

LOCAL
GOVERNMENT
COMMISSION
FOR ENGLAND

FINAL
RECOMMENDATIONS
ON THE FUTURE
ELECTORAL
ARRANGEMENTS FOR
SWINDON

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

March 1999

LOCAL GOVERNMENT COMMISSION FOR ENGLAND

This report sets out the Commission's final recommendations on the electoral arrangements for Swindon.

Members of the Commission are:

Professor Malcolm Grant (Chairman)

Professor Michael Clarke (Deputy Chairman)

Peter Brokenshire

Pamela Gordon

Robin Gray

Robert Hughes CBE

Barbara Stephens (Chief Executive)

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Local Government Commission for England

2 March 1999

Dear Secretary of State

On 24 February 1998, the Commission began a periodic electoral review of the borough of Swindon under the Local Government Act 1992. We published our draft recommendations for electoral arrangements on 1 September 1998 and undertook a twelve-week period of consultation.

We have now prepared our final recommendations in the light of the consultation. We have confirmed our draft recommendations for the Borough Council subject to a minor modification (see paragraph 63) in the light of further evidence. This report sets out our final recommendations for changes to electoral arrangements in Swindon Borough.

We recommend that Swindon Borough Council should be served by 59 councillors representing 22 wards, and that some changes should be made to ward boundaries in order to improve electoral equality, having regard to the statutory criteria. We recommend that elections should continue to take place by thirds.

We note that you have now set out in the White Paper *Modern Local Government – In Touch with the People* (Cm 4014, HMSO), legislative proposals for a number of changes to local authority electoral arrangements. However, until such time as that new legislation is in place 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 Borough 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 Swindon on 24 February 1998. We published our draft recommendations for electoral arrangements on 1 September 1998, after which we undertook an eight-week period of consultation.

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

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

- **in 13 of the 21 wards, the number of electors represented by each councillor varies by more than 10 per cent from the average for the borough, and nine wards vary by more than 20 per cent from the average;**
- **this level of electoral equality is expected to deteriorate, with the number of electors per councillor forecast to vary by more than 10 per cent from the average in 16 wards, and by more than 20 per cent in ten wards.**

Our main final recommendations for future electoral arrangements (Figures 1 and 2 and paragraphs 63 and 64) are that:

- **Swindon Borough Council should be served by 59 councillors, five more than at present;**
- **there should be 22 wards, one more than at present;**
- **the boundaries of 19 of the existing 21 wards should be modified, while two wards should retain their existing boundaries;**
- **elections should continue to take place by thirds.**

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

- **In 17 of the 22 wards, the number of electors per councillor would vary by no more than 10 per cent from the borough average.**
- **By 2003 the number of electors per councillor is projected to vary by less than 10 per cent from the average in all wards.**

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

- **revised warding arrangements for Stratton St Margaret Parish Council;**
- **new warding arrangements for Blunsdon St Andrew, Chiseldon and Haydon Wick parish councils.**

All further correspondence on these recommendations and the matters discussed in this report should be addressed to the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, who will not make an Order implementing the Commission's recommendations before 13 April 1999:

**The Secretary of State
Local Government Review
Department of the Environment,
Transport and the Regions
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 Abbey Meads	3	Haydon Wick ward (part – Haydon End parish ward (as proposed) of Haydon Wick parish (part)); Blunsdon ward (part – Abbey Meads parish ward of Blunsdon St Andrew parish (part))	Large Map and Map 2
2 Blunsdon	1	Blunsdon ward (part – parishes of, Castle Eaton, Hannington, Stanton Fitzwarren South Marston and Blunsdon parish (part)); Ridgeway ward (part – South Marston parish)	Large Map and Map 2
3 Central	3	Central ward; Walcot ward (part); Eastcott ward (part)	Large Map
4 Covingham & Nythe	3	Covingham ward (Covingham parish); Dorcan ward (part); St Margaret ward (part – Stratton St Margaret parish (part))	Large Map and Map A3
5 Dorcan	3	Dorcan ward (part)	Large Map
6 Eastcott	3	Eastcott ward (part); Lawns ward (part)	Large Map
7 Freshbrook & Grange Park	3	Freshbrook ward; Toothill ward (part)	Large Map
8 Gorse Hill & Pinehurst	3	Gorse Hill ward (part); Whitworth ward (part)	Large Map
9 Haydon Wick	3	Haydon Wick ward (Haydon Wick parish (part)); Blunsdon ward (part – Baxter parish (as proposed) of Blunsdon St Andrew parish)	Large Map
10 Highworth	3	<i>Unchanged</i> (the parishes of Inglesham and Highworth)	Map 2
11 Moredon	3	Moredon ward; Western ward (part); Haydon Wick ward (part – Ray parish ward (as proposed) of Haydon Wick parish); Whitworth ward (part)	Large Map
12 Old Town & Lawn	3	Lawns ward (part)	Large Map
13 Parks	3	<i>Unchanged</i> (Park ward)	Large Map
14 Penhill	2	Whitworth ward (part)	Large Map and Map A4

Figure 1 (continued):
The Commission's Final Recommendations: Summary

Ward name	Number of councillors	Constituent areas	Map reference
15 Ridgeway	1	Ridgeway ward (parishes of Bishopstone, Wanborough and Liddington); Chiseldon ward (part Badbury ward (as proposed) of Chiseldon parish)	Map 2
16 St Philip	3	St Philip ward (St Philip ward of St Margaret parish); Gorsehill ward (part); Blunsdon ward (part – Kingsdown parish ward (as proposed) of Blunsdon parish)	Large Map and Map A4
17 St Margaret	3	St Margaret ward (part – St Margaret parish ward of Stratton St Margaret parish)	Large Map and Map A3
18 Shaw & Nine Elms	3	Toothill ward (part)	Large Map
19 Toothill & Westlea	2	Toothill ward (part)	Large Map
20 Walcot	2	Walcot ward (part); Lawns ward (part)	Large Map
21 Western	3	Western ward (part)	Large Map
22 Wroughton & Chiseldon	3	Wroughton ward (Wroughton parish); Chiseldon ward (part – Chiseldon parish ward (as proposed) of Chiseldon parish); Freshbrook ward (part)	Large Map

Notes: 1 The area towards the centre of Swindon (the wards of Central, Dorcan, Eastcott, Freshbrook, Gorse Hill, Lawns, Moredon, Park, Toothill, Walcot, Western and Whitworth) is entirely unparished.

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

Figure 2:
The Commission's Final Recommendations for Swindon

Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (1998)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2003)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
1 Abbey Meads	3	992	331	-86	6,860	2,287	-5
2 Blunsdon	1	2,636	2,636	15	2,636	2,636	9
3 Central	3	6,829	2,276	-1	6,829	2,276	-6
4 Covingham & Nythe	3	7,061	2,354	2	7,061	2,354	-3
5 Dorcan	3	7,138	2,379	3	7,138	2,379	-2
6 Eastcott	3	7,372	2,457	7	7,372	2,457	2
7 Freshbrook & Grange Park	3	7,439	2,480	8	7,439	2,480	3
8 Gorse Hill & Pinehurst	3	6,777	2,259	-2	6,777	2,259	-7
9 Haydon Wick	3	6,625	2,208	-4	7,637	2,546	5
10 Highworth	3	6,747	2,249	-2	6,747	2,249	-7
11 Moredon	3	7,404	2,468	7	7,404	2,468	2
12 Old Town & Lawn	3	7,501	2,500	9	7,501	2,500	3
13 Parks	3	6,988	2,329	1	6,988	2,329	-4
14 Penhill	2	4,569	2,285	-1	4,569	2,285	-6
15 Ridgeway	1	2,304	2,304	0	2,304	2,304	-5
16 St Philip	3	7,207	2,402	4	7,207	2,402	-1
17 St Margaret	3	7,417	2,472	8	7,417	2,472	2
18 Shaw & Nine Elms	3	7,090	2,363	3	7,090	2,363	-2
19 Toothill & Westlea	2	5,283	2,642	15	5,283	2,642	9
20 Walcot	2	5,102	2,551	11	5,102	2,551	6
21 Western	3	7,525	2,508	9	7,525	2,508	4

Figure 2 (continued):
The Commission's Final Recommendations for Swindon

Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (1998)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2003)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
22 Wroughton & Chiseldon	3	7,714	2,571	12	7,714	2,571	6
Totals	59	135,720	—	—	142,600	—	—
Averages	—	—	2,300	—	—	2,417	—

Source: Electorate figures are based on Swindon Borough Council's submission.

