

# Draft recommendations on the future electoral arrangements for North Hertfordshire

Further electoral review

*June 2005*

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# What is The Boundary Committee for England?

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

Members of the Committee are:

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

Archie Gall (Director)

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



## Executive summary

The Boundary Committee for England is responsible for conducting electoral reviews of local authorities, as directed by The Electoral Commission. As a result of the poor levels of electoral equality in North Hertfordshire under the existing electoral arrangements, The Electoral Commission directed The Boundary Committee to review the electoral arrangements of the district on 2 June 2004. The broad objective of this electoral review is to achieve, as far as possible, equal representation across the district as a whole.

## Current electoral arrangements

Under the existing arrangements four wards currently have electoral variances of more than 10% from the district average. The development that was anticipated in the five year period that occurred between 1996 and 2001, which were the dates the Local Government Commission for England (LGCE) were using when undertaking its review, was overestimated. However, in Graveley & Wymondley ward more development was undertaken which has resulted in the ward having a particularly poor variance, with 72% more electors than the district average.

The table below outlines the four stages of the review.

<b>Stage</b>	<b>Stage starts</b>	<b>Description</b>
One	3 August 2004	Submission of proposals to us
Two	30 November 2004	Our analysis and deliberation
Three	21 June 2005	Publication of draft recommendations and consultation on them
Four	13 September 2005	Analysis of submissions received and formulation of final recommendations

## Submissions received

During Stage One we received four relevant submissions. The District Council proposed a district-wide scheme based on a council size of 50, an increase of one. Kimpton Parish Council and Royston Town Council considered that the existing warding arrangements should be retained in their areas, and Wymondley Parish Council wanted to be in a ward with areas similar to its own.

## Analysis and draft recommendations

### Electorate figures

The Council has forecast an increase in electorate of approximately 3% between 2003 and 2008, most of which is planned in the Great Ashby development in the existing Graveley & Wymondley ward. At the beginning of Stage Two the District Council amended its projected figures by approximately 40 electors as it had failed to include some planned housing in the Great Ashby development in Graveley parish and also over estimated some electors in Knebworth ward, that would in fact be in Codicote ward. Having discussed these figures with the council officers, visited the area, seen the development which is currently under construction and received details of how the

District Council calculated the figures, we are satisfied that they currently provide the most accurate estimation of the 2008 electorate of North Hertfordshire, and we have used them when making our recommendations.

## Council size

During Stage One we received one submission relating to council size, from the District Council. It proposed to increase the existing council size of 49 members by one to 50. We did not consider that the Council had argued for this increase sufficiently and, after further investigation, we did not consider that a council size of 50 would best represent the district. We therefore propose to retain a council size of 49 members.

## General analysis

We are proposing recommendations largely based on the existing arrangements, as put forward in the District Council's proposals. We have made minor amendments to the boundaries in the town areas to improve the level of electoral equality. In particular, in Letchworth town we have made a number of amendments as, under the District Council's scheme, the town was allocated 14 councillors, but under a council size of 49 the town is entitled to only 13 councillors. In the rural areas surrounding the towns we have proposed to combine some existing single-member wards, creating two- and three-member wards to improve electoral equality, where we consider that the Council's proposed wards have levels of electoral equality that could be improved.

## What happens next?

There will now be a consultation period, during which everyone is invited to comment on the draft recommendations on future electoral arrangements for North Hertfordshire contained in this report. We will take fully into account all submissions received by 12 September 2005. Any received **after** this date may not be taken into account.

We have not finalised our conclusions on the electoral arrangements for North Hertfordshire and welcome comments from interested parties. In particular, we found our decisions regarding the large three-member Hitchwood, Offa & Hoo ward to be a difficult judgement between our statutory criteria. We would particularly welcome local views, backed up by demonstrable evidence, during Stage Three. We will consider all the evidence submitted to us during the consultation period before preparing our final recommendations.

Express your views by writing directly to us:

**Review Manager**  
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**The Boundary Committee for England**  
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**Table 1: Draft recommendations: Summary**

	<b>Ward name</b>	<b>Number of Councillors</b>	<b>Constituent district areas</b>
1	Arbury	1	(Unchanged) Arbury ward (the parishes of Ashwell, Bygrave, Caldecote, Hinxworth, Newnham and Radwell)
2	Baldock East	1	Baldock East ward; part of Baldock Town ward
3	Baldock Town	3	Part of Baldock Town ward
4	Cadwell	1	(Unchanged) Cadwell ward (the parishes of Holwell and Ickleford)
5	Chesfield	2	Graveley & Wymondley ward (the parishes of Graveley and Wymondley)
6	Codicote & Kimpton	2	Codicote ward (Village parish ward of Codicote parish); Kimpton ward (Kimpton parish)
7	Ermine	1	Part of Ermine ward (the parishes of Barkway, Barley, Nuthampstead, Reed and Therfield)
8	Hitchin Bearton	3	Hitchin Bearton ward; part of Hitchin Highbury ward
9	Hitchin Highbury	3	Part of Hitchin Highbury ward; part of Hitchin Priory ward
10	Hitchin Oughton	2	(Unchanged) Hitchin Oughton ward
11	Hitchin Priory	2	Part of Hitchin Priory ward (North parish ward of St Ippolyts parish and unparished area)
12	Hitchin Walsworth	3	Hitchin Walsworth ward; part of Hitchin Highbury ward
13	Hitchwood, Offa & Hoo	3	Hitchwood ward (the parishes of Langley and St Pauls Walden and St Ippolyts South parish ward of St Ippolyts parish); Hoo ward (the parishes of Hexton, Kings Walden, Lilley and Preston and Cockernhoe parish ward of Offley parish); Offa ward (the parish of Pirton and Offley parish ward of Offley parish)
14	Knebworth	2	(Unchanged) Knebworth ward (Knebworth parish and East parish ward of Codicote parish)
15	Letchworth East	2	Part of Letchworth East ward
16	Letchworth Grange	3	Letchworth Grange ward; part of Letchworth East ward
17	Letchworth South East	3	Letchworth South East ward; part of Letchworth East ward; part of Letchworth South West ward
18	Letchworth South West	3	Part of Letchworth South West ward; part of Letchworth East ward; part of Letchworth Wilbury ward
19	Letchworth Wilbury	2	Part of Letchworth Wilbury ward; part of Letchworth East ward
20	Royston Heath	2	Part of Royston Heath ward; part of Royston Meridian ward

	<b>Ward name</b>	<b>Number of Councillors</b>	<b>Constituent district areas</b>
21	Royston Meridian	2	Part of Royston Meridian ward
22	Royston Palace	2	Royston Palace ward; part of Royston Heath ward.
23	Weston & Sandon	1	Weston & Sandon ward (the parishes of Clothall, Rushden, Sandon, Wallington and Weston); part of Ermine ward (the parish of Kelshall)

Notes:

1. The district comprises 35 parishes and the unparished towns of Hitchin and Baldock.
2. The maps accompanying this report illustrate the proposed wards outlined above.
3. We have made a number of minor boundary amendments to ensure that existing ward boundaries adhere to ground detail. These changes do not affect any electors.



