

Final recommendations on the
future electoral arrangements
for Uttlesford in Essex

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

November 2000

LOCAL GOVERNMENT COMMISSION FOR ENGLAND

LOCAL GOVERNMENT COMMISSION FOR ENGLAND

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

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A large map illustrating the proposed ward boundaries for Great Dunmow, Saffron Walden and Stansted Mountfitchet is inserted inside the back cover of the report.



Local Government Commission for England

28 November 2000

Dear Secretary of State

On 30 November 1999 the Commission began a periodic electoral review of Uttlesford under the Local Government Act 1992. We published our draft recommendations in May 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 in the light of further evidence. This report sets out our final recommendations for changes to electoral arrangements in Uttlesford (see paragraph 100).

We recommend that Uttlesford District Council should be served by 44 councillors representing 27 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 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 Uttlesford on 30 November 1999. We published our draft recommendations for electoral arrangements on 16 May 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 Uttlesford:

- **in 16 of the 31 wards the number of electors represented by each councillor varies by more than 10 per cent from the average for the district and 10 wards vary by more than 20 per cent from the average;**
- **by 2004 electoral equality is not expected to improve, with the number of electors per councillor forecast to vary by more than 10 per cent from the average in 18 wards and by more than 20 per cent in 10 wards.**

Our main final recommendations for future electoral arrangements (Figures 1 and 2 and paragraph 100) are that:

- **Uttlesford District Council should have 44 councillors, two more than at present;**
- **there should be 27 wards, instead of 31 as at present;**
- **the boundaries of 22 of the existing wards should be modified and nine wards should retain their existing boundaries;**
- **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 21 of the proposed 27 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 all but one of the proposed 27 wards expected to vary by no more than 10 per cent from the average for the district in 2004.**

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

- **revised warding arrangements and the redistribution of councillors for the parishes of Great Dunmow, Great Easton, Saffron Walden and Stansted Mountfitchet.**

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 8 January 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 Ashdon	1	Ashdon ward (the parishes of Ashdon and Hadstock); Saffron Walden (Shire) ward (part – part of Shire parish ward of Saffron Walden parish)	Large Map and Map 2
2 Barnston & High Easter	1	Great Dunmow South ward (part – the parish of Barnston); The Canfields ward (part – the parish of High Easter)	Map 2
3 Birchanger	1	<i>Unchanged</i> (Birchanger parish)	Map 2
4 Broad Oak & the Hallingburys	2	Great Hallingbury ward (and parish); Hatfield Broad Oak ward (and parish); Little Hallingbury ward (and parish)	Map 2
5 Clavering	1	Clavering ward (part – the parishes of Clavering and Wicken Bonhunt)	Map 2
6 Elsenham	2	Elsenham ward (and parish); Henham ward (part – the parish of Henham); Takeley ward (part – the parish of Chickney)	Map 2
7 Felsted	2	<i>Unchanged</i> (the parishes of Felsted and Little Dunmow)	Map 2
8 Great Dunmow North	2	Great Dunmow (North) ward (part – part of Great Dunmow (North) parish ward of Great Dunmow parish)	Large Map
9 Great Dunmow South	3	Great Dunmow (North) ward (part – part of Great Dunmow (North) parish ward of Great Dunmow parish); Great Dunmow (South) ward (part – Great Dunmow (South) parish ward of Great Dunmow parish)	Large Map
10 Hatfield Heath	1	<i>Unchanged</i> (Hatfield Heath parish)	Map 2
11 Littlebury	1	Clavering ward (part – the parish of Arkesden); Littlebury ward (the parishes of Littlebury, Strethall and Wendens Ambo)	Map 2
12 Newport	2	Newport ward (and parish); Rickling ward (the parishes of Quendon & Rickling and Widdington)	Map 2

Ward name	Number of councillors	Constituent areas	Map reference
13 Saffron Walden Audley	3	Saffron Walden (Audley) ward (Audley parish ward of Saffron Walden parish); Saffron Walden (Castle) ward (part – part of Castle parish ward of Saffron Walden parish); Saffron Walden (Plantation) ward (part – part of Plantation parish ward of Saffron Walden parish)	Large Map
14 Saffron Walden Castle	3	Saffron Walden (Castle) ward (part – part of Castle parish ward of Saffron Walden parish); Saffron Walden (Shire) ward (part – part of Shire parish ward of Saffron Walden parish)	Large Map
15 Saffron Walden Shire	3	Saffron Walden (Plantation) ward (part – part of Plantation parish ward of Saffron Walden parish); Saffron Walden (Shire) ward (part – part of Shire parish ward of Saffron Walden parish)	Large Map
16 Stansted North	2	Stansted Mountfitchet ward (part – part of Benfield and Castle parish wards of Stansted Mountfitchet parish)	Large Map
17 Stansted South	2	Stansted Mountfitchet ward (part – Stansted Mountfitchet parish ward and part of Benfield and Castle parish wards of Stansted Mountfitchet parish)	Large Map
18 Stebbing	1	<i>Unchanged</i> (the parishes of Lindsell and Stebbing)	Map 2
19 Stort Valley	1	<i>Unchanged</i> (the parishes of Berden, Farnham and Manuden)	Map 2
20 Takeley & the Canfields	2	Takeley ward (part – the parish of Takeley); The Canfields ward (part – the parishes of Great Canfield and Little Canfield)	Map 2
21 Thaxted	2	Thaxted ward (the parishes of Little Bardfield and Thaxted); The Eastons ward (part – part of Great Easton parish)	Maps 2 and A2
22 The Chesterfords	1	<i>Unchanged</i> (the parishes of Great Chesterford and Little Chesterford)	Map 2
23 The Eastons	1	Takeley ward (part – the parish of Broxted); The Eastons ward (part – part of Great Easton parish and the parishes of Little Easton and Tilty)	Maps 2 and A2
24 The Rodings	1	The Canfields ward (part – the parish of High Roothing); The Rodings ward (the parishes of Aythorpe Roding, Leaden Roding, Margaret Roding and White Roothing)	Map 2

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Constituent areas	Map reference
25	The Sampfords	1	<i>Unchanged</i> (the parishes of Great Sampford, Hempstead, Little Sampford and Radwinter)	Map 2
26	Wenden Lofts	1	<i>Unchanged</i> (the parishes of Chrishall, Elmton, Langley and Wenden Lofts)	Map 2
27	Wimbish & Debden	1	<i>Unchanged</i> (the parishes of Debden and Wimbish)	Map 2

Notes: 1 The whole district is parished.

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

Figure 2: The Commission's Final Recommendations for Uttlesford

Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (1999)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2004)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
1 Ashdon	1	1,261	1,261	3	1,271	1,271	-2
2 Barnston & High Easter	1	1,268	1,268	4	1,288	1,288	-1
3 Birchanger	1	795	795	-35	1,233	1,233	-5
4 Broad Oak & the Hallingburys	2	2,621	1,311	7	2,669	1,335	2
5 Clavering	1	1,173	1,173	-4	1,185	1,185	-9
6 Elsenham	2	2,769	1,385	13	2,803	1,402	8
7 Felsted	2	2,374	1,187	-3	2,934	1,467	13
8 Great Dunmow North	2	1,735	868	-29	2,430	1,215	-7
9 Great Dunmow South	3	3,422	1,141	-6	3,691	1,230	-6
10 Hatfield Heath	1	1,316	1,316	8	1,360	1,360	4
11 Littlebury	1	1,224	1,224	0	1,268	1,268	-3
12 Newport	2	2,545	1,273	4	2,569	1,285	-1
13 Saffron Walden Audley	3	3,628	1,209	-1	3,868	1,289	-1
14 Saffron Walden Castle	3	3,610	1,203	-1	3,877	1,292	-1
15 Saffron Walden Shire	3	3,884	1,295	6	3,900	1,300	0
16 Stansted North	2	2,625	1,313	8	2,693	1,347	3
17 Stansted South	2	2,111	1,056	-13	2,611	1,306	0
18 Stebbing	1	1,240	1,240	2	1,266	1,266	-3
19 Stort Valley	1	1,160	1,160	-5	1,212	1,212	-7
20 Takeley & the Canfields	2	2,455	1,228	1	2,526	1,263	-3
21 Thaxted	2	2,616	1,308	7	2,693	1,347	3
22 The Chesterfords	1	1,330	1,330	9	1,344	1,344	3

Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (1999)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2004)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
23 The Eastons	1	1,250	1,250	2	1,278	1,278	-2
24 The Rodings	1	1,402	1,402	15	1,410	1,410	8
25 The Sampfords	1	1,379	1,379	13	1,419	1,419	9
26 Wenden Lofts	1	1,218	1,218	0	1,256	1,256	-4
27 Wimbish & Debden	1	1,263	1,263	4	1,275	1,275	-2
Totals	44	53,674	-	-	57,329	-	-
Averages	-	-	1,220	-	-	1,303	-

Source: *Electorate figures are based on information provided by Uttlesford 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.*

1 INTRODUCTION

1 This report contains our final recommendations on the electoral arrangements for the district of Uttlesford in Essex. We have now reviewed 12 districts in Essex 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 Uttlesford. The last such review was undertaken by our predecessor, the Local Government Boundary Commission (LGBC), which reported to the Secretary of State in July 1975 (Report No. 21), the electoral arrangements for Essex County Council were last reviewed in November 1980 (Report No. 401). We completed a directed electoral review of Thurrock in 1996 and a periodic electoral review of Southend-on-Sea in 1999. We expect to undertake a periodic electoral review of Thurrock in 2000 and 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* (third edition published in October 1999), 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.

10 Following publication of the White Paper, we advised all authorities in our 1999/00 PER programme, including the Essex districts, that the Commission would continue to maintain its current approach to PERs as set out in the October 1999 *Guidance*. Nevertheless, we considered that local authorities and other interested parties might wish to have regard to the Secretary of State's intentions and legislative proposals in formulating electoral schemes as part of PERs of their areas. 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*.

11 This review was in four stages. Stage One began on 30 November 1999, when we wrote to Uttlesford District Council inviting proposals for future electoral arrangements. We also notified Essex County Council, Essex Police Authority, the local authority associations, Essex Local Councils Association, parish and town councils in the district, the Member of Parliament with constituency interests in the district and 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 28 February 2000. At Stage Two

we considered all the representations received during Stage One and prepared our draft recommendations.

12 Stage Three began on 16 May 2000 with the publication of our report, *Draft recommendations on the future electoral arrangements for Uttlesford in Essex*, and ended on 10 July 2000. Comments were sought on our preliminary conclusions. Finally, during Stage Four we reconsidered our draft recommendations in the light of the Stage Three consultation and now publish our final recommendations.

2 CURRENT ELECTORAL ARRANGEMENTS

13 The district of Uttlesford is situated in north-west Essex and is bounded by Cambridgeshire to the north, and Hertfordshire to the west. It is rural in character and covers the largest area of any district in the county. Uttlesford covers 64,158 hectares and has a population of approximately 69,000. The district contains 58 parishes, and is entirely parished. The main settlements in Uttlesford district are Saffron Walden, Great Dunmow and Stansted Mountfitchet; the district is also home to Stansted Airport. Saffron Walden town comprises 20 per cent of the district's total electorate.

14 To compare levels of electoral inequality between wards, we calculated the extent to which the number of electors per councillor in each ward (the councillor:elector ratio) varies from the 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 53,674 (February 1999). The Council presently has 42 members who are elected from 31 wards. One of the wards is represented by three councillors, nine are each represented by two councillors and 21 are single-member wards. The whole Council is elected every four years.

16 Since the last electoral review there has been an increase in the electorate in Uttlesford district, with around 30 per cent more electors than two decades ago as a result of new housing developments. The most notable increases have been in Great Dunmow, Saffron Walden and Stansted Mountfitchet, with approximately 49 per cent, 44 per cent and 25 per cent more electors respectively than 20 years ago.

17 At present, each councillor represents an average of 1,278 electors, which the District Council forecasts will increase to 1,365 by the year 2004 if the present number of councillors is maintained. However, due to demographic and other changes over the past two decades, the number of electors per councillor in 16 of the 31 wards varies by more than 10 per cent from the district average, 10 wards by more than 20 per cent and six wards by more than 30 per cent. The worst imbalance is in Great Hallingbury ward where the councillor represents 59 per cent fewer electors than the district average.

Map 1: Existing Wards in Uttlesford

Figure 3: Existing Electoral Arrangements

Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (1999)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2004)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
1 Ashdon	1	903	903	-29	909	909	-33
2 Birchanger	1	795	795	-38	1,233	1,233	-10
3 Clavering	1	1,449	1,449	13	1,475	1,475	8
4 Elsenham	1	1,811	1,811	42	1,839	1,839	35
5 Felsted	2	2,374	1,187	-7	2,934	1,467	7
6 Great Dunmow (North)	2	2,513	1,257	-2	3,257	1,629	19
7 Great Dunmow (South)	2	3,369	1,685	32	3,601	1,801	32
8 Great Hallingbury	1	520	520	-59	542	542	-60
9 Hatfield Broad Oak	1	946	946	-26	956	956	-30
10 Hatfield Heath	1	1,316	1,316	3	1,360	1,360	0
11 Henham	1	1,269	1,269	-1	1,277	1,277	-6
12 Littlebury	1	948	948	-26	978	978	-28
13 Little Hallingbury	1	1,155	1,155	-10	1,171	1,171	-14
14 Newport	1	1,694	1,694	33	1,714	1,714	26
15 Rickling	1	851	851	-33	855	855	-37
16 Saffron Walden (Audley)	2	2,636	1,318	3	2,876	1,438	5
17 Saffron Walden (Castle)	2	3,017	1,509	18	3,177	1,589	16
18 Saffron Walden (Plantation)	2	3,251	1,626	27	3,257	1,629	19
19 Saffron Walden (Shire)	2	2,576	1,288	1	2,697	1,349	-1
20 Stansted Mountfitchet	3	4,392	1,464	15	4,958	1,653	21
21 Stebbing	1	1,240	1,240	-3	1,266	1,266	-7
22 Stort Valley	1	1,160	1,160	-9	1,212	1,212	-11

Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (1999)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2004)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
23 Takeley	2	2,357	1,179	-8	2,430	1,215	-11
24 Thaxted	2	2,327	1,164	-9	2,396	1,198	-12
25 The Canfields	1	1,470	1,470	15	1,484	1,484	9
26 The Chesterfords	1	1,330	1,330	4	1,344	1,344	-2
27 The Eastons	1	1,111	1,111	-13	1,139	1,139	-17
28 The Rodings	1	1,034	1,034	-19	1,042	1,042	-24
29 The Sampfords	1	1,379	1,379	8	1,419	1,419	4
30 Wenden Lofts	1	1,218	1,218	-5	1,256	1,256	-8
31 Wimbish & Debden	1	1,263	1,263	-1	1,275	1,275	-7
Totals	42	53,674	-	-	57,329	-	-
Averages	-	-	1,278	-	-	1,365	-

Source: Electorate figures are based on information provided by Uttlesford 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 1999, electors in Great Hallingbury ward were over-represented by 59 per cent, while electors in Newport ward were under-represented by 33 per cent. Figures have been rounded to the nearest whole number.