Note: The 'variance from average' column shows by how far in percentage terms, the number of electors per councillor varies from the average for the borough. 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 borough of Swindon.

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

- the statutory criteria in section 13(5) of the Local Government Act 1992; and
- the Rules to be Observed in Considering Electoral Arrangements in Schedule 11 to the Local Government Act 1972.

3 We have also had regard to our *Guidance and Procedural Advice for Local Authorities and Other Interested Parties* (published in March 1996, supplemented in September 1996 and updated in March 1998). This sets out our approach to the reviews.

4 This review was in four stages. Stage One began on 24 February 1998, when we invited proposals for the future electoral arrangements from Swindon Borough Council, and copied the letter to Wiltshire Police Authority, the local authority associations, the Wiltshire Association of Local Councils, parish and town councils in the borough, the Members of Parliament and the Member of the European Parliament with constituency interests in the borough, and the headquarters of the main political parties. At the start of the review and following publication of our draft recommendations, we published a notice in the local press, issued a press release and invited the Borough Council to publicise the review more widely. The closing date for receipt of representations was 8 June 1998. At Stage Two, we considered all the representations received during Stage One and prepared our draft recommendations.

5 Stage Three was extended by four weeks at the request of a number of local authorities in Wiltshire to enable them to take into account the implications of the Government's White Paper. It

began on 1 September 1998 with the publication of our report, *Draft Recommendations on the Future Electoral Arrangements for Swindon*, and ended on 23 November 1998. 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.

Map 1:
Existing Wards in Swindon



KEY	
EXISTING WARD BOUNDARY	—————
EXISTING PARISH BOUNDARY	- - - - -

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Key to Wards

1	Blunsdon	8	Gorse Hill	15	St Margaret
2	Central	9	Haydon Wick	16	St Philip
3	Chiseldon	10	Highworth	17	Toothill
4	Covingham	11	Lawns	18	Walcot
5	Dorcan	12	Moreton	19	Western
6	Eastcott	13	Park	20	Whitworth
7	Freshbrook	14	Ridgeway	21	Wroughtton

Figure 3:
Existing Electoral Arrangements

Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (1998)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2003)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
1 Blunsdon	1	3,301	3,301	31	7,020	7,020	166
2 Central	3	5,676	1,892	-25	5,676	1,892	-28
3 Chiseldon	1	2,092	2,092	-17	2,092	2,092	-21
4 Covingham	1	3,125	3,125	24	3,125	3,125	18
5 Dorcan	3	7,595	2,532	1	7,595	2,532	-4
6 Eastcott	3	7,537	2,512	0	7,537	2,512	-5
7 Freshbrook	3	6,932	2,311	-8	6,932	2,311	-13
8 Gorse Hill	3	6,855	2,285	-9	6,855	2,285	-14
9 Haydon Wick	2	7,089	3,545	41	10,250	5,125	94
10 Highworth	3	6,747	2,249	-11	6,747	2,249	-15
11 Lawns	3	7,662	2,554	2	7,662	2,554	-3
12 Moredon	3	6,612	2,204	-12	6,612	2,204	-17
13 Park	3	6,988	2,329	-7	6,988	2,329	-12
14 Ridgeway	1	2,749	2,749	9	2,749	2,749	4
15 St Margaret	3	10,896	3,632	45	10,896	3,632	38
16 St Philip	3	6,253	2,084	-17	6,253	2,084	-21
17 Toothill	3	12,935	4,312	72	12,935	4,312	63
18 Walcot	3	5,937	1,979	-21	5,937	1,979	-25
19 Western	3	7,775	2,592	3	7,775	2,592	-2
20 Whitworth	3	5,235	1,745	-31	5,235	1,745	-34
21 Wroughton	3	5,729	1,910	-24	5,729	1,910	-28
Totals	54	135,720	—	—	142,600	—	—
Averages	—	—	2,513	—	—	2,641	—

Source: Electorate figures are based on Swindon Borough Council's submission.

Note: The 'variance from average' column shows by how far, in percentage terms, the number of electors per councillor varies from the average for the Borough. The minus symbol (-) denotes a lower than average number of electors. For example, electors in St Margaret ward are relatively under-represented by 45 per cent, while electors in Central ward are relatively over-represented by 25 per cent. Figures have been rounded to the nearest whole number.

3. DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS

10 During Stage One, we received a representation from Swindon Borough Council on electoral arrangements for the whole borough. Representations were also received from seven parish councils. In the light of these representations and evidence available to us, we reached preliminary conclusions which were set out in the report, *Draft Recommendations on the Future Electoral Arrangements for Swindon*.

11 Our draft recommendations were largely based on the Borough Council's scheme, which we considered achieved a good balance between securing reasonable electoral equality and reflecting the interests and identities of local communities in the borough. However, we proposed to depart from that scheme in three areas. First, we were not persuaded that the proposed Toothill & Westlea and Shaw & Nine Elms wards would provide the most satisfactory reflection of communities in the area. In particular, we considered that the Ramleaze and Eastleaze area appeared to have more in common with Shaw & Nine Elms (the two original villages) than with the larger residential areas of Toothill and Westlea. Accordingly, we proposed retaining Ramleaze and Eastleaze within the same ward as Shaw & Nine Elms, utilising Whitehill Way as the boundary between the two wards. Second, we were not persuaded that the proposed transfer of Chandler Close from Lawns ward to Walcot ward (affecting some 38 electors) would offer a better boundary than the present one. We noted that this proposed boundary modification would marginally affect the level of electoral equality between the two wards, with the number of electors per councillor in the proposed Walcot ward varying by 11 per cent. Third, in the interests of electoral equality, we proposed a minor boundary modification between the proposed St Margaret and Covingham & Nythe wards in order to provide a better level of electoral equality between these two wards. We proposed that:

- (a) Swindon Borough Council should be served by 59 councillors, representing 22 wards;
- (b) the boundaries of 19 of the existing 21 wards should be modified, while two wards should retain their existing boundaries;

- (c) there should be modifications to the warding arrangements of Stratton St Margaret Parish Council;
- (d) there should be new warding arrangements for Blunsdon St Andrew, Chiseldon and Haydon Wick parish councils.

Draft Recommendation

Swindon Borough Council should comprise 59 councillors, serving 22 wards. Elections should continue to take place by thirds.

12 Our proposals would have resulted in significant improvements in electoral equality, with the number of electors per councillor varying by no more than 10 per cent from the borough average in 18 of the 22 wards. By 2003 the number of electors per councillor is projected to vary by no more than 10 per cent in all 22 wards.

4. RESPONSES TO CONSULTATION

13 During the consultation on our draft recommendations report, nine representations were received. A list of respondents is available on request from the Commission's offices.

This proposal was supported by Councillor Eley and a local resident. Furthermore, councillors Fanning and Cox and a local resident opposed our draft recommendation to include Eastleaze in a new Shaw & Nine Elms ward.

Swindon Borough Council

14 The Borough Council supported our draft recommendations subject to one minor modification. It requested that further consideration be given to its Stage One proposal to modify the boundary between the proposed Old Town & Lawn ward and Walcot ward.

Julia Drown MP

15 Julia Drown MP proposed that the boundaries between the wards of Toothill & Westlea, Freshbrook & Grange Park and Shaw & Nine Elms be changed "to follow a more natural line in terms of local geography whilst taking into account the natural focal points for local communities".

Parish and Town Councils

16 Blunsdon St Andrew Parish Council opposed our draft recommendations. It argued that "future arrangements should be for the existing Parish of Blunsdon to be served by two parish councils: one for the present village of Blunsdon, and the other for the new development of Abbey Meads".