**Table 2: Draft recommendations for North Hertfordshire – 2003 electorate**

Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2003)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
1 Arbury	1	2,064	2,064	8
2 Baldock East	1	2,099	2,099	9
3 Baldock Town	3	5,628	1,876	-2
4 Cadwell	1	1,823	1,823	-5
5 Chesfield	2	3,303	1,652	-14
6 Codicote & Kimpton	2	3,853	1,927	0
7 Ermine	1	1,883	1,883	-2
8 Hitchin Bearton	3	5,645	1,882	-2
9 Hitchin Highbury	3	5,438	1,813	-6
10 Hitchin Oughton	2	3,757	1,879	-2
11 Hitchin Priory	2	3,603	1,802	-6
12 Hitchin Walsworth	3	5,951	1,984	3
13 Hitchwood, Offa & Hoo	3	5,557	1,852	-3
14 Knebworth	2	4,041	2,021	5
15 Letchworth East	2	3,960	1,980	3
16 Letchworth Grange	3	5,803	1,934	1
17 Letchworth South East	3	5,816	1,939	1
18 Letchworth South West	3	6,076	2,025	6
19 Letchworth Wilbury	2	4,016	2,008	5

**Table 2 (continued): Draft recommendations for North Hertfordshire – 2008 electorate**

Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2008)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
1 Arbury	1	2,095	2,095	6
2 Baldock East	1	2,099	2,099	7
3 Baldock Town	3	5,682	1,894	-4
4 Cadwell	1	1,828	1,828	-7
5 Chesfield	2	4,505	2,253	14
6 Codicote & Kimpton	2	3,899	1,950	-1
7 Ermine	1	1,911	1,911	-3
8 Hitchin Bearton	3	5,725	1,908	-3
9 Hitchin Highbury	3	5,722	1,907	-3
10 Hitchin Oughton	2	3,757	1,879	-5
11 Hitchin Priory	2	3,778	1,889	-4
12 Hitchin Walsworth	3	5,958	1,986	1
13 Hitchwood, Offa & Hoo	3	5,594	1,865	-5
14 Knebworth	2	4,051	2,026	3
15 Letchworth East	2	3,999	2,000	1
16 Letchworth Grange	3	5,844	1,948	-1
17 Letchworth South East	3	5,819	1,940	-2
18 Letchworth South West	3	6,096	2,032	3
19 Letchworth Wilbury	2	4,016	2,008	2

**Table 2 (continued): Draft recommendations for North Hertfordshire – 2003 electorate**

<b>Ward name</b>	<b>Number of councillors</b>	<b>Electorate (2003)</b>	<b>Number of electors per councillor</b>	<b>Variance from average %</b>
20 Royston Heath	2	3,968	1,984	3
21 Royston Meridian	2	3,957	1,979	3
22 Royston Palace	2	4,032	2,016	5
23 Weston & Sandon	1	1,726	1,726	-10
<b>Totals</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>93,999</b>	<b>–</b>	<b>–</b>
<b>Averages</b>	<b>–</b>	<b>–</b>	<b>1,918</b>	<b>–</b>

**Table 2 (continued): Draft recommendations for North Hertfordshire – 2008 electorate**

<b>Ward name</b>	<b>Number of councillors</b>	<b>Electorate (2008)</b>	<b>Number of electors per councillor</b>	<b>Variance from average %</b>
20 Royston Heath	2	4,182	2,091	6
21 Royston Meridian	2	4,149	2,075	5
22 Royston Palace	2	4,102	2,051	4
23 Weston & Sandon	1	1,748	1,748	-11
<b>Totals</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>96,599</b>	<b>–</b>	<b>–</b>
<b>Averages</b>	<b>–</b>	<b>–</b>	<b>1,971</b>	<b>–</b>

Source: Electorate figures are based on information provided by North Hertfordshire 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.



# Introduction

1 This report contains our proposals for the electoral arrangements for the district of North Hertfordshire, on which we are now consulting.

2 At its meeting on 12 February 2004 The Electoral Commission agreed that the Boundary Committee should make on-going assessments of electoral variances in all local authorities where the five-year forecast period following a Periodic Electoral Review (PER) has elapsed. It was agreed that the criteria for deciding which authorities should be investigated were that either:

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

3 In those local authority areas that meet the criteria we conducted some research. The intention of the research was to establish the reasons behind the continuing imbalances and assess what action, if any, was appropriate to rectify the situation.

4 This is our first review of the electoral arrangements of North Hertfordshire. North Hertfordshire district's last review was carried out by the Local Government Commission for England (LGCE), which reported to the Secretary of State in February 1998. An Order implementing the new electoral arrangements was made on 16 October 1998 and the first elections on the new arrangements took place in May 1999.

5 In carrying out these reviews we must have regard to:

- the statutory criteria contained in section 13(5) of the Local Government Act 1992 (as amended by SI 2001 No. 3962), i.e. the need to:
  - reflect the identities and interests of local communities;
  - secure effective and convenient local government; and
  - achieve equality of representation.
- Schedule 11 to the Local Government Act 1972.

6 Details of the legislation under which the review of North Hertfordshire is being conducted are set out in a document entitled *Guidance and procedural advice for periodic electoral reviews* (Published by the Electoral Commission in July 2002). This *Guidance* sets out the approach to the review.

7 Our task is to make recommendations to The Electoral Commission on the number of councillors who should serve on a council, and the number, boundaries and names of wards. We can also propose changes to the electoral arrangements for parish and town councils in the district.

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

9 Electoral equality, in the sense of each elector in a local authority having a vote of equal weight when it comes to the election of councillors, is a fundamental democratic principle. When electoral imbalances arise across an area, or between individual wards, that principle can become eroded if the imbalances are left uncorrected. Accordingly, the objective of an electoral review is to ensure that the number of electors represented by each councillor is, as near as is possible, the same across a district. In practice, providing that each councillor represents exactly the same number of electors is unachievable given geographic and other constraints, including the make up and distribution of communities. However, our aim in any review is to recommend wards that are as close to the district average as possible in terms of the number of electors per councillor, while also taking account of evidence in relation to community identity and effective and convenient local government.

10 We are not prescriptive on council size. However, we believe that any proposals relating to council size, whether these are for an increase, a reduction, or the retention of the existing size, should be supported by strong evidence and arguments. The Electoral Commission's *Guidance* to the Committee on this subject is quite clear. It is of paramount importance that any council size proposed to us has been developed and can be argued in the context of the authority's internal political management structures, put in place following the Local Government Act 2000. It should also reflect the changing role of councillors in the new structure. As intimated in its *Guidance*, The Electoral Commission requires the decision on council size to be based on an overall view about what is right for the particular authority and not just by addressing any imbalances in small areas of the authority by simply adding or removing councillors from these areas. While we will consider ways of achieving the correct allocation of councillors between, say, a number of towns in an authority or between rural and urban areas, our starting point must always be that the recommended council size reflects the authority's political management arrangements and best provides for convenient and effective local government and that there is evidence for this.

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

12 Where multi-member wards are proposed, we believe that the number of councillors to be returned from each ward should not exceed three, other than in the most exceptional circumstances. Numbers in excess of three could result in an unacceptable dilution of accountability to the electorate and we have not, to date, prescribed any wards with more than three councillors.

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

Table 3: Stages of the review

Stage	Stage starts	Description
One	3 August 2004	Submission of proposals to us
Two	30 November 2004	Our analysis and deliberation
Three	21 June 2005	Publication of draft recommendations and consultation on them
Four	13 September 2005	Analysis of submissions received and formulation of final recommendations

14 Stage One began on 3 August 2004, when we wrote to North Hertfordshire District Council inviting proposals for future electoral arrangements. We also notified Hertfordshire Police Authority, the Local Government Association, Hertfordshire Local Councils Association, parish councils in the district, Members of Parliament with constituency interests in the district, 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 North Hertfordshire District Council to publicise the review further. The closing date for receipt of representations, the end of Stage One, was 29 November 2004.

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

16 We are currently at Stage Three. This stage, which began on 21 June 2005 and will end on 12 September 2005, involves publishing the draft proposals in this report and public consultation on them. **We take this consultation very seriously and it is therefore important that all those interested in the review should let us have their views and evidence, whether or not they agree with these draft proposals.**

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

## Equal Opportunities

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

- The general duty set out in section 71(1) of the Race Relations Act 1996 and the statutory Code of Practice on the Duty to Promote Race Equality (Commission for Racial Equality, May 2002), i.e. to have due regard to:
  - eliminate unlawful racial discrimination;
  - promote equality of opportunity; and
  - promote good relations between people of different racial groups.

## National Parks, AONBs and the Broads

19 The Boundary Committee has also had regard to:

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

## 2 Current electoral arrangements

20 The district of North Hertfordshire was created in the structural review of 1972, which brought together the former urban districts of Baldock, Hitchin, Letchworth and Royston with the surrounding rural villages, covering 37,357 hectares. Letchworth was the first garden city, planned and founded in 1903, and has since had great influence on the development of town planning of both shopping areas and housing estates.

