

Draft recommendations on the  
future electoral arrangements for  
Mid Suffolk

*January 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  
Kru Desai  
Pamela Gordon  
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 Stowmarket is inserted inside the back cover of the report.



## SUMMARY

The Commission began a review of the electoral arrangements for Mid Suffolk on 27 June 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 Mid Suffolk:

- **in 15 of the 34 wards the number of electors represented by each councillor varies by more than 10 per cent from the average for the district and eight 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 17 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 114-115) are that:

- **Mid Suffolk District Council should have 40 councillors, as at present;**
- **there should be 31 wards, instead of 34 as at present;**
- **the boundaries of 26 of the existing wards should be modified, resulting in a net reduction of three, and eight wards should retain their existing boundaries;**
- **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 28 of the proposed 31 wards the number of electors per councillor would vary by no more than 10 per cent from the district average.**
- **An improved level of electoral equality is forecast to continue with the number of electors per councillor in 29 of the proposed wards 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 Haughley and Combs and for Stowmarket Town Council.**

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

- **We will consult on our draft recommendations for eight weeks from 9 January 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 5 March 2001:

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Figure 1: The Commission's Draft Recommendations: Summary

	<b>Ward name</b>	<b>Number of councillors</b>	<b>Constituent areas</b>	<b>Map reference</b>
1	Bacton & Old Newton	1	Stowupland ward (part – Bacton, Gipping and Old Newton with Dagworth parishes)	Map 2
2	Badwell Ash	1	Badwell Ash ward (part – Badwell Ash, Great Ashfield, Hunston, Stowlangtoft and Wyverstone parishes); Walsham-le-Willows ward (part – Finningham and Westhorpe parishes)	Map 2
3	Barking & Somersham	1	Barking ward (part – Barking, Nettlestead, Offton, Somersham and Willisham parishes); Bramford ward (part – Baylham parish)	Map 2
4	Bramford & Blakenham	2	Bramford ward (part – Bramford, Great Blakenham and Little Blakenham parishes); Barking ward (part – Flowton parish)	Map 2
5	Claydon & Barham	2	Claydon ward (Akenham, Claydon and Whitton parishes); Barham ward (Barham, Hemingstone and Henley parishes)	Map 2
6	Debenham	1	Debenham ward (part – Debenham and Winston parishes); Wetheringsett ward (part – Aspall parish)	Map 2
7	Elmswell & Norton	2	Elmswell ward (Elmswell parish); Norton ward (part – Norton and Tostock parishes)	Map 2
8	Eye	1	<i>Unchanged</i> (Eye parish)	Map 2
9	Fressingfield	1	Fressingfield ward (part – Fressingfield parish); Weybread ward (part – Mendham, Metfield, and Weybread parishes)	Map 2
10	Gislingham	1	<i>Unchanged</i> (Burgate, Gislingham, Mellis, Thornham Magna, Thornham Parva and Wortham parishes)	Map 2
11	Haughley & Wetherden	1	Haughley & Wetherden ward (part – North ward of Haughley parish as proposed and Wetherden parish)	Map 2 and Large Map
12	Helmingham & Coddenham	1	Helmingham ward (Ashbocking, Crowfield, Framsdon, Gosbeck, Helmingham and Pettaugh parishes); Creeting ward (part – Coddenham parish)	Map 2
13	Hoxne	1	Hoxne ward (part – Athelington, Denham, Horham, Hoxne and Redlingfield parishes); Weybread ward (part – Syleham and Wingfield parishes)	Map 2
14	Mendlesham	1	<i>Unchanged</i> (Cotton, Mendlesham and Wickham Skeith parishes)	Map 2
15	Needham Market	2	<i>Unchanged</i> (Needham Market town and Badley parish)	Map 2
16	Onehouse	1	<i>Unchanged</i> (Buxhall, Great Finborough, Harleston, Onehouse and Shelland parishes )	Map 2
17	Palgrave	1	<i>Unchanged</i> (Brome & Oakley, Palgrave, Stuston, Thrandeston and Yaxley parishes)	Map 2