Other Representations

17 We received a further six representations from local political groups, local councillors and residents. A committee formed by the Swindon Labour Party argued that the proposed boundary between the wards of Toothill and Freshbrook should be realigned on the grounds that the proposed boundary between Toothill and Shaw (Whitehill Way) would be "unnatural and divisive". It argued that Freshbrook, Toothill and Shaw should be divided into three three-member wards.

5. ANALYSIS AND FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS

18 As indicated previously, the Commission's prime objective in considering the most appropriate electoral arrangements for Swindon is to achieve electoral equality, having regard to the statutory criteria set out in the Local Government Act 1992 and Schedule 11 to the Local Government Act 1972, which refers to the ratio of electors to councillors being "as nearly as may be, the same in every ward of the district or borough".

19 However, our function is not merely arithmetical for three reasons. First, 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. Second, we must have regard to the desirability of fixing identifiable boundaries, and to maintaining local ties which might otherwise be broken. Third, we must consider the need to secure effective and convenient local government, and reflect the interests and identities of local communities.

20 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.

21 Our *Guidance* states that, while we accept that the achievement of absolute electoral equality for the authority as a whole is likely to be unattainable, we consider that, if electoral imbalances are to be kept to a 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. Regard must also be had to five-year forecasts of change in electorates. We will require particular justification for schemes which result in, or retain,

an imbalance of over 10 per cent in any ward. Any imbalances of 20 per cent and over should arise only in the most exceptional of circumstances, and will require the strongest justification.

Electorate Forecasts

22 During Stage One, the Borough Council submitted electorate forecasts for the year 2003, projecting an increase in the electorate of some 5 per cent from 135,720 to 142,600 over the five-year period from 1998 to 2003. The Borough 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. 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 can reasonably be made at the time.

23 At Stage Three, we received no comments on the Council's electorate forecasts, and remain satisfied that they provide the best estimates presently available.

Council Size

24 We indicated in our *Guidance* that we would normally expect the number of councillors serving a Borough council to be in the range of 30 to 60.

25 Swindon Borough Council is at present served by 54 councillors. At Stage One, the Borough Council proposed an increase in council size to 59. It argued that this was necessary given the significant growth since the time of the last review, and the fact that this growth was projected to continue over the next five years, including the "largest single private housing estate in Western Europe", with permission for over ten thousand dwellings to be constructed. It indicated that this development had commenced two years previously, and is now well under way. It also considered that the achievement of unitary status had placed

increased responsibilities on members, and that this justified the increase in council size. No other comments were received.

26 Having considered the size and distribution of the electorate, the geography and other characteristics of the area, together with the representations received, we concluded that the statutory criteria and the achievement of electoral equality would best be met by a council size of 59. We have not received evidence during Stage Three to persuade us to move away from this view. We have therefore decided to confirm our draft recommendation for a council size of 59 as final.

Electoral arrangements

27 Having considered all representations received during Stages One and Three of the review, we have further considered our draft recommendations. We are pleased to note that our draft recommendations would appear to have been well received locally, with the only area of opposition relating to the existing wards of Freshbrook and Toothill in the western area. The following areas, based on existing wards, are considered in turn:

- (a) Blunsdon, Haydon Wick and Highworth wards;
- (b) Gorse Hill, Moredon, St Philip, Western and Whitworth wards;
- (c) St Margaret, Covingham and Dorcan wards;
- (d) Central, Eastcott, Lawns, Park and Walcot wards;
- (e) Freshbrook and Toothill wards;
- (f) Wroughton, Chiseldon and Ridgeway wards.

28 Details of our final recommendations for the future electoral arrangements in Swindon are summarised in Figures 1 and 2 and illustrated on Map 2, the maps at Appendix A and the large map at the back of the report.

Blunsdon, Haydon Wick and Highworth wards

29 Currently, Haydon Wick ward comprises the parish of Haydon Wick, and is represented by two councillors. Blunsdon ward comprises the parishes of Blunsdon St Andrew, Castle Eaton, Hannington, and Stanton Fitzwater, and is represented by a single councillor. The two wards are significantly under-represented, with the number of electors per

councillor varying by 41 per cent and 31 per cent from the borough average respectively. However, as a result of exceptional projected growth over the next five years, this level of electoral inequality is expected to increase, with the number of electors per councillor projected to vary by 94 per cent and 116 per cent respectively by 2003. Highworth ward comprises the parish and town of Highworth and surrounding villages and hamlets. It is represented by three councillors, and has 11 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the borough average.

30 At Stage One, the Borough Council proposed containing the larger part of the development within a new three-member Abbey Meads ward, which would comprise parts of Haydon Wick and Blunsdon St Andrew parishes. The proposed Abbey Meads ward would be bounded by Tadpole Lane and Lady Lane to the north, the A419 to the east and the county boundary to the west. The southern boundary would follow the disused rail track, then the stream forming the boundary with Haydon Wick, Lady Lane, Elstree Way, Thamesdown Avenue and Elstree Way once more. As a result of the proposed boundary changes, the Council proposed transferring Osterley Road into Abbey Meads ward, and transferring a small area from Blunsdon ward to Haydon Wick ward. This proposal would unite the whole of Ekesbury Close in one ward.

31 Furthermore, at Stage One the Borough Council proposed transferring part of Haydon Wick ward to Moredon ward, with the proposed boundary following the rear of properties on the east side of Fennel Close and Bayleaf Close, and then to the rear of properties on the south side of Borage Close and Rosemary Close. It also proposed a number of further boundary modifications to Blunsdon ward, including the transfer of the Bramwell Close area to St Philip ward. The Borough Council argued that this part of Blunsdon ward had a number of established community links with properties in St Philip ward, including being situated in the same catchment area for school purposes and sharing a polling station. The Borough Council also proposed that the parish of South Marston (currently in Ridgeway ward) would be better incorporated with villages in Blunsdon ward, with which it had more in common. It argued that South Marston parish was separated from other villages in Ridgeway ward by some two to three miles and by the London to Bristol railway line.

32 Under the Borough Council's scheme, the number of electors per councillor in the proposed Blunsdon and Haydon Wick wards would vary by 15 per cent and 4 per cent from the average respectively. This level of electoral equality would improve over the next five years, with the number of electors per councillor in the two wards varying by 9 per cent and 5 per cent respectively. The proposed Abbey Meads ward would be subject to a high degree of electoral inequality initially, with some 86 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the borough average. However, as indicated earlier, this ward is projected to undergo exceptional development over the next five years, with the electorate projected to increase from 992 to 6,840 (some 85 per cent). This expected growth would provide for a much improved electoral equality by 2003, with the number of electors per councillor projected to vary by only 5 per cent from the average.

33 In relation to Highworth ward, at Stage One, the Borough Council proposed no change to the existing electoral arrangements. It argued that the ward was well-established, and that by increasing the council size to 59, the number of electors per councillor would vary by only 2 per cent from the borough average (7 per cent in five years' time).

34 At Stage One, we received two further submissions. Haydon Wick Parish Council expressed its opposition to the transfer of electors from Haydon Wick ward to Moredon ward. Blunsdon Parish Council expressed its opposition to the transfer of Lyall Close and Blunsdon Abbey Caravan Park from Blunsdon ward to the new Abbey Meads ward.

35 In our draft recommendation report, we concluded that we should endorse the Borough Council's proposals, which we considered represented a better balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria than the current arrangements. While we noted that the proposed Abbey Meads ward would initially have poor electoral equality, we were sufficiently persuaded that the Council's projections are a reasonable estimate of the likely future growth. We considered the objections raised by Blunsdon St Andrew and Haydon Wick parish councils but, in both cases, were not persuaded to depart from the Borough Council's proposals. While Haydon Wick Parish Council objected to the transfer of part of its parish to Moredon ward, we noted that the current boundary splits two streets between two wards,

and that the two areas would appear to share a number of interests. Also, while Blunsdon Parish Council objected to the transfer of Lyall Close and Blunsdon Abbey Caravan Park from Blunsdon ward to the new Abbey Meads ward, we considered that these would appear to be more closely associated with the housing development in Abbey Meads ward and are separated from Blunsdon village by the A419 dual carriageway.