21 If the existing arrangements remained, five wards would be expected to have an electoral variance of over 10% by 2008. Graveley & Wymondley ward would be expected to have 129% more electors than the district average by 2008. Therefore, having considered these levels of electoral inequality which are forecast to worsen over time, The Electoral Commission directed The Boundary Committee for England to undertake a review of the electoral arrangements of North Hertfordshire District Council on 2 June 2004.

22 The district contains 34 parishes, but the towns of Hitchin and Baldock are unparished. The four towns of Baldock, Hitchin, Letchworth and Royston comprise 74% of the district's total electorate.

23 The electorate of the district is 93,999 (December 2003). The Council presently has 49 members who are elected from 26 wards. Eight wards are represented by three members, seven by two members and 11 by a single member.

24 At present, each councillor represents an average of 1,918 electors, which the District Council forecasts will increase to 1,971 by the year 2008 if the present number of councillors is maintained. However, overestimations in electorate growth during the last electoral review and uneven growth across the district has resulted in the number of electors per councillor in four of the 26 wards varying by more than 10% from the district average. The worst imbalance is in Graveley & Wymondley ward where the councillor represents 72% more electors than the district average.

25 To compare levels of electoral inequality between wards, we calculated the extent to which the number of electors per councillor in each ward 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'.

**Table 4: Existing electoral arrangements in North Hertfordshire – 2003 electorate**

Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2003)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
1 Arbury	1	2,064	2,064	8
2 Baldock East	1	1,794	1,794	-6
3 Baldock Town	3	5,933	1,978	3
4 Cadwell	1	1,823	1,823	-5
5 Codicote	1	2,091	2,091	9
6 Ermine	1	2,010	2,010	5
7 Graveley & Wymondley	1	3,303	3,303	72
8 Hitchin Bearton	3	5,470	1,823	-5
9 Hitchin Highbury	3	5,586	1,862	-3
10 Hitchin Oughton	2	3,757	1,879	-2
11 Hitchin Priory	2	4,061	2,031	6
12 Hitchin Walsworth	3	5,520	1,840	-4
13 Hitchwood	1	2,064	2,064	8
14 Hoo	1	1,843	1,843	-4
15 Kimpton	1	1,762	1,762	-8
16 Knebworth	2	4,041	2,021	5
17 Letchworth East	3	5,334	1,778	-7
18 Letchworth Grange	3	5,127	1,709	-11
19 Letchworth South East	3	5,287	1,762	-8
20 Letchworth South West	3	5,790	1,930	1
21 Letchworth Wilbury	2	4,133	2,067	8
22 Offa	1	1,650	1,650	-14
23 Royston Heath	2	4,038	2,019	5

**Table 4 (continued): Existing electoral arrangements in North Hertfordshire –2008 electorate**

	<b>Ward name</b>	<b>Number of councillors</b>	<b>Electorate (2008)</b>	<b>Number of electors per councillor</b>	<b>Variance from average %</b>
1	Arbury	1	2,095	2,095	6
2	Baldock East	1	1,794	1,794	-9
3	Baldock Town	3	5,987	1,996	1
4	Cadwell	1	1,828	1,828	-7
5	Codicote	1	2,127	2,127	8
6	Ermine	1	2,041	2,041	4
7	Graveley & Wymondley	1	4,505	4,505	129
8	Hitchin Bearton	3	5,550	1,850	-6
9	Hitchin Highbury	3	5,870	1,957	-1
10	Hitchin Oughton	2	3,757	1,879	-5
11	Hitchin Priory	2	4,236	2,118	7
12	Hitchin Walsworth	3	5,527	1,842	-7
13	Hitchwood	1	2,090	2,090	6
14	Hoo	1	1,845	1,845	-6
15	Kimpton	1	1,772	1,772	-10
16	Knebworth	2	4,051	2,026	3
17	Letchworth East	3	5,373	1,791	-9
18	Letchworth Grange	3	5,168	1,723	-13
19	Letchworth South East	3	5,290	1,763	-11
20	Letchworth South West	3	5,810	1,937	-2
21	Letchworth Wilbury	2	4,133	2,067	5
22	Offa	1	1,659	1,659	-16
23	Royston Heath	2	4,252	2,126	8

**Table 4 (continued): Existing electoral arrangements in North Hertfordshire – 2003 electorate**

	<b>Ward name</b>	<b>Number of councillors</b>	<b>Electorate (2003)</b>	<b>Number of electors per councillor</b>	<b>Variance from average %</b>
24	Royston Meridian	2	4,041	2,021	5
25	Royston Palace	2	3,878	1,939	1
26	Weston & Sandon	1	1,599	1,599	-17
	<b>Totals</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>93,999</b>	<b>–</b>	<b>–</b>
	<b>Averages</b>	<b>–</b>	<b>–</b>	<b>1,918</b>	<b>–</b>

**Table 4 (continued): Existing electoral arrangements in North Hertfordshire – 2008 electorate**

<b>Ward name</b>	<b>Number of councillors</b>	<b>Electorate (2008)</b>	<b>Number of electors per councillor</b>	<b>Variance from average %</b>
24 Royston Meridian	2	4,233	2,117	7
25 Royston Palace	2	3,948	1,974	0
26 Weston & Sandon	1	1,618	1,618	-18
<b>Totals</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>96,599</b>	<b>–</b>	<b>–</b>
<b>Averages</b>	<b>–</b>	<b>–</b>	<b>1,971</b>	<b>–</b>

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

Note: The 'variance from average' column shows by how far, in percentage terms, the number of electors per councillor varies from the average for the district. The minus symbol (-) denotes a lower than average number of electors. For example, in 2003, electors in Weston & Sandon ward were relatively over-represented by 17%, while electors in Graveley & Wymondley ward were significantly under-represented by 72%. Figures have been rounded to the nearest whole number.



### 3 Submissions received

26 At the start of the review members of the public and other interested parties were invited to write to us giving their views on the future electoral arrangements for North Hertfordshire District Council and its constituent parish and town councils.

27 During this initial stage of the review, officers from the Boundary Committee visited the area and met officers and members from the District Council. We are grateful to all concerned for their co-operation and assistance. We received five representations during Stage One, including a district-wide scheme from the District Council, all of which may be inspected at our offices and those of the District Council.

#### North Hertfordshire District Council

28 The District Council proposed a council of 50 members, one more than at present, serving 26 wards. The District Council proposed to retain all of the existing ward boundaries and add an additional councillor to Graveley & Wymondley ward to address the large imbalance in this ward. It also proposed to rename this ward Chesfield to reflect its history and take account of the large Great Ashby development in the ward.

29 The District Council proposed 10 single-member wards, eight two-member wards and eight three-member wards. It provided brief community identity argument for each of its proposed wards in terms of transport, community facilities, natural and artificial boundaries and history.

#### Parish and town councils

30 Representations were received from three parish councils and one town council. Royston Town Council considered that Royston wards should remain the same and 'that no further changes are required 'since the last review'. Kimpton Parish Council reported that it was pleased with the current arrangements for the parish. Wymondley Parish Council was concerned that the parish should be in a ward with areas with similar concerns and rural communities. It did not consider that it should be linked to urban areas. Ashwell Parish Council raised issues relating to the committee structure of the District Council, considering that the needs of the parish are not given 'sufficient attention' in the Baldock & District Committee. However, this is not an issue that can be considered as part of this review by the Boundary Committee and therefore has not been considered as part of this review.



## 4 Analysis and draft recommendations

31 We have not finalised our conclusions on the electoral arrangements for North Hertfordshire and welcome comments from all those interested relating to the proposed ward boundaries, number of councillors, ward names, and parish council electoral arrangements. In particular, we found our decisions regarding our large three-member Hitchwood, Offa and Hoo ward to be a difficult judgement between our statutory criteria. This was due to the lack of evidence received from local interested parties during Stage One. In such cases, we have sought to achieve the best levels of electoral equality in the absence of any evidence reflecting the other two criteria, and would particularly welcome local views, backed up by demonstrable evidence, during Stage Three. We will consider all the evidence submitted to us during the consultation period before preparing our final recommendations.

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

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

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

34 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: the achievement of absolute electoral equality is unlikely to be attainable. There must be a degree of flexibility. However, our approach, in the context of the statutory criteria, is to keep that to a minimum.

