

Draft recommendations on the
future electoral arrangements for
South Oxfordshire

February 2001

LOCAL GOVERNMENT COMMISSION FOR ENGLAND

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

Members of the Commission are:

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

Barbara Stephens (Chief Executive)

We are statutorily required to review periodically the electoral arrangements – such as the number of councillors representing electors in each area and the number and boundaries of wards and electoral divisions – of every principal local authority in England. In broad terms our objective 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, and the number of councillors and ward names. We can also make recommendations for change to the electoral arrangements of parish and town councils in the district.

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

SUMMARY

The Commission began a review of the electoral arrangements for South Oxfordshire on 25 July 2000.

- **This report summarises the representations we received during the first stage of the review, and makes draft recommendations for change.**

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

- **in 21 of the 32 wards the number of electors represented by each councillor varies by more than 10 per cent from the average for the district and nine wards vary by more than 20 per cent from the average;**
- **by 2005 this unequal representation is not expected to improve, with the number of electors per councillor forecast to vary by more than 10 per cent from the average in 22 wards and by more than 20 per cent in nine wards.**

Our main draft recommendations for future electoral arrangements (Figures 1 and 2 and paragraphs 117-118) are that:

- **South Oxfordshire District Council should have 48 councillors, two less than at present;**
- **there should be 26 wards, instead of 32 as at present;**
- **the boundaries of 30 of the existing wards should be modified and two wards should retain their existing boundaries, resulting in a net reduction of six;**
- **whole council elections should continue to take place every four years.**

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

- **In four of the proposed 26 wards the number of electors per councillor would vary by no more than 10 per cent from the district average.**
- **This improved level of electoral equality is expected to continue with the number of electors per councillor in one ward expected to vary by no more than 10 per cent from the average for the district in 2005.**

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

- **revised warding arrangements and the redistribution of councillors for the parishes of Didcot and Thame;**
- **new warding arrangements and the redistribution of councillors for the parish of East Hagbourne.**

This report sets out our draft recommendations on which comments are invited.

- **We will consult on our draft recommendations for eight weeks from 20 February 2001. Because we take this consultation very seriously, we may move away from our draft recommendations in the light of Stage Three responses. It is therefore important that all interested parties let us have their views and evidence, *whether or not* they agree with our draft recommendations.**
- **After considering local views, we will decide whether to modify our draft recommendations and then make our final recommendations to the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions.**
- **It will then be for the Secretary of State to accept, modify or reject our final recommendations. He will also determine when any changes come into effect.**

You should express your views by writing directly to the Commission at the address below by 23 April 2001:

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Figure 1: The Commission's Draft Recommendations: Summary

Ward name	Number of councillors	Constituent areas	Map reference
1 Aston Rowant	1	Aston Rowant ward (part – the parishes of Aston Rowant, Crowell, Sydenham and Tetsworth); Thame North ward (part – the parish of Towersey)	Map 2
2 Benson	2	Benson ward (the parishes of Benson and Ewelme); Chalgrove ward (part – the parishes of Berrick Salome and Brightwell Baldwin)	Map 2
3 Berinsfield	2	Berinsfield ward (the parish of Berinsfield); Dorchester ward (the parishes of Dorchester, Drayton St Leonard and Warborough); Chalgrove ward (part – the parishes of Newington and Stadhampton)	Map 2
4 Chalgrove	1	Chalgrove ward (part – the parish of Chalgrove)	Map 2
5 Chinnor	2	<i>Unchanged</i> ; Chinnor ward (the parish of Chinnor)	Map 2
6 Cholsey & Hagbourne	3	Cholsey ward (the parishes of Cholsey and Moulsoford); Hagbourne ward (part – the parishes of Aston Tirrold, Aston Upton, the proposed East Hagbourne parish ward of East Hagbourne parish, North Moreton, South Moreton and West Hagbourne); Brightwell ward (part – the parishes of Little Wittenham and Long Wittenham)	Map 2
7 Crowmarsh	1	Crowmarsh ward (part – the parishes of Crowmarsh and Ipsden); Nettlebed ward (part – the parish of Nuffield)	Map 2
8 Didcot East	2	Didcot Northbourne ward; Didcot South ward (part); Hagbourne ward (part – the proposed Millbrook parish ward of East Hagbourne parish)	Map 2 and large map
9 Didcot North	3	Didcot North ward (part); Didcot Northbourne ward (part)	Map 2 & large map
10 Didcot South	2	Didcot South ward (part)	Map 2 & large map
11 Didcot West & Central	2	Didcot North ward (part); Didcot South ward (part)	Map 2 & large map
12 Forest	1	Crowmarsh ward (part – the parishes of Checkendon and Stoke Row); Nettlebed ward (part – the parish of Bix and Assendon); Rotherfield Peppard ward (part – the parishes of Highmoor and Rotherfield Greys)	Map 2
13 Garsington	1	Garsington ward (the parishes of Cuddesdon & Denton and Garsington); Clifton Hampden ward (part – the parishes of Marsh Baldon and Toot Baldon)	Map 2

Ward name	Number of councillors	Constituent areas	Map reference
14 Goring	2	Goring ward (the parishes of Goring and South Stoke); Goring Heath ward (part – the parishes of Goring Heath and Whitchurch-on-Thames)	Map 2
15 Great Milton	1	Great Milton ward (the parishes of Great Haseley, Great Milton, Little Milton and Tiddington-with-Albury); Wheatley ward (part – the parish of Waterstock)	Map 2
16 Henley North	2	Henley ward (part – the Henley North parish ward of Henley parish)	Maps 2 and A2
17 Henley South	2	Henley ward (part – the Henley South parish ward of Henley parish)	Maps 2 and A2
18 Sandford	1	Clifton Hampden ward (part – the parishes of Clifton Hampden, Culham, Nuneham Courtenay and Sandford-on-Thames)	Map 2
19 Shiplake	2	Kidmore End ward (the parishes of Eye & Dunsden and Kidmore End); Shiplake ward (the parishes of Harpsden and Shiplake); Goring Heath ward (part – the parish of Mapledurham)	Map 2
20 Sonning Common & Rotherfield Peppard	2	Rotherfield Peppard ward (part – the parish of Rotherfield Peppard); Sonning Common ward (the parish of Sonning Common)	Map 2
21 Thame North	2	Thame North ward (part – the Thame North parish ward of Thame parish); Thame South ward (part – part of the Thame South parish ward of Thame parish)	Maps 2 and A3
22 Thame South	2	Thame South ward (part – part of the Thame South parish ward of Thame parish)	Maps 2 and A3
23 Wallingford & Brightwell-cum-Sotwell	3	Wallingford ward (the parish of Wallingford); Brightwell ward (part – the parish of Brightwell-cum-Sotwell)	Map 2
24 Watlington	2	Aston Rowant ward (part – the parishes of Adwell, Lewknor, Stoke Talmage and Wheatfield); Chalgrove ward (part – the parishes of Britwell Salome and Cuxham-with-Easington); Nettlebed ward (part – the parishes of Nettlebed, Pishill-with-Stonor and Swyncombe); Watlington ward (the parishes of Pyrton, Shirburn and Watlington)	Map 2

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Constituent areas	Map reference
25	Wheatley	3	Forest Hill ward (the parishes of Beckley & Stowood, Elsfield, Forest Hill-with-Shotover, Stanton St John and Woodeaton); Horspath ward (the parish of Horspath); Wheatley ward (part – the parishes of Holton, Waterperry-with-Thomley and Wheatley)	Map 2
26	Woodcote	1	<i>Unchanged</i> (the parish of Woodcote)	Map 2

Notes: 1 The whole district is parished.

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

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

4 All proposed ward boundaries are based upon the revised parish boundaries which come into effect in April 2003

Figure 2: The Commission's Draft Recommendations for South Oxfordshire

Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2000)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2005)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
1 Aston Rowant	1	1,891	1,891	-8	1,934	1,934	-8
2 Benson	2	3,761	1,881	-8	3,916	1,958	-7
3 Berinsfield	2	4,400	2,200	7	4,369	2,185	4
4 Chalgrove	1	2,159	2,159	5	2,197	2,197	4
5 Chinnor	2	4,556	2,278	11	4,567	2,284	8
6 Cholsey & Hagbourne	3	5,910	1,970	-4	5,906	1,969	-7
7 Crowmarsh	1	1,834	1,834	-11	1,909	1,909	-9
8 Didcot East	2	4,015	2,008	-2	3,960	1,980	-6
9 Didcot North	3	5,014	1,671	19	6,631	2,210	5
10 Didcot South	2	4,281	2,141	4	4,306	2,153	2
11 Didcot West & Central	2	4,041	2,021	-2	4,045	2,023	-4
12 Forest	1	1,914	1,914	-7	1,871	1,871	-11
13 Garsington	1	2,197	2,197	7	2,179	2,179	3
14 Goring	2	4,625	2,313	13	4,607	2,304	9
15 Great Milton	1	1,962	1,962	-5	1,959	1,959	-7
16 Henley North	2	4,351	2,176	6	4,364	2,182	3
17 Henley South	2	4,202	2,101	2	4,320	2,160	2
18 Sandford	1	1,996	1,996	-3	2,023	2,023	-4
19 Shiplake	2	3,894	1,947	-5	3,923	1,962	-7
20 Sonning Common & Rotherfield Peppard	2	4,134	2,067	1	4,237	2,119	0
21 Thame North	2	4,288	2,144	4	4,214	2,107	0
22 Thame South	2	4,006	2,003	-3	4,232	2,116	0

Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2000)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2005)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
23 Wallingford & Brightwell-cum-Sotwell	3	6,405	2,135	4	6,603	2,201	4
24 Watlington	2	4,173	2,087	2	4,174	2,087	-1
25 Wheatley	3	6,661	2,220	8	6,813	2,271	8
26 Woodcote	1	1,961	1,961	-5	1,976	1,976	-6
Totals	48	98,631	–	–	101,235	–	–
Averages	–	–	2,055	–	–	2,109	–

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

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

1 INTRODUCTION

1 This report contains our draft recommendations on the electoral arrangements for the district of South Oxfordshire in Oxfordshire on which we are now consulting. We are reviewing the five districts in Oxfordshire as part of our programme of periodic electoral reviews (PERs) of all 386 principal local authority areas in England. Our programme started in 1996 and is currently expected to be completed by 2004.