36 At Stage Three, our draft recommendations were supported by the Borough Council. Blunsdon Parish Council opposed our draft recommendations, arguing that the existing area covered by Blunsdon parish should be served by two parish councils: one for the current village of Blunsdon and the other for the new Abbey Meads development. However, we have no powers to formally recommend the creation of parish and town councils, and are therefore not able to consider this matter as part of this electoral review. Accordingly, having given careful consideration to the representations received at Stage Three, we remain satisfied that our draft recommendations would strike the best balance between the statutory criteria and the need to secure equality of representation. We have therefore decided to confirm our draft recommendation as final.

Gorse Hill, Moredon, St Philip, Western and Whitworth wards

37 Currently, while the wards of Gorse Hill, Moredon, Western and Whitworth are unparished, St Philip ward lies within Stratton St Margaret parish. All five wards are each represented by three councillors. Western ward has 3 per cent more electors per councillor than the borough average, while Gorse Hill, Moredon, St Philip and Whitworth wards have 9 per cent, 12 per cent, 17 per cent and 31 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the average respectively. This level of electoral equality is projected to deteriorate over the next five years.

38 At Stage One, the Borough Council proposed boundary modifications to all five wards in order to secure a better level of electoral equality. First, it proposed a number of boundary modifications between Gorse Hill ward and adjoining wards: that the boundary between Gorse Hill and St Philip wards be modified as the present boundary splits Pinehurst Circle, and would appear to divide the community arbitrarily; that the boundary between Gorse Hill and St Philip wards be modified as the

present boundary splits Wheeler Avenue from similar style housing in St Philip ward; and that the boundary between Gorse Hill and Moredon wards be modified in order to unite the whole of the Olive Grove development within Moredon ward. Second, it proposed transferring an old power station site from Western ward to Moredon ward. It argued that this area of land has been redeveloped into a housing estate, and is entirely isolated from the rest of Western ward by industrial units and playing fields. Third, as already indicated, the Borough Council proposed transferring part of Haydon Wick ward to Moredon ward and part of Blunsdon ward to St Philip ward on the grounds that these areas had a greater sense of affinity with their proposed wards. As a result of its proposals, the Borough Council argued that Gorse Hill ward be renamed Gorse Hill & Pinehurst ward and that Whitworth ward be renamed Penhill ward.

39 Its proposals provided for much improved electoral equality, with the number of electors per councillor varying by no more than 10 per cent in all five wards. This level of electoral equality is projected to remain relatively constant over the next five years.

40 In our draft recommendations report, we endorsed the Borough Council's proposals. We considered that its proposals would represent the best balance between securing good electoral equality and reflecting the interests and identities of the constituent communities. In particular, we noted that the Borough Council's scheme would provide for the Wheeler Avenue area to be combined with the rest of Upper Stratton, with which it shares a number of community interests, and for the whole of the Pinehurst development and the Olive Grove area to be united within a single ward.

41 During Stage Three, the Borough Council supported our draft recommendation. No other representations were received. Accordingly, we remain satisfied that our draft recommendations strike the best balance between securing electoral equality and reflecting the statutory criteria, and confirm them as final. The proposed new warding arrangements are illustrated on Map A4 at Appendix A and the large map at the back of the report.

St Margaret, Covingham and Dorcan wards

42 Currently, St Margaret ward comprises the parish wards of Coleview & Nythe and St Margaret parish ward of Stratton St Margaret parish, and is represented by three councillors. Covingham ward comprises Covingham parish, and is represented by one councillor. Dorcan ward is unparished, and is represented by three councillors. While Dorcan ward currently achieves good electoral equality, with 1 per cent more electors per councillor than the borough average, St Margaret and Covingham wards have 45 per cent and 24 per cent more electors per councillor than the average. However, as a result of no projected growth over the next five years in these three wards, the number of electors per councillor in Dorcan, St Margaret and Covingham wards is projected to vary by 4 per cent, 38 per cent and 18 per cent by 2003.

43 At Stage One, the Borough Council argued that the number of councillors for the area should be increased from seven to nine, with modifications proposed to all three wards in order to produce three three-member wards. It proposed transferring part of Coleview & Nythe parish ward from St Margaret ward to Covingham ward. It argued that Nythe is a discrete area, with a number of close community links with Covingham, including shopping and library facilities. It also indicated that Stratton St Margaret Parish Council voted unanimously to accept the proposed changes. The Borough Council also proposed transferring the recent development to the east of Dorcan School to Covingham ward. It argued that the residents in this area are separated from the other residential properties in Dorcan ward by a large industrial estate, and therefore have little community interests with residents in Dorcan ward. It also indicated that the only access to this development is from St Pauls Drive (in Covingham ward). As a result of its proposals, the Borough Council argued that Covingham ward should be renamed Covingham & Nythe ward. No other representations were received.

44 In our draft recommendations report, we endorsed the Borough Council's proposals as we considered they would secure a good level of electoral equality, would cause minimal disruption to the current arrangements and would appear to better reflect the interests and identities of communities in the area. However, we also

proposed a minor boundary modification between the proposed St Margaret and Covingham & Nythe wards in order to provide a better level of electoral equality between these two wards. Under our draft recommendations, the proposed St Margaret, Covingham & Nythe and Dorcan wards would vary by 8 per cent, 2 per cent and 3 per cent from the borough average.

45 At Stage Three, our draft recommendations were supported by the Borough Council. No other representations were received. In light of the absence of opposing views expressed at Stage Three, we remain satisfied that our draft recommendations strike the best balance between securing electoral equality and reflecting the statutory criteria. We have therefore decided to confirm our draft recommendations as final. The proposed new warding arrangements are illustrated on Map A3 at Appendix A and the large map at the back of the report.

Central, Eastcott, Lawns, Park and Walcot wards

46 The wards of Central, Eastcott, Lawns Park and Walcot are all unparished, and are each represented by three councillors. Currently, while the number of electors per councillor is equal to the average in Eastcott ward and varies by 2 per cent and 7 per cent in Lawns and Park wards respectively, there are 25 per cent and 21 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the borough average in Central and Walcot wards. This level of electoral equality is not projected to improve over the next five years.

47 At Stage One, the Borough Council argued that the number of councillors for Walcot ward should be reduced from three to two, with modifications to Central, Eastcott, Lawns and Walcot wards, in order to secure a better level of electoral equality. It argued that Central ward should be increased in size by including parts of Eastcott and Walcot wards. First, it proposed that the Rushy Platt estate should be transferred from Eastcott ward to Central ward as this development is only accessed via the Wooton Bassett Road which is contained in Central ward. Second, it proposed that the housing developments in North Walcot should be transferred from Walcot ward to Central ward as these developments are more easily accessed from Central ward, and are separated from the rest of Walcot ward by a busy dual carriageway. The Borough Council also proposed a number of minor

boundary modifications between Eastcott ward and Lawns ward in order to tidy the existing boundaries. No change was proposed to Park ward.

48 As a result of its proposals, the Borough Council argued that Lawns ward should be renamed Old Town & Lawns ward and that Park ward be renamed Parks ward. Also as part of its submission, the Borough Council indicated that a local councillor for Lawns ward suggested the transfer of Chandler Close from Lawns ward to Walcot ward.

49 In our draft recommendations report we endorsed the Borough Council's proposals for the area, subject to one minor modification. We considered the proposal to transfer Chandler Close from Lawns ward to Walcot ward, but were not persuaded that this proposal would offer a better boundary than the present one. Also, as a result of this proposed boundary change, we noted that the number of electors per councillor in the proposed Walcot ward would vary by 11 per cent from the average.

50 At Stage Three, the Borough Council did not oppose our recommendations but reiterated its Stage One proposal to transfer Chandler Close from Lawns ward. It argued that Chandler Close has greater affinity with Cirencester Court (the development immediately adjoining Walcot ward) than with the more established properties contained within Lawns ward.

51 Having given careful consideration to representations received at Stage Three, we have decided to confirm our draft recommendations as final, subject to one minor modification. We have been persuaded to endorse the Borough Council's proposed boundary between Old Town & Lawns and Walcot ward, with Chandler Close being included in the proposed Walcot ward. On balance, we consider that this would provide a better reflection of communities in the area. Under our final recommendations, the proposed Old Town & Lawns ward and Parks ward would vary by 9 per cent and 1 per cent from the borough average respectively (3 per cent and 4 per cent from the average by 2003).