35 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 taken into account and we would aim to recommend a scheme which provides improved electoral equality over this period.

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

## Electorate figures

37 As part of the previous review of North Hertfordshire, the District Council forecast an increase in the electorate of 4% between 1996 and 2001. The actual increase was just 2%. However, between 2001 and the start of this review the electorate has increased by 4%. The District Council had expected growth in Graveley & Wymondley ward, and it was accepted that this ward would have a large electoral imbalance by 2001 (35%). However, between 2001 and 2004 extensive growth has occurred in this ward and further growth is expected. The District Council submitted electorate forecasts for the year 2008, projecting an increase in the electorate of approximately 3% from 93,999 to 96,599 over the five-year period from 2003 to 2008. It expects almost half of the growth to be in Graveley & Wymondley ward due to the expansion of the Great Ashby development. In order to prepare these forecasts, the Council estimated rates and locations of housing development with regard to local development plans, the expected rate of building over the five-year period and assumed occupancy rates.

38 The District Council amended the initial electorate figures it provided during Stage One by approximately 40 electors. It said that it had failed to include some planned housing in the Great Ashby development of Graveley & Wymondley ward and also overestimated a small number in Knebworth ward that should have been included in Codicote ward.

39 We know that forecasting electorates is difficult and, having considered the District Council's figures, accept that they are the best estimates that can reasonably be made at this time. We welcome further evidence on electorate forecasts during Stage Three.

## Council size

40 North Hertfordshire District Council presently has 49 members. The District Council proposed a council of 50 members, an increase of one. It considered that 'there should be no substantial change to the total number of members on the council' it continued by saying 'there are no areas of the decision making process that are a cause for concern due to the lack of member involvement'. It therefore considered that increasing the number of members by one would 'provide adequately for the electorate of Graveley & Wymondley'. None of the other submissions we received discussed the council size of North Hertfordshire District Council.

41 After considering the proposal received at Stage One we did not consider that we had received any evidence on which to base a decision on council size for North Hertfordshire. We did not consider we had been provided with sufficient discussion of the ways in which the proposed council size increase would better reflect the District Council's political management structures, taking into account the representational elements of councillors' work in order to secure effective and convenient local government. The only justification given for the increase in council size was for improving electoral equality in one area, Graveley & Wymondley ward. In our view, on its own, such justification is insufficient to warrant an increase in council size. We were therefore in the position of having to reach our own conclusions on the most appropriate council size for North Hertfordshire District Council. To assist us in reaching an informed decision we asked the District Council to provide us with more information regarding the council's political management structure and councillors' representational work, in order that we would be able to recommend the most appropriate council size for the district.

42 The District Council responded to this request saying that ‘the Council did not set out to ignore any advice we received from your team ...[but]... believed that the key issue to be considered was electoral equality and based our submission on that’. The District Council continued that the additional evidence submitted ‘fully supports [the] assertion that in general there should be no significant change to the size of the authority’, and considered that ‘an increase of one, whilst not significant, seems an acceptable resolution to the electoral equality issue in Graveley & Wymondley’.

43 In the further information provided, the District Council outlined the new system of governance that it had adopted in 2001. The Cabinet consists of the Leader and seven councillors who are each assigned a portfolio. The District Council went on to describe its structure in detail, referring to its scrutiny committees, standards committee, area committees and other meetings and partnerships. It detailed meetings attended, and said that excluding extra meetings the District Council and scrutiny committees hold approximately 120 meetings per year. From the District Councils Members Allowance Survey 2004, the majority of members who responded to it reported to spend between two and four hours a week attending council and committee meetings and a similar time preparing for them. It also provided details of all other groups and meetings councillors are involved in as part of their responsibilities. The Council included a copy of the Audit Commission’s Comprehensive Performance Assessment report (CPA). Whilst this does not directly discuss council size, it does consider that North Hertfordshire District Council is a ‘fair’ council.

44 Combined with this evidence, we examined distribution of councillors across the district, compared with the distribution of electorate, in order to see which council size provides the best fit between the four towns and the rural areas. From this it was possible to see that a council size of 50 produces an incorrect allocation of councillors between the towns and the rural area. This would lead to an imbalance in the number of electors represented by each councillor, and would necessitate combining rural and urban areas, which we are reluctant to do, as we do not consider that this would reflect a community of identity.

45 Under the existing and projected electorate figures, Letchworth is over-represented by one councillor, electing 14 members while being entitled to only 13, and the rural area is under-represented by one councillor, electing 12 councillors while being entitled to 13. This remains the case under the District Council’s proposals for a council size of 50. Under a council size of 50, Hitchin is entitled to 12.91 (13) councillors, Letchworth to 13.35 (13), Royston to 6.44 (6), Baldock to 4.03 (4) and the rural areas to 13.27 (13) councillors. Therefore when these figures are rounded the district is actually only entitled to 49 councillors. The District Council’s proposed council size of 50 attempts to address the under-represented rural area (Graveley & Wymondley ward). However it does not solve the over-representation in Letchworth.

46 It is the case that electoral equality is difficult to achieve where areas are not allocated the correct number of councillors. Therefore, on the basis of producing a better allocation of councillors (and hence higher levels of electoral equality) across the district, we considered that a council size of 49 provided the most appropriate council size, as it addresses both the over and under-representation in the district. Such an approach ensures that the constituent areas have the correct number of councillors that the electorate is entitled to. A council size of 49 (the existing) would allow us to achieve

the correct allocation by removing a councillor from Letchworth and reallocating one to the rural area, specifically Graveley & Wymondley ward. We therefore consider that it would be inappropriate to propose an increase in council size.

47 Therefore, having looked at the size and distribution of the electorate, the geography and other characteristics of the area, together with the responses received, we conclude that the statutory criteria would best be met by a council of 49 members.

## Electoral equality

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

49 In the absence of any strong community identity argument or evidence we have sought to improve electoral equality in North Hertfordshire. As we have not received any opposition to the existing wards or submissions that suggest that they do not provide effective and convenient local government and represent communities of identity, we have tried to base our recommendations on the existing wards. However, because of the lack of strong evidence, we have looked to improve electoral equality even in those areas where the existing arrangements provide electoral variances under 10% of the district average. Therefore, in the urban areas in particular, we have made amendments to the existing ward boundaries and in two rural areas in the west and south of the district we have adopted the approach of combining wards in order to improve electoral equality. However, we have accepted variances over 10% in Chesfield and Weston & Sandon wards because having considered the options available to us we consider that these facilitate the best combination of the statutory criteria as outlined in paragraph 5, for the whole district.

## General analysis

50 Our draft recommendations are a combination of the existing and our own proposals. The District Council did not suggest any boundary amendments in its scheme, and proposed retaining the existing arrangements with the exception of adding another councillor to Graveley & Wymondley ward, making it a two-member ward. We did not receive any substantial argument to maintain the existing ward arrangements. We have therefore, in the most part, looked to improve on electoral equality within the district. Consequently this has led to a reduction in the number of single-member wards

in North Hertfordshire. We will, however, be prepared to move away from these proposals should we receive compelling arguments and evidence in favour of single-member wards that meet our statutory criteria at Stage Three.

51 We are recommending 23 wards in the district; five single-member wards, 10 two-member wards and eight three-member wards. In the urban areas we have proposed small boundary amendments to all but one of the existing wards to achieve better levels of electoral equality, and in Letchworth town to address the additional councillor currently representing the area. Although there was a lack of substantive evidence in the submissions we received, we have taken account of the issues of community identity where possible following a visit to the area. We have not recommended wards combining urban and rural areas because we do not consider that this represents community identity or the provision of effective and convenient local government.

52 Having looked at the size and distribution of the electorate, the geography and other characteristics of the area, together with the responses received, we conclude that the statutory criteria would best be met by these proposals.