2 This is our first review of the electoral arrangements of South Oxfordshire. The last such review was undertaken by our predecessor, the Local Government Boundary Commission (LGBC), which reported to the Secretary of State in June 1980 (Report No. 385). The electoral arrangements of Oxfordshire County Council were last reviewed in June 1982 (Report No. 428). We expect to review the County Council's electoral arrangements in 2002.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

9 The review is in four stages (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Stages of the Review

Stage	Description
One	Submission of proposals to the Commission
Two	The Commission’s analysis and deliberation
Three	Publication of draft recommendations and consultation on them
Four	Final deliberation and report to the Secretary of State

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

11 Stage One began on 25 July 2000, when we wrote to South Oxfordshire District Council inviting proposals for future electoral arrangements. We also notified Oxfordshire County Council, Oxfordshire Police Authority, the local authority associations, Oxfordshire Association of Local Councils, parish and town councils in the district, the Members of Parliament with constituency interests in the district, the Members of the European Parliament for the South East Region, and the headquarters of the main political parties. We placed a notice in the local press, issued a press release and invited the District Council to publicise the review further. The closing date for receipt of representations, the end of Stage One, was 16 October 2000.

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

13 Stage Three began on 20 February 2001 and will end on 23 April 2001. This stage involves publishing the draft recommendations 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 our draft recommendations.**

14 During Stage Four we will reconsider the draft recommendations in the light of the Stage Three consultation, decide whether to move away from them in any areas, and submit final recommendations to the Secretary of State. Interested parties will have a further six weeks to make representations to the Secretary of State. It will then be for him to accept, modify or reject our final recommendations. If the Secretary of State accepts the recommendations, with or without modification, he will make an Order. The Secretary of State will determine when any changes come into effect.

2 CURRENT ELECTORAL ARRANGEMENTS

16 The District of South Oxfordshire covers the south-eastern area of Oxfordshire. Much of its southern border is formed by the River Thames. Reading and West Berkshire adjoin the District to the south, Vale of White Horse to the west; Oxford City, Cherwell, Aylesbury Vale to the north; Wycombe to the east and Wokingham to the south east. The District includes the main towns of Didcot, Henley and Thame and the smaller towns of Chinnor and Wallingford, with the remainder of the area being predominantly rural.

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

18 The District has a population of approximately 125,000 within an area of 67,125 hectares. The current electorate is 98,631 and is forecast to increase to 101,235 over the next five years. Didcot, in particular, is forecast to undergo considerable growth by 2005. Elections are of the whole council every four years. The last election was held on 6 May 1999 and the existing council comprises 20 Liberal Democrats, 20 Conservatives, 7 Labour and 3 Independents.

19 Since the last electoral review there has been an increase in the electorate in South Oxfordshire District, with around 3 per cent more electors than two decades ago as a result of new housing developments. The most notable increase has been in Didcot North ward.

20 At present, each councillor represents an average of 1,973 electors, which the District Council forecasts will increase to 2,025 by the year 2005 if the present number of councillors is maintained. However, due to demographic and other changes over the past two decades, the number of electors per councillor in 21 of the 32 wards varies by more than 10 per cent from the district average, nine wards by more than 20 per cent and four wards by more than 30 per cent. The worst imbalance is in Didcot North ward where the councillor represents 124 per cent more electors than the district average.

Map 1: Existing Wards in South Oxfordshire

Figure 4: Existing Electoral Arrangements

Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2000)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2005)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
1 Aston Rowant	1	2,131	2,131	8	2,175	2,175	7
2 Benson	2	3,362	1,681	-15	3,520	1,760	-13
3 Berinsfield	1	1,924	1,924	-2	1,894	1,894	-6
4 Brightwell	1	1,978	1,978	0	1,952	1,952	-4
5 Chalgrove	2	3,492	1,746	-11	3,546	1,773	-12
6 Chinnor	2	4,556	2,278	15	4,567	2,284	13
7 Cholsey	2	3,082	1,541	-22	3,071	1,536	-24
8 Clifton Hampden	1	2,331	2,331	18	2,355	2,355	16
9 Crowmarsh	1	2,385	2,385	21	2,417	2,417	19
10 Didcot North	2	8,835	4,418	124	10,450	5,225	158
11 Didcot Northbourne	1	3,060	3,060	55	2,985	2,985	47
12 Didcot South	3	4,950	1,650	-16	5,000	1,667	-18
13 Dorchester	1	1,797	1,797	-9	1,777	1,777	-12
14 Forest Hill	1	1,606	1,606	-19	1,598	1,598	-21
15 Garsington	1	1,862	1,862	-6	1,847	1,847	-9
16 Goring	2	3,038	1,519	-23	3,031	1,516	-25
17 Goring Heath	1	1,787	1,787	-9	1,773	1,773	-12
18 Great Milton	1	1,900	1,900	-4	1,898	1,898	-6
19 Hagbourne	1	2,599	2,599	32	2,613	2,613	29
20 Henley	5	8,553	1,711	-13	8,684	1,737	-14
21 Horspath	1	1,106	1,106	-44	1,104	1,104	-45
22 Kidmore End	1	1,481	1,481	-25	1,472	1,472	-27
23 Nettlebed	1	1,927	1,927	-2	1,920	1,920	-5
24 Rotherfield Peppard	1	1,648	1,648	-16	1,769	1,769	-13
25 Shiplake	1	2,213	2,213	12	2,254	2,254	11
26 Sonning Common	2	3,005	1,503	-24	2,991	1,496	-26
27 Thame North	2	4,439	2,220	13	4,361	2,181	8

Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2000)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2005)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
28 Thame South	2	4,213	2,107	7	4,440	2,220	10
29 Wallingford	3	5,163	1,721	-13	5,380	1,793	-11
30 Watlington	1	2,236	2,236	13	2,243	2,243	11
31 Wheatley	2	4,011	2,006	2	4,172	2,086	3
32 Woodcote	1	1,961	1,961	-1	1,976	1,976	-2
Totals	50	98,631	-	-	101,235	-	-
Averages	-	-	1,973	-	-	2,025	-

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

Note: The 'variance from average' column shows by how far, in percentage terms, the number of electors per councillor varies from the average for the district. The minus symbol (-) denotes a lower than average number of electors. For example, in 2000, electors in Horspath ward were relatively over-represented by 44 per cent, while electors in Didcot North ward were relatively under-represented by 124 per cent. Figures have been rounded to the nearest whole number.

3 REPRESENTATIONS RECEIVED

21 At the start of the review we invited members of the public and other interested parties to write to us giving their views on the future electoral arrangements for South Oxfordshire District Council and its constituent parish and town councils.

22 During this initial stage of the review, officers from the Commission 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 21 representations during Stage One, including district-wide schemes from the District Council and South Oxfordshire Conservative Association, all of which may be inspected at the offices of the District Council and the Commission.

South Oxfordshire District Council

23 The District Council proposed an increase in council size from the current 50 members to 54 members representing both single and multi-member wards. The Council's scheme provided reasonable electoral equality across the district but resulted in a significant amount of parish warding outside of the three main towns of Didcot, Henley and Thame, including several instances where rural parishes were warded with urban areas. The Council had consulted locally on a 54-member scheme and included a summary of responses in its submission. The Council's proposal is summarised at Appendix B.

South Oxfordshire Conservative Association

24 South Oxfordshire Conservative Association (hereafter referred to as the Conservatives) also submitted a district-wide scheme, proposing a reduction in council size from 50 to 48 members. The Conservatives' scheme also provided reasonable electoral equality and only proposed warding one parish outside of the three main towns. They reasoned that using "existing parish boundaries wherever possible would make sense to most people" and contended that mixed rural/town wards "could mean councillors not representing either part of their ward effectively". They also stated that they had supported putting forward two schemes for public consultation. The Conservatives largely proposed single and two-member wards and only one three-member ward. The Conservatives provided argumentation to support their scheme overall, although they did not submit any ward by ward descriptions or any proposed ward names. In Didcot, they proposed that the town be represented by nine councillors overall, but did not supply any detailed ward boundaries.

Oxfordshire County Council

25 Oxfordshire County Council stated that it opposed linking rural parishes with urban areas in the creation of district wards and county divisions. It also contended that two and three member wards in the towns of Didcot and Thame "are likely to create difficulties for the County Council in formulating their proposals to meet the criteria for future county electoral divisions".

Parish and Town Councils

26 We received representations from one town council and 10 parish councils. Thame Town Council supported the District Council's scheme, particularly in relation to Thame. North Moreton Parish Council proposed that the parishes of North Moreton, South Moreton, Aston Tirrold and Aston Upthorpe should remain together with "Cholsey or others as necessary" and particularly opposed the Council's proposal. South Moreton Parish Council and Aston Upthorpe & Aston Tirrold Parish Council supported the views of North Moreton Parish Council.

27 Whitchurch-on-Thames Parish Council opposed the Council's proposed scheme, stating its preference for the status quo. It further stated that it shared no common identity with parishes further east and emphasised its links with Whitchurch Hill in Goring Heath parish. Lewknor Parish Council expressed concern that the parish could be vulnerable to warding because the two main settlements within Lewknor are physically separated.

28 Wheatley Parish Council also opposed the District Council's proposals to ward part of its parish with Horspath, arguing that this would create a ward with little common identity. It also objected to any reduction in the number of its parish councillors. Pyrton Parish Council objected to the Council's proposal to transfer its parish from Watlington ward to Chalgrove ward and objected to the proposed increase in council size to 54 members. Sydenham Parish Council stated that it was "appalled" at the District Council's proposal to ward the parish with Thame South ward. It contended that, as a rural community, it could not be properly represented when linked with an urban area and stated its preference to remain within Aston Rowant ward.

29 Shiplake Parish Council also objected to the District Council's proposals. It argued that although it did not disagree with the proposal to link it with Harpsden parish, it opposed combining the new Binfield Heath parish in a ward with Sonning Common parish. It suggested that a better warding arrangement would combine the parishes of Shiplake, Harpsden, Eye & Dunsden and Kidmore End. Rotherfield Peppard Parish Council stated that it would prefer to be linked with the parishes of Highmoor, Checkendon and Rotherfield Greys rather than that of Sonning Common. It contended that this would leave Rotherfield Peppard Parish Council with only a minority voice.

Other Representations

30 We received a further seven representations, from a district councillor and six local residents. District Councillor Rudge strongly opposed the proposed increase in council size from 50 to 54 members, arguing that this would result in increased cost to the taxpayer "with no apparent benefit". Instead he supported the Conservatives' proposed 48-member scheme. Councillor Rudge also opposed the proposal to link the new Binfield Heath parish with Sonning Common parish.

31 A resident objected to the Council's proposed merger of West Hagbourne parish with Didcot. She argued that this would split West Hagbourne parish from its "sibling village, East Hagbourne" and would "effectively reduce our representation on the Council". Three other residents also opposed this proposal for the same reasons, while registering their disagreement with the way in which the Council had conducted its public consultation.