Freshbrook and Toothill wards

52 Freshbrook and Toothill wards make up the large western expansion area of Swindon that was

developed from the mid 1980s to the mid 1990s. Both wards are each represented by three councillors. Currently, while the number of electors per councillor varies by 8 per cent from the borough average in Freshbrook ward, there are 72 per cent more electors per councillor than the average in Toothill ward.

53 At Stage One, the Borough Council proposed increasing the number of councillors representing this area from six to eight, and dividing the area into three new wards. It proposed transferring the Prinnels area from Toothill ward to Freshbrook ward and dividing the remainder of Toothill wards into two new wards – Shaw & Nine Elms and Toothill & Westlea. The proposed Shaw & Nine Elms ward, to be represented by two councillors, would comprise the Middleleaze, Shaw, Nine Elms, Peatmoor and Sparcells areas, and the proposed Toothill & Westlea ward, to be represented by three councillors, comprising the Westlea, Toothill, Ramleaze and Eastleaze areas. The Council also proposed transferring Hay Lane Camp from Freshbrook ward to a new Wroughton & Chiseldon ward. It argued that this area is separated from the rest of Freshbrook by the M4 and the London to Bristol railway line, and has little affinity with the urban residential area of Freshbrook. No other representations were received.

54 In our draft recommendations report, we accepted the case made for an increase in the current level of representation for the area. We endorsed the Borough Council's proposals for Freshbrook ward. We considered that the transfer of the Prinnels area from Toothill ward to Freshbrook ward and the transfer of Hay Lane Camp would provide a much improved standard of electoral equality in the area and would also utilise more recognisable boundaries. However, we expressed reservations over the proposed warding arrangements for the remainder of the existing Toothill ward. While we accepted that the ward should be split between two new wards, we were not persuaded that the proposed Toothill & Westlea and Shaw & Nine Elms wards would provide the best balance between electoral equality and reflecting the interests and identities of the constituent communities in the area. In particular, we considered that the Ramleaze and Eastleaze areas would appear to have more in common with Shaw & Nine Elms than with the larger residential areas of Toothill and Westlea. We further noted that

the Ramleaze and Eastleaze areas are separated from the south of Toothill ward by the busy Whitehill Way. On balance, therefore, we considered that there would be merit in retaining the Ramleaze and Eastleaze areas within the same ward as Shaw and Nine Elms, using Whitehill Way as the boundary between the two wards.

55 At Stage Three, our draft recommendations gained the support of the Borough Council. Swindon Labour Party Committee accepted the principle of three wards covering the area, but expressed concern at the proposed boundary between Toothill and Freshbrook wards. It also proposed that the area be represented by nine councillors, one more than proposed in our draft recommendations. Julia Drown MP, three local councillors and two local residents also expressed reservations over the proposed warding arrangements in this area.

56 Having carefully considered the submissions received at Stage Three, we remain satisfied that our draft recommendations would strike the best balance between securing electoral equality and the statutory criteria and confirm them as final. We have carefully considered the alternative proposal, but note that, while it would improve electoral equality within the proposed wards of Freshbrook & Grange Park, Toothill & Westlea and Shaw & Nine Elms, the increase in the number of councillors would adversely affect other wards in the borough. Our final recommendation would provide a reasonable level of electoral equality for the three wards, with the number of electors per councillor in the proposed Freshbrook & Grange Park, Shaw & Nine Elms and Toothill & Westlea wards varying by 8 per cent, 3 per cent and 15 per cent from the borough average respectively. This level of electoral equality would further improve over the next five years, with all wards projected to vary by less than 10 per cent from the average.

Wroughton, Chiseldon and Ridgeway wards

57 The three wards of Wroughton, Chiseldon and Ridgeway cover a large rural area in the south of the borough, adjoining Kennet district. Currently, Wroughton and Chiseldon wards have 24 per cent and 17 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the borough average respectively, while Ridgeway ward has 9 per cent more than average. While the level of electoral inequality is expected to improve

in Ridgeway ward, with the number of electors per councillor varying by 4 per cent in 2003, the electoral inequality in Wroughton and Chiseldon wards is expected to increase over the next five years, and the number of electors per councillor is projected to vary by 28 per cent and 21 per cent from the average by 2003.

58 At Stage One, the Borough Council proposed boundary modifications to all three wards. It proposed expanding Wroughton ward to include the part of Chiseldon ward that lies to the east of the A346, with the western part of Chiseldon parish being combined with the adjacent Ridgeway ward. Also, as already discussed, the Borough Council proposed that Hay Lane Camp should be transferred from Freshbrook ward to the proposed Wroughton and Chiseldon ward; and that South Marston parish be transferred from Ridgeway ward to Blunsdon ward. Its proposals provided for much improved electoral equality, with the number of electors per councillor in the proposed Wroughton & Chiseldon ward varying by 12 per cent from the average, while the number of electors per councillor in the proposed Ridgeway ward would be equal to the average.

59 Submissions were also received from Chiseldon and Wroughton parish councils, both of whom opposed the Borough Council's proposal to combine Wroughton and Chiseldon parishes in a new three-member ward. In particular, Wroughton Parish Council expressed concern over the reduction in the number of councillors representing the rural area, and argued that the proposals were "biased" against the rural areas.

60 In our draft recommendations report, we concluded that the Borough Council's proposed warding arrangements for this area represented the best balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria. We were sympathetic to the concerns expressed by the two parish councils, and recognised the difficulty of reconciling the achievement of electoral equality and reflecting the interests and identities of communities in the rural area. Nevertheless, we were persuaded that the current level of electoral inequality should be addressed.

61 At Stage Three, our draft recommendations were supported by the Borough Council. No other comments were received. In the absence of opposing views expressed, we remain satisfied that our draft recommendations would strike the best balance between the statutory criteria and the need to secure electoral equality, and confirm them as final. Our final recommendations provide for much improved electoral equality, with the number of electors per councillor in the proposed Wroughton & Chiseldon ward varying by 12 per cent from the average, while the number of electors in the proposed Ridgeway ward would be equal to the average. By 2003, the number of electors per councillor in the proposed Wroughton & Chiseldon and Ridgeway wards would vary by 6 per cent and 5 per cent from the district average respectively. Details of the proposed boundaries are illustrated on Map A2 at Appendix A and the large map at the back of the report.

Electoral Cycle

62 In our draft recommendations report, we proposed that the present system of elections by thirds in Swindon be retained. No contrary representations were received on this issue, and we have therefore decided to confirm our draft recommendations as final.

Conclusions

63 Having considered all the representations and evidence received, we have decided to substantially endorse our draft recommendations, subject to a minor boundary modification between the proposed Walcot and Old Town & Lawn wards.

64 We have concluded that, in Swindon:

- (a) there should be an increase in council size from 54 to 59;
- (b) there should be 22 wards, one more than at present;
- (c) the boundaries of 19 of the existing wards should be modified;
- (d) elections should continue to take place by thirds.

65 Figure 4 shows the impact of our final recommendations on electoral equality, comparing them with the current arrangements, based on 1998 and 2003 electorate figures.

66 As shown in Figure 4, our final recommendations for Swindon Borough Council would result in the number of electors per councillor in 17 wards varying by less than 10 per cent from the borough average. This level of electoral equality is projected to improve further over the next five years, with all 22 wards varying by no more than 10 per cent from the borough average in 2003. Our final recommendations are set out in more detail in Figures 1 and 2, and illustrated on Map 2, the maps at Appendix A and the large map at the back of the report.

Final Recommendation

Swindon Borough Council should comprise 59 councillors serving 22 wards, as detailed and named in Figures 1 and 2, and illustrated in Map 2, the maps at Appendix A and the large map at the back of the report. The Council should continue to hold elections by thirds.

Parish and Town Council Electoral Arrangements

67 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 borough wards, it must also be divided into parish wards, so that each parish ward lies wholly within a single ward of the borough. Accordingly, we propose a number of consequential parish ward changes, as detailed below.