3 DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS

18 During Stage One we received eight representations, including district-wide schemes from Uttlesford District Council and Saffron Walden Constituency Liberal Democrats, and representations from the Stansted & District Liberal Democrats, Saffron Walden Constituency Conservative Association, three parish and town councils and a local resident. 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 Uttlesford in Essex*.

19 Our draft recommendations were based on the District Council's proposals in their entirety, which we considered struck the best balance available between electoral equality and the statutory criteria. We proposed that:

- Uttlesford District Council should be served by 44 councillors, compared with the current 42, representing 27 wards, four fewer than at present;
- the boundaries of 22 of the existing wards should be modified, while nine wards should retain their existing boundaries;
- there should be new warding arrangements for Great Dunmow, Great Easton, Saffron Walden and Stansted Mountfitchet parishes.

Draft Recommendation

Uttlesford District Council should comprise 44 councillors, serving 27 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 21 of the 27 wards varying by no more than 10 per cent from the district average. This level of electoral equality was forecast to improve further, with only one ward varying by more than 10 per cent from the average in 2004 (Felsted ward at 13 per cent).

4 RESPONSES TO CONSULTATION

21 During the consultation on our draft recommendations report 13 representations were received. A list of all respondents is available on request from the Commission. All representations may be inspected at the offices of Uttlesford District Council and the Commission.

Uttlesford District Council

22 The District Council supported the draft recommendations and stated that it was “pleased that the Commission has decided to adopt the Council’s own proposals without modification”. However, it proposed that Hatfield Forest ward be renamed Broad Oak & the Hallingburys.

Liberal Democrat Group

23 The Liberal Democrat Group made a number of comments regarding our draft recommendations, making particular reference to the proposed council size and the local consultation exercises undertaken. It suggested that its scheme (based on a 38-member council) be re-considered by the Commission in formulating its final recommendations.

Parish Councils

24 We received 11 representations from parish and town councils in the district. Birchanger, Broxted and Hadstock parish councils and Great Dunmow Town Council each supported the draft recommendations. Saffron Walden Town Council expressed support for the boundaries included in the draft recommendations, but proposed that Common ward be renamed Castle.

25 Arkesden Parish Council opposed the proposed Littlebury ward, for reasons of community identity. Hatfield Broad Oak and Little Hallingbury parish councils both opposed the proposed Hatfield Forest ward, suggesting that it would not reflect community ties in the area. Great Canfield, Little Canfield and Takeley parish councils opposed the proposed Takeley ward, each stating that such a proposal would combine settlements of significantly different profiles. Great Canfield and Little Canfield parish councils further proposed an alternative ward name in the event of the draft recommendation being endorsed as final.

5 ANALYSIS AND FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS

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

27 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.

28 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.

29 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 also be had to five-year forecasts of change in electorates.

Electorate Forecasts

30 At Stage One the District Council submitted electorate forecasts for the year 2004, projecting an increase in the electorate of some 6 per cent from 53,674 to 57,161 over the five-year period from 1999 to 2004. It expects most of the growth to be in Great Dunmow (North) ward, although a significant amount is also expected in the wards of Birchanger and Stansted Mountfitchet. The Council estimated rates and locations of housing development with regard to structure and local plans, and the expected rate of building over the five-year period and assumed occupancy rates. 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.

31 At Stage Three Little Canfield and Takeley Parish Councils expressed concern that the District Council’s forecast electorate for Takeley parish had not taken into account all of the

proposed housing developments planned for the area. In the light of these comments we sought further clarification from the District Council regarding its electoral forecasts for the area. The District Council reiterated its original forecast electorate for Takeley, continuing to consider them to reflect accurately the proposed growth in the area. In the light of these comments we are content that the District Council's electoral forecasts represent the best estimates that can reasonably be made at this time.

Council Size

32 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 look carefully at arguments why this might not be the case.

33 The District Council proposed a council of 44 members. In support of its proposal the Council acknowledged that the "precise consequences of the new political management arrangements are unpredictable", but suggested that "the workload of members, whether fulfilling an executive or non-executive role, will intensify not least because of the potentially greater emphasis on the constituency role and the key task of ensuring Best Value." It also argued that because the district is primarily rural in nature it should be "considered appropriate to continue with a relatively low elector/member ratio" and that "in a sparsely populated area there is inevitably a demanding constituency workload" for those members who represent a number of parishes.

34 Both Saffron Walden Constituency Liberal Democrats and Stansted & District Liberal Democrats proposed a 38-member council, four fewer than at present. Both groups asserted that a scheme based on this council size would best reflect community identities in Uttlesford. Saffron Walden Constituency Liberal Democrats also suggested that "with the imminent implementation of revised political structures, and the setting up of a political executive, non-executive members will have less involvement in the day-to-day business of the Council and more time to work on ward issues."

35 At Stage Two we carefully considered the proposals for both a 44- and 38-member council size. We noted that the District Council's proposal for a 44-member council had received cross-party support from members. However, we also noted that the District Council had, in fact, consulted on a 42-member scheme but that feedback during this consultation would seem to indicate that a 42-member scheme would not provide for a convenient distribution of members between Saffron Walden, Great Dunmow and Stansted Mountfitchet, and that achieving electoral equality would be at the expense of convenient and effective local government and community identities across the district.

36 We also considered the proposal for a 38-member scheme and noted that the supporting argumentation regarding the future role of the councillor in Uttlesford was dramatically different from that of the District Council. We were also concerned that the Liberal Democrats' proposed scheme based on a council size of 38 was not, to the best of our knowledge, made available for

public inspection, and neither did it receive cross-party support from members on the District Council.

37 In the light of some level of cross-party support and the local consultation exercise undertaken we recommended that the District Council's proposal to increase the number of members from 42 to 44 be adopted as part of our draft recommendations.

38 During Stage Three the Liberal Democrat Group made a number of comments regarding the proposed council size of 44. In commenting on our argumentation for a council size of 44, it stated that the Commission did "not attempt to analyse the arguments but come out in support of 44 members rather than 38. Surely you should address whether the change in political management should result in more or less members." The Group also argued "that both the 38-member scheme and the 44-member scheme came out of a realisation that 42 would not work, therefore to accept one, and reject the other, on the basis of the extent of consultation is totally illogical." We received no further comments at Stage Three regarding council size.

39 It is important to note that in practice there is no implicit or explicit assumption in the Government's proposals that a greater or smaller number of councillors would be required in order to implement the new political management structures and in fact, views throughout local government itself vary greatly. Additionally, it is not the Commission's task to pass judgement on whether a proposed structure requires a given number of councillors; rather, we will seek to ensure that adequate consideration is given to the structure locally, and that any consequential proposal for a change in council size has been based on sound reflection of the implications for both the council and electors. At Stage Two we analysed the District Council's scheme and considered it to have given these issues adequate weight, particularly in the light of the local consultation exercise undertaken. Additionally, it is important to note, as outlined above and in the draft recommendations report, that the Commission endorsed a proposal for a 44-member council size on the basis that such a proposal received some level of cross-party support on the District Council and that the scheme which it facilitated was the result of comments received from the local consultation exercise. The Liberal Democrats' scheme fulfilled neither of these criteria.

40 We do not consider that the representation from the Liberal Democrats provides sufficient argumentation or evidence on the appropriateness of a council size of 38 members under any new managerial structure which the council may decide to adopt in the future, nor that there is any wider local preference for such a council size. We therefore remain of the view that a council size of 44 members would facilitate an electoral scheme which would provide the best balance presently available between electoral equality and the statutory criteria.