32 Another resident stated his opposition to the Council's proposal to combine Sydenham parish in a ward with the town of Thame. He argued that this proposal ignored the differing rural and urban natures of the two areas. A local resident opposed the Council's proposals affecting Whitchurch-on-Thames, arguing that the area has more community links with Goring Heath.

4 ANALYSIS AND DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS

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

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

35 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.

36 Our *Guidance* states that we accept that the achievement of absolute electoral equality for the authority as a whole is likely to be unattainable. However, we consider that, if electoral imbalances are to be kept to the minimum, the objective 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 start from the standpoint of electoral equality, and then make adjustments to reflect relevant factors, such as community identity and interests. Regard must also be had to five-year forecasts of changes in electorates. Regard must be had to five-year forecasts of changes in electorates and we would aim to recommend a scheme which provides improved electoral equality over this five-year period.

Electorate Forecasts

37 The District Council submitted electorate forecasts for the year 2005, projecting an increase in the electorate of some 3 per cent from 98,631 to 101,235 over the five-year period from 2000 to 2005. It expects most of the growth to be in Didcot North ward. The Council has estimated rates and locations of housing development with regard to structure and local plans, the expected rate of building over the five-year period and assumed occupancy rates. Advice from the District Council on the likely effect on electorates of changes to ward boundaries has been obtained.

38 We accept that forecasting electorates is an inexact science and, having given consideration to the District Council’s figures, are content that they represent the best estimates that can reasonably be made at this time.

Council Size

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

40 At present South Oxfordshire District Council has 50 members. The District Council proposed a council of 54 members. The Council stated that it had considered councillor : elector ratios in other districts of comparable size in coming to its decision for a 54-member council. It cited examples of where the Commission has increased council size in previous reviews but did not provide detailed justification as to why its proposed increase of four members was necessary or how it would provide for more effective and convenient local government.

41 The Conservatives argued that the Council’s proposal to increase the number of councillors to 54 “... can only mean further cost”. They stated that “this point is held out by the move of South Oxfordshire District Council towards a cabinet-government style” and contended that “as decisions are taken by a smaller, inner core of councillors, there becomes less need for so many councillors”. The Conservatives concluded by stating “we believe that the council can operate successfully with the 48 members that we propose”.

42 Councillor Rudge also opposed the proposed increase in councillors from 50 to 54 members. He argued that this proposal “would result in increased cost to the rate payer with no apparent benefit”. He continued to state that such a proposal would “not be in accordance with the principle of Best Value”. He supported the view that with a move towards a cabinet system “less, rather than more councillors, would make financial sense”.

43 Shiplake Parish Council argued that the Council’s proposed increase in council size “make[s] little sense and will lead to an increase in costs for South Oxfordshire District Council”. They further contended “... we do not believe this is acceptable”.

44 Pyrton Parish Council stated that they did not support the Council’s proposal to increase the number of councillors by four as it would “increase the Council’s bureaucracy and cost unnecessarily”.

45 Having considered the representations received we have concluded that there is little justification or local support for an increase in council size. We note that the Council did not submit any detailed analysis or evidence demonstrating how such an increase in council size would impact on its operation. Moreover, the majority of letters sent to the District Council (summarised in Appendix 7 of the Council’s submission) oppose an increase in council size and its scheme, with a large number of respondents showing support for the Conservatives’ alternative 48-member scheme. Having considered the appropriate allocation of councillors across the district, we note that while a 54-member council would provide reasonable representation in the rural parts of the district, to secure the best balance of representation between the urban and rural areas, it would be necessary to ward rural parishes with urban areas in several parts of the district in order to improve electoral equality. Under a 48-member Council, as proposed by the Conservatives, it is possible to retain external town boundaries, without the inclusion of surrounding rural parishes while also securing

good electoral equality. It also provides good representation in the district as a whole and avoids unnecessarily dividing existing groups of parishes. With these considerations in mind and in light of the local views expressed during Stage One, we are of the opinion that a council size of 48 members would provide the best balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria.

Electoral Arrangements

46 Having adopted a 48-member council size, our capacity to endorse the Council's proposals is very limited. While we recognise that the Council's scheme did achieve reasonable electoral equality across the district under a 54-member council, we consider that the identities and interests of local communities could be better reflected, particularly in some of the rural wards which border the urban areas of the district. In contrast, we note that the Conservatives' proposed council size of 48 members facilitates a scheme which combines groups of parishes with similar interests and better recognises the importance of achieving a balance between electoral equality, reflecting the identities and interests of local communities and providing easily identifiable boundaries.

47 We have noted the comments made by Oxfordshire County Council that "two and three-member wards in the towns of Didcot and Thame ... are likely to create difficulties for the County Council in formulating their proposals...for future electoral divisions". It also contended that, as a consequence, "some of the proposed district council wards for these areas, will need to be divided into smaller units ... to remedy this situation". This is an issue which has arisen in a number of review areas. It is indicative of the tensions which can arise between the achievement of electoral equality within the individual districts of a county, each of whose electoral arrangements can vary significantly in terms of councillor:elector ratios and ward sizes, and across county council electoral divisions, while also seeking some measure of coterminosity between the two. These tensions are not readily reconciled.

48 In certain cases, it has been put to us that in reviewing district electoral arrangements we should prescribe ward patterns and sizes that would be compatible with county council divisions. We do not believe this to be a viable approach. As a Commission, we rely heavily on local authorities and other interested parties to put proposals to us on how the electoral arrangements within their individual areas might be improved. We believe that the interests of local democracy are best served by basing our recommendations on schemes which are generated locally, address the statutory criteria, and achieve a high level of electoral equality.

49 Nevertheless, we recognise that coterminosity between county divisions and district wards is capable of being conducive to effective and convenient local government, and we place a high value on its achievement as part of our reviews of County Council electoral arrangements.

50 Having considered the representations received and in order to secure the best balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria, we propose basing our draft recommendations on the Conservatives' scheme. However, in order to better reflect the identities and interests of local communities, we propose some amendments to their scheme in Didcot, Thame and parts of the more rural areas in the north and south of the district. While we note that our proposals are largely based on the Conservatives' scheme overall, we also note that they broadly reflect those of the Council in some areas.

Ward Names

51 In their Stage One submission the Conservatives did not provide ward names for any of their proposed wards. Given that we are putting forward a scheme based on that submitted by the Conservatives with some amendments we are putting forward our own ward names for consultation. We have attempted to reflect the identities of the proposed wards, while also having regard to existing ward names and the names of the parishes which have been grouped to form wards where relevant. However, we would welcome views on all our proposed ward names during Stage Three.

52 Details of our draft recommendations, including changes to district ward boundaries as a consequence of amended parish boundaries which have been approved by the Secretary of State and set out in The South Oxfordshire (Parishes) Order 2000, are set out in Figures 1 and 2, and illustrated on Map 2, at Appendix A and on the large map inserted at the back of this report.

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

- (a) Didcot North, Didcot Northbourne, Didcot South
- (b) Brightwell, Cholsey, Hagbourne and Wallingford
- (c) Benson, Berinsfield, Chalgrove, Clifton Hampden and Dorchester
- (d) Crowmarsh, Goring, Goring Heath and Woodcote
- (e) Kidmore End, Rotherfield Peppard, Shiplake and Sonning Common
- (f) Henley
- (g) Aston Rowant, Chinnor, Nettlebed and Watlington
- (h) Thame North and Thame South
- (i) Forest Hill, Garsington, Great Milton, Horspath and Wheatley

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

Didcot North, Didcot Northbourne, Didcot South

55 The town of Didcot is situated at the south western edge of the district. Didcot North ward (comprising the All Saints and Georgetown parish wards of Didcot parish) is represented by two councillors, Didcot Northbourne ward (comprising the Didcot Northbourne parish ward of Didcot parish) is represented by a single councillor and Didcot South ward (comprising the Greenmere and Park parish wards of Didcot parish) is represented by three councillors. Under the existing arrangements, the number of electors per councillor in Didcot North, Didcot Northbourne and Didcot South wards is 124 per cent above, 55 per cent above and 16 per cent below the district average respectively (158 per cent above, 47 per cent above and 18 per cent below by 2005).

56 The Conservatives proposed that Didcot should be represented by nine councillors overall, but did not submit detailed proposals, stating it should be “warded as necessary”.

57 A joint submission from two residents supported transferring the Millbrook area of East Hagbourne parish to a Didcot ward, stating that this area has more identity with Didcot Town.

58 We have carefully considered the representations received at Stage One. We recognise that Didcot is currently significantly under-represented and requires additional representation to address this and in order to account for the considerable growth forecast in the north of the town over the five year period to 2005. As detailed earlier, we propose basing our draft recommendations on a council size of 48. We have noted that under such a council size, Didcot would be entitled to 8.2 councillors initially (8.7 in 2005). Furthermore, we have noted that the Council and two local residents propose that the Millbrook area of East Hagbourne parish be included in a Didcot ward. This was also supported by East Hagbourne Parish Council during the District Council's local consultation. As a consequence, if the Millbrook area was included in with Didcot, the area as a whole would be entitled to 8.5 councillors initially (almost exactly nine councillors in 2005). Therefore, in order to secure the best balance of representation between the town area and the surrounding parishes, while also reflecting local community identities, we propose that East Hagbourne parish be warded with the Millbrook area be included in a ward with part of Didcot, and that the area as a whole be represented by nine councillors.

59 Our proposed three-member Didcot North ward would comprise polling districts RG and RH to the north of the railway line. We propose a new two-member Didcot West & Central ward comprising the remainder of the existing Didcot North ward to the south of this boundary, with the inclusion of the properties on Barleyfields and Elbourne and those on Wantage Road up to Park Road. We propose including the Millbrook area of East Hagbourne parish in our proposed two-member Didcot East ward. In order to improve electoral equality further in Didcot East and Didcot South wards, we propose that Mereland Road, Richmere Road, Ridgeway Road, Sinodun Road and the roads leading from them are included in Didcot East ward.

60 Under our draft recommendations, the number of electors per councillor in our proposed Didcot East and Didcot North wards would be 2 per cent below the district average and 19 per cent below respectively (6 per cent below and 5 per cent above by 2005). The number of electors per councillor in our proposed Didcot South and Didcot West & Central wards would be 4 per cent above the district average and 2 per cent below respectively (2 per cent above and 4 per cent below by 2005). Our draft recommendations for this area are illustrated on the large map at the back of this report. We would welcome all views during Stage Three, particularly with regard to our proposed ward names.