## Warding arrangements

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

- a Letchworth East, Letchworth Grange, Letchworth South East, Letchworth South West and Letchworth Wilbury wards (page 33)
- b Hitchin Bearton, Hitchin Highbury, Hitchin Oughton, Hitchin Priory and Hitchin Walsworth wards (page 35)
- c Baldock East and Baldock Town wards (page 36)
- d Royston Heath, Royston Meridian and Royston Palace wards (page 37)
- e Graveley & Wymondley ward (page 38)
- f Arbury, Ermine and Weston & Sandon wards (page 39)
- g Cadwell, Hitchwood, Hoo and Offa wards (page 41)
- h Codicote, Kimpton and Knebworth wards (page 42)

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

## Letchworth East, Letchworth Grange, Letchworth South East, Letchworth South West and Letchworth Wilbury wards

55 Under the existing arrangements Letchworth comprises the five wards of Letchworth East, Letchworth Grange, Letchworth South East, Letchworth South West and Letchworth Wilbury. Table 4 (pages 22-25) outlines the existing electoral variances for 2003 and also the variances which the wards are forecast to have by 2008 if the existing arrangements remained in place.

56 We received one submission in relation to Letchworth during Stage One, which was from the District Council. It did not propose any changes to the electoral arrangements of Letchworth. It provided some community identity argument for the current wards, stating that there is a 'strong sense of community' focused around the community centres, churches and schools that serve each of the five wards. However, much of the

evidence given by the District Council was descriptive of the roads and boundaries of each ward, rather than providing details of why exactly these particular wards could not be altered during this review. We therefore do not consider that the argument put forward by the District Council was strong enough to retain the existing warding arrangements in the town.

57 As discussed in the 'council size' section of this report, we noted that under a council size of 49 (and also a council size of 50, as proposed by the District Council) the area of Letchworth town is entitled to 13 councillors, not 14 as under the current arrangements. Therefore it was not possible to retain the existing arrangements and provide a good level of electoral equality for the town. We have therefore proposed our own amendments to the five wards to take account of the councillor allocation.

58 We also took into consideration that the areas of the five Letchworth wards were made into a parish (Letchworth Garden City parish), on 2 December 2004 (The North Hertfordshire (Parish) Order, SI 2004 no. 3195), with the external boundary of the whole town making up the parish boundary. Our proposals for the electoral arrangements of the parish are detailed subsequently in this report

59 As discussed previously in paragraph 49, we have sought to improve electoral equality by making amendments to the existing wards and to address the councillor allocation in the town. Whilst we did not receive any evidence to convince us to retain the existing arrangements, we also did not receive any evidence to suggest that the existing wards do not provide effective and convenient local government or reflect communities of interest. Therefore we are proposing amendments to the existing arrangements to improve electoral equality. In Letchworth Grange ward we felt that the geography and the housing pattern lent itself to moving additional electors into the ward. We therefore propose to include all those properties on Longmead, Hawthorn Hill, Wheat Hill, Haymoor, Wilbury Road and those properties on Cowslip Hill between Wilbury Road and Hawthorn Hill as well as the properties on Norton Road from the existing Letchworth East ward in our proposed Letchworth Grange ward. Our proposed Letchworth Grange ward would remain a three-member ward.

60 We also propose to transfer the remaining properties on Cowslip Hill from Letchworth East ward into the existing Letchworth Wilbury ward. On visiting the area we considered that these properties would be better placed with their neighbours across the road, rather than those on the other side of Norton Common, particularly in light of the amendment outlined above, which would mean that these properties were no longer in the same ward as the rest of Cowslip Hill, and other neighbouring properties. Our proposed Letchworth Wilbury ward would remain a two-member ward.

61 To further improve the electoral equality in Letchworth Wilbury we propose to transfer those properties from Marmet Avenue and those on the southern side of Icknield Way between Redhoods Way West and Bridge Road into the existing Letchworth South West ward. We also propose to transfer those properties to the east of Bridge Road, bounded by Norton Common, Norton Way North and the railway line, into our proposed Letchworth South West ward from the existing Letchworth East ward. We acknowledge that the railway line is a strong existing boundary; however, as it can be crossed at both Norton Way North and Bridge Road, we consider that these two amendments have suitable access into the rest of our proposed three-member Letchworth South West ward.

62 We propose to transfer a clearly defined area of the existing Letchworth East ward into Letchworth South East ward in order to improve electoral equality. We considered that the properties in Jackman's Place and those properties on the east of Pixmore Avenue between Baldock Road and Broughton Hill along with those houses on the north side of Baldock Road between Pixmore Avenue and the recreation ground formed a distinct area of housing. We consider that there are good links between this area and Letchworth South East ward, and confirmed this on visiting the area. We are also proposing one final amendment to the existing arrangements in Letchworth. We propose to transfer all the properties on Whitethorn Lane from Letchworth South West ward into our proposed three-member Letchworth South East ward. Again we considered that these areas had good road links to the rest of the ward and if included provided improved electoral equality. Under our proposals we have moved a large number of electors from the existing Letchworth East ward, therefore our proposed Letchworth East ward would be represented by two councillors.

63 We consider that each of these amendments will still reflect the existing communities of the wards and, having visited the area, remain satisfied with our proposed amendments. We consider that the improved electoral equality that our draft recommendations provide outweighs any opposition to change we received at Stage One. All of our proposed Letchworth wards are expected to have electoral variances within 3% of the district average by 2008. Tables 1 and 2 on pages 9-15 and Maps 1 and 3 that accompany this report provide details of the constituent parts and electoral variances of our draft recommendations for Letchworth East, Letchworth Grange, Letchworth South East, Letchworth South West and Letchworth Wilbury wards.

## Hitchin Bearton, Hitchin Highbury, Hitchin Oughton, Hitchin Priory and Hitchin Walsworth wards

64 Under the existing arrangements Hitchin comprises the four unparished wards of Hitchin Bearton, Hitchin Highbury, Hitchin Oughton and Hitchin Walsworth as well as Hitchin Priory ward which contains North parish ward of St Ippolyts and an unparished area. Table 4 (pages 22-25) outlines the existing electoral variances for 2003 and also the variances which the wards are forecast to have by 2008 if the existing arrangements remained in place.

65 We received one submission in relation to Hitchin during Stage One, which was from the District Council. The District Council did not propose any changes to the electoral arrangements of Hitchin. It considered that as 'there have been no significant developments since the 1997 review and no significant developments are planned for completion by 2008, no changes should be made'. It provided some community identity argument, stating that the individual wards have their own community groups and residents' associations. As with its proposal for Letchworth, the Council's submission did not provide any convincing evidence to retain the existing arrangements. Although the existing arrangements provide good levels of electoral equality, in the absence of any convincing evidence about the reflection of communities that the wards provide, we considered that they could be improved, and therefore sought to do this.

66 When considering ward arrangements in the town, rather than creating new arbitrary wards we looked at making amendments to the existing wards to improve the electoral variances because we did not receive any evidence to suggest that the existing

arrangements do not provide effective and convenient local government or reflect community identity. We looked for areas that had obvious ground features we could tie new boundaries to and areas of wards that appeared to relate to adjoining wards.

67 We propose transferring those properties to the east of the railway line from Hitchin Highbury ward into a three-member Hitchin Walsworth ward. On visiting the area we considered that this part of the town had better links to Hitchin Walsworth ward than it did to Hitchin Highbury ward. We noted that, under the existing arrangements, electors would have to travel through Hitchin Walsworth ward in order to get to the remainder of Hitchin Highbury ward. We did not consider this was ideal, particularly as electoral equality and access could be improved by transferring the area into Hitchin Walsworth ward using the railway line as a strong ward boundary.

68 As the above amendment worsened electoral equality in Hitchin Highbury ward, we therefore looked to transfer electors from Hitchin Priory ward into Hitchin Highbury ward. We considered transferring electors from the south of the Stevenage Road. However, as part of this area is the North parish ward of St Ippolyts parish, we were reluctant to further ward this parish, and without doing so we felt it would have resulted in a Hitchin Priory ward with poor links between the areas within it. We therefore looked at transferring the town centre area of Hitchin Priory that lies between the eastern boundary of the existing ward and east of Park Way. Having visited this area we believe that the A602 is a strong boundary and maintains the links between the main settlements in the remainder of the ward. We are therefore recommending this amended two-member Hitchin Priory ward.