Electoral Arrangements

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

42 We noted the consensus behind a number of the District Council's proposals, the consultation exercise which it undertook with interested parties and the significant improvements in electoral equality achieved. Although we were aware that the District Council consulted locally on a 42-member scheme, and not on the 44-member scheme submitted, the official submission largely reflected the scheme which was consulted on and comments received during that consultation. The Liberal Democrats' scheme, although providing moderately better electoral equality, would not, in our opinion, better reflect community identities in Uttlesford; in particular the groups of parishes known as The Canfields and The Rodings would be split between wards. We were also concerned, as stated above, that this scheme did not command a substantial amount of local support neither was it consulted on locally. In view of this and the arguments outlined above regarding council size we considered that the District Council's scheme would provide a better balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria than the current arrangements or other schemes submitted at Stage One, and we therefore based our draft recommendations on the District Council's 44-member scheme.

43 Additionally, in view of our proposal to recommend that Uttlesford be represented by 44 members, we were unable to make detailed comparisons with the boundaries proposed under the Liberal Democrat Groups' 38-member schemes, as ward sizes and configurations varied substantially. The Commission, in undertaking these reviews, is obliged first to decide on an appropriate council size for the district, which facilitates electoral equality and the statutory criteria. Having thus proposed a specific council size the Commission must then make proposals on particular warding arrangements. While we have obviously considered the ward boundaries proposed by all respondents, including the Liberal Democrats, the fact that these are identified in the context of a different council size, and thus a different councillor:elector ratio, results in differing levels of electoral variance to that envisaged by the respondents. Thus the Liberal Democrats' proposed wards do not provide electoral equality under a 44-member council size. It is important to note that under a council size of 44 the number of electors per councillor would be 1,220 while under a council size of 38, the number of electors per councillor would be 1,412, a difference of nearly 200 electors per ward. Such a difference in ward size in a parished area such as Uttlesford could necessitate district wards containing a completely different configuration of parishes. However, we attempted to draw on the local knowledge that the alternative schemes provided and made comparisons where appropriate.

44 However, having taken all these factors into account, we came to the opinion that the scheme submitted by the District Council represented the best arrangement currently available in the District, giving electoral equality while reflecting local community identity and facilitating convenient and effective local government. We therefore adopted the District Council's scheme as our draft recommendations without modification.

45 At Stage Three the District Council expressed its full support for the boundaries included in our draft recommendations. However, we received a number of comments regarding our draft recommendations, particularly from parish councils, and have reconsidered the proposals in the light of views expressed. For district warding purposes, the following areas, based on existing wards, are considered in turn:

- (a) Saffron Walden wards (Audley, Castle, Plantation and Shire);
- (b) Littlebury, The Chesterfords and Wenden Lofts wards;
- (c) Ashdon, The Sampfords and Wimbish & Debden wards;
- (d) Clavering, Newport and Stort Valley wards;
- (e) Elsenham, Henham, Rickling and Takeley wards;
- (f) Stebbing, Thaxted and The Eastons wards;
- (g) Birchanger, Great Hallingbury, Little Hallingbury and Stansted Mountfitchet wards;
- (h) Felsted, Great Dunmow (North) and Great Dunmow (South) wards;
- (i) Hatfield Broad Oak, Hatfield Heath, The Canfields and The Rodings wards.

46 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.

Saffron Walden – Audley, Castle, Plantation and Shire wards

47 The town of Saffron Walden is situated in the north of the district and covers the parish of the same name. At present Saffron Walden is represented by four two-member wards: Audley, Castle, Plantation and Shire. The number of electors per councillor is 3 per cent above the district average in Audley ward (5 per cent by 2004), 18 per cent above the average in Castle ward (16 per cent by 2004), 27 per cent above the average in Plantation ward (19 per cent by 2004) and 1 per cent above the average in Shire ward (1 per cent below by 2004).

48 The District Council proposed that the urban centre of Saffron Walden be divided between three wards, rather than four as at present. A new three-member Saffron Walden Audley ward would include the whole of the existing Saffron Walden (Audley) ward, that part of Saffron Walden (Castle) ward south of Castle Street and west of Castle Hill and that part of Saffron Walden (Plantation) ward west of Landscape View, Debden Road and Roos Hill. It also proposed a new three-member Saffron Walden Common ward comprising the remainder of Saffron Walden (Castle) ward and that part of Saffron Walden (Shire) ward north of East Street and Radwinter Road. A new three-member Saffron Walden Shire ward was proposed to include the eastern part of the existing Saffron Walden (Plantation) ward and the southern part of the existing Saffron Walden (Shire) ward. Swards End, a village on the outskirts of Saffron Walden town, part of the existing Shire ward and Saffron Walden parish, would be included in a revised Ashdon ward (see below). Under these proposals no ward would vary by more than 1 per cent from the district average by 2004.

49 The Liberal Democrats proposed that Saffron Walden town be represented by four two-member wards and that Swards End form part of a modified Wimbish & Debden ward. However, as previously discussed, the Liberal Democrats' scheme in this area did not provide satisfactory levels of electoral equality, as they were based on a 38-member council size.

50 We considered carefully all the representations received at Stage One. As stated earlier, we based our draft recommendations on the District Council's scheme and noted that in this area it provided excellent levels of electoral equality by 2004 and clearly identifiable boundaries. We were informed that the proposal to include Swards End in a revised Ashdon ward, to improve electoral equality, was opposed locally. However, we were unable to find an alternative arrangement for the area that would strike an equally good balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria. Additionally, it was interesting to note that the Liberal Democrats also proposed that Swards End be separated from Saffron Walden town for district warding purposes. We therefore adopted the District Council's scheme in this area without modification. The electoral variances under our draft recommendations were the same as those under the District Council's scheme.

51 At Stage Three Saffron Walden Town Council supported the proposed ward boundaries for Saffron Walden, but suggested that Saffron Walden Common ward be renamed Saffron Walden Castle, to better reflect local community and historical ties. Hadstock Parish Council supported our proposal to include Swards End, part of Saffron Walden parish, in a modified Ashdon ward. No other specific comments relating to our proposals in this area were received.

52 Having carefully considered the representations received, we have decided to endorse our draft recommendations for Saffron Walden Audley and Saffron Walden Shire wards without modification. However, in the light of comments received from Saffron Walden Town Council, we recommend that Saffron Walden Common ward be renamed Saffron Walden Castle. We agree with the Town Council that such a proposal would better reflect historical ties in the town, although we have noted that the Castle would no longer be situated in the said ward. Under our final recommendations, illustrated on the large map at the back of the report, the number of electors per councillor would be the same as under the draft recommendations. These proposals would have a consequential effect on the parish warding of Saffron Walden parish, the details of which are outlined later in the chapter.

Littlebury, The Chesterfords and Wenden Lofts wards

53 These three wards are situated in the north-west of the district and are each represented by one member. Littlebury ward comprises the parishes of Littlebury, Strethall and Wendens Ambo and is 10 per cent over-represented (14 per cent by 2004), The Chesterfords ward comprises the parishes of Great Chesterford and Little Chesterford and is 4 per cent under-represented (2 per cent over-represented by 2004), while Wenden Lofts ward comprises the parishes of Chrishall, Elmdon, Langley and Wenden Lofts and is 5 per cent over-represented (8 per cent by 2004).

54 The District Council proposed no change to the level of representation or boundaries of the existing The Chesterfords and Wenden Lofts wards. However, it proposed that the existing single-member Littlebury ward be extended south-westwards to include Arkesden parish (part of the existing Clavering ward, see below). Under these proposals the number of electors per councillor would be equal to the average in Littlebury and Wenden Lofts wards (3 per cent and 4 per cent below the district average respectively by 2004) and 9 per cent above the average in The Chesterfords ward (3 per cent by 2004).