Brightwell, Cholsey, Hagbourne and Wallingford wards

61 These wards are situated in the west and south-west of the district. The number of electors per councillor in the existing single-member Brightwell ward (comprising the parishes of Brightwell-cum-Sotwell, Little Wittenham and Long Wittenham), the two-member Cholsey ward (comprising the parishes of Cholsey and Moulsoford) is equal to the district average and 22 per cent below respectively (4 per cent below and 24 per cent below by 2005). The number of electors per councillor in the single-member Hagbourne ward (comprising the parishes of Aston Tirrold, Aston Upthorpe, East Hagbourne, North Moreton, South Moreton and West Hagbourne) and the three-member Wallingford ward (comprising the parish of Wallingford) is 32 per cent above the district average and 13 per cent below respectively (29 per cent above and 11 per cent below by 2005).

62 At Stage One, the Conservatives proposed extending the boundaries of the existing Brightwell ward to incorporate the parish of North Moreton (Ward 27). It proposed that the remainder of the current Hagbourne ward form an amended single-member Hagbourne ward (Ward 28). The Conservatives proposed warding the northern part of Cholsey parish with Wallingford (Ward 25), with the remainder of Cholsey parish and Moulsoford parish creating a revised ward (Ward 26).

63 Under the Conservatives 48-member council, the number of electors per councillor in its proposed Wards 25, 26, 27 and 28 would be 1 per cent below, 4 per cent above, 10 per cent above and 13 per cent above the district average respectively (equal to the district average, 1 per cent above, 6 per cent above and 11 per cent above by 2005).

64 North Moreton Parish Council argued that the parishes of North Moreton, South Moreton, Aston Tirrold and Aston Upthorpe should remain “warded together or with Cholsey and others if necessary”. It particularly opposed any proposal to separate the Moreton parishes from the Aston parishes. As an alternative, North Moreton Parish Council suggested that North and South Moreton parishes, Aston Tirrold and Upthorpe parishes and the existing Cholsey ward merge to form a new two-member Rural Cholsey ward. South Moreton Parish Council objected to any proposal to alter the current Hagbourne ward, particularly any that would separate North Moreton and South Moreton parishes from Aston Tirrold and Aston Upthorpe parishes. The Parish Council expressed its support for North Moreton Parish Council’s submission.

65 Aston Tirrold and Aston Upthorpe Parish Councils also supported North Moreton Parish Council’s submission stating in a joint submission that it put forward “well argued views, particularly on the links between the Astons and the Moretons”.

66 Four local residents stated their opposition to any proposal which would link the rural parish of West Hagbourne with part of Didcot, contending that such a proposal would reduce the effectiveness of West Hagbourne’s representation. One resident suggested that the proposal to split West Hagbourne parish from East Hagbourne parish and to transfer it to a Didcot ward was “ill-informed and irresponsible”. The resident further contended that such a merger “can only be to the detriment of the small village community” because of the “inevitable conflict of interests”. As mentioned earlier, two local residents jointly proposed that the Millbrook area of East Hagbourne parish should be warded with Didcot as it shares greater links with the town rather than the village of East Hagbourne.

67 Having considered the representations received at Stage One, we have noted the opposition to the possible warding of West Hagbourne parish with Didcot town and to any proposed separation of West Hagbourne from East Hagbourne. We also recognise that there is strong support in favour of retaining the association between the parishes of Aston Tirrold, Aston Upthorpe, North Moreton and South Moreton and note the objections to dividing these parishes. It has been particularly difficult to devise new warding arrangements in this part of the district due to the location of the parishes and the geographical constraints of Didcot and the River Thames. We have considered several options for district wards in this area in order to secure the best balance between securing good electoral equality and reflecting local communities.

68 In order to secure good electoral equality and reflect the identities and interests of local communities, we are proposing a three-member ward comprising Hagbourne ward (less the Millbrook area of East Hagbourne), Cholsey ward and the parishes of Little Wittenham and Long Wittenham from Brightwell ward. The number of electors per councillor in our proposed Cholsey and Hagbourne ward would be 4 per cent below the district average initially (7 per cent below by 2005). We acknowledge that it would be a geographically large ward. However, it would represent the best balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria, given the aforementioned constraints. As a consequence of our proposed Cholsey and Hagbourne ward, we propose linking Brightwell-cum-Sotwell parish with Wallingford ward to form a new three-member ward in order to secure better electoral equality, particularly as, in our view, the two areas have excellent road links. We have noted that under a 48-member council, the current three-member Wallingford ward would be over represented by 15 per cent initially (11 per cent by 2005). However, the number of electors per councillor in our revised three-member Wallingford & Brightwell-cum-Sotwell ward would be 4 per cent above the district average both initially and in 2005.

69 In formulating our draft proposals for this area we considered other alternative warding arrangements. We have noted that the Conservatives' proposals for this area would result in the separation of North Moreton parish from its "sister parish" of South Moreton and would result in Cholsey parish being warded and divided between two wards. In our view, this would not provide for the best reflection of local communities.

70 We have noted that North Moreton Parish Council's proposed Rural Cholsey ward would secure good electoral equality under a 48-member council, with the number of electors per councillor being 2 per cent below the district average initially (4 per cent below by 2005). However, given the constraints of the district boundaries in this area, this proposal would result in the parishes of East and West Hagbourne having to either form a ward in their own right or be included in a ward with Didcot. If these two parishes were to form a single-member ward under a 48-member council size, it would be over-represented by 20 per cent initially (22 per cent by 2005). We are of the view that this level of electoral imbalance is unacceptable, and considered including the parishes of East Hagbourne and West Hagbourne in a ward with part of Didcot. However, we noted that there is notable local opposition to such a proposal (although there is some local support for including the Millbrook area of East Hagbourne in a Didcot ward, as detailed earlier) and we are persuaded that such a combination of rural and urban areas would not secure the best reflection of local communities. Therefore, we propose that West Hagbourne parish and the village area of East Hagbourne parish should be joined with the more rural parishes to the east. However, as detailed earlier, we agree that the urban overspill in the Millbrook area of East Hagbourne parish should be included in a new Didcot East ward.

71 We considered alternative configurations of parishes in the area to create new wards. We considered adding West Hagbourne parish and the village part of East Hagbourne parish to North Moreton Parish Council's proposed two-member Rural Cholsey ward; however, we have noted that under a 48-member council, such a ward would be under-represented by 26 per cent initially (23 per cent by 2005). Therefore in order to secure reasonable electoral equality it would be necessary to transfer North Moreton parish to another ward, or to divide the parish of Cholsey between two wards. However, as discussed earlier, we do not consider that these are viable options as they would have a detrimental effect on the reflection of the identities and interests of local communities.

72 Under our draft recommendations for a 48-member council, the number of electors per councillor in our proposed Cholsey & Hagbourne and Wallingford & Brightwell-cum-Sotwell wards would be 4 per cent below the district average and 4 per cent above respectively (7 per cent below and 4 per cent above by 2005). Our draft recommendations for this area are illustrated on Map 2 in Appendix A. We would welcome views from all interested parties at Stage Three.

Benson, Berinsfield, Chalgrove, Clifton Hampden and Dorchester wards

73 These wards are situated in the centre of the district. Benson ward (comprising the parishes of Benson and Ewelme) and Chalgrove ward (comprising the parishes of Berrick Salome, Brightwell Baldwin, Britwell Salome, Chalgrove, Cuxham with Easington, Newington and Stadhampton) are each represented by two councillors. Under the current arrangements, the number of electors per councillor in these wards is 15 per cent below the district average and 11 per cent below respectively (13 per cent below and 12 per cent below by 2005). Berinsfield ward (comprising the parish of Berinsfield), Clifton Hampden ward (comprising the parishes of Clifton Hampden, Culham, Marsh Baldon, Nuneham Courtenay, Sandford-on-Thames and Toot Baldon) and Dorchester wards (comprising the parishes of Dorchester, Drayton St Leonard and Warborough) are each represented by a single councillor. Under the existing arrangements, the number of electors per councillor in these wards is 2 per cent below the district average, 18 per cent above and 9 per cent below respectively (6 per cent below, 16 per cent above and 12 per cent below by 2005).

74 At Stage One, the Conservatives proposed amalgamating the parish of Drayton St Leonard with the existing single-member ward of Berinsfield (Ward 7). It further proposed that the remainder of the Dorchester ward be enlarged to include Stadhampton and Newington parishes (Ward 24). The Conservatives put forward a new single-member Chalgrove ward comprising the parish of the same name (Ward 6) and also proposed that Brightwell Baldwin parish be transferred from the existing Chalgrove ward to a revised two-member Benson ward with the addition of Berrick Salome parish (Ward 21).

75 Under the Conservatives' scheme for a 48-member council, the number of electors per councillor in its proposed Wards 6, 7, 21 and 24 would be 5 per cent above, 3 per cent above, 9 per cent below and 11 per cent above the district average respectively (4 per cent above the district average, 1 per cent below, 7 per cent below and 8 per cent above by 2005).

76 Pyrton Parish Council objected to any proposal to transfer Pyrton parish from Watlington ward to a revised Chalgrove ward contending that its interests "historically and currently are very firmly with Watlington".

77 As detailed earlier, we propose basing our draft recommendations on the Conservatives' scheme. We consider that the Conservatives' proposals for this area of the district better reflect local community identities and interests as they combine parishes with existing links and similar identities while also securing reasonable electoral equality. However, we have reservations about its proposed Ward 24 comprising the parishes of Stadhampton, Newington, Dorchester and Warborough. We note that in order to travel from Stadhampton in the north of the ward to Dorchester parish in the south, by the main road link (the A329), it would be necessary to pass through Drayton St Leonard parish which the Conservatives proposed should be included in a revised Berinsfield ward (Ward 7). In the

absence of any direct road links from the north to the south of the proposed Ward 24, we consider that combining the Conservatives' proposed Wards 7 and 24 to form a revised two-member Berinsfield ward would create a more cohesive ward with better communications.

78 We consider that the Conservatives' proposed Ward 21 (combining the parishes of Benson, Berrick Salome, Brightwell Baldwin and Ewelme) represents a good balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria and therefore propose endorsing this proposal as part of our draft recommendations. We also consider that their proposed Chalgrove ward (Ward 6) would best reflect local interests and facilitate the most appropriate warding arrangements to the east and south of the district, and also propose endorsing it as part of our draft recommendations.

