

Final recommendations on the
future electoral arrangements
for Luton

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

November 2001

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

WHAT IS THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT COMMISSION FOR ENGLAND?

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

Members of the Commission are:

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

Barbara Stephens (Chief Executive)

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

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

SUMMARY

We began a review of Luton's electoral arrangements on 5 September 2000. We published our draft recommendations for electoral arrangements on 9 May 2001. The Commission's Stage Three consultation period was put into abeyance from 10 May 2001 to 7 June 2001 as a consequence of the General Election; therefore, the closing date for receipt of submissions at the end of Stage Three was 6 August 2001.

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

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

- **in eight of the 16 wards the number of electors represented by each councillor varies by more than 10 per cent from the average for the borough and one ward varies by more than 20 per cent, both initially and by 2005.**

Our main final recommendations for future electoral arrangements (see Tables 1 and 2 and paragraphs 84-85) are that:

- **Luton Borough Council should have 48 councillors, as at present;**
- **there should be 19 wards, instead of 16 as at present;**
- **the boundaries of 13 of the existing wards should be modified, resulting in a net increase of three, and three wards should retain their existing boundaries;**
- **elections should continue to take place every four years.**

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

- **In all of the proposed 19 wards the number of electors per councillor would vary by no more than 9 per cent from the borough average initially, with no ward expected to vary by more than 6 per cent from the average for the borough in 2005.**

All further correspondence on these final recommendations and the matters discussed in this report should be addressed to the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, who will not make an Order implementing them before 2 January 2002:

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

Table 1: Final Recommendations: Summary

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Constituent areas	Map reference
1	Barnfield	2	part of Icknield ward; part of Saints ward; part of Stopsley ward	Large map
2	Biscot	3	part of Biscot ward; part of High Town ward; part of Saints ward	Large map
3	Bramingham	2	part of Bramingham ward	Large map
4	Challney	3	<i>Unchanged</i> – Challney ward	Large map
5	Crawley	2	part of Crawley ward; part of High Town ward	Large map
6	Dallow	3	Dallow ward; part of Biscot ward; part of South ward	Large map
7	Farley	3	Farley ward; part of South ward	Large map
8	High Town	2	part of High Town ward	Large map
9	Icknield	2	part of Icknield ward; part of Saints ward	Large map
10	Leagrave	3	<i>Unchanged</i> – Leagrave ward	Large map
11	Lewsey	3	<i>Unchanged</i> – Lewsey ward	Large map
12	Limbury	2	part of Limbury ward; part of Sundon Park ward	Large map
13	Northwell	2	part of Bramingham ward; part of Sundon Park ward	Large map
14	Round Green	3	part of High Town ward; part of Stopsley ward; part of Crawley ward	Large map
15	Saints	3	part of Biscot ward; part of Saints ward; part of Limbury ward	Large map
16	South	3	part of South ward; part of Biscot ward	Large map
17	Stopsley	2	part of Stopsley ward; part of Putteridge ward	Large map
18	Sundon Park	2	part of Sundon Park ward	Large map
19	Wigmore	3	part of Putteridge ward; part of Crawley ward	Large map

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

Table 2: Final Recommendations for Luton

	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	Barnfield	2	5,596	2,798	1	5,772	2,886	1
2	Biscot	3	8,708	2,903	5	8,967	2,989	5
3	Bramingham	2	5,720	2,860	3	5,829	2,915	2
4	Challney	3	8,412	2,804	1	8,892	2,964	4
5	Crawley	2	5,626	2,813	2	5,648	2,824	-1
6	Dallow	3	8,316	2,772	0	8,742	2,916	2
7	Farley	3	8,083	2,694	-3	8,299	2,766	-3
8	High Town	2	5,486	2,743	-1	5,644	2,822	-1
9	Icknield	2	5,611	2,806	2	5,747	2,874	1
10	Leagrave	3	7,824	2,608	-6	8,048	2,683	-6
11	Lewsey	3	8,798	2,933	6	8,952	2,984	5
12	Limbury	2	5,682	2,841	3	5,761	2,881	1
13	Northwell	2	5,693	2,847	3	5,862	2,931	3
14	Round Green	3	8,077	2,692	-3	8,250	2,750	-3
15	Saints	3	8,218	2,739	-1	8,540	2,847	0
16	South	3	7,563	2,521	-9	8,059	2,686	-6
17	Stopsley	2	5,425	2,713	-2	5,511	2,756	-3
18	Sundon Park	2	5,616	2,808	2	5,684	2,842	0
19	Wigmore	3	8,218	2,739	-1	8,349	2,783	-2
	Totals	48	132,672	-	-	136,556	-	-
	Averages	-	-	2,764	-	-	2,845	-

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

Note: The 'variance from average' column shows by how far, in percentage terms, the number of electors per councillor varies from the average for the borough. The minus symbol (-) denotes a lower than average number of electors. Figures have been rounded to the nearest whole number. The total number of electors in 2000 and 2005 are marginally different from those in Table 3 (by 23 and 5 electors respectively). This has a negligible effect on electoral variances and the average number of electors per councillor.