55 The Liberal Democrats proposed a different configuration of wards to cover the area currently represented by these wards. However, as previously discussed, we were unable to consider the Liberal Democrats' proposed boundaries in detail, owing to the difference in ward patterns and councillor:elector ratios under schemes based on 44- and 38-member councils and thus the poor electoral equality achieved under the Group's proposals. A resident of Saffron Walden expressed opposition to the District Council's initial proposal to include a small number of electors from Saffron Walden town in a revised Littlebury ward. However, this proposal did not form part of the District Council's final Stage One submission.

56 We carefully considered the Stage One representations and given our proposal for a council size of 44, adopted the District Council's proposed Littlebury, The Chesterfords and Wenden Lofts wards without modification. We considered this arrangement to accurately reflect local communities, whilst providing improved electoral equality.

57 At Stage Three, Arkesden Parish Council opposed the proposed Littlebury ward, arguing that the parishes of Arkesden and Littlebury have no community ties and pointed out that they are "physically separated by a hill". As an alternative, it proposed that the parish be included in a ward with Clavering parish, as the ties between the two parishes "are long-term and deep-rooted". We received no further comments regarding our recommendations in this area.

58 We have noted Arkesden Parish Council's comments and have reconsidered our proposals for the area in an attempt to address the concerns expressed. However, it is important to note that including Arkesden parish in a modified Clavering ward would result in Littlebury ward being over-represented by 25 per cent and Clavering ward being under-represented by 13 per cent. We have not been persuaded by the evidence received at Stage Three, regarding community identities in the area, that such electoral inequalities are justified. Additionally, we have been unable to find an alternative arrangement, and note that no scheme has been submitted by local interest groups that would provide an equally satisfactory balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria. Consequently, and in the light of no other opposition to the proposals, we propose that our draft recommendations for Littlebury, The Chesterfords and Wenden Lofts wards be confirmed as final. Under our final recommendations, as illustrated on Map 2, the electoral variances would be the same as those under the draft recommendations.

Ashdon, The Sampfords and Wimbish & Debden wards

59 These three wards are situated in the north-east of the district and are each represented by one member. Ashdon ward comprises Ashdon and Hadstock parishes, The Sampfords ward comprises the parishes of Great Sampford, Hempstead, Little Sampford and Radwinter while Wimbish & Debden ward comprises the parishes of Debden and Wimbish. The number of electors per councillor is 29 per cent below the district average in Ashdon ward (33 per cent by 2004), 8 per cent above the average in The Sampfords ward (4 per cent by 2004) and 1 per cent below the average in Wimbish & Debden ward (7 per cent by 2004).

60 In this area the District Council proposed no change to the representation or boundaries of the existing The Sampfords and Wimbish & Debden wards. However, it proposed that the existing

single-member Ashdon ward be extended westwards to include Swards End, a small village situated to the east of Saffron Walden town and part of Saffron Walden parish. In its submission the Council argued that adding Swards End to the existing Ashdon ward, rather than the alternatives of neighbouring Great Chesterford and Radwinter parishes, would strike the best balance between electoral equality and the reflection of community identities. Under its proposals the number of electors per councillor would be 3 per cent above the district average in Ashdon ward (2 per cent below by 2004), 13 per cent above the average in The Sampfords ward (9 per cent by 2004) and 4 per cent above the average in Wimbish & Debden ward (2 per cent below by 2004).

61 The Liberal Democrats proposed a different configuration of wards in this area. They proposed that Swards End (part of Saffron Walden parish) be included in a revised Wimbish & Debden ward, that Hadstock parish be included in a ward with The Chesterfords and that Radwinter and Hempstead parishes be included in a revised Ashdon ward with Ashdon parish. However, as previously discussed, the Liberal Democrats' scheme in this area did not provide satisfactory levels of electoral equality, owing to it being based on a 38- member council size.

62 We carefully considered all the representations received at Stage One and endorsed the District Council's proposals for The Sampfords and Wimbish & Debden wards, which would provide good levels of electoral equality, reflect community ties and command some local support, as part of our draft recommendations. We noted that if Ashdon ward were to remain unchanged it would be 33 per cent over-represented by 2004 and, in our view, it was therefore inevitable that the ward be modified. We were unable to find an alternative arrangement for this area which we considered would strike an equally good balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria. In particular we noted two issues: first, that the alternatives for improving electoral equality in Ashdon ward were restricted because of its geographical situation, and second, that Swards End is a community separated from Saffron Walden by some distance (it currently forms a separate polling district) and therefore appears to be the most suitable settlement to include in an alternative ward. We therefore adopted the District Council's proposed Ashdon ward, without modification.

63 At Stage Three Hadstock Parish Council and Saffron Walden Town Council supported our proposal to include Swards End (part of Saffron Walden parish) in a modified Ashdon ward. We received no further comments regarding our proposals in this area. In the light of this support and the absence of an alternative arrangement that would provide an equally good balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria, we propose endorsing our draft recommendations for the wards of Ashdon, The Sampfords and Wimbish & Debden as final. Under our final recommendations, outlined on Map 2 and the large map at the back of the report, the electoral variances would be the same as under the draft recommendations.

Clavering, Newport and Stort Valley wards

64 The single-member wards of Clavering, Newport and Stort Valley are situated in the west of the district. Clavering ward comprises the parishes of Arkesden, Clavering and Wicken Bonhunt.

Newport ward is coterminous with Newport parish and Stort Valley ward comprises the parishes of Berden, Farnham and Manuden. At present, the member for Clavering ward represents 13 per cent more electors than the district average (8 per cent by 2004), the member for Newport ward represents 33 per cent more electors than the district average (26 per cent by 2004) and the member for Stort Valley ward represents 9 per cent fewer electors than the average (11 per cent by 2004).

65 The District Council proposed that Clavering ward retain its existing level of representation but be modified to exclude Arkesden parish (to be included in a revised Littlebury ward, as detailed above). Newport ward would be extended to include Quendon & Rickling and Widdington parishes (the existing Rickling ward) and be represented by two members, rather than one as at present. The existing Stort Valley ward would remain unchanged under the District Council's scheme. Under these proposals the number of electors per councillor would be 4 per cent below the district average in Clavering ward (9 per cent by 2004), 4 per cent above the average in Newport ward (1 per cent below by 2004) and 5 per cent below the average in Stort Valley ward (7 per cent by 2004).

66 The Liberal Democrats proposed that Ugley parish be included in a revised Stort Valley ward; that Clavering ward should be modified to include Arkesden, Clavering and Langley parishes; and that Newport ward be modified to include the whole of the existing Newport and Rickling wards (see below) and parts of Clavering and Littlebury wards and be represented by two councillors. However, as previously discussed, we were unable to consider the Liberal Democrats' proposed boundaries in detail, owing to the difference in ward patterns under schemes based on 44- and 38-member councils. The Stansted & District Liberal Democrats' proposals for this area mirrored those of the Saffron Walden Constituency Liberal Democrats.

67 Having carefully considered the Stage One representations we adopted the District Council's proposed Clavering, Newport and Stort Valley wards without modification. We considered the arrangement to reflect accurately local communities, whilst providing good levels of electoral equality under a council size of 44.

68 At Stage Three, Arkesden Parish Council proposed that it form part of a modified Clavering ward. As outlined above, to endorse this proposal would result in significant electoral inequalities. In the light of some support expressed for our draft recommendations from the District Council, and in the absence of other opposition, we propose that our draft recommendations be endorsed as final, without modification. We consider that they strike the best balance presently available between electoral equality and the statutory criteria. Under our final recommendations, outlined on Map 2, the electoral variances would be the same as under the draft recommendations.