79 Under our draft recommendations for a 48-member council, the number of electors per councillor in our proposed Benson, Berinsfield and Chalgrove wards would be 8 per cent below the district average, 7 per cent above and 5 per cent above respectively (7 per cent below, 4 per cent above and 4 per cent above by 2005). Our draft recommendations for this area are illustrated on Map 2 in Appendix A.

Crowmarsh, Goring, Goring Heath and Woodcote wards

80 These wards are situated in the south of the district and are each represented by a single councillor except for Goring ward which is currently served by two councillors. Under the existing arrangements, the number of electors per councillor in Crowmarsh ward (comprising the parishes of Checkendon, Crowmarsh, Ipsden and Stoke Row) and Goring ward (comprising the parishes of Goring and South Stoke) is 21 per cent above the district average and 23 per cent below respectively (19 per cent above and 25 per cent below by 2005). The number of electors per councillor in Goring Heath ward (comprising the parishes of Goring Heath, Mapledurham and Whitchurch-on-Thames) and Woodcote ward (comprising the parish of Woodcote) is 9 per cent below and 1 per cent below respectively (12 per cent below and 2 per cent below by 2005).

81 At Stage One, the Conservatives proposed retaining the existing Woodcote ward (Ward 18). They put forward a revised Crowmarsh ward (Ward 20) less the parishes of Checkendon and Stoke Row but with the inclusion of Nuffield parish. They proposed that Goring Heath parish be included in the existing two-member Goring ward (Ward 19) and that Checkendon, Whitchurch and Mapledurham parishes be transferred to its proposed single-member Ward 17, with the parish of Kidmore End.

82 Under the Conservatives' 48-member council, the number of electors per councillor in its proposed Wards 17, 18, 19 and 20 would be 10 per cent above, 5 per cent below, 2 per cent below and 11 per cent below the district average respectively (5 per cent above, 6 per cent below, 5 per cent below and 9 per cent below by 2005).

83 Whitchurch-on-Thames Parish Council expressed its preference to retain the status quo. It also maintained that its links, historically and physically are with Whitchurch Hill in Goring Heath parish, arguing that it "has no natural connection" with Mapledurham or Kidmore End parishes. While criticising the Council's consultation on the review, a local resident also stated that Whitchurch-on-Thames parish has good links and a "natural affinity" with Goring Heath parish and that there were "no links whatsoever" with Mapledurham or Kidmore End parishes.

84 We have given careful consideration to the views received about this area. We recognise that available warding arrangements are constrained by the district boundary and the River Thames and also note the opposition to the Council's proposals for Goring and Whitchurch wards. We have noted that the Conservatives' proposals would involve the separation of Whitchurch-on-Thames and Goring Heath parishes, a proposal which has not received support from other local respondents. In the light of this opposition and in order to better reflect the identity and interests of the parishes in this area, we are proposing our own warding arrangements for Goring and Whitchurch wards. We propose that the existing Goring ward be joined by the parishes of Goring Heath and Whitchurch-on-Thames to form a two-member Goring ward. We consider that the Conservatives' amended Crowmarsh ward, combining the parishes of Crowmarsh, Ipsden and Nuffield, would better reflect local communities by combining parishes with similar interests without adversely affecting the statutory criteria in surrounding wards. We propose endorsing the Conservatives' proposals to retain the existing Woodcote ward, which was also suggested by the Council, as this would maintain a good balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria.

85 Under our draft recommendations for a 48-member council, the number of electors per councillor in our proposed Crowmarsh, Goring and Woodcote wards would be 11 per cent below the district average, 13 per cent above and 5 per cent below respectively (9 per cent below, 9 per cent above and 6 per cent below by 2005).

Kidmore End, Rotherfield Peppard, Shiplake and Sonning Common wards

86 These wards are situated in the south of the district and are each currently represented by a single councillor except for Sonning Common ward which is currently represented by two councillors. Under the existing arrangements the number of electors per councillor in Kidmore End ward (comprising the parishes of Eye & Dunsden and Kidmore End) and Rotherfield Peppard ward (comprising the parishes of Highmoor, Rotherfield Greys and Rotherfield Peppard) is 25 per cent below the district average and 16 per cent below respectively (27 per cent below and 13 per cent below by 2005). The number of electors per councillor in Shiplake ward (comprising the parishes of Harpsden and Shiplake) and Sonning Common ward (comprising the parish of Sonning Common) is 12 per cent above and 24 per cent below the district average respectively (11 per cent above and 26 per cent below by 2005).

87 The Conservatives proposed a new single-member Ward 17 comprising the parishes of Checkendon, Kidmore End, Mapledurham and Whitchurch-on-Thames. They proposed that the parishes of Shiplake and Eye & Dunsden form a new single-member ward (Ward 15) and put forward a new two-member ward combining the parishes of Rotherfield Peppard and Sonning Common (Ward 16). They also recommended that Harpsden parish of the current Shiplake ward merge with the parishes of Rotherfield Greys and Highmoor from the existing Rotherfield Peppard ward, Bix & Assendon parish from the current Nettlebed ward and Stoke Row parish from the current Crowmarsh ward to create a new single-member ward (Ward 14).

88 Under the Conservatives' 48-member council, the number of electors per councillor in its proposed Wards 14, 15, 16 and 17 would be 6 per cent below, 8 per cent above, 1 per cent above and 10 per cent above the district average respectively (7 per cent below, 6 per cent above, equal to the average and 5 per cent above by 2005).

89 Councillor Rudge disagreed with any proposal which would incorporate the new parish of Binfield Heath (operative in April 2003) with the parishes of Sonning Common and Eye & Dunsden. He argued that Binfield Heath's "essentially rural" character would have "nothing in common" with Sonning Common which is "essentially urban", and that it should continue to be linked with Shiplake parish.

90 Shiplake Parish Council also expressed its opposition to any proposal to link the future Binfield Heath parish with Sonning Common parish. While stating that it had no objection to the proposal to link the parish with that of Harpsden, it insisted that it did not wish to be joined with the "much larger ... urban" parish of Sonning Common. As an alternative, the Parish Council recommended that the parishes of Harpsden, Shiplake, Binfield Heath and Eye & Dunsden form a ward with the inclusion of Kidmore End parish if necessary. Rotherfield Peppard Parish Council stated its preference to "continue to be grouped with rural parishes". It further stated the current Rotherfield Peppard ward "has been a very satisfactory relationship for all three villages for the last twenty years". It opposed the possibility of being warded with the parish of Sonning Common, arguing that this would leave the parish with a minority voice.

91 As mentioned earlier, Whitchurch-on-Thames Parish Council and a local resident opposed any proposal which would separate Whitchurch-on-Thames parish from Goring Heath parish.

92 We have given careful consideration to the views about this area. As previously discussed, we are of the view that the Whitchurch-on-Thames and Goring Heath parishes should continue to remain in the same ward. As a consequence of our proposals for Goring ward, possible warding arrangements for the remainder of the parishes at the southern edge of the district are limited. We also note that potential warding arrangements in this area are constrained by the district boundary and the town of Henley, as well as the strong boundaries of the River Thames, the A4130 and the A4074. Therefore we recognise that parishes in this area have distinct groupings and, in formulating our draft proposals, we have attempted to respect their identity while improving on the current levels of electoral imbalance. Accordingly, and in the absence of any other viable alternatives which would secure equivalent electoral equality, we propose that the parish of Mapledurham merge with the current Kidmore End and Shiplake wards to form a new two-member Shiplake ward which would be five per cent below the district average initially (7 per cent below by 2005).

93 We considered Rotherfield Peppard Parish Council's opposition to a combined Rotherfield Peppard and Sonning Common ward, as proposed by the Conservatives. While we are sympathetic to the nature of the concerns expressed, we note that there are good communications links between the two wards and we are not persuaded that such a proposal would adversely affect the statutory criteria. We also consider that a merger into a two-member ward would facilitate the creation of a good electoral scheme across this area as a whole. The number of electors per councillor would be 1 per cent above the district average initially (equal to the average by 2005). We consequently propose that the parishes of Rotherfield Greys, Bix & Assendon, Highmoor, Stoke Row and Checkendon form a new single-member Forest ward. The number of electors per councillor would be 7 per cent below the district average initially (11 per cent below by 2005). While we recognise that this would result in a ward with a variance of 11 per cent below the district average in 2005, we consider that this ward combines rural parishes which are well linked and that have similar identities and would facilitate the achievement of good electoral equality, community interest and identity in

surrounding wards. In the absence of any ward names, we propose that this ward be named Forest but would welcome local views on this proposal.

Henley ward

94 The parish of Henley is covered by Henley ward. This ward covers the town of Henley in the south east of the district and is currently represented by five councillors. Under the existing arrangements the number of electors per councillor in Henley ward is 13 per cent below the district average (14 per cent below by 2005).

95 Under its 48-member scheme, the Conservatives' proposed that Henley be represented by four councillors overall and be divided between a two-member Henley North ward and a two-member Henley South ward. They proposed that the boundary between the two wards should reflect that of the parish ward boundaries so that it follows the centre of Greys Road.

96 In formulating our draft recommendations for Henley, we have noted that the current ward is significantly over-represented. We have noted that at Stage One the Conservatives proposed that the town be represented by four councillors overall. Having considered how many councillors Henley would be entitled to under a 48-member council we agree with this view, and propose that it should be represented by four councillors. We are also of the view that the Conservatives' proposals to utilise the current Henley parish ward boundaries as district ward boundaries would make for effective and convenient local government without damaging local interests and we therefore propose endorsing this proposal.

97 Under our draft recommendations for a 48-member council, the number of electors per councillor in our proposed Henley North and Henley South wards would be 6 per cent above and 2 per cent above the district average respectively (3 per cent above and 2 per cent above by 2005). Our draft recommendations for this area are illustrated on Map A2 in Appendix A.

Aston Rowant, Chinnor, Nettlebed and Watlington wards

98 These wards are situated in the north-east and east of the district. Under the current arrangements, Aston Rowant ward (comprising the parishes of Adwell, Aston Rowant, Crowell, Lewknor, Stoke Talmage, Sydenham, Tetsworth and Wheatfield), Nettlebed (comprising the parishes of Bix & Assendon, Nettlebed, Nuffield, Pishill with Stonor and Swyncombe) and Watlington ward (comprising the parishes of Pyrton, Shirburn and Watlington) are each represented by a single councillor. The number of electors per councillor in these wards is 8 per cent above the district average, 2 per cent below and 13 per cent above respectively (7 per cent above, 5 per cent below and 11 per cent above by 2005). Chinnor ward (comprising the parish of Chinnor) is currently represented by two councillors. The number of electors per councillor in Chinnor ward is 15 per cent above the district average (13 per cent above by 2005).

