district wards. We were therefore content to propose a reallocation of the number of town councillors to reflect our proposed boundary changes, resulting in Edenbridge North parish being served by five councillors and Edenbridge South being served by ten councillors.

213 In response to our draft recommendations report, a local resident stated his support for Edenbridge to comprise two two-member district wards and proposed that under this arrangement, each ward could be represented by either seven or eight parish councillors. In support of the District Council’s proposed wards in the area, another local resident proposed that Edenbridge North ward be represented by eight town councillors and that Edenbridge South ward be represented by seven parish councillors. However, as described earlier, we have proposed alternative warding arrangements for Edenbridge as part of our final recommendations.

214 We have not received any other representations regarding the number of town councillors in Edenbridge and therefore propose that the town wards should reflect the proposed district wards. We propose that Edenbridge North & East ward be represented by 8 councillors and Edenbridge South & West ward be represented by 7 councillors.

Final Recommendation
Edenbridge Town Council should comprise 15 town councillors, as at present, representing two wards: Edenbridge North parish ward (returning eight councillors) and Edenbridge South parish ward (returning seven councillors). The parish ward boundaries should reflect the proposed district ward boundaries in the area as illustrated on Map A4 in Appendix A.

215 The parish of Eynsford is currently served by seven councillors. At the request of the parish council, the District Council proposed that the number of councillors serving the parish should increase from seven to eight. We were content to put this forward as part of our draft recommendations but invited the views of the parish council at Stage Three. At Stage Three,

Eynsford Parish Council stated its support for the proposed increase in the number of parish councillors. In the light of the support for our draft recommendations we confirm them as final.

Final Recommendation
Eynsford Parish Council should comprise eight councillors, an increase of one, who should be elected from the parish as a whole.

216 The parish of Hartley is currently served by 11 councillors. At Stage One, the District Council proposed that the number of councillors serving the parish should increase from 11 to 13 and we were content to put this forward as part of our draft recommendations. However, we invited the views of the parish council at Stage Three. At Stage Three, Hartley Parish Council and a resident supported an increase in the number of parish councillors from 11 to 13. In the light of the support for our draft recommendations we confirm them as final.

Final Recommendation
Hartley Parish Council should comprise 13 councillors, an increase of two, who should be elected from the parish as a whole.

217 The parish of Sevenoaks is currently served by 15 town councillors representing five wards. Sevenoaks Kippington, Sevenoaks Northern, Sevenoaks St John’s, Sevenoaks Town and Sevenoaks Wildernesse are each represented by three councillors. At Stage One, the District Council proposed minor amendments to the boundaries between the wards. Due to the amendments we proposed at district level, we also propose that a new Wildernesse parish ward of Sevenoaks be created and included in the district ward of Seal & Weald. We proposed that this new Wildernesse parish ward be represented by a single councillor and that the remaining Sevenoaks East ward be represented by two councillors. Elsewhere, we proposed that the parish wards be amended to reflect the district wards and that they each continue to be represented by three town councillors.

218 In response to our draft recommendations, a number of respondents, including Sevenoaks Town Council, Sevenoaks Liberal Democrats, a group of Liberal Democrat councillors, District & Town Councillor Clayton, Town Councillors Purves and Walshe, contended that the elector:parish councillor ratio in the proposed Wildernesse parish ward would be much less than in the remainder of Sevenoaks town.

219 We note the opposition to the creation of a Wildernesse parish ward and its consequent allocation of a single councillor. However, as mentioned earlier in the report, we are proposing the creation of the Wildernesse parish ward in order to improve electoral equality in the proposed Seal & Weald district ward and in the Sevenoaks town district wards. In doing so, we note that this area must be given the minimum representation of a single councillor at parish level. As a consequence of our decision to adopt our draft recommendations for the district warding

arrangements in Sevenoaks town as final, we also propose confirming our draft recommendations for Sevenoaks Town Council’s electoral arrangements as final.

Final Recommendation
Sevenoaks Town Council should comprise 15 town councillors, as at present, representing six wards, one more than at present: Sevenoaks Kippington parish ward (returning three councillors), Sevenoaks Northern parish ward (returning three councillors), Sevenoaks St John’s parish ward (returning three councillors), Sevenoaks Town parish ward (returning three councillors), Sevenoaks Eastern parish ward (returning two councillors). Wildernesse parish ward should be that part of Sevenoaks parish that falls within the Seal & Weald district ward and be represented by a single councillor. The boundaries between the six parish wards should reflect the proposed district ward boundaries, as illustrated on the large map at the back of the report.

220 The parish of Shoreham is currently served by 10 councillors representing two wards. Shoreham ward is served by seven councillors and Badger’s Mount ward is served by three councillors. At Stage One the District Council proposed creating a new parish ward of Well Hill in order to facilitate district warding arrangements. It proposed that Shoreham ward be allocated six members, Badger’s Mount ward three members and the new Well Hill ward be served by a single councillor. We were content to put this forward as part of our draft recommendations.

221 In response to our draft recommendations report, Crockenhill Parish Council and Well Hill Resident’s Association stated their support for the creation of a Well Hill parish ward. As mentioned earlier, in the light of support received for this parish ward to be named “The Well Hill Hundreds”, we propose putting this forward as part of our final recommendations. We have received no further comments regarding parish council arrangements in this area and are therefore confirming our draft recommendations for Shoreham Parish Council’s electoral arrangements as final.