1 INTRODUCTION

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

2 This was our first review of the electoral arrangements of Luton. The last such review was undertaken by our predecessor, the Local Government Boundary Commission (LGBC), which reported to the Secretary of State in August 1975 (Report no. 54). Since undertaking that review, Luton has become a unitary authority (1997).

3 In carrying out these reviews, we have had regard to:

- the statutory criteria contained in section 13(5) of the Local Government Act 1992, i.e. the need to:
 - 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 Full details of the legislation under which we work are set out in a document entitled *Guidance and Procedural Advice for Local Authorities and Other Interested Parties* (fourth edition published in December 2000). This *Guidance* sets out our approach to the reviews.

5 Our task is to make recommendations to the Secretary of State on the number of councillors who should serve on the Borough Council, and the number, boundaries and names of wards.

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

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

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

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

10 This review was in four stages. Stage One began on 5 September 2000, when we wrote to Luton Borough Council inviting proposals for future electoral arrangements. We also notified Bedfordshire Police Authority, the Members of Parliament with constituencies in the borough, the Members of the European Parliament for the Eastern Region, and the headquarters of the main political parties. We placed a notice in the local press, issued a press release and invited the Borough Council to publicise the review further. The closing date for receipt of representations, the end of Stage One, was 27 November 2000. At Stage Two we considered all the representations received during Stage One and prepared our draft recommendations.

11 Stage Three began on 9 May 2001 with the publication of our report, *Draft recommendations on the future electoral arrangements for Luton*, and ended on 6 August 2001. During this period we sought comments from the public and any other interested parties on our preliminary conclusions. The Commission's Stage Three consultation period was put into abeyance from 10 May 2001 to 7 June 2001 as a consequence of the General Election; therefore, the closing date for receipt of submissions at the end of Stage Three was 6 August 2001. Finally, during Stage Four we reconsidered our draft recommendations in the light of the Stage Three consultation and now publish our final recommendations.

2 CURRENT ELECTORAL ARRANGEMENTS

12 The borough of Luton has a population of some 183,300 and covers an area of 4,336 hectares, with a population density of 41.8 persons per hectare. Its population has grown dramatically over the last century, with the expansion of the engineering industry. However, further expansion is limited due to the green belt areas on its borders. Luton is linked to the motorway system by the M1 and is 30 miles north of London. It is also served by London Luton Airport, and the Luton Airport Parkway railway station provides a dedicated rail link. Luton became a Unitary Authority in 1997 and is unparished.

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

14 The electorate of the borough is 132,695 (February 2000). The Council presently has 48 members who are elected from 16 three-member wards. The whole Council is elected every four years.

15 At present, each councillor represents an average of 2,764 electors, which the Borough Council forecasts will increase to 2,845 by the year 2005 if the present number of councillors is maintained. However, due to demographic and other changes over the past two decades, the number of electors per councillor currently varies by more than 10 per cent from the borough average in eight of the 16 wards. The worst imbalance is in Putteridge ward, where each of the three councillors represents 36 per cent more electors per councillor than the borough average.

Map 1: Existing Wards in Luton

Table 3: Existing Electoral Arrangements

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2000)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2005)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
1	Biscot	3	8,989	2,996	8	9,270	3,090	9
2	Bramingham	3	9,748	3,249	18	9,990	3,330	17
3	Challney	3	8,412	2,804	1	8,892	2,964	4
4	Crawley	3	7,832	2,611	-6	7,964	2,655	-7
5	Dallow	3	7,383	2,461	-11	7,786	2,595	-9
6	Farley	3	6,899	2,300	-17	7,115	2,372	-17
7	High Town	3	7,451	2,484	-10	7,614	2,538	-11
8	Icknield	3	9,524	3,175	15	9,759	3,253	14
9	Leagrave	3	7,824	2,608	-6	8,048	2,683	-6
10	Lewsey	3	8,798	2,933	6	8,952	2,984	5
11	Limbury	3	7,151	2,384	-14	7,317	2,439	-14
12	Putteridge	3	11,239	3,746	36	11,436	3,812	34
13	Saints	3	8,218	2,739	-1	8,470	2,823	-1
14	South	3	8,881	2,960	7	9,356	3,119	10
15	Stopsley	3	7,065	2,355	-15	7,208	2,403	-16
16	Sundon Park	3	7,281	2,427	-12	7,384	2,461	-13
	Totals	48	132,695	-	-	136,561	-	-
	Averages	-	-	2,764	-	-	2,845	-

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

Note: The 'variance from average' column shows by how far, in percentage terms, the number of electors per councillor varies from the average for the borough. The minus symbol (-) denotes a lower than average number of electors. For example, in 2000, electors in Farley ward were relatively over-represented by 17 per cent, while electors in Putteridge ward were significantly under-represented by 36 per cent. Figures have been rounded to the nearest whole number.

3 DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS

16 During Stage One we received seven representations, including borough-wide schemes from the Borough Council, Conservative Group, Luton Liberal Democrats, Green Party and Luton Independent Residents' Federation and representations from two local residents. In the light of these representations and evidence available to us, we reached preliminary conclusions, which were set out in our report, *Draft recommendations on the future electoral arrangements for Luton*.