99 The Conservatives proposed slightly modifying the current Aston Rowant ward (Ward 12) to include Towersey parish but with Lewknor parish being transferred to their proposed Watlington ward. As a consequence of this proposal, the Conservatives proposed no change to the existing Chinnor ward (Ward 1). To the south of these wards, they proposed an enlarged two-member

Watlington ward (Ward 13) with the addition of Lewknor parish from the current Aston Rowant ward, the parishes of Cuxham-with-Easington and Britwell Salome from the current Chalgrove ward and Swyncombe, Pishill-with-Stonor and Nettlebed parishes from the existing Nettlebed ward.

100 As mentioned earlier, Pyrton Parish Council wished to retain its links with Watlington ward and Sydenham Parish Council opposed any proposal to combine it in a ward with Thame. Lewknor Parish Council opposed any proposal which would divide the parish between two wards.

101 We have carefully considered the representations received regarding this area. We note in particular the local opposition to any proposals which would involve the transfer of Tetsworth and Sydenham parishes to more urban Thame wards. We also note that Pyrton Parish Council wished to retain its links with Watlington parish. Having considered the Conservatives' proposed wards in this area, we are of the view that they would provide a good balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria. In particular, we consider it important to reflect the interests of the rural parishes surrounding Thame and Chinnor and are of the opinion that the Conservatives' proposals achieve this without adversely affecting the identities and interests of local communities.

102 With these considerations in mind, we propose endorsing the Conservatives' proposals subject to a minor amendment to the boundary between its proposed Aston Rowant and Watlington ward. We are of the view that the parishes of Adwell, Stoke Talmage and Wheatfield have more identity and better road links with parishes to the south due to the boundary of the M40 to their north. We therefore propose that these parishes be included in the proposed Watlington ward. We considered available options for a revised Watlington ward and concluded that, although geographically large, the Conservatives' proposed two-member ward would enable us to maintain groupings of parishes which have common identities and long-standing associations.

103 Under our draft recommendations for a 48-member council, the number of electors per councillor in our proposed Aston Rowant, Chinnor and Watlington wards would be 8 per cent below the district average, 11 per cent above and 2 per cent above respectively (8 per cent below, 8 per cent above and 1 per cent below by 2005). We would welcome views on these proposals at Stage Three.

Thame North and Thame South Wards

104 The parish of Thame is divided between the wards of Thame North and Thame South, which are both represented by two councillors. Under the existing arrangements, the number of electors per councillor in Thame North and Thame South wards is 13 per cent above the district average and seven per cent above respectively (8 per cent above and 10 per cent above by 2005).

105 The Conservatives proposed that Thame be divided between a two-member Thame North ward and a two-member Thame South ward and that these wards should reflect the existing parish wards of the same name.

106 Thame Town Council expressed its support for the Council's proposals in the Thame area, for five councillors serving three district wards, which would include surrounding more rural parishes within Thame wards. Sydenham Parish Council expressed opposition to being included in a ward with part of Thame, arguing "there is no logic in linking us to an urban community, where our

minority affairs will be swamped by town matters”. They further contended that such a proposal “purely for reasons of balancing numbers of electors, is unacceptable”. Instead, Sydenham Parish Council expressed its preference to remain within Aston Rowant ward, with the addition of Towersey parish “if appropriate”. A local resident also objected to a combined Thame/Sydenham ward stating that it would not be in the best interests of the community and that “priority will be given to the population mass”.

107 In Thame, we note the merit of using the parish ward boundaries in creating a two-member Thame North and a two-member Thame South ward without the inclusion of surrounding rural parishes (as proposed by the Conservatives) and we consider that this would provide for a better reflection of local communities. However, in order to use a more easily identifiable boundary between the Conservatives’ proposed Thame North and Thame South ward, and to achieve improved electoral equality by 2005, we propose a minor amendment so that the boundary follows the centre of Priestend, High Street, Buttermarket, East Street and Kingsley Road.

108 The number of electors per councillor in our proposed Thame North and Thame South wards would be 4 per cent above and 3 per cent below the district average respectively (both equal to the average by 2005). Our draft recommendations for this area are illustrated on Map A3 in Appendix A.

Forest Hill, Garsington, Great Milton, Horspath and Wheatley wards

109 These wards are situated in the north and north west of the district and are each represented by a single councillor, except for Wheatley ward which is represented by two councillors. Under the existing arrangements, the number of electors per councillor in Forest Hill ward (comprising the parishes of Beckley & Stowood, Elsfield, Forest Hill-with-Shotover, Stanton St John and Woodeaton), Garsington ward (comprising the parishes of Cuddesdon & Denton and Garsington) and Great Milton ward (comprising the parishes of Great Haseley, Great Milton, Little Milton and Tiddington-with-Albury) is 19 per cent below, 6 per cent below and 4 per cent below the district average respectively (21 per cent below, 9 per cent below and 6 per cent below by 2005). The number of electors per councillor in Horspath ward (comprising the parish of Horspath) and Wheatley ward (comprising the parishes of Holton, Waterperry-with-Thomley, Waterstock and Wheatley) is 44 per cent below and 2 per cent above the district average respectively (45 per cent below and 3 per cent above by 2005).

110 The Conservatives proposed that the parish of Holton be transferred from the existing Wheatley ward into an enlarged Forest Hill ward (Ward 9) and that the parishes of Waterperry-with-Thomley and Waterstock be transferred from the existing Wheatley ward into an enlarged Great Milton ward (Ward 10). The Conservatives further proposed that the parishes of Horspath and Wheatley be combined to form a new two-member ward (Ward 11). They also proposed that the existing Garsington ward be enlarged to incorporate the parishes of Marsh Baldon and Toot Baldon (Ward 22).

111 Under the Conservatives’ 48-member scheme, the number of electors per councillor in its proposed Wards 9, 10, 11 and 22 would be 11 per cent above, 2 per cent above, 3 per cent above and

7 per cent above the district average respectively (10 per cent above, 1 per cent below, 3 per cent above and 3 per cent above by 2005).

112 We have given careful consideration to the views received at Stage One and have noted that the Conservatives' scheme for this area would secure reasonable electoral equality. We have noted that the Conservatives propose including Waterperry-with-Thomley parish in a ward with which it does not have any direct road access. Therefore, in order to better reflect the identities and interests of local communities we propose that the parish should be included in a ward with parishes to its north-west. We are therefore putting forward for consultation purposes a single-member Great Milton ward comprising the existing ward and the parish of Waterstock. As a consequence, the number of electors per councillor in our proposed Great Milton ward would be 5 per cent below the district average initially (7 per cent below by 2005). While we acknowledge that this is a slightly worse level of electoral equality than under the Conservatives' proposal, we are of the view that it provides a better reflection of local communities and more effective and convenient local government.

113 We have noted that the Conservatives' proposed Forest Hill ward (Ward 9) would be under-represented by 11 per cent initially (10 per cent by 2005). In addition, we have noted that if Waterperry-with-Thomley parish were included in the ward that it would be under-represented by 18 per cent initially (16 per cent by 2005). We are of the view that this level of electoral imbalance is unacceptable and have therefore considered alternative ward configurations in this north-western area. However, having studied the links between the parishes and given the constraints of the district boundary, we recognise that the pattern of parishes restricts the number of available options to create district wards without warding parishes and splitting them between wards. We have noted the opposition to such a proposal from Wheatley Parish Council. Therefore, in order to reflect the identities and interests of local communities in this area while also securing a good level of electoral equality, we propose combining the Conservatives' proposed Ward 9 and Ward 11, with the parish of Waterperry-with-Thomley to form a three-member Wheatley ward.

114 We propose endorsing the Conservatives' proposed single-member Ward 22, comprising the parishes of Cuddesdon with Denton, Garsington, Marsh Baldon and Toot Baldon as we consider that this would reflect the identities and interests of local communities while achieving good electoral equality by 2005. As the Conservatives did not provide a ward name at Stage One, we propose that this ward is named Garsington.

115 Under our draft recommendations for a 48-member council, the number of electors per councillor in our proposed Garsington, Great Milton and Wheatley wards would be 7 per cent above the district average, 5 per cent below and 8 per cent above respectively (3 per cent above, 7 per cent below and 8 per cent above by 2005). Our draft recommendations for this area are illustrated on Map 2 in Appendix A. We would welcome all views during Stage Three, particularly with regard to ward names.

Electoral Cycle

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

Conclusions

117 Having considered all the evidence and representations received during the initial stage of the review, we propose that:

- there should be a reduction in council size from 50 to 48;
- there should be 26 wards;
- the boundaries of 30 of the existing wards should be modified, resulting in a net reduction of six wards;
- elections should continue to be held for the whole council.

118 As already indicated, we have based our draft recommendations on the Conservatives' proposals, but propose to depart from them in the following areas:

- in Didcot we are proposing that the town be represented by nine councillors overall, and are putting forward our own proposals for one three-member ward and three two-member wards;
- in the south west, we propose a new three-member Cholsey & Hagbourne ward, a new three-member Brightwell-cum-Sotwell ward and propose a new two-member Berinsfield ward in the centre of the district;
- in the south east, we are proposing a number of minor boundary modifications;
- in the north east we propose minor modifications to the boundary between the proposed Thame North and Thame South parish wards and between the proposed Aston Rowant and Watlington wards;
- in the north west of the district we propose a new three-member Wheatley ward and a modified Great Milton ward.

119 Figure 5 shows the impact of our draft recommendations on electoral equality, comparing them with the current arrangements, based on 2000 electorate figures and with forecast electorates for the year 2005.

Figure 5: Comparison of Current and Recommended Electoral Arrangements

	2000 electorate		2005 forecast electorate	
	Current arrangements	Draft recommendations	Current arrangements	Draft recommendations
Number of councillors	50	48	50	48
Number of wards	32	26	32	26
Average number of electors per councillor	1,973	2,055	2,025	2,109
Number of wards with a variance more than 10 per cent from the average	21	4	22	1
Number of wards with a variance more than 20 per cent from the average	9	0	9	0

120 As shown in Figure 5, our draft recommendations for South Oxfordshire District Council would result in a reduction in the number of wards varying by more than 10 per cent from the district average from 21 to four. By 2005 only one ward is forecast to vary by more than 10 per cent from the average for the district.

Draft Recommendation
 South Oxfordshire District Council should comprise 48 councillors serving 26 wards, as detailed and named in Figures 1 and 2, and illustrated on Map 2 and in Appendix A, including the large map inside the back cover. The Council should continue to hold whole-council elections every four years.