Final Recommendation
Shoreham Parish Council should comprise 10 parish councillors, as at present, representing three wards, one more than at present: Shoreham parish ward (returning six councillors), Badger’s Mount parish ward (returning three councillors) and The Well Hill Hundreds parish ward (returning a single councillor). The boundaries between the three parish wards should reflect the proposed district ward boundaries as illustrated on Maps 2 and A2 in Appendix A.

222 The parish of Swanley is currently served by 16 councillors representing five wards. Swanley Christchurch, Swanley St Mary’s and Swanley White Oak are each served by four councillors. Swanley Hextable is served by three councillors and Swanley Village is served by one councillor. At Stage One, the District Council proposed a minor amendment to the boundary

between Hextable and Swanley White Oak parish wards. We were content to put this forward as part of our draft recommendations.

223 We have received no further comments regarding town council arrangements in this area and are therefore confirming our draft recommendations as final.

Final Recommendation

Swanley Town Council should comprise 16 town councillors representing five wards, as at present: Swanley Christchurch parish ward (returning four councillors), Swanley Hextable parish ward (returning three councillors), Swanley St Mary's parish ward (returning four councillors), Swanley Village parish ward (returning one councillor) and Swanley White Oak parish ward (returning four councillors). The boundaries between the five parish wards should reflect the proposed district ward boundaries, as illustrated on Map A3 in Appendix A.

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

Map 2: The Commission's Final Recommendations for Sevenoaks

6 NEXT STEPS

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

226 It now falls to the Secretary of State to decide whether to give effect to our recommendations, with or without modification, and to implement them by means of an Order. Such an Order will not be made before 19 June 2001

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

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

APPENDIX A

Final Recommendations for Sevenoaks: Detailed Mapping

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

Map A1 illustrates, in outline form, the proposed ward boundaries within the district and indicates the areas which are shown in more detail in Maps A2, A3, A4, A5, A6 and the large map at the back of the report.

Map A2 illustrates the proposed warding of Shoreham parish.

Map A3 illustrates the proposed warding of Swanley town.

Map A4 illustrates the proposed warding of Edenbridge town.

Map A5 illustrates the proposed warding of Chiddingstone parish.

Map A6 illustrates the proposed warding of Ash-cum-Ridley parish.

The **large map** inserted in the back of the report illustrates the existing and proposed warding arrangements for the town of Sevenoaks.

Map A1: Final Recommendations for Sevenoaks: Key Map

Map A2: Proposed Warding of Shoreham Parish

Map A3: Proposed Warding of Swanley town.

Map A4: Proposed Warding of Edenbridge town.

Map A5: Proposed Warding of Chiddingstone parish.

Map A6: Proposed Warding of Ash-cum-Ridley parish.

APPENDIX B

Draft Recommendations for Sevenoaks:

Our final recommendations, detailed in Figures 1 and 2, differ from those we put forward as draft recommendations in respect of nine wards, where our draft proposals are set out below.

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

Ward name	Constituent areas
Brasted & Ide Hill	Brasted ward (the parish of Brasted); Sundridge ward (part – the Ide Hill parish ward of Sundridge parish)
Chevening & Sundridge	Chevening ward (the parish of Chevening); Sundridge ward (part – the Sundridge parish ward of Sundridge parish)
Edenbridge North	Edenbridge North ward (part);
Edenbridge South	Edenbridge South ward; Edenbridge North ward (part)
Otford, Shoreham & Eynsford	Otford ward (the parish of Otford); Shoreham ward (part – the Shoreham parish ward of Shoreham parish); Eynsford ward (the parish of Eynsford)
Penshurst, Fordcombe, Leigh & Chiddingstone	Penshurst & Fordcombe ward (the parish of Penshurst); Somerden ward (part – the parish of Chiddingstone); Leigh ward (the parish of Leigh)
Sevenoaks Kippington	Sevenoaks Kippington ward (part)
Sevenoaks Northern	Sevenoaks Northern ward (part); Sevenoaks Kippington ward (part); Sevenoaks Town & St John's ward (part)
Sevenoaks Town & St John's ward	SevenoaksTown & St John's ward (part); Sevenoaks Wildernesse ward (part); Sevenoaks Kippington ward (part)

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

Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2000)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2005)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
Brasted & Ide Hill	1	1,663	1,663	4	1,663	1,663	4
Chevening & Sundridge	2	3,193	1,597	0	3,233	1,617	1
Edenbridge North	1	1,541	1,541	-3	1,605	1,605	0
Edenbridge South	3	4,585	1,528	-4	4,661	1,554	-3
Otford, Shoreham & Eynsford	3	4,951	1,650	3	4,951	1,650	3
Penshurst, Fordcombe, Leigh & Chiddingstone	2	3,366	1,683	5	3,366	1,683	5
Sevenoaks Kippington	2	3,261	1,631	2	3,261	1,631	2
Sevenoaks Northern	2	3,269	1,635	2	3,269	1,635	2
Sevenoaks Town & St John's	3	4,763	1,588	-1	4,763	1,588	-1

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

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

APPENDIX C

Code of Practice on Written Consultation

The Cabinet Office's November 2000 *Code of Practice on Written Consultation*, www.cabinet-office.gov.uk/servicefirst/index/consultation.htm, requires all Government Departments and Agencies to adhere to certain criteria, set out below, on the conduct of public consultations. Non-Departmental Public Bodies, such as the Local Government Commission, 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.

Commission 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	The Commission complies with this requirement
It should be clear who is being consulted, about what questions, in what timescale and for what purpose	The Commission complies 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	The Commission complies 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	The Commission complies 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	The Commission consults 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	The Commission complies with this requirement
Departments should monitor and evaluate consultations, designating a consultation coordinator who will ensure the lessons are disseminated	The Commission complies with this requirement