17 Our draft recommendations were based on both the Liberal Democrats' and the Conservatives' 48-member schemes. In some areas of the borough there was consensus between the two schemes and as we considered that both schemes achieved an appropriate balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria in these areas, we were content to adopt them as part of our draft recommendations. In the centre of the borough we believed that community identity was best reflected by the Conservatives' proposals for smaller two-member wards, while elsewhere in the borough we proposed adopting a mixture of the Liberal Democrats' and our own proposals. We proposed that:

- Luton Borough Council should be served by 48 councillors, as at present, representing 19 wards, three more than at present;
- the boundaries of 15 of the existing wards should be modified, while one ward should retain its existing boundaries;
- elections should continue to take place every four years.

Draft Recommendation

Luton Borough Council should comprise 48 councillors, serving 19 wards. The whole council should continue to be elected every four years.

18 Our proposals would have resulted in significant improvements in electoral equality, with the number of electors per councillor in all of the 19 wards varying by no more than 10 per cent from the borough average. This level of electoral equality was forecast to improve further, with no ward varying by more than 6 per cent from the average in 2005.

4 RESPONSES TO CONSULTATION

19 During the consultation on our draft recommendations report, we received 25 representations. A list of all respondents is available from us on request. All representations may be inspected at our offices and those of Luton Borough Council.

Luton Borough Council

20 The Borough Council attached the minutes of the Electoral Boundary Review Panel, which continued to argue for an increase in council size and suggested a public inquiry. It also stated that the draft recommendations split natural communities and proposed moving part of the Runfold estate into the proposed Limbury ward.

Luton Borough Council Conservative Group

21 The Conservative Group continued to support a council size of 48 and described the draft recommendations “as fair and, insofar as it is possible, does provide genuine community of interests across the borough”.

Luton Liberal Democrats

22 The Liberal Democrats continued to support a council size of 48 and stated that the Commission had “reached the best of the available solutions” and should forward the draft recommendations to the Secretary of State “substantially unchanged”.

Member of Parliament

23 Kelvin Hopkins MP, expressed “strong support for Luton Borough Council’s scheme” for a council size of 54. He also attached a detailed analysis of the draft recommendations and the Borough Council’s scheme.

Other Representations

24 A further 21 representations were received in response to our draft recommendations from an MEP, local groups, councillors and local residents. Mr Duff MEP, Councillor Flint, Jamia Alakbaria (enclosing a 26 signature petition), Dallow Development Group, Project Kickout, Pakistan/Kashmir Youth Forum and one local resident generally supported the draft recommendations.

25 Bramingham Wood Residents Association and six local residents opposed the inclusion of their area in the proposed Marsh Farm ward. The Association also proposed five alternative warding configurations for the area.

26 Farley Tenants & Residents Association proposed an alternative boundary between the proposed wards of Farley and South. One local resident argued for the retention of the existing Limbury ward. A local resident proposed some boundary changes affecting seven wards and a 13 signature petition proposed boundary modifications between the proposed wards of Challney and Legrave and Legrave and Lewsey. Councillor Davis and two local residents supported the Borough Council’s proposal for an increase in council size from 48 to 54.

5 ANALYSIS AND FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS

27 As described earlier, our prime objective in considering the most appropriate electoral arrangements for Luton 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”.

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

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

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

Electorate Forecasts

31 Since 1975 there has been a 5 per cent increase in the electorate of Luton borough. At Stage One the Borough Council submitted electorate forecasts for the year 2005, projecting an increase in the electorate of approximately 3 per cent from 132,695 to 136,541 over the five-year period from 2000 to 2005. It expects the growth to be fairly evenly spread across the borough. In order to prepare these forecasts, the Council estimated rates and locations of housing development with regard to structure and local plans, the expected rate of building over the five-year period and assumed occupancy rates. We accept that this is an inexact science and, having considered the forecast electorates, we stated in our draft recommendations report that we were satisfied that they represented the best estimates that could reasonably be made at the time.

32 We received no comments on the Council’s electorate forecasts during Stage Three, and remain satisfied that they represent the best estimates currently available.

Council Size

33 As already explained, we start by assuming 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.

34 At Stage One, the Borough Council proposed an increase in council size from 48 to 54

members, while the Conservative Group on the Council and the Luton Liberal Democrats proposed the retention of the existing council size. In our draft recommendations report we adopted the Conservatives' and Liberal Democrats' proposal for a council of 48 members. We considered that in the light of the lack of consensus between political groups on this issue, the apparent lack of widespread consultation specifically on the issue of council size and any supporting evidence, the case for an increase in council size had not been made. Therefore, having considered the size and distribution of the electorate, the geography and other characteristics of the area, together with the representations received, we concluded that the achievement of electoral equality and the statutory criteria would best be met by a council size of 48 members.