Parish and Town Council Electoral Arrangements

121 In undertaking reviews of electoral arrangements, we are required to comply as far as possible with the provisions set out in Schedule 11 to the 1972 Act. The Schedule provides that if a parish is to be divided between different district wards it must also be divided into parish wards, so that each parish ward lies wholly within a single ward of the district. Accordingly, we propose consequential warding arrangements for the parishes of Didcot, East Hagbourne and Thame to reflect the proposed district wards.

122 The parish of Didcot is currently served by 21 councillors serving five wards: All Saints ward (represented by three councillors), Georgetown ward (represented by five councillors), Greenmere ward (represented by five councillors), Northbourne ward (represented by three councillors) and Park ward (represented by five councillors). At Stage One the District Council did not make any specific proposals in relation to the allocation of town councillors in Didcot. In the light of our draft recommendations for district warding in Didcot town, we propose modifying the parish ward boundaries to correspond with those of the district wards within the town. We also propose that the parish ward names reflect those of the district wards. We would welcome views on these proposals, particularly from Didcot Town Council.

Draft Recommendation
Didcot Town Council should comprise 21 councillors, as at present, representing four wards, 1 less than at present: Didcot East ward (returning five councillors), Didcot North ward (returning six councillors), Didcot South ward (returning five councillors) and Didcot West and Central ward (returning five councillors). The parish ward boundaries should reflect the proposed district ward boundaries in the area, as illustrated and named on the large map at the back of the report.

123 The parish of East Hagbourne is currently served by 7 councillors and is not warded. In order to reflect our recommendations, we propose that East Hagbourne parish should comprise two parish wards. We propose that Millbrook parish ward be represented by 3 councillors and that East Hagbourne parish ward be represented by 4 councillors.

Draft Recommendation
East Hagbourne Parish Council should comprise 7 councillors, as at present, representing two wards: East Hagbourne parish ward (comprising that part of the parish contained in the proposed Cholsey & Hagbourne district ward), returning four councillors and Millbrook parish ward, returning three councillors. The boundary between the two parish wards should reflect the proposed district ward boundary, as illustrated and named on the large map at the back of the report.

124 The parish of Thame is currently divided into two parish wards, Thame North returning eight councillors and Thame South, returning eight councillors. In the light of our draft recommendations for district warding in Thame town, we propose modifying the parish ward boundaries to correspond with those of the district wards within the town.

Draft Recommendation

Thame Parish should comprise 16 councillors, as at present, representing two wards: Thame North, returning eight councillors and Thame South, returning eight councillors. The boundary between the two parish wards should reflect the proposed district ward boundary, as illustrated and named on Map A3 in Appendix A.

125 We are not proposing any change to the electoral cycle of parish and town councils in the district.

Draft Recommendation

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

126 We have not finalised our conclusions on the electoral arrangements for South Oxfordshire and welcome comments from the District Council and others relating to the proposed ward boundaries, number of councillors, electoral cycle, ward names, and parish and town council electoral arrangements. We will consider all the evidence submitted to us during the consultation period before preparing our final recommendations.

Map 2: The Commission's Draft Recommendations for South Oxfordshire

5 NEXT STEPS

127 We are putting forward draft recommendations on future electoral arrangements for consultation. We will take fully into account all representations received by 23 April 2001. Representations received after this date may not be taken into account. All representations will be available for public inspection by appointment at the offices of the Commission and the District Council, and a list of respondents will be available on request from the Commission after the end of the consultation period.

128 Views may be expressed by writing directly to us:

Review Manager
South Oxfordshire Review
Local Government Commission for England
Dolphyn Court
10/11 Great Turnstile
London WC1V 7JU

Fax: 020 7404 6142
E-mail: reviews@lgce.gov.uk
www.lgce.gov.uk

129 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 Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions. After the publication of our final recommendations, all further correspondence should be sent to the Secretary of State, who cannot make an Order giving effect to our recommendations until six weeks after he receives them.

APPENDIX A

Draft Recommendations for South Oxfordshire: Detailed Mapping

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

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

Map A2 illustrates the proposed warding of Henley parish.

Map A3 illustrates the proposed warding of Thame parish.

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

Map A1: Draft Recommendations for South Oxfordshire: Key Map

Map A2: Proposed Warding of Henley Parish

Map A3: Proposed Warding of Thame Parish

APPENDIX B

South Oxfordshire Conservative Association's Proposed Electoral Arrangements

Our draft recommendations detailed in Figures 1 and 2 differ from those put forward by the Conservatives in 18 wards, where the Conservatives' proposals were as follows:

Figure B1: South Oxfordshire Conservative Association's Proposal: Constituent Areas

Ward number	Constituent areas
4	Thame North ward (part – the Thame North ward of Thame parish)
5	Thame South ward (part – the Thame South ward of Thame parish)
7	Berinsfield ward (the parish of Berinsfield); Dorchester ward (part – the parish of Drayton St Leonard)
9	Forest Hill ward (the parishes of Beckley & Stowood, Elsfield, Forest Hill with Shotover, Stanton St John and Woodeaton); Wheatley ward (part – the parish of Holton)
10	Great Milton ward (the parishes of Great Hasely, Great Milton, Little Milton and Tiddington with Albury); Wheatley ward (part – the parishes of Waterperry-with-Thomley and Waterstock)
11	Horspath ward (the parish of Horspath); Wheatley ward (part – the parish of Wheatley)
13	Aston Rowant ward (part – the parish of Lewknor); Chalgrove ward (part – the parishes of Britwell and Cuxham-with-Easington); Nettlebed ward (part – the parishes of Nettlebed, Pishill with Stonor and Swyncombe); Watlington ward (the parishes of Pyrton, Shirburn and Watlington)
14	Crowmarsh ward (part – the parish of Stoke Row); Nettlebed ward (part – the parish of Bix & Assendon); Rotherfield Peppard ward (part – the parishes of Highmoor and Rotherfield Greys); Shiplake ward (part – the parish of Harpsden);
15	Kidmore End ward (part – the parish of Eye & Dunsden); Shiplake ward (part – the parish of Shiplake)
17	Crowmarsh ward (part – the parish of Checkendon); Goring Heath ward (part – the parishes of Mapledurham & Whitchurch); Kidmore End ward (part – the parish of Kidmore End)
19	Goring ward (part – the parishes of Goring and South Stoke); Goring Heath ward (part – the parish of Goring Heath)
20	Crowmarsh ward (part – the parishes of Crowmarsh and Ipsden); Nettlebed ward (part – the parish of Nuffield)
21	Chalgrove ward (part – the parishes of Berrick Salome and Brightwell Baldwin); Benson ward (the parishes of Benson and Ewelme)

Ward number	Constituent areas
24	Chalgrove ward (part – the parishes of Newington and Stadhampton); Dorchester ward (part – the parishes of Dorchester and Warborough)
25	Cholsey ward (part – part of the parish of Cholsey); Wallingford ward (the parish of Wallingford)
26	Cholsey ward (part – part of the parish of Cholsey and the parish of Moulsoford)
27	Brightwell ward (the parishes of Brightwell-cum-Sotwell, Little Wittenham and Long Wittenham); Hagbourne ward (part – the parish of North Moreton)
28	Hagbourne ward (part – the parishes of Aston Tirrold, Aston Upthorpe, East Hagbourne, South Moreton and West Hagbourne)

Figure B2: South Oxfordshire Conservative Association's Proposals: Number of Councillors and Electors by Ward

Ward number	Number of councillors	Electorate (2000)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average (%)	Electorate (2005)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average (%)
4	2	4,081	2,041	-1	4,006	2,003	-5
5	2	4,213	2,107	2	4,440	2,220	5
7	1	2,124	2,124	3	2,091	2,091	-1
8	9	16,845	1,872	-9	18,435	2,048	-3
9	1	2,290	2,290	11	2,326	2,326	10
10	1	2,091	2,091	2	2,086	2,086	-1
11	2	4,247	2,124	3	4,360	2,180	3
13	2	4,088	2,044	-1	4,083	2,042	-3
14	1	1,939	1,939	-6	1,951	1,951	-7
15	1	2,215	2,215	8	2,233	2,233	6
17	1	2,271	2,271	10	2,213	2,213	5
18	1	1,963	1,963	-5	1,976	1,976	-6
19	2	4,018	2,009	-2	4,004	2,002	-5
20	1	1,836	1,836	-11	1,909	1,909	-9
21	2	3,762	1,881	-9	3,916	1,958	-7
24	1	2,277	2,277	11	2,278	2,278	8
25	3	6,117	2,039	-1	6,327	2,109	0
26	1	2,128	2,128	4	2,124	2,124	1
27	1	2,257	2,257	10	2,230	2,230	6
28	1	2,320	2,320	13	2,335	2,335	11

Source: Electorate figures are based on the Conservatives' submission.

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

South Oxfordshire District Council's Proposed Electoral Arrangements

Figure B3: South Oxfordshire District Council's Proposal: Constituent Areas

Ward name	Constituent areas
Aston Rowant	Aston Rowant ward (part – the parishes of Adwell, Aston Rowant, Crowell, Lewknor and Wheatfield); Chinnor ward (part – the proposed Chinnor West ward of Chinnor parish)
Benson	Benson ward (the parishes of Benson and Ewelme); Chalgrove ward (part – the parish of Berrick Salome)
Berinsfield	<i>Unchanged</i> ; the parish of Berinsfield
Brightwell	<i>Unchanged</i> : the parishes of Brightwell-cum-Sotwell, Little Wittenham and Long Wittenham
Chalgrove	Aston Rowant ward (part – the parish of Stoke Talmage); Chalgrove ward (part – the parishes of Brightwell Baldwin, Britwell Salome, Chalgrove, Cuxham-with-Easington, Newington and Stadhampton)
Chinnor East	Chinnor ward (part – the proposed Chinnor East ward of Chinnor parish)
Chinnor North	Chinnor ward (part – the proposed Chinnor North ward of Chinnor parish)
Cholsey	Cholsey ward (the parishes of Cholsey and Moulsoford); Hagbourne ward (part – the parishes of Aston Tirrold and Aston Upthorpe)
Crowmarsh	Crowmarsh ward (part – the parishes of Crowmarsh and Ipsden); Goring ward (part – the parish of South Stoke)
Didcot East	Didcot North ward (part); Didcot Northbourne ward (part); Hagbourne ward (part – the Millbrook ward of East Hagbourne parish)
Didcot North	Didcot North ward (part)
Didcot South	Didcot South ward (part); Didcot Northbourne ward (part)
Didcot West	Didcot South ward (part); Didcot Northbourne ward (part)
Dorchester	<i>Unchanged</i> ; the parishes of Dorchester, Drayton St Leonard and Warborough
Forest Hill	Forest Hill ward (the parishes of Beckley & Stowood, Elsfield, Forest Hill-with-Shotover, Stanton St John and Woodeaton); Wheatley ward (part – the parishes of Waterperry-with-Thomley and Waterstock)
Garsington	Garsington ward (part – the parish of Garsington); Clifton Hampden ward (part – the parishes of Marsh Baldon and Toot Baldon)
Goring	Goring ward (part – the proposed Goring North ward of Goring parish)
Goring Heath	Goring ward (part – the proposed Goring South ward of Goring parish); Goring Heath ward (part – the parish of Goring Heath)
Great Milton	<i>Unchanged</i> ; the parishes of Great Haseley, Great Milton, Little Milton and Tiddington-with-Albury)