69 We are also proposing an additional amendment to our proposed three-member Hitchin Highbury ward by transferring an area into Hitchin Bearton ward to further improve electoral equality. We propose to transfer the properties on Walsworth Road, Trevor Road and those properties on Benslow Lane, between Walsworth Road and Benslow Rise, into our proposed three-member Hitchin Bearton ward. We consider that, in light of the lack of any strong community identity evidence, this small amendment to improve electoral equality is acceptable. We do not propose to make any amendments to the existing Hitchin Oughton ward, as we consider that it has an acceptable level of electoral equality.

70 Under our draft recommendations all of our proposed Hitchin wards are expected to have electoral variances within 5% of the district average by 2008. Tables 1 and 2 on pages 9-15 and Maps 1, 2 and 3 that accompany this report, provide details of the constituent parts and electoral variances of our draft recommendations for Hitchin Bearton, Hitchin Highbury, Hitchin Oughton, Hitchin Priory and Hitchin Walsworth wards.

## Baldock East and Baldock Town wards

71 Under the existing arrangements Baldock comprises the two unparished wards of Baldock East and Baldock Town. Table 4 (pages 22-25) outlines the existing electoral variances for 2003 and also the variances which the wards are forecast to have by 2008 if the existing arrangements remained in place.

72 We received one submission in relation to Baldock during Stage One, which was from the District Council. The District Council did not propose any changes to the

electoral arrangements of Baldock. It considered that as 'there have been no significant developments since the 1997 review and no significant developments are planned for completion by 2008, no changes should be made'. It provided some community identity argument relating to the history of the two wards, its facilities and ground features. As the Council states in its description of the area, the two wards are separated by Clothall Common, 'which creates a natural divide' between the two wards. Because of this and the location of the settlements in the wards, it was difficult to suggest improvements to the existing arrangements which have a reasonable levels of electoral equality. However, as with the other town areas we considered that these variances could be improved.

73 The residential area to the north of the railway line in Baldock Town ward is relatively separate from the rest of the ward. To get into other parts of either Baldock Town or Baldock East ward from this area it is necessary to travel along the existing ward boundary of Roman Road, therefore it appeared to make little difference with regards to road links, which ward the area is represented by. On visiting the area we were content that this part of Baldock Town ward could be transferred into Baldock East ward improving electoral equality and maintaining links within the wards. We are therefore proposing an amended three-member Baldock Town ward and a single-member Baldock East ward.

74 Under our draft recommendations both of our proposed Baldock wards are expected to have electoral variances within 7% of the district average by 2008. Tables 1 and 2 on pages 9-15 and Maps 1 and 3 that accompany this report provide details of the constituent parts and electoral variances of our draft recommendations for Baldock East and Baldock Town wards.

## Royston Heath, Royston Meridian and Royston Palace wards

75 Under the existing arrangements Royston comprises the three wards of Royston Heath, Royston Meridian and Royston Palace. Table 4 (pages 22-25) outlines the existing electoral variances for 2003 and also the variances which the wards are forecast to have by 2008 if the existing arrangements remained in place.

76 We received two submissions in relation to Royston during Stage One, one from the District Council and one from Royston Town Council. The District Council did not propose any changes to the electoral arrangements of Royston. It considered that as 'there have been no significant developments since the 1997 review and no significant developments are planned for completion by 2008, no changes should be made'. Royston Town Council considered that no changes were necessary since the last review, but provided no evidence in support of the existing wards.

77 We noted that the existing wards returned reasonable electoral equality. However, we considered that this could be improved slightly, and with the lack of any strong community argument we considered that improving electoral equality should take precedence. We examined a number of options for the area, including creating two three-member wards using the strong ground feature of the railway line and the existing western boundaries of Royston Palace and Royston Meridian wards to divide the town. However, this resulted in worse levels of electoral equality resulting in a western ward (Royston Heath and part of Royston Palace ward) with an electoral variance of 13%. Therefore, as with Letchworth, and in fact all the urban areas in the district, we looked

to make small well-defined amendments to the existing arrangements, which we have done in two areas.

78 We propose to transfer the properties on the north side of Barkway Road, and in Limekin Close from Royston Meridian ward into Royston Heath ward. We also propose to transfer the properties on Minster Road and Willowside Way and the area north of these properties, from Royston Heath ward into Royston Palace ward. These wards would all return two councillors.

79 Under our draft recommendations our proposed Royston wards are expected to have electoral variances within 6% of the district average by 2008. Tables 1 and 2 on pages 9-15 and Maps 1 and 4 that accompany this report, provide details of the constituent parts and electoral variances of our draft recommendations for Royston Heath, Royston Meridian and Royston Palace wards.

## Graveley & Wymondley ward

80 Under the existing arrangements Graveley & Wymondley ward comprises the parishes of Graveley and Wymondley. Table 4 (pages 22-25) outlines the existing electoral variance for 2003 and also the variance that the ward is forecast to have by 2008 if the existing arrangement remained in place.

81 We received two submissions in relation to Graveley & Wymondley ward at Stage One, from the District Council and Wymondley Parish Council. The District Council proposed to add an additional councillor to the ward to make it a two-member ward, with no boundary amendments to the ward. Under a council size of 49 (and 50 as proposed by the Council) Graveley & Wymondley ward is entitled to two councillors. Wymondley Parish Council stated that it did not wish for the parish to be contained in a ward that mixed urban and rural settlements, and felt that it should be in a ward with other, similar parishes 'i.e. small rural communities or villages where the issues are similar' to its own.

82 By adding an additional councillor to Graveley & Wymondley ward, it would have an electoral variance of 14% by 2008. In the District Council's submission, it consulted on three other alternatives for the ward. It noted that the Great Ashby development in Graveley parish is a separate community from the rest of this rural ward, as it is an overspill of part of the development in Stevenage, and looked at the possibility of making this area a ward in its own right. However, this would result in Great Ashby ward with an electoral variance of 16% by 2008, which is worse than under the existing arrangements. This would have allowed for the transfer of the remainder of Graveley parish into Weston & Sandon ward (-3% by 2008) and the joining of Wymondley parish with Hitchwood ward (53% by 2008). Whilst this would address the imbalance in Weston & Sandon, and improve electoral equality, it would worsen electoral equality in the amended Hitchwood ward. The District Council also looked at combining Wymondley parish with Hitchin Walsworth ward (9% by 2008). However, it did not consider that this was a suitable option. We agreed that while this would provide reasonable electoral equality, in light of the comments made by Wymondley Parish Council and our own reluctance to combine urban and rural areas we did not consider this to be a suitable proposal.

83 We considered again another of the Council’s alternatives to combine Wymondley parish with the Great Ashby development and include Graveley village with Weston & Sandon ward. Although this provided good electoral equality (7%) it created a division with no links between the main settlements of Great Ashby and Wymondley parish, and we did not consider we could recommend this, particularly in light of the District Council’s consultation and rejection of such a proposal. On visiting this area we confirmed our opinion that such a proposal would result in a ward with no direct links between the settlements and therefore felt that there would be little community of interest or identity.

84 We also looked at our own alternatives for the ward by transferring Graveley & Wymondley ward (minus the Great Ashby development) into either of the neighbouring wards of Weston & Sandon or Hitchwood. However, both these options resulted in worse levels of electoral equality than under the existing arrangements, of 44% and 68% respectively. Given that the existing Graveley & Wymondley ward is located between urban wards and the district boundary, thus restricting the alternative options available to us, and having examined possible options with similar rural areas, we do not propose to amend the boundaries of the existing ward and are therefore adopting the District Council’s proposal for this ward. We are content that the best balance of the criteria would be to retain the existing Graveley & Wymondley ward, but to allocate an additional councillor to it, making it a two-member ward. We consider that the electoral variance of 14% is justified as it maintains an existing and identified community. The District Council proposed to rename this ward Chesfield because of historical links and to ‘recognise Great Ashby’. We see no reason not to adopt this, and propose to name this ward Chesfield.

85 Under our draft recommendations our proposed Chesfield ward is expected to have an electoral variance of 14% from the district average by 2008. Tables 1 and 2 on pages 9-15 and Map 1 that accompanies this report provide details of the constituent parts and electoral variances of our draft recommendations for Chesfield ward.