35 During Stage Three, the Conservative Group and the Liberal Democrats continued to support a council size of 48. The draft recommendations were also supported by Mr Duff MEP, Councillor Flint, Jamia Alakbaria (enclosing a 26 signature petition), Dallow Development Group, Project Kickout, Pakistan/Kashmir Youth Forum and one local resident.

36 Luton Borough Council, Kelvin Hopkins MP, Councillor Davis and two local residents proposed a council size of 54. The submission from the Borough Council stated that the Commission "should be aware that although this is the Council's formal response the views expressed do not represent the unanimous view of the Panel, nor the Council. The views represent those of the Labour Group only". The Borough Council submitted details of similar sized authorities to emphasize the fact that Luton should have more councillors, in particular, Southend. However, in Southend the increase in council size from 39 to 51 received complete cross-party support, extensive public consultation and support and we were presented with a well-argued factual case. As stated earlier, this was certainly not the case in Luton at Stage One and neither does it appear to be the case at Stage Three. Indeed, the majority of respondents who commented on council size at Stage Three, including local groups, stated a preference for retaining the existing council size of 48 members.

37 Therefore having carefully considered the representations received with regards to council size, we are content to confirm our draft recommendation for a council size of 48 as final.

Electoral Arrangements

38 At draft recommendation stage we proposed a council size of 48 and as the schemes from the Borough Council, Luton Green Party and Luton Independent Residents' Federation were based on significantly different council sizes, their proposals were generally incompatible and we were therefore unable to give them further consideration.

39 We noted that the Borough Council, Conservatives and Liberal Democrats each proposed multi-member wards throughout the borough, and we were persuaded that, given the urban nature of Luton, this approach provided for a more appropriate reflection of the statutory criteria. Both the Liberal Democrats' and the Conservatives' 48-member schemes provided for good electoral equality. However, we considered that the Conservatives' uniform pattern of two-member wards would not facilitate as effective a reflection of the statutory criteria as a mixed pattern of two and three-member wards which, as the Liberal Democrats argued, "enables communities to be welded together". In some areas of the borough there was consensus between the two schemes and as we considered that both schemes achieved an appropriate balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria in these areas, we were content to adopt them as part of our draft recommendations. In the centre of the borough we believed that community identity was best reflected by the Conservatives' proposals for smaller two-member

wards, while elsewhere in the borough we proposed adopting a mixture of the Liberal Democrats' and our own proposals.

40 The draft recommendations were generally supported at Stage Three. However, as stated above, the Borough Council opposed the draft recommendations, continuing to argue for a council size of 54. Kelvin Hopkins MP, who strongly supported the Borough Council provided a detailed analysis of the Borough Council's scheme. However as described above, with confirmation of a council size of 48, any alternative warding arrangement proposed by the respondents is incompatible with the warding arrangements proposed under our draft recommendations. Therefore we are unable to give them further consideration in the narrative below. Indeed, while much of the argumentation was based on reflecting local community identities, the views expressed were not generally shared by the majority of respondents, who made submissions to the Commission at Stage Three.

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

- (a) Bramingham, Lewsey, Legrave and Sundon Park wards;
- (b) Challney, Icknield, Limbury and Saints wards;
- (c) Biscot, Dallow and High Town wards;
- (d) Farley and South wards;
- (e) Crawley, Putteridge and Stopsley wards.

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

Bramingham, Lewsey, Legrave and Sundon Park wards

43 The four three-member wards of Bramingham, Lewsey, Legrave and Sundon Park currently have 18 per cent more, 6 per cent more, 6 per cent fewer and 12 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the borough average respectively (17 per cent more, 5 per cent more, 6 per cent fewer and 13 per cent fewer by 2005).

44 At Stage One the Liberal Democrats' proposals built on existing arrangements in this area. They proposed no change to the existing Lewsey ward. The existing Legrave ward would be combined with a small area of the existing Challney ward (properties to the north of Vincent Gardens including those properties on Addington Way, Eynsford Road, Ousley Close and Platt Close) to form a two-member ward. They proposed retaining the existing Sundon Park ward, less those properties to the east of Wauluds Bank Drive and less those properties on Copenhagen Close and Brussels Way as a two-member ward. The remainder of Bramingham ward would be divided east-west into two two-member wards, the boundary running along the west side of Great Bramingham Wood and Little Bramingham Wood, as proposed by the Conservatives. The eastern section would form a new two-member Marsh Farm ward, while the western section would form a revised two-member Bramingham ward.

45 The Liberal Democrats argued that the Lewsey Farm estate and the neighbouring Poets area are bounded by the M1 and main Dunstable Road and that communities on either side of these strong boundaries share no common interest. They argued that Legrave is bounded by the M1 and the railway and that it shares no community identity with communities across these boundaries and that Sundon Park maintains a strong and distinct cultural identity while being

naturally separated from Marsh Farm by Bramingham Road, Leagrave Park and “the spinney”. They argued that the Marsh Farm area also maintains a strong sense of community identity and is naturally separated from Bramingham by the Great Bramingham Wood.

46 We noted that the Liberal Democrats’ proposals built upon existing arrangements in this area and were similar to proposals submitted by the Conservatives. We were content that these proposals provided for the most appropriate balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria. We therefore adopted the Liberal Democrats’ proposals for Bramingham, Leagrave, Lewsey, Marsh Farm and Sundon Park wards as part of our draft recommendations.