68 In our draft recommendations report, we proposed that Blunsdon St Andrew Parish Council should in future comprise 17 councillors, representing four new wards. We further proposed that the boundaries of the new wards should reflect proposed changes at borough level. We have received no evidence to persuade us to move away from this view.

Figure 4 :
Comparison of Current and Recommended Electoral Arrangements

	1998 electorate		2003 forecast electorate	
	Current arrangements	Final recommendations	Current arrangements	Final recommendations
Number of councillors	54	59	54	59
Number of wards	21	22	21	22
Average number of electors per councillor	2,513	2,300	2,641	2,417
Number of wards with a variance more than 10 per cent from the average	13	5	16	0
Number of wards with a variance more than 20 per cent from the average	9	1	10	0

Final Recommendation

Blunsdon St Andrew Parish Council should comprise 17 councillors representing four wards, with the proposed Abbey Meads ward being represented by nine parish councillors, the proposed Blunsdon ward being represented by six councillors and the proposed Baxter and Kingsdown wards each being represented by one parish councillor. The new parish wards should reflect the proposed new borough wards, as illustrated on the large map at the back of the report.

69 In our draft recommendations report, we proposed that Chiseldon Parish Council should continue to comprise 15 parish councillors, representing two wards. We further proposed that the boundaries of the new wards should reflect proposed changes at borough ward level. We have received no evidence to persuade us to move away from this view.

Final Recommendation

Chiseldon Parish Council should comprise 15 town councillors representing two wards, with the proposed Chiseldon ward being represented by 14 parish councillors and the Badbury ward being represented by one parish councillor. The new parish wards should reflect the proposed new borough wards, as illustrated on Map A2 at Appendix A.

70 In our draft recommendation report we proposed that Haydon Wick Parish Council should in future comprise 18 parish councillors, representing three wards. We further proposed that the boundaries of the new parish wards should reflect proposed changes at borough ward level. We have received no evidence to persuade us to move away from this view.

Final Recommendation

Haydon Wick Parish Council should comprise 18 parish councillors, representing three parish wards, with the proposed Haydon Wick ward being represented by 13 councillors, the proposed Haydon End ward being represented by four parish councillors and the proposed Ray ward being represented by one parish councillor. The new parish wards should reflect the proposed new borough wards, as illustrated on the large map at the back of the report.

71 In our draft recommendations report, we proposed that Stratton St Margaret Parish Council should in future comprise 23 parish councillors, and that the number of wards should be increased from three to four. We further proposed that the boundaries of the new wards should reflect proposed changes at borough ward level. We have received no evidence to persuade us to move away from this view.

Final Recommendation

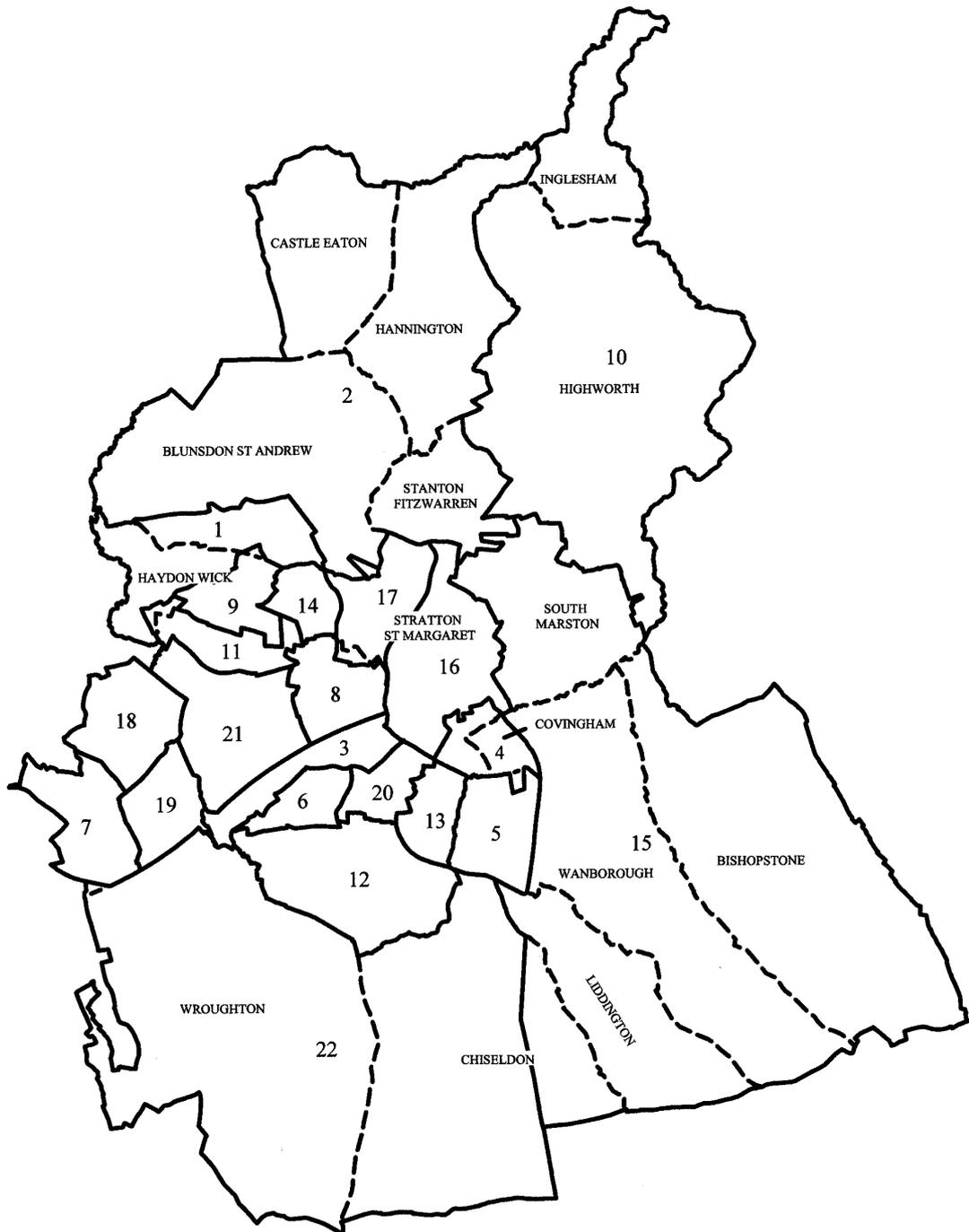
Stratton St Margaret Parish Council should comprise 23 parish councillors representing four wards, with the proposed St Philip ward being represented by eight parish councillors, the proposed St Margaret ward being represented by seven parish councillors and the proposed Coleview and Lower Coleview & Nythe wards each being represented by four parish councillors. The new parish wards should reflect the proposed new borough wards, as illustrated on Map A3 at Appendix A.

72 In our draft recommendations report we did not propose any change to the electoral cycle of parish and town councils in the borough. No contrary representations were received on this issue, and we have therefore decided to confirm our draft recommendations as final.

Final Recommendation

Elections for parish and town councils should continue to be held at the same time as elections for principal authorities.

Map 2:
The Commission's Final Recommendations for Swindon



KEY	
PROPOSED WARD BOUNDARY	—————
EXISTING PARISH BOUNDARY	- - - - -

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Key to Wards

1 Abbey Meads	8 Gorse Hill and Pinehurst	15 Ridgeway
2 Blunsdon	9 Haydon Wick	16 St Margaret
3 Central	10 Highworth	17 St Philip
4 Covingham and Nythe	11 Moredon	18 Shaw and Nine Elms
5 Dorcan	12 Old Town and Lawn	19 Toothill and Westlea
6 Eastcott	13 Parks	20 Walcot
7 Freshbrook and Grange Park	14 Penhill	21 Western
		22 Wroughton and Chiseldon

6. NEXT STEPS

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

74 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 earlier than six weeks from the date that our recommendations are submitted to the Secretary of State.

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

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

APPENDIX A

Final Recommendations for Swindon: Detailed Mapping

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

Map A1 illustrates, in outline form, the proposed ward boundaries within the borough and indicates the area which is shown in more detail on the large map at the back of the report.