Elsenham, Henham, Rickling and Takeley wards

69 The single-member wards of Elsenham, Henham and Rickling and the two-member ward of Takeley are situated in the centre of the district. Elsenham ward is coterminous with the parish of the same name; Henham ward comprises the parishes of Henham and Ugley; while Rickling ward

comprises the parishes of Quendon, Rickling and Widdington. Takeley ward comprises the parishes of Broxted, Chickney and Takeley. The number of electors per councillor is 42 per cent above the district average in Elsenham ward (35 per cent by 2004), 1 per cent below the average in Henham ward (6 per cent by 2004), 33 per cent below the average in Rickling ward (37 per cent by 2004) and 8 per cent below the average in Takeley ward (11 per cent by 2004).

70 The District Council proposed that this area be wholly reconfigured. It proposed a revised two-member Elsenham ward, to include Chickney, Elsenham and Henham parishes and a revised Takeley ward to include the parishes of Great Canfield, Little Canfield and Takeley. Henham and Rickling wards would cease to exist under these arrangements with their constituent parts being included in Stansted North (see below), Elsenham and Newport wards (see above). Under these proposals the number of electors per councillor would be 13 per cent above the district average in Elsenham ward (8 per cent by 2004) and 1 per cent above the average in Takeley ward (3 per cent below by 2004).

71 The Liberal Democrats proposed a revised Takeley ward, including the parishes of Hatfield Broad Oak, Little Canfield and Takeley and a new Elsenham & Henham ward including Chickney, Elsenham and Henham parishes. Rickling ward would be included in a revised Newport ward while Ugley parish would be included in a revised Stort Valley ward. However, as previously discussed, the Liberal Democrats' scheme in this area did not provide satisfactory levels of electoral equality, given that they were based on a 38- member council size.

72 We carefully considered the Stage One representations. In our view the District Council's proposals for this area provided the best balance available between electoral equality and the statutory criteria and we therefore adopted its proposed Takeley and Elsenham wards without modification. The Commission was aware that a number of parishes in this area did not wholly support the District Council's proposals, and therefore considered a number of alternative arrangements, however, we were unable to identify another configuration which would give similar levels of electoral equality.

73 At Stage Three, Broxted Parish Council expressed support for the draft recommendations. Takeley Parish Council stated that it was "not in favour of the proposed changes". Great Canfield Parish Council stated that the parish "has absolutely nothing in common with Takeley, and that the combination is a total mismatch". Little Canfield Parish Council stated that "we do not wish to be linked to Takeley, as it is an urban area whose interests and problems are so much different from our own." Great Canfield and Little Canfield parish councils further proposed that, if the draft recommendations for this area were to stand, Takeley ward be renamed Takeley & the Canfields.

74 We have considered the draft recommendations in this area in the light of comments received at Stage Three. We have identified a number of alternatives, in particular that the Canfield parishes be included in a two-member ward with The Rodings parishes, which would result in an electoral variance of 24 per cent, or that they be included in a ward with Little Easton parish and part of Great Easton parish. We do not consider these alternatives provide an equally good balance

between electoral equality and the statutory criteria. It is also important to note that no alternative arrangement, based on a council size of 44, has been submitted by any local interest groups for this area. We are therefore endorsing the proposed Elsenham and Takeley wards as part of our final recommendations. However, we do propose, as suggested by both Great Canfield and Little Canfield parish councils, that Takeley ward be renamed Takeley & the Canfields, to better reflect the constituent parts of the proposed ward. Under the final recommendations, illustrated on Map 2, the electoral variances would be the same as those under the draft recommendations.

Stebbing, Thaxted and The Eastons wards

75 These three wards are situated in the east of the district. The single-member Stebbing ward is 3 per cent over-represented (7 per cent by 2004) and comprises the parishes of Lindsell and Stebbing. The two-member Thaxted ward is 9 per cent over-represented (12 per cent by 2004) and comprises the parishes of Little Bardfield and Thaxted. The single-member The Eastons ward is 13 per cent over-represented (17 per cent by 2004) and comprises the parishes of Great Easton, Little Easton and Tilty.

76 At Stage One the District Council proposed that the existing Stebbing ward be retained unchanged and that Thaxted ward, while retaining its existing level of representation, be extended southwards to include Duton Hill village (part of Great Easton parish). The District Council stated that it had considered a number of alternatives in this area, to avoid dividing Great Easton parish between wards; however, it had been unable to find an alternative proposal that would provide equally good levels of electoral equality. The remainder of Great Easton parish would be included in a revised The Eastons ward with the parishes of Broxted (part of the existing Takeley ward), Little Easton and Tilty (part of the existing The Eastons ward). This proposal would require that Great Easton parish be warded.

77 The Liberal Democrats proposed that Little Bardfield parish (part of the existing Thaxted ward) be included in a revised Stebbing ward, that The Sampfords parishes be included in a modified Thaxted ward and that Broxted parish (part of the existing Takeley ward) be added to the existing The Eastons ward. However, as previously discussed, we were unable to consider the Liberal Democrats' proposed boundaries in detail, owing to the difference in ward patterns under schemes based on 44- and 38-member councils.

78 Having carefully considered the Stage One representations we endorsed the District Council's proposed Thaxted and Stebbing wards as they would provide good levels of electoral equality and in our view, meet the statutory criteria. As outlined in the draft recommendations report the Commission does not undertake the dividing of parishes between district wards lightly and therefore attempted to find electoral arrangements for this area that would avoid dividing Great Easton parish between wards. However, we noted that, due to the nature of the district and particularly, the geographic situation of the main towns, it is not possible to use whole parishes as building blocks in this area and provide satisfactory electoral equality under a council size of 44. Failure to ward a parish in this area would result in Thaxted ward having an electoral variance of around 20 per cent. We therefore adopted the District Council's scheme in this area without

modification. Under the District Council's scheme the number of electors per councillor would be 2 per cent above the district average in Stebbing ward (3 per cent below by 2004) and 7 per cent above the average in Thaxted ward (3 per cent by 2004).

79 At Stage Three Broxton Parish Council expressed support for our draft recommendations. No other comments regarding our proposals in this area were received. In the light of this support, and the absence of an alternative arrangement which would provide a better balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria, we propose that our draft recommendations be endorsed as final, without modification. Under our final recommendations, illustrated on Map 2, the electoral variances would be the same as under the draft recommendations. These proposals would have a consequential effect on the parish warding of Great Easton parish, which would have to be warded for the first time, the details of which are outlined below and on Map A2.

Birchanger, Great Hallingbury, Little Hallingbury and Stansted Mountfitchet wards

80 These four wards are situated in the south-west of the district and each is coterminous with the parish of the same name. The number of electors per councillor in Birchanger ward is 38 per cent below the district average (10 per cent by 2004), 59 per cent below the average in Great Hallingbury (60 per cent by 2004), 26 per cent below the average in Little Hallingbury ward (28 per cent by 2004) and 15 per cent above the average in Stansted Mountfitchet ward (21 per cent by 2004).

81 The District Council proposed no change to the existing Birchanger ward. It proposed that Great Hallingbury and Little Hallingbury wards (and parishes) be included in a new Hatfield Forest ward (detailed below). It also proposed a total re-configuration of wards in the Stansted area. It proposed a new two-member Stansted North ward to include that part of the existing Stansted Mountfitchet ward north of the Stansted Mountfitchet to Elsenham railway line and Chapel Hill, and Ugley parish. The remainder of the existing Stansted Mountfitchet ward would form a new two-member Stansted South ward. Under these proposals the number of electors per councillor would be 35 per cent below the average in Birchanger ward (5 per cent by 2004), 8 per cent above the average in Stansted North ward (3 per cent by 2004) and 13 per cent below the average in Stansted South ward (equal to the average by 2004).