47 Under our draft recommendations the wards of Bramingham, Leagrave, Lewsey, Marsh Farm and Sundon Park would have 3 per cent more, 2 per cent more, 2 per cent fewer, 6 per cent more, 3 per cent more and 2 per cent more electors per councillor than the borough average respectively (2 per cent more, 2 per cent fewer, 5 per cent more, 3 per cent more and equal to the average by 2005).

48 At Stage Three, Bramingham Wood Residents Association and six local residents opposed our proposed Marsh Farm ward. The Residents Association provided five alternative warding arrangements based on two three-member wards for the area, as opposed to the three two-member wards proposed at draft recommendation stage. Each alternative provided for good levels of electoral equality and resulted in the area represented by the Association remaining in Bramingham ward. One local resident suggested that the Bramingham ward boundary should follow the A6 Barton Road, as the area to the east is part of Warren Hill “a long established community”. The respondent also proposed a boundary alignment between the proposed wards of Marsh Farm and Sundon Park. However, these alternative proposals would result in a knock on effect across the wards in the north of the borough and therefore we are unable to consider them. We also received a 13-signature petition proposing boundary modifications between the proposed wards of Challney and Leagrave and Leagrave and Lewsey. The respondents stated that the area of Addington Way should be included in Challney ward and not Leagrave “because of its natural links” and the Holgate Drive area should be included in Leagrave ward because of its “natural link” with Leagrave ward and not Lewsey ward.

49 Having carefully considered the petition from local residents and having revisited the area, we have decided to move away from our draft recommendation and propose modifying the boundary between Leagrave and Challney wards. In our opinion, this would address the concerns over community identities and interests expressed by the respondents and utilise clear boundaries, resulting in no change to the existing boundaries of Challney and Leagrave wards. However, we are not convinced by the argument that the Holgate Drive area looks towards Leagrave ward, therefore coupled together with the fact that it is divided from our proposed Leagrave ward by a main road and is currently in Lewsey ward, we propose endorsing our draft recommendation for Lewsey ward as final.

50 We have carefully considered the opposition of Bramingham Wood Residents Association and some local residents to the proposed Marsh Farm ward. However, having visited the area it is clear that the area covered by the Bramingham Wood Residents Association is divided from the remainder of the existing Bramingham ward by Great and Little Bramingham Woods. We therefore propose confirming the draft recommendations for the proposed wards of Bramingham, Marsh Farm and Sundon Park as final, subject to one amendment. It would appear from respondents that the ward name Marsh Farm has some negative connotations locally. Respondents stated that if the draft recommendations remained unaltered in this area, the ward should be renamed, although there was no clear preference for an alternative name. The names

proposed were; Lea Manor, Lygetun, North, Northwell or Waulud. Having visited the area we noted that Northwell Drive is centrally located in the ward and runs along the ward from north to south. Therefore we propose renaming Marsh Farm ward, Northwell.

51 Under our final recommendations, the number of electors per councillor in Bramingham, Leagrave, Lewsey, Northwell and Sundon Park would be 3 per cent more, 6 per cent fewer, 6 per cent more, 3 per cent more and 2 per cent more than the borough average respectively (2 per cent more, 6 per cent fewer, 5 per cent more, 3 per cent more and equal to the average by 2005). Our final recommendations for these wards are illustrated on Map 2 and the large map at the back of this report.

Challney, Icknield, Limbury and Saints wards

52 The four three-member wards of Challney, Icknield, Limbury and Saints currently have 1 per cent more, 15 per cent more, 14 per cent fewer and 1 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the borough average respectively (4 per cent, 14 per cent more, 14 per cent fewer and 1 per cent fewer than the average by 2005).

53 At Stage One, the Conservatives proposed dividing the existing Icknield ward between two two-member wards. The area to the south of Ringwood Road and east of New Bedford Road would be combined with that part of the existing Saints ward to the south of Austin Road and east of Culverhouse Road, to form a new two-member Barnfield ward. The northern part of Icknield, less part of the area around Gooseberry Hill, would form a revised two-member Icknield ward. The remainder of the existing Saints ward, less Maidenhall Road, Newark Road, part of Selbourne Road and Sherwood Road (which would all be transferred to a revised Biscot ward), would form a revised two-member Saints ward. The existing Limbury ward (plus the area from Icknield ward around Goosebury Hill) would be divided between two two-member wards. The area to the north of Trinity Road, Limbury Road and Marsh Farm Road would form a revised two-member Limbury ward. The remainder of the existing Limbury ward would be combined with that part of the existing Challney ward to the north of Stoneygate Road and that part of Leagrave ward to the east of Vincent Road and south of Vincent Road to form a two-member Beechwood ward. The remainder of Challney ward, less properties to the west of Stanton Road (which would be transferred into a new Poets ward) would form a revised two-member Challney ward.