Ward name	Constituent areas
Hagbourne	Hagbourne ward (part – the proposed East Hagbourne ward of East Hagbourne parish, the parishes of North Moreton, South Moreton and West Hagbourne)
Henley North	Henley ward (part – part of the Henley North ward of Henley parish, part of the Henley South ward of Henley parish)
Henley Rural	Henley ward (part – part of the Henley North ward of Henley parish); Nettlebed ward (part – the parish of Bix & Assendon); Rotherfield Peppard ward (part – the parish of Rotherfield Peppard)
Henley South	Henley ward (part – part of the Henley South parish ward of Henley parish)
Horspath	Horspath ward (the parish of Horspath); Wheatley ward (part – the proposed Littleworth ward of Wheatley parish)
Kidmore End	Kidmore End ward (part – the parish of Kidmore End); Goring Heath ward (part – the parishes of Mapledurham and Whitchurch)
Nettlebed	Nettlebed ward (part – the parishes of Nettlebed, Nuffield, Pishill with Stonor and Swyncombe); Crowmarsh ward (part – the parish of Stoke Row)
Rotherfield Peppard	Rotherfield Peppard ward (part – the parishes of Highmoor and Rotherfield Peppard); Crowmarsh ward (part – the parish of Checkendon)
Shiplake	Shiplake ward (part – the parishes of Harpsden and Shiplake)
Sonning Common	Sonning Common ward (the parish of Sonning Common); Shiplake ward (part – the parish of Binfield Heath); Kidmore End ward (part – the parish of Eye & Dunsden)
Thame East	Thame North ward (part – part of the Thame North ward of Thame parish, the parish of Towersey)
Thame South	Aston Rowant ward (part – the parish of Sydenham); Thame South ward (part – part of the Thame South ward of Thame parish)
Thame West	Thame North ward (part – part of the Thame North ward of Thame parish); Thame South ward (part – part of the Thame South ward of Thame parish); Aston Rowant ward (part – the parish of Tetsworth)
Wallingford North	Wallingford ward (part – the proposed Wallingford North ward of Wallingford parish)
Wallingford South	Wallingford ward (part – the proposed Wallingford South ward of Wallingford parish)
Watlington	Watlington ward (part – the parish of Watlington)
Wheatley	Wheatley ward (part – the parishes of Holton and Wheatley); Garsington ward (part – the parish of Cuddesdon & Denton)

Figure B4: South Oxfordshire District Council's Proposals: Number of Councillors and Electors by Ward

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2000)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average (%)	Electorate (2005)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average (%)
1	Aston Rowant	1	1,882	1,882	3	1,894	1,894	1
2	Benson	2	3,616	1,808	-1	3,774	1,887	1
3	Berinsfield	1	1,924	1,924	5	1,894	1,894	1
4	Brightwell	1	1,978	1,978	8	1,952	1,952	4
5	Chalgrove	2	3,556	1,778	-3	3,607	1,804	-4
6	Chinnor East	1	2,019	2,019	11	2,024	2,024	8
7	Chinnor North	1	1,943	1,943	6	1,949	1,949	4
8	Cholsey	2	3,498	1,749	-4	3,480	1,740	-7
9	Crowmarsh	1	1,854	1,854	2	1,919	1,919	2
10	Didcot East	2	3,508	1,754	-4	3,604	1,802	-4
11	Didcot North	3	4,609	1,536	-16	6,051	2,017	8
12	Didcot South	3	5,192	1,731	-5	5,240	1,747	-7
13	Didcot West	2	4,049	2,025	11	4,047	2,024	8
14	Dorchester	1	1,797	1,797	-2	1,777	1,777	-5
15	Forest Hill	1	1,797	1,797	-2	1,786	1,786	-5
16	Garsington	1	1,782	1,782	-2	1,760	1,760	-6
17	Goring	1	1,866	1,866	2	1,861	1,861	-1
18	Goring Heath	1	1,768	1,768	-3	1,768	1,768	-6
19	Great Milton	1	1,900	1,900	4	1,898	1,898	1
20	Hagbourne	1	1,670	1,670	-9	1,697	1,697	-9
21	Henley North	2	3,793	1,897	4	3,790	1,895	1
22	Henley Rural	1	1,840	1,840	1	1,834	1,834	-2
23	Henley South	2	3,689	1,845	1	3,828	1,914	2
24	Horspath	1	1,760	1,760	-4	1,800	1,800	-4
25	Kidmore End	1	1,870	1,870	2	1,851	1,851	-1
26	Nettlebed	1	1,951	1,951	7	1,956	1,956	4
27	Rotherfield Peppard	1	1,765	1,765	-3	1,838	1,838	-2
29	Shiplake	1	1,833	1,833	0	1,874	1,874	0
30	Sonning Common	2	3,808	1,904	4	3,792	1,896	1

Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2000)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average (%)	Electorate (2005)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average (%)
31 Thame East	2	3,792	1,896	4	3,803	1,902	1
32 Thame South	1	1,949	1,949	7	1,944	1,944	4
33 Thame West	2	3,707	1,854	1	3,882	1,941	4
34 Wallingford North	1	1,781	1,781	-2	1,823	1,823	-3
35 Wallingford South	2	3,382	1,691	-7	3,557	1,779	-5
36 Watlington	1	1,965	1,965	8	1,975	1,975	5
37 Wheatley	2	3,581	1,791	-2	3,707	1,854	-1

Source: *Electorate figures are based on South Oxfordshire District Council's submission.*

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

APPENDIX C

The Statutory Provisions

Local Government Act 1992: the Commission's Role

1 Section 13(2) of the Local Government Act 1992 places a duty on the Commission to undertake periodic electoral reviews of each principal local authority area in England, and to make recommendations to the Secretary of State. Section 13(3) provides that, so far as reasonably practicable, the first such review of any area should be undertaken not less than 10 years, and not more than 15 years, after this Commission's predecessor, the Local Government Boundary Commission (LGBC), submitted an initial electoral review report on the county within which that area, or the larger part of the area, was located. This timetable applies to districts within shire and metropolitan counties, although not to South Yorkshire and Tyne and Wear¹. Nor does the timetable apply to London boroughs; the 1992 Act is silent on the timing of periodic electoral reviews in Greater London. Nevertheless, these areas will be included in the Commission's review programme. The Commission has no power to review the electoral arrangements of the City of London.

2 Under section 13(5) of the 1992 Act, the Commission is required to make recommendations to the Secretary of State for any changes to the electoral arrangements within the areas of English principal authorities as appear desirable to it, having regard to the need to:

- (a) reflect the identities and interests of local communities; and
- (b) secure effective and convenient local government.

3 In reporting to the Secretary of State, the Commission may make recommendations for such changes to electoral arrangements as are specified in section 14(4) of the 1992 Act. In relation to principal authorities, these are:

- the total number of councillors to be elected to the council;
- the number and boundaries of electoral areas (wards or divisions);
- the number of councillors to be elected for each electoral area, and the years in which they are to be elected; and
- the name of any electoral area.

¹ The Local Government Boundary Commission did not submit reports on the counties of South Yorkshire and Tyne and Wear.

4 Unlike the LGBC, the Commission may also make recommendations for changes in respect of electoral arrangements within parish and town council areas. Accordingly, in relation to parish or town councils within a principal authority's area, the Commission may make recommendations relating to:

- the number of councillors;
- the need for parish wards;
- the number and boundaries of any such wards;
- the number of councillors to be elected for any such ward or, in the case of a common parish, for each parish; and
- the name of any such ward.

5 In conducting the review, section 27 of the 1992 Act requires the Commission to comply, so far as is practicable, with the rules given in Schedule 11 to the Local Government Act 1972 for the conduct of electoral reviews.

Local Government Act 1972: Rules to be Observed in Considering Electoral Arrangements

6 By virtue of section 27 of the Local Government Act 1992, in undertaking a review of electoral arrangements the Commission is required to comply so far as is reasonably practicable with the rules set out in Schedule 11 to the 1972 Act. For ease of reference, those provisions of Schedule 11 which are relevant to this review are set out below.

7 In relation to shire districts:

Having regard to any changes in the number or distribution of the local government electors of the district likely to take place within the period of five years immediately following the consideration (by the Secretary of State or the Commission):

- (a) the ratio of the number of local government electors to the number of councillors to be elected shall be, as nearly as may be, the same in every ward in the district;
- (b) in a district every ward of a parish council shall lie wholly within a single ward of the district;
- (c) in a district every parish which is not divided into parish wards shall lie wholly within a single ward of the district.

8 The Schedule also provides that, subject to (a)–(c) above, regard should be had to:

- (d) the desirability of fixing ward boundaries which are and will remain easily identifiable; and

(e) any local ties which would be broken by the fixing of any particular ward boundary.

9 The Schedule provides that, in considering whether a parish should be divided into wards, regard shall be had to whether:

(f) the number or distribution of electors in the parish is such as to make a single election of parish councillors impracticable or inconvenient; and

(g) it is desirable that any area or areas of the parish should be separately represented on the parish council.

10 Where it is decided to divide any such parish into parish wards, in considering the size and boundaries of the wards and fixing the number of parish councillors to be elected for each ward, regard shall be had to:

(h) any change in the number or distribution of electors of the parish which is likely to take place within the period of five years immediately following the consideration;

(i) the desirability of fixing boundaries which are and will remain easily identifiable; and

(j) any local ties which will be broken by the fixing of any particular boundaries.

11 Where it is decided not to divide the parish into parish wards, in fixing the number of councillors to be elected for each parish regard shall be had to the number and distribution of electors of the parish and any change which is likely to take place within the period of five years immediately following the fixing of the number of parish councillors.

Appendix D

Code of Practice on Written Consultation

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

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

Commission compliance with Code criteria

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