	<b>Ward name</b>	<b>Number of councillors</b>	<b>Constituent areas</b>	<b>Map reference</b>
18	Rattlesden	1	<i>Unchanged</i> (Drinkstone, Felsham, Gedding and Rattlesden parishes)	Map 2
19	Rickinghall	1	Rickinghall ward (part – Botesdale, Redgrave, Rickinghall Inferior and Rickinghall Superior parishes)	Map 2
20	Ringshall	1	Ringshall ward (part – Battisford, Great Bricett, Little Finborough and Ringshall parishes and South ward of Combs parish as proposed)	Map 2 and Large Map
21	Stowmarket Central	2	Stowmarket Central ward (part – Central ward of Stowmarket town (part))	Map 2 and Large Map
22	Stowmarket North	3	Stowmarket Central ward (part – Central ward of Stowmarket town (part)); Stowmarket North ward (part – North ward of Stowmarket town (part)) Haughley & Wetherden ward (part – South ward of Haughley parish as proposed)	Map 2 and Large Map
23	Stowmarket South	2	Stowmarket South ward (South ward of Stowmarket town) Ringshall ward (part – North ward of Combs parish as proposed)	Map 2 and Large Map
24	Stowupland	1	Creeting ward (part – Creeting St Peter or West Creeting parish); Stowupland ward (part – Stowupland parish)	Map 2
25	Stradbroke & Laxfield	1	Stradbroke ward (part – Stradbroke and Wilby parishes); Fressingfield ward (part – Laxfield parish)	Map 2
26	The Stonhams	1	Creeting ward (part – Creeting St Mary parish); Stonham ward (part – Earl Stonham, Stonham Aspal, and Stonham Parva parishes)	Map 2
27	Thurston & Hessett	2	Norton ward (part – Hessett and Beyton parishes); Thurston ward (Thurston parish)	Map 2
28	Walsham-le-Willows	1	Walsham-le-Willows ward (part – Walsham-le-Willows and Wattisfield parishes); Badwell Ash ward (part – Langham parish); Rickinghall ward (part – Hinderclay parish)	Map 2
29	Wetheringsett	1	Hoxne ward (part – Occold parish ); Stonham ward (part – Mickfield parish); Wetheringsett ward (part – Braiseworth, Stoke Ash, Thorndon, Thwaite and Wetheringsett parishes)	Map 2
30	Woolpit	1	<i>Unchanged</i> (Woolpit parish)	Map 2
31	Worlingworth	1	Worlingworth ward (part – Bedfield, Bedingfield, Kenton, Monk Soham, Southholt, Tannington and Worlingworth parishes); Debenham ward (part – Ashfield-cum-Thorpe parish); Stradbroke ward (part – Brundish parish); Wetheringsett ward (part – Rishangles parish)	Map 2

*Notes: 1 The whole district is parished, containing a total of 122 parishes.*

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

Figure 2: The Commission's Draft Recommendations for Mid Suffolk

	<b>Ward name</b>	<b>Number of councillors</b>	<b>Electorate (2000)</b>	<b>Number of electors per councillor</b>	<b>Variance from average %</b>	<b>Electorate (2005)</b>	<b>Number of electors per councillor</b>	<b>Variance from average %</b>
1	Bacton & Old Newton	1	1,766	1,766	5	1,790	1,790	2
2	Badwell Ash	1	1,791	1,791	6	1,878	1,878	7
3	Barking & Somersham	1	1,666	1,666	-1	1,724	1,724	-2
4	Bramford & Blakenham	2	3,214	1,607	-5	3,260	1,630	-8
5	Claydon & Barham	2	3,304	1,652	-2	3,536	1,768	0
6	Debenham	1	1,681	1,681	0	1,869	1,869	6
7	Elmswell & Norton	2	3,461	1,731	2	3,572	1,786	1
8	Eye	1	1,536	1,536	-9	1,633	1,633	-7
9	Fressingfield	1	1,781	1,781	5	1,839	1,839	4
10	Gislingham	1	1,844	1,844	9	1,905	1,905	8
11	Haughley & Wetherton	1