54 The Liberal Democrats proposed retaining the existing three-member Icknield ward, less the area to the south of Laburnum Grove and west of Birdsfoot Lane (which would be transferred into a revised Limbury ward), and less the area south of Riddy Lane and west of New Bedford Road (which would be transferred into a revised Saints ward). The modified Saints ward would also include all properties east of Bancroft Road, currently in Limbury ward, and would retain three members. The remainder of Limbury ward would be combined with the above mentioned area of Icknield ward to form a revised three-member Limbury ward. Challney ward would remain virtually unchanged, apart from a minor boundary amendment to its northern boundary.

55 The Liberal Democrats argued that in Challney ward the Luton-Dunstable trunk road actually connects the various constituent parts and that the Challney High Schools are at the centre of the ward. They argued that Limbury ward is naturally bounded by Bramingham Road, Marsh Road Shopping Centre, Waller Avenue, Blundell Road and Birdsfoot Lane.

56 We recognised that the Liberal Democrats' proposals build on existing arrangements whilst providing for good electoral equality, but we considered that the Conservatives' proposed two-

member Barnfield and Icknield wards provided for a better reflection of community identity in this area. However, we considered that the Conservatives' proposed boundary between Icknield and Limbury wards would split an existing community and therefore proposed amending it, to follow the existing boundary along Catsbrook Road and Icknield Way. Similarly we considered that the boundary between the proposed Icknield and Barnfield wards that runs east-west from New Bedford Road to Old Bedford Road could be improved by moving it south to run along Barnfield Avenue. We considered that this amendment provided for a stronger boundary and a more logical division of electors within the existing Icknield ward.

57 However, elsewhere in this area we were not convinced that a pattern of two-member wards would provide an effective reflection of community identity. We noted that the Conservatives' proposed division of Challney ward into three new wards abandons the railway as a strong existing boundary and we considered that these proposals would split existing communities. We noted that the Liberal Democrats' proposals retained Challney ward virtually unchanged and preserved the strong existing boundary along the railway line whilst providing for good electoral equality. We therefore adopted the Liberal Democrats' proposals for Challney ward as part of our draft recommendations without amendment. In the light of the loss of electors to the proposed Barnfield ward, we amended the Liberal Democrats' proposed Saints ward to include all properties east of Limbury Road, Trinity Road and Archway Road, while we proposed transferring Britannia Avenue, Ellerdine Close and Nunnery Lane back into a revised two-member Limbury ward. We considered that the revised Limbury ward, which was roughly based on the Conservatives' proposed two-member Limbury ward, and the amended Saints ward, provided the best available balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria.

58 Therefore, we adopted the Conservatives' proposed Icknield and Barnfield wards subject to the amendments detailed above. In Challney ward we adopted the Liberal Democrats' proposals unamended, while our proposals for a two-member Limbury and three-member Saints wards were based on a combination of the Liberal Democrats' and Conservatives' proposals.

59 Under our draft recommendations Barnfield, Challney, Icknield, Limbury and Saints wards would have 1 per cent more, 2 per cent fewer, 2 per cent more, 3 per cent fewer and 3 per cent more electors per councillor than the borough average respectively (1 per cent more, equal to, 1 per cent more, 4 per cent fewer and 4 per cent more than the average by 2005).

60 In response to our draft recommendations, as stated earlier, we received a 13-signature petition proposing a boundary modification between the proposed wards of Challney and Leagrave. The respondents stated that the area of Addington Way should be included in Challney ward and not Leagrave "because of its natural links". Having visited the area, we concurred with this view and propose modifying the boundary, resulting in no change to the present warding arrangements of Challney ward.

61 We also received a representation from one local resident arguing for the retention of Icknield Road in the proposed Limbury ward. He argued that "Limbury ward should end at Blundell Road" and that "few people in the Limbury ward would challenge that view". Another resident suggested a further boundary amendment between the proposed wards of Icknield and Barnfield and Limbury and Saints (and proposed renaming Saints ward Biscot), however this would have an adverse effect on the warding arrangements proposed in this area. Therefore we do not propose adopting these modifications. Having visited the area, we believe that our proposed Limbury ward continues to generally provide clear boundaries. However we noted that the properties on Limbury Road (even numbers) and Stanmore Crescent which we proposed placing in Saints ward, only have access from Limbury Road, therefore we propose including

those 312 electors in the proposed Limbury ward. Therefore, subject to the two boundary amendments discussed above, we are content to endorse our draft recommendations for this area as final.

62 Under our final recommendations Barnfield, Challney, Icknield, Limbury and Saints wards would have 1 per cent more, 1 per cent more, 2 per cent more, 3 per cent more and 1 per cent less electors per councillor than the borough average respectively (1 per cent more, 4 per cent more, 1 per cent more, 1 per cent more and equal to the average by 2005). Our final recommendations for these wards are illustrated on the large map at the back of this report.

Biscot, Dallow and High Town wards

63 The three three-member wards of Biscot, Dallow and High Town currently have 8 per cent more, 11 per cent fewer and 10 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the borough average respectively (9 per cent more, 9 per cent fewer and 11 per cent fewer than the average by 2005).