82 The Liberal Democrats proposed that Stansted Mountfitchet parish be divided among two district wards: Stansted North and Stansted South & Birchanger. They also proposed that Great Hallingbury and Little Hallingbury wards form part of a new two-member The Hallingburys ward with Hatfield Heath ward. Stansted & District Liberal Democrats' proposals in this area mirrored those of the Saffron Walden Constituency Liberal Democrats. However, as previously discussed, we were unable to consider the Liberal Democrats' proposed boundaries in detail, owing to the difference in ward patterns under schemes based on 44- and 38-member councils.

83 We carefully considered the Stage One representations and, given our proposal for a council size of 44, we adopted the District Council's recommendations for Birchanger, Stansted North and Stansted South wards without modification. In our opinion, they would strike the best balance

presently available between electoral equality and the statutory criteria. It is important to note that although the proposed Birchanger ward would be over-represented by 35 per cent initially, the number of electors per councillor by 2004 would only be 5 per cent below the district average. Under these proposals Stansted Mountfitchet parish would be warded. We were aware that this particular arrangement was not supported by all the local interest groups, and therefore sought further evidence on this issue at Stage Three.

84 At Stage Three, Birchanger Parish Council expressed support for our recommendations in this area. The Liberal Democrats made a number of comments regarding our proposals in this area, particularly in respect to an error in the draft recommendations report in describing their proposals for Stansted. However, in the light of the support expressed for the proposals and our adoption of a 44-member council size, we recommend that the draft recommendations be endorsed as final, without modification. We consider that they strike the best balance presently available between electoral equality and the statutory criteria and are not minded to reconsider the Liberal Democrats proposals, since they are based on a different council size and thus would not provide electoral equality. Under our final recommendations, outlined on Map 2 and on the large map at the back of the report, the electoral variances would be the same as under the draft recommendations. These proposals would have a consequential effect on the parish warding of Stansted Mountfitchet parish, the details of which are outlined below.

Felsted, Great Dunmow (North) and Great Dunmow (South) wards

85 These two-member wards are situated in the south-east of the district. Felsted ward comprises the parishes of Felsted and Little Dunmow and is 7 per cent over-represented (7 per cent under-represented by 2004). Great Dunmow (North) ward covers part of Great Dunmow parish and is 2 per cent over-represented (19 per cent under-represented by 2004). The remainder of Great Dunmow parish forms part of Great Dunmow South ward with Barnston parish. Great Dunmow South ward is 32 per cent under-represented (unchanged by 2004).

86 The District Council proposed that Felsted ward retain its existing level of representation and boundaries, on the basis that such a proposal would best reflect local community identities, particularly as Felsted parish is situated on the far eastern border of the district, having boundaries with only the parishes of Little Dunmow and Stebbing in Uttlesford district. However, it proposed a reconfiguration of the wards covering Great Dunmow town. Revised Great Dunmow North and Great Dunmow South wards would cover the whole of Great Dunmow parish, with the boundary between the two wards broadly following Stortford Road, Rosemary Lane and Rosemary Downs to The Causeway, continuing on to the town boundary. Barnston parish would form part of a new Barnston & High Easter ward (see below). Under its proposals, the number of electors per councillor would be 3 per cent below the district average in Felsted ward (13 per cent above by 2004), 29 per cent below the average in Great Dunmow North ward (7 per cent by 2004) and 6 per cent below the average in Great Dunmow South ward (unchanged by 2004).

87 The Liberal Democrats proposed a very similar configuration of wards to the District Council in this area. They proposed an almost identical Barnston & High Easter ward (additionally to include Margaret Roding parish) and two district wards to cover Great Dunmow parish.

88 Saffron Walden Constituency Conservative Association opposed the District Council's proposal to include Barnston parish in a ward with "the Easters". As an alternative arrangement it proposed that the area be divided into new Dunmow North, Dunmow Central and Dunmow South & Barnston wards. It stated that such an arrangement would better reflect community identities in the town, but did not propose detailed boundaries.

89 We carefully considered the Stage One representations received. We noted the Conservative Association's proposals for an alternative arrangement in this area and that the scheme would provide good levels of electoral equality locally. However, consideration was not given to the knock-on effects of these particular proposals; excluding Barnston parish from the proposed Barnston & High Easter ward would result in an electoral variance of 55 per cent. The Commission was unwilling to endorse such electoral inequality and were unable to find an alternative arrangement which would not be detrimental to neighbouring established communities, including Great Dunmow and the group of parishes known as The Rodings. We therefore adopted the District Council's proposed Barnston & High Easter ward as part of our draft recommendations. We also recommended that the District Council's proposed wards for Great Dunmow town be adopted without modification as they would provide good levels of electoral equality under a council size of 44 and would be based on identifiable boundaries. These proposals would have consequential implications for the warding of Great Dunmow parish.

90 We noted the electoral variance of 13 per cent by 2004 in the District Council's proposed Felsted ward. However, we were unable to identify an alternative arrangement in the area that would provide an equally good balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria (as outlined above). To improve this electoral variance would require the creation of a three-member rural ward (opposed locally) or be at the expense of community identities, particularly in Little Dunmow parish. We were not satisfied that the alternatives would provide improved electoral arrangements or facilitate convenient and effective local government.

91 At Stage Three Great Dunmow Town Council "resolved to support the recommendations in so far as they relate to the Parish of Great Dunmow". We received no further comments regarding our proposals for this area. In the light of the support expressed and the absence of alternative arrangements which would provide a better balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria, we are confirming our draft recommendations as final. Under the final recommendations, outlined on Map 2 later in the chapter and the large map at the back of the report, the electoral variances would be the same as under the draft recommendations. These proposals would have a consequential effect on the parish warding of Great Dunmow parish, the details of which are outlined below.

Hatfield Broad Oak, Hatfield Heath, The Canfields and The Rodings wards

92 These four single-member wards are situated in the far south of the district. The boundaries of Hatfield Broad Oak and Hatfield Heath wards are coterminous with the parishes of the same name, with the number of electors per councillor being 26 per cent below and 3 per cent above the district average respectively (30 per cent below and equal to the average by 2004). The

Canfields ward comprises the parishes of Great Canfield, High Easter, High Roothing and Little Canfield and is 15 per cent under-represented (9 per cent by 2004). The Roding ward comprises the parishes of Aythorpe Roding, Leaden Roding, Margaret Roding and White Roothing and is 19 per cent over-represented (24 per cent by 2004).

93 The District Council proposed that the parishes of Great Hallingbury, Hatfield Broad Oak and Little Hallingbury be included in a new single-member Hatfield Forest ward. Hatfield Heath ward would remain unchanged under the District Council's proposals. The existing The Canfields ward would be divided between a number of revised wards. High Roding would form part of a revised The Rodings ward, High Easter parish would form part of a new single-member Barnston & High Easter ward and Great Canfield and Little Canfield parishes would form part of a revised Takeley ward (see above). The Canfields ward would cease to exist under these arrangements. Under these proposals the number of electors per councillor would be 7 per cent above the district average in Hatfield Forest ward (2 per cent by 2004), 8 per cent above the average in Hatfield Heath ward (4 per cent by 2004) and 15 per cent above the average in The Rodings ward (8 per cent by 2004).

94 The Liberal Democrats proposed that four of the five Rodings parishes and Great Canfield parish form a revised The Rodings ward, that Hatfield Heath parish be included in a ward with The Hallingburys, that Hatfield Broad Oak ward form part of revised Takeley ward (see above) and that High Easter and Margaret Roding parishes form part of a new Barnston & High Easter ward. However, as previously discussed, we were unable to consider the Liberal Democrats' proposed boundaries in detail, owing to the difference in ward patterns under schemes based on 44- and 38-member councils and thus the poor electoral equality achieved under the Group's proposals.