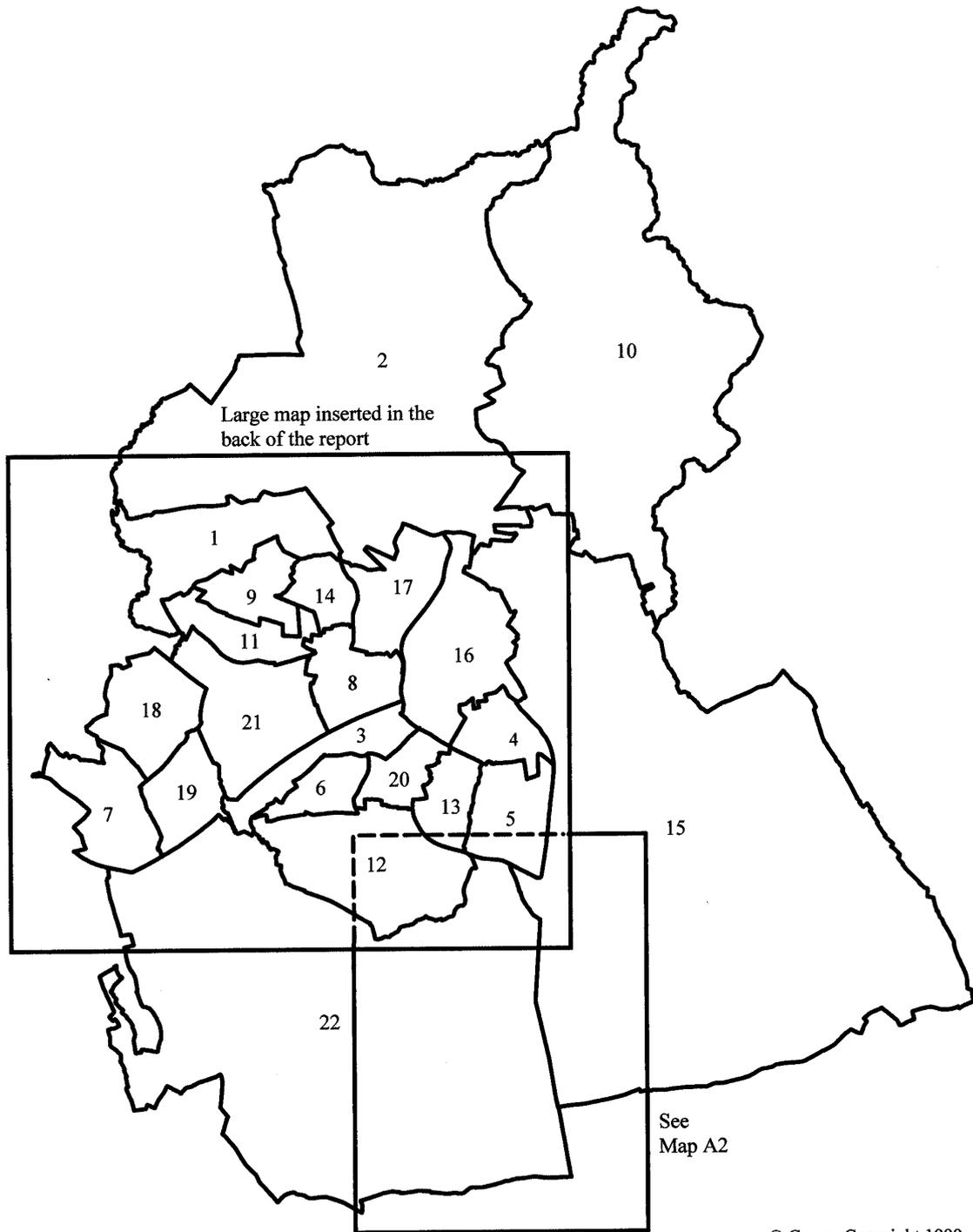
Map A2 illustrates the proposed parish warding of Chiseldon.

Map A3 illustrates the proposed parish warding of Stratton St Margaret parish.

Map A4 illustrates the proposed boundaries between Gorse Hill & Pinehurst, St Philip and Whitworth wards.

The **large map** inserted in the back of the report illustrates the proposed warding arrangements for Swindon Town.