64 At Stage One the Liberal Democrats proposed only minimal change to warding arrangements in this area. They proposed retaining Dallow ward virtually unchanged, amending the northern boundary so that it follows the length of Dunstable Road, rather than Beech Road and the A5065, arguing that the borough boundary and Dunstable Road form natural boundaries on either side of Dallow ward. That area in Biscot ward south of Dunstable Road would be transferred into the revised Dallow ward. The remainder of Biscot ward would be combined with that area of High Town ward west of New Bedford Road to form a three-member Biscot ward. The remainder of High Town ward, less the area to the east of Pomfret Avenue and Haddon Road, and less the area north of Kingston Road and Ridgeway Road, would form a revised two-member High Town ward.

65 We considered that the Liberal Democrats' proposals provided for the most appropriate balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria, and in order to facilitate a good scheme throughout the borough we adopted their proposals for this area without amendment as part of our draft recommendations.

66 Under our draft recommendations Biscot, Dallow and High Town wards would have 5 per cent more, 2 per cent fewer and 1 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the borough average respectively (5 per cent more, equal to and 1 per cent fewer than the average by 2005).

67 In response to our draft recommendations in this area we received general support from three local groups. The Dallow Development Group, Project Kickout and Pakistan/Kashmir Youth Forum. The Dallow Development Group expressed "united support for the recommendations by the Commission which clearly demonstrate the balance in population per councillor and the need to not break natural neighbourhoods". The Group also suggested that to clearly reflect local community identities and interests, the remainder of the electors in Ashburnham Road, Vestry Close and St Mary's Hospital (totalling 205 electors), should also be included in the proposed Dallow ward and not the proposed South ward. This view was also shared by the Pakistan/Kashmir Youth Forum, who also proposed that Hazelbury Crescent, Avondale Road and the left side of Kenilworth Road remain as part of Biscot ward. The Forum stated that "if the Commission does not feel this feasible, we will not be disappointed". Project Kickout supported our draft recommendations and in particular our proposed Biscot ward. One local resident suggested that Biscot ward should be renamed Bury Park.

68 We have given careful consideration to the evidence and representations received, and

having visited the area propose adopting the proposal from Dallow Development Group and Pakistan/Kashmir Youth Forum to amend our proposed boundary between the proposed wards of Dallow and South. We believe that the alternative boundary clearly reflects local community identities and interests and continues to provide for good levels of electoral equality. With regards to the revised boundary for Biscot ward proposed by Pakistan/Kashmir Youth Forum, we are not convinced that it would provide a clearer boundary than that proposed at draft recommendation stage and, coupled with the support of Project Kickout for our draft recommendations, we propose confirming our draft recommendation for Biscot ward as final.

69 Under our final recommendations Biscot, Dallow and High Town wards would have 5 per cent more, equal to and 1 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the borough average respectively (5 per cent more, 2 per cent more and 1 per cent fewer than the average by 2005). Our final recommendations for these wards are illustrated on Map 2 and the large map at the back of this report.

Farley and South wards

70 Farley and South wards are each represented by three members and currently have 17 per cent fewer and 7 per cent more electors per councillor than the borough average respectively (17 per cent fewer and 10 per cent more by 2005).

71 At Stage One the Liberal Democrats proposed only minor modifications to warding arrangements in this area. They proposed transferring those properties to the west of London Road and Castle Street, currently in South ward, along with Tennyson Road and part of West Hill Drive into a revised three-member Farley ward. The remainder of South ward would be combined with those properties to the east of New Bedford Road that are currently in Biscot ward to form a revised three-member South ward.

72 However, we regarded the inclusion of Tennyson Road and part of West Hill Drive in Farley ward as anomalous and a poor reflection of community identity. Therefore, we proposed retaining Tennyson Road and West Hill Drive in South ward and using the length of London Road as a boundary, to provide for a better reflection of community identity. We therefore adopted the Liberal Democrats' proposals for this area as part of our draft recommendations subject to the above boundary modification.

73 Under our draft recommendations Farley and South wards would have equal to and 10 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the borough average respectively (equal to and 6 per cent fewer by 2005).

74 In response to our draft recommendations Farley Tenants & Residents Association considered that a more appropriate boundary for the Farley ward would be Farley Hill itself rather than London Road. However, the Association did support the draft recommendation to exclude Tennyson Road and West Hill Drive from the proposed Farley ward.

75 We have given careful consideration to the representation received from the Residents Association. However, we continue to believe that our proposed boundary generally reflects the statutory criteria and provides for a good level of electoral equality. However, as a consequence of our proposed boundary modification between the wards of Dallow and South to reflect community identities and interests, we propose transferring 235 electors back to Farley ward from our proposed South ward (reverting to the existing northern boundary of the existing Farley ward).

76 Under our final recommendations Farley and South wards would have 3 per cent fewer and 9 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the borough average respectively (3 per cent fewer and 6 per cent fewer by 2005). Our final recommendations for these wards are illustrated on Map 2 and the large map at the back of this report.