95 We carefully considered the Stage One representations and, given our proposal for a council size of 44, we adopted the District Council's recommendations for Hatfield Forest, Hatfield Heath and The Rodings wards without modification. We considered that this arrangement would strike the best balance available between electoral equality and the statutory criteria. We were aware that this particular arrangement was not supported by all the local interest groups and sought further evidence on this issue at Stage Three.

96 At Stage Three Hatfield Broad Oak and Little Hallingbury Parish Councils both opposed the proposed Hatfield Forest ward, each asserting that such an arrangement would not best reflect local community interests. The District Council proposed that Hatfield Forest ward be renamed Broad Oak & the Hallingburys. However, no alternative warding proposals were put forward.

97 We have noted the concerns of Hatfield Broad Oak and Little Hallingbury parish councils and have reconsidered our proposals for this area in the light of their comments. However, as outlined in the draft recommendations report, the status quo in this area is not an option: for example three single-member wards in this area, as favoured locally, would result in electoral variances of 58 per cent, 27 per cent and 10 per cent. We have not been convinced by evidence received at Stage Three that such electoral variances are justified. The alternative arrangement we identified for this area was to create two single-member wards, one including Little Hallingbury parish and part of

Great Hallingbury parish, with the remainder of Great Hallingbury parish being included in another ward with Hatfield Broad Oak parish. We do not consider this arrangement to provide a more satisfactory scheme than that included in the draft recommendations. We therefore recommend that our draft recommendation for a Hatfield Forest ward be confirmed as final. However, we propose that it be renamed Broad Oak & the Hallingburys as suggested by the District Council, to better reflect the mix of parishes included in the proposed ward. We also propose that Hatfield Heath and The Rodings wards be confirmed as final, we consider that the arrangements provide the best balance presently available between electoral equality and the statutory criteria. Under the final recommendations, illustrated on Map 2, the electoral variances would be the same as under the draft recommendations.

Electoral Cycle

98 At Stage One we received no proposals regarding the electoral cycle of the district. Accordingly, we made no recommendation for change to the present system of whole-council elections every four years.

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

Conclusions

100 We conclude that, in Uttlesford:

- there should be a increase in council size from 42 to 44;
- there should be 27 wards, four fewer than at present;
- the boundaries of 22 of the existing wards should be modified;
- the Council should continue to hold whole-council elections every four years.

101 Figure 4 shows the impact of our final recommendations on electoral equality, comparing them with the current arrangements, based on 1999 and 2004 electorate figures.

Figure 4: Comparison of Current and Recommended Electoral Arrangements

	1999 electorate		2004 forecast electorate	
	Current arrangements	Final recommendations	Current arrangements	Final recommendations
Number of councillors	42	44	42	44
Number of wards	31	27	31	27
Average number of electors per councillor	1,278	1,220	1,365	1,303
Number of wards with a variance more than 10 per cent from the average	16	6	18	1
Number of wards with a variance more than 20 per cent from the average	10	2	10	0

102 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 16 to six with no wards varying by more than 20 per cent from the district average. By 2004 only one ward is forecast to vary by more than 10 per cent from the average for the district. We conclude that our recommendations would best meet the need for electoral equality, having regard to the statutory criteria.

Final Recommendation
 Uttlesford District Council should comprise 44 councillors serving 27 wards, as detailed and named in Figures 1 and 2, and illustrated on Map 2, Appendix A and 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

103 In undertaking reviews of electoral arrangements, we are required to comply as far as is reasonably practicable 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, in our draft recommendations report we proposed consequential changes to the warding arrangements for Great Dunmow, Great Easton, Saffron Walden and Stansted Mountfitchet parishes, to reflect the proposed district wards.

104 The parish of Saffron Walden is currently served by 16 councillors representing four wards: Audley, Castle, Plantation and Shire. Under our draft recommendations, Saffron Walden parish would be divided between four district wards. We proposed that the existing town ward boundaries be modified to reflect the proposed district ward boundaries.

105 In response to our consultation report, Saffron Walden Town proposed that Saffron Walden Common parish ward be renamed Saffron Walden Castle to reflect better community identities. Having considered all the evidence received, we concur with the Town Council that the proposed parish ward of Saffron Walden Common should be renamed Saffron Walden Castle to better reflect community identities, and thus propose that it form part of our final recommendations. However, we propose that the remainder of our draft recommendations be confirmed as final, without modification.

Final Recommendation
Saffron Walden Town Council should comprise 16 councillors, as at present, representing four wards: Audley, Castle and Shire (returning five councillors each) and Swards End (returning one councillor). The town ward boundaries should reflect the proposed district ward boundaries in the area, as illustrated and named on the large map at the back of the report.

106 The parish of Great Dunmow is currently served by 15 councillors. Under our draft recommendations Great Dunmow parish would be divided between two district wards: Great Dunmow North and Great Dunmow South. We proposed that the existing parish ward boundaries be modified to reflect the proposed district ward boundaries.

107 The Town Council expressed general support for the draft recommendations. We therefore confirm our draft recommendation as final for the warding of Great Dunmow parish.

Final Recommendation
Great Dunmow Town Council should comprise 15 councillors, as at present, representing two wards: Great Dunmow North (returning six councillors) and Great Dunmow South (returning nine councillors). The boundary between the two town wards should reflect the proposed district ward boundary between Great Dunmow North and Great Dunmow South wards, as illustrated and named on the large map at the back of the report.

108 The parish of Stansted Mountfitchet is currently served by 15 councillors. Under our draft recommendations Stansted Mountfitchet parish would be divided between two district wards: Stansted North and Stansted South. We therefore proposed that the parish warding arrangements be modified. The boundary between the new parish wards would reflect the proposed district ward boundary. We received no comments regarding these particular proposals in response to our consultation report, from the District Council or the Parish Council. We therefore confirm our draft recommendations for warding Stansted Mountfitchet parish as final.

Final Recommendation

Stansted Mountfitchet Parish Council should comprise 15 councillors, as at present, representing two wards: Stansted North (returning seven councillors) and Stansted South (returning eight councillors). The boundary between the two parish wards should reflect the proposed district ward boundary, as illustrated and named on the large map at the back of the report.

109 The parish of Great Easton is currently served by seven councillors and is not warded. Under our draft recommendations Great Easton parish would be divided between two district wards: Thaxted and The Eastons. We therefore proposed that the parish be warded for the first time. The boundary between the new parish wards would reflect the proposed district ward boundary. We received no comments regarding these particular proposals in response to our consultation report from the District Council or the Parish Council. We therefore confirm our draft recommendations for warding Great Easton parish as final.

Final Recommendation

Great Easton Parish Council should comprise seven councillors, as at present, representing two wards: Duton Hill (returning three councillors) and Great Easton (returning four councillors). The boundary between the two parish wards should reflect the proposed district ward boundary, as illustrated and named on Map A2 in Appendix A.

110 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.

Final Recommendation

For parish councils, whole-council elections should continue to take place every four years, on the same cycle as that of the District Council.

Map 2: The Commission's Final Recommendations for Uttlesford

6 NEXT STEPS

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

112 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 8 January 2001.

113 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 Uttlesford: Detailed Mapping

The following maps illustrate the Commission's proposed ward boundaries for the Uttlesford 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 Map A2 and the large map at the back of the report.

Map A2 illustrates the proposed district ward boundary between the wards of Thaxted and The Eastons

The **large map** inserted in the back of the report illustrates the proposed warding arrangements for Great Dunmow, Saffron Walden and Stansted Mountfitchet.

Map A1: Final Recommendations for Uttlesford: Key Map

Map A2: Proposed District Ward Boundary Between Thaxted and The Eastons Wards