Map A1:
Final Recommendations for Swindon: Key Map

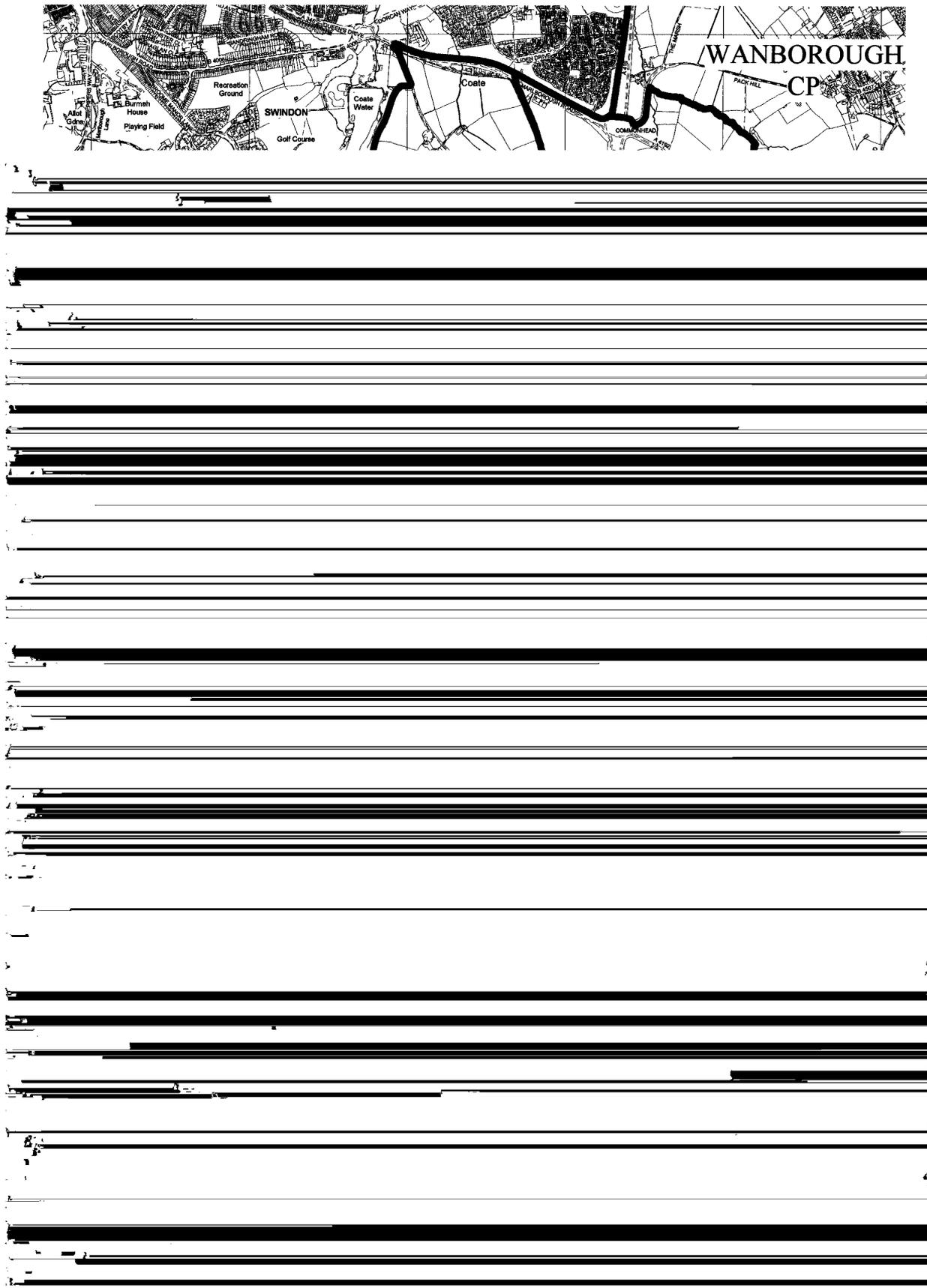


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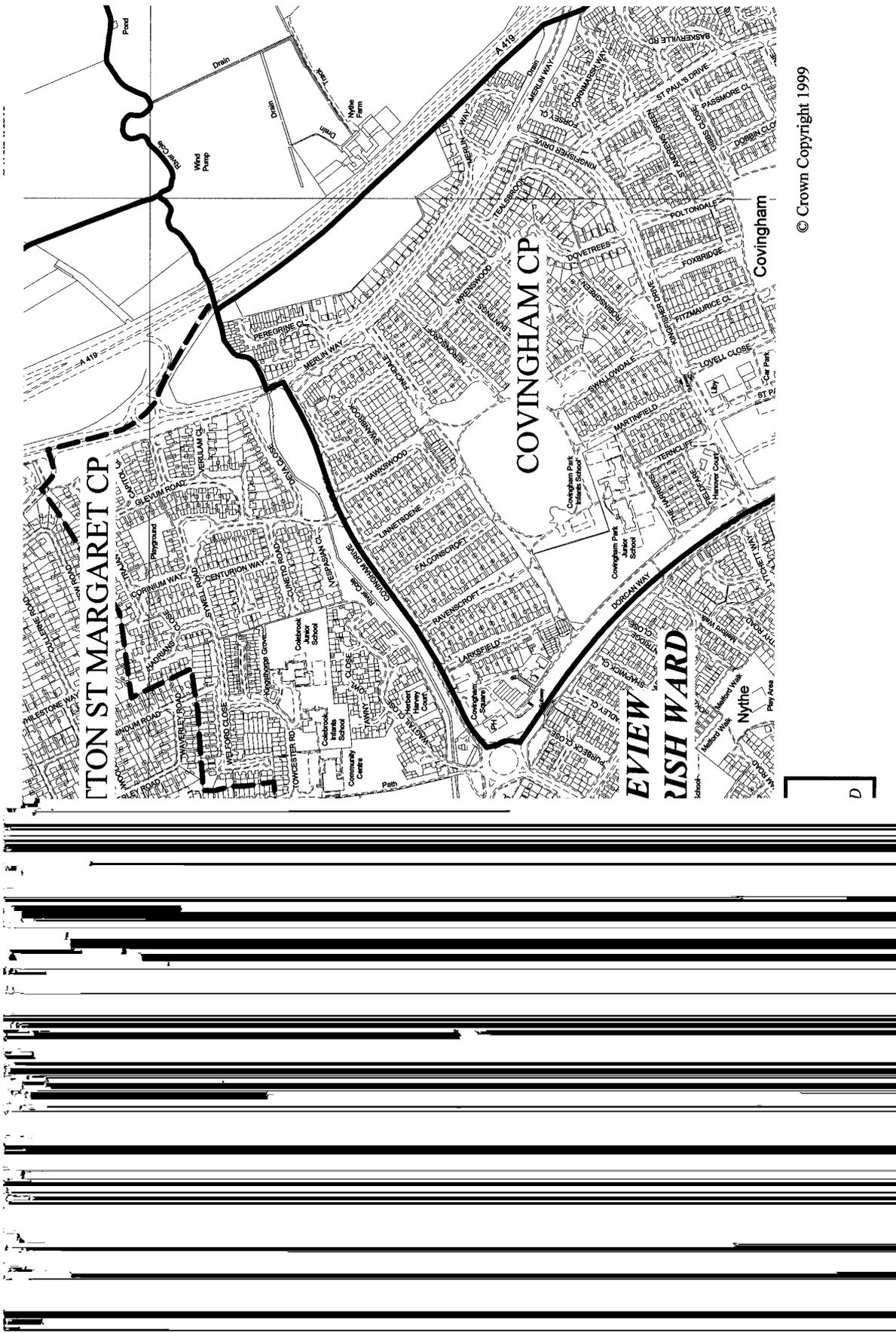
Key to Wards

1	Abbey Meads	8	Gorse Hill and Pinehurst	15	Ridgeway
2	Blunsdon	9	Haydon Wick	16	St Margaret
3	Central	10	Highworth	17	St Philip
4	Covingham and Nythe	11	Moredon	18	Shaw and Nine Elms
5	Dorcan	12	Old Town and Lawn	19	Toothill and Westlea
6	Eastcott	13	Parks	20	Walcot
7	Freshbrook and Grange Park	14	Penhill	21	Western
				22	Wroughton and Chiseldon

Map A2:
Proposed Parish Ward Boundaries in Chiseldon Parish

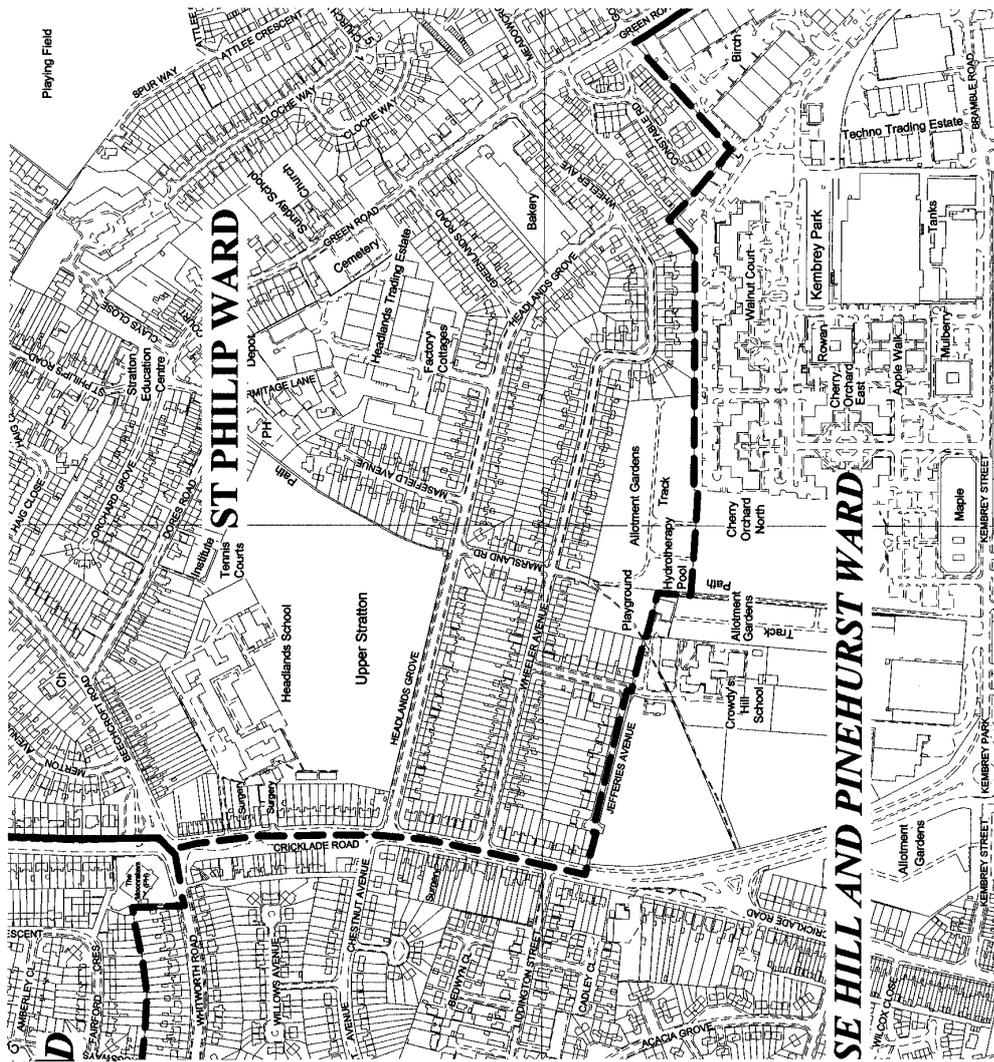


Map A3:
Proposed Parish Ward Boundaries in Stratton St Margaret Parish



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Map A4:
Proposed Boundaries for Gorse Hill & Pinehurst, St Philip and Whitworth Wards



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