Crawley, Putteridge and Stopsley wards

77 Crawley, Putteridge and Stopsley wards are each represented by three members and currently have 6 per cent fewer, 36 per cent more and 15 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the borough average respectively (7 per cent fewer, 34 per cent more and 16 per cent fewer than the average by 2005).

78 At Stage One the Liberal Democrats proposed significant modifications to warding arrangements in this area. They proposed transferring properties on Bray Road, Hallwick Road, Littlechurch Road and Mobley Green that are currently in Stopsley ward into a new two-member Wigmore ward. The new Wigmore ward would comprise all the properties to the south of Chesford Road and Eastfield Close that are currently in Putteridge ward and the area to the south of Eaton Green Road and east of Vauxhall Way, currently in Crawley ward. This combined area would be united with the area of Crawley ward to the north of Eaton Green Road and east of Holtsmere Close, Newnham Close and Barrowby Close. The remainder of the existing Putteridge ward would be combined with the remaining properties in Stopsley ward that lie to the east of Vauxhall Way and Sunningdale, to form a revised three-member Stopsley ward. Those properties to the west of Hart Lane and south of Crawley Green Road, currently in Crawley ward, would form a revised two-member Crawley ward. The remainder of the existing Crawley ward would be combined with the remainder of the existing Stopsley ward and the properties north of Kingston Road and Ridgeway Road that are currently in High Town ward, to form a new two-member Round Green ward.

79 However, we considered that the Liberal Democrats' proposal to retain a three-member Stopsley ward which includes the area south of Turners Road North was a poor representation of community identity. We therefore proposed amending the Liberal Democrats' proposals in this area by transferring all properties to the south of Stopsley Road, currently in Stopsley ward, into the Liberal Democrats' proposed Round Green ward to form a new three-member ward. The remaining area of the proposed Stopsley ward would form a two-member ward. We considered that this proposal united areas of similar profile whilst continuing to provide for a good level of electoral equality. Elsewhere in this area we considered that the Liberal Democrats' proposals provided for a good balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria and adopted them as part of our draft recommendations, subject to some minor amendments to the boundary between Wigmore and Stopsley wards in order to improve electoral equality in the light of our proposed modifications to the Liberal Democrats' proposals.

80 Under our draft recommendations Crawley, Round Green, Stopsley and Wigmore wards would have 2 per cent more, 3 per cent fewer, 2 per cent fewer and 1 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the borough average respectively (1 per cent fewer, 3 per cent fewer, 3 per cent fewer and 2 per cent fewer than the average by 2005).

81 At Stage Three, we received only one specific representation with regards to our proposals in this area. Councillor Flint, stated that the Hart Lane area "does not fit well either geographically or community-wise with Crawley ward". However, he stated that "there is no obvious or better alternative" to the draft recommendation. Therefore in the absence of any viable alternatives to

our warding arrangements in this area, we have decided to endorse our draft recommendations for the wards of Crawley, Round Green, Stopsley and Wigmore as final. The levels of electoral equality in these wards would be the same as under our draft recommendations. Our final recommendations are illustrated on Map 2 and the large map at the back of this report.

Electoral Cycle

82 At Stage One we received five representations regarding the Borough Council's electoral cycle. The Borough Council and the Conservatives proposed no change to the present system of whole-council elections every four years. The Liberal Democrats, Green Party and Independent Residents' Federation all supported elections by thirds. We were not persuaded by the arguments for change and as there appeared to be some support for the current electoral cycle, we made no recommendation for change to the present system of whole-council elections every four years.

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

Conclusions

84 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 that the wards of Challney and Leagrave should retain their existing boundaries;
- we propose boundary realignments between the proposed wards of Saints and Limbury, South and Dallow and Farley and South;
- we propose that Marsh Farm ward should be renamed Northwell.

85 We conclude that, in Luton:

- there should be 48 councillors, as at present;
- there should be 19 wards, three more than at present;
- the boundaries of 13 of the existing wards should be modified;
- the Council should continue to hold whole-council elections every four years.

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

Table 4: Comparison of Current and Recommended Electoral Arrangements

	2000 electorate		2005 forecast electorate	
	Current arrangements	Final recommendations	Current arrangements	Final recommendations
Number of councillors	48	48	48	48
Number of wards	16	16	16	16
Average number of electors per councillor	2,764	2,764	2,845	2,845
Number of wards with a variance more than 10 per cent from the average	8	0	8	0
Number of wards with a variance more than 20 per cent from the average	1	0	1	0

87 As Table 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 eight to none. This level of electoral equality would improve further in 2005, with no ward varying by more than 6 per cent from the average. We conclude that our recommendations would best meet the need for electoral equality, having regard to the statutory criteria.

Final Recommendation

Luton Borough Council should comprise 48 councillors serving 19 wards, as detailed and named in Tables 1 and 2, and illustrated on Map 2 and the large map inside the back cover. The Council should continue to hold whole-council elections every four years.

Map 2: Final Recommendations for Luton

6 WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

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

89 It is now up to the Secretary of State to decide whether to endorse our recommendations, with or without modification, and to implement them by means of an Order. Such an Order will not be made before 2 January 2002.

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

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