## Arbury, Ermine and Weston & Sandon wards

86 The three rural wards in this section are located in the east of the district. Table 5 (below) outlines the constituent areas of each of the existing wards. Table 4 (pages 22-25) outlines the existing electoral variance for 2003 and also the variance that the wards are forecast to have by 2008 if the existing arrangements remained in place.

Table 5: Existing arrangements

<b>Name of ward</b>	<b>Constituent areas</b>	<b>Councillors</b>
Arbury	Ashwell, Bygrave, Caldecote, Hinxworth, Newnham and Radwell parishes	1
Ermine	Barkway, Barley, Kelshall, Nuthampstead, Reed and Therfield parishes	1
Weston & Sandon	Clothall, Rushden, Sandon, Wallington and Weston parishes	1

87 We received one submission in relation to these wards during Stage One, which was from the District Council. The District Council did not propose any changes to the electoral arrangements of these wards. It considered that in both Arbury and Ermine wards, as 'there have been no significant developments since the 1997 review and no significant developments are planned for completion by 2008, no changes should be made'. It noted the imbalance of Weston & Sandon ward (-18% from the district average) but considered that this should remain owing to the fact that it was bounded by East Hertfordshire district and the railway line and the A505, and that it had already exhausted attempts to address the imbalance by including Graveley village in the ward, as detailed in the above section. We did not consider that this argument was sufficient to justify the large imbalance of Weston & Sandon ward and therefore looked to the two wards of Arbury and Ermine, which border the ward, to attempt to address the situation.

88 In the District Council's submission it described all three wards as collectives of individual and independent communities that focus principally on their own individual village facilities. Only in Arbury ward did the District Council state that 'parish services are used by residents from neighbouring parishes in the ward', although it did not describe in detail what these were and how services bring these communities together. We therefore considered that, as the parishes in this area appeared to be quite independent, there was no reason why parishes could not be transferred between wards in this area to address the imbalance in Weston & Sandon ward.

89 As both Arbury and Ermine wards currently have more electors than the district average and Weston & Sandon ward has fewer, we looked at moving either Kelshall parish from Ermine ward or Bygrave parish from Arbury ward into the existing Weston & Sandon ward in order to address the imbalance. In terms of electoral equality, transferring Bygrave parish would result in the better outcome with the remainder of Arbury ward and the amended Weston & Sandon ward having electoral variances of -4% and -8% by 2008, respectively. Whereas transferring Kelshall parish results in Ermine and Weston & Sandon wards having electoral variances of -3% and -11% by 2008, respectively. However, on visiting the area, we considered that the road links between Kelshall parish and the Weston & Sandon ward were markedly better. The railway line and the A505 provide a significant barrier between Bygrave parish and the existing Weston & Sandon ward, making travelling between the areas difficult. It would be necessary to drive into Baldock town and back out again to get from one part of the ward to the other, which we did not consider would reflect community identity when an alternative exists. We also note that comments made in the District Council's submission that within Arbury ward that 'parish services are used by residents from neighbouring parishes in the ward'. We therefore propose to transfer Kelshall parish from Ermine ward into an amended single-member Weston & Sandon ward. We acknowledge that our proposals result in Weston & Sandon ward having an electoral variance of over 10% of the district average, however, attempting to lower this variance results in the high variance being transferred into another ward, simply moving the problem rather than solving it. Therefore we consider that this is the best option available to us.

90 Under our draft recommendations our proposed single-member Arbury, Ermine and Weston & Sandon wards are expected to have electoral variances with 11% of the district average by 2008. Tables 1 and 2 on pages 9-15 and Map 1 that accompanies this report provide details of the constituent parts and electoral variances of our draft recommendations for these three wards.

## Cadwell, Hitchwood, Hoo and Offa wards

91 The four rural wards in this section are located in the west of the district. Table 6 (below) outlines the constituent areas of each of the existing wards. Table 4 (pages 22-25) outlines the existing electoral variance for 2003 and also the variance that the ward is forecast to have by 2008 if the existing arrangements remained in place.

Table 6: Existing arrangements

<b>Name of ward</b>	<b>Constituent areas</b>	<b>Councillors</b>
Cadwell	Holwell and Ickleford parishes	1
Hitchwood	Langley and St Pauls Walden parishes and South parish ward of St Ippolyts parish	1
Hoo	Hexton, Kings Walden, Lilley and Preston parishes and Cockernhoe parish ward of Offley parish	1
Offa	Pirton parish and Offley parish ward of Offley parish	1

92 We received one submission in relation to these wards during Stage One, which was from the District Council. The District Council did not propose any changes to the electoral arrangements of these wards. It considered that in Cadwell, Hitchwood and Hoo wards, as 'there have been no significant developments since the 1997 review and no significant developments are planned for completion by 2008, no changes should be made'. It noted the imbalance of Offa ward (-16% from the district average by 2008) but considered that this should remain given that the ward has 'a cricket club, as well as an active and engaging community which supports many clubs'. It also considered that the 'undulating panoramic countryside, as well as a very active parish council' and community facilities of the ward justified the imbalance. We did not consider that this argument was compelling enough to justify the large imbalance of Offa ward and therefore sought to improve this variance.

93 The existing wards surrounding Offa ward are all also expected to have electoral variances below the district average by 2008, with the exception of Hitchin Priory ward. Therefore transferring whole or parts of parishes from the neighbouring wards would only move the imbalance elsewhere in the district. Also, in light of the amendments made to Hitchin town (detailed previously in this report) neither of the bordering Hitchin wards are expected to have electoral variances of more than the district average and in any case, where possible, we would not seek to propose warding arrangements that combined urban and rural areas, as we do not consider that such wards accurately reflect community identity or provide for effective and convenient local government.

94 We therefore looked at combining Offa ward with the surrounding rural wards. As outlined before, while we did not receive substantial evidence in favour of retaining the existing arrangements, we also did not receive any that suggested the existing arrangements did not reflect communities of identity. We therefore looked at combining whole wards to address the imbalance. We looked initially at a ward comprising the

existing Offa and Cadwell wards. However, we considered that the settlements in Cadwell looked more towards Hitchin town than Offa ward. We also looked at combining Offa and Hoo wards in a two-member Hoo & Offa ward and we noted that this would still provide a variance of over 10% from the district average (-11% by 2008). Therefore, we looked to improve the electoral variance further by combining Hitchwood, Hoo and Offa wards together in a three-member ward. We consider this proposed ward combines areas with similar geography and strong road links. We propose to name this ward Hitchwood, Offa & Hoo.

95 We note that this creates a geographically large ward. However, in the absence of any strong argument stating why the existing wards reflect community identity or provide the most effective and convenient local government we consider that we have little option but to recommend wards that provide for as high levels of electoral equality as is possible. Our recommendations are open for further consultation and we will be reassessing these proposals during Stage Three of the review, where we may recommend alternative arrangements for the area on the basis of any submissions we receive. We would at this point highlight the importance we place on community identity evidence and arguments relating to effective and convenient local government when making our recommendations, and we would invite comments and suggestions relating to this recommendation in particular, at Stage Three.

96 In light of our proposals in other areas and the good level of electoral equality that the existing arrangements return (-7% by 2008), we are not proposing any amendments to the existing Cadwell ward. We therefore propose retaining the existing Cadwell ward.

97 Under our draft recommendations our proposed Hitchwood, Offa & Hoo and Cadwell wards are expected to have electoral variances within 7% of the district average by 2008. Tables 1 and 2 on pages 9-15 and Map 1 that accompanies this report provide details of the constituent parts and electoral variances of our draft recommendations for Hitchwood, Offa & Hoo and Cadwell wards.

## Codicote, Kimpton and Knebworth wards

98 The three wards in this section are located in the south of the district. Table 7 (below) outlines the constituent areas of each of the existing wards. Table 4 (pages 22-25) outlines the existing electoral variance for 2003 and also the variance that the ward is forecast to have by 2008 if the existing arrangements remained in place.

Table 7: Existing arrangements

<b>Name of ward</b>	<b>Constituent areas</b>	<b>Councillors</b>
Codicote	Village parish ward of Codicote parish	1
Kimpton	Kimpton parish	1
Knebworth	Knebworth parish and East parish ward of Codicote parish	2

99 We received two submissions in relation to these wards during Stage One, from the District Council and Kimpton Parish Council. The District Council did not propose any changes to the electoral arrangements of these wards. It considered that, in all three

wards, as 'there have been no significant developments since the 1997 review and no significant developments are planned for completion by 2008, no changes should be made'. It did not provide any relevant detailed evidence in support of retaining the existing wards, rather it just listed the facilities that serve each ward and the road networks of the wards. Kimpton Parish Council expressed its contentment with the current arrangements for the parish, but did not provide any further evidence in support of this opinion.

100 As detailed previously, that while reasonable electoral variances for the existing wards are expected by 2008, without any significant argument and evidence in support of the wards our principal aim must be to improve electoral equality throughout the district. We therefore explored ways to reduce the electoral variances of these wards.

101 We noted that, under the existing arrangements, Codicote and Kimpton wards would have electoral variances of 8% and -10% by 2008. Both these communities share a common boundary on the southern side of the district and have good connections to one another via rural road links. Therefore, as with the rural wards in the west of the district we looked to combine these wards. On visiting this area we confirmed our opinion that strong road links between these wards existed. We note Kimpton Parish Council's submission, in which it expressed its satisfaction with the current arrangements for the parish. However, without any strong supporting evidence in favour of retaining the existing arrangements, our main aim is to improve electoral equality. Under these proposals a two-member Codicote & Kimpton ward would have an electoral variance within 1% of the district average by 2008.

102 The existing two-member Knebworth ward would have an electoral variance only 3% higher than the district average by 2008. Therefore we are not proposing any changes to the existing Knebworth ward.

103 Under our draft recommendations our proposed Codicote & Kimpton and Knebworth wards are expected to have electoral variances within 3% of the district average by 2008. Tables 1 and 2 on pages 9-15 and Map 1 that accompanies this report provide details of the constituent parts and electoral variances of our draft recommendations for Codicote & Kimpton and Knebworth wards.

## Conclusions

104 Table 8 shows how our draft recommendations will affect electoral equality, comparing them with the current arrangements (based on 2003 electorate figures) and with forecast electorates for the year 2008.

Table 8: Comparison of current and recommended electoral arrangements

	Current arrangements		Draft recommendations	
	2003	2008	2003	2008
Number of councillors	49	49	49	49
Number of wards	26	26	23	23
Average number of electors per councillor	1,918	1,971	1,918	1,971
Number of wards with a variance more than 10% from the average	4	5	1	2
Number of wards with a variance more than 20% from the average	1	1	0	0

105 As shown in Table 8, our draft recommendations for North Hertfordshire District Council would result in a reduction in the number of wards with an electoral variance of more than 10% from four to one. By 2008 only two wards are forecast to have an electoral variance of more than 10%. We propose to retain the existing council size and are confirming a council size of 49 members.

**Draft recommendation**

North Hertfordshire District Council should comprise 49 councillors serving 23 wards, as detailed and named in Tables 1 and 2 on pages 9-15, and illustrated on the large maps.

## Parish council electoral arrangements

106 As part of an FER the Committee can make recommendations for new electoral arrangements for parishes. Where there is no impact on the district council’s electoral arrangements, the Committee will generally be content to put forward for consideration proposals from parish and town councils for changes to parish electoral arrangements in FERs. However, the Committee will usually wish to see a degree of consensus between the district council and the parish council concerned. Proposals should be supported by evidence, illustrating why changes to parish electoral arrangements are required. The Committee cannot recommend changes to the external boundaries of parishes as part of an FER.

107 Responsibility for reviewing and implementing changes to the electoral arrangements of existing parishes, outside of an electoral review conducted by the Committee, lies with district councils. Such reviews must be conducted in accordance with section 17 of the Local Government and Rating Act 1997. If a district council wishes to make an Order amending the electoral arrangements of a parish that has been subject to an electoral arrangements order made by either the Secretary of State or The Electoral Commission within the past five years, the consent of the Commission is required.

108 We received no proposals relating to parish electoral arrangements. However, due to our proposals for district wards in parished areas it has been necessary to amend the electoral arrangements in two parishes. Accordingly, we propose consequential warding arrangements for the parishes of Royston and Letchworth Garden City to reflect the proposed district wards.

109 The parish of Royston is currently served by 15 councillors representing three wards: Royston Heath, Royston Meridian and Royston Palace. We do not propose changing the number of councillors but are making amendments to reflect the district wards.

**Draft recommendation**

Royston Parish Council should comprise 15 councillors, as at present, representing three wards: Royston Heath (returning 5 councillors), Royston Meridian (returning 5 councillors) and Royston Palace (returning 5 councillors). The parish ward boundaries should reflect the proposed district ward boundaries in the area, as illustrated and named on Map 4 accompanying this report.

110 The Secretary of State made an Order creating the parish of Letchworth Garden City on 2 December 2004, following a petition from local residents requesting that a parish be established. On 4 May 2005 North Hertfordshire District Council made an Order for the electoral arrangements of this parish, which allocates it 24 councillors, representing five wards: Letchworth East, Letchworth Grange, Letchworth South East, Letchworth South West and Letchworth Wilbury. These are to be based on the existing district wards of the same names. To date we are unaware of any local consultation being carried out regarding the parish council size of 24 councillors. We would therefore welcome comments from interested parties at Stage Three, whether it is considered that this council size is appropriate for this parish.

111 Schedule 11 to the 1972 Act requires the Boundary Committee to make recommendations that do not divide any unwarded parish or parish ward between district wards. Therefore, as a result of our draft recommendations for the district wards in Letchworth garden City we are required to recommend parish wards that reflect our proposed district wards.

**Draft recommendation**

Letchworth Garden City Parish Council should comprise 24 councillors, as at present, representing five wards: Letchworth East (returning 4 councillors), Letchworth Grange (returning 5 councillors), Letchworth South East (returning 5 councillors), Letchworth South West (returning 6 councillors) and Letchworth Wilbury (returning 4 councillors). The boundaries between the five parish wards should reflect the proposed district ward boundaries, as illustrated and named on Map 3 accompanying this report.



## 5 What happens next?

112 There will now be a consultation period, during which everyone is invited to comment on the draft recommendations on the future electoral arrangements for North Hertfordshire contained in this report. We will take fully into account all submissions received by 12 September 2005. Any received *after* this date may not be taken into account. All responses (including names and addresses of respondents unless specified otherwise) may be inspected at our offices and those of the District Council. A list of respondents will be available from us on request after the end of the consultation period.

113 Express your views by writing directly to us:

**Review Manager  
North Hertfordshire Review  
The Boundary Committee for England  
Trevelyan House  
Great Peter Street  
London SW1P 2HW**

**[reviews@boundarycommittee.org.uk](mailto:reviews@boundarycommittee.org.uk)**

114 Please note that the consultation stages of an electoral review are public consultations. In the interests of openness and transparency, the Committee now makes available for public inspection full copies of all representations it takes into account as part of a review. Accordingly, copies of all Stage Three representations will be placed on deposit locally at the offices of North Hertfordshire District Council, at the Committee's offices in Trevelyan House and on its website at [www.boundarycommittee.org.uk](http://www.boundarycommittee.org.uk). A list of respondents will be available from us on request after the end of the consultation period.

115 In the light of representations received, we will review our draft recommendations to consider whether they should be altered. As indicated earlier, it is therefore important that all interested parties let us have their views and evidence, **whether or not** they agree with our draft recommendations. We will then submit our final recommendations to The Electoral Commission. After the publication of our final recommendations, all further correspondence should be sent to The Electoral Commission, which cannot make the Order giving effect to our recommendations until six weeks after it receives them.



## 6 Mapping

### Draft recommendations for North Hertfordshire: Detailed mapping

The following maps illustrate our proposed ward boundaries for North Hertfordshire district.

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

**Sheet 2, Map 2** illustrates the proposed boundaries in Hitchin town.

**Sheet 3, Map 3** illustrates the proposed boundaries in Baldock and Letchworth towns.

**Sheet 4, Map 4** illustrates the proposed boundaries in Royston town.



## Appendix A

### Code of practice on written consultation

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

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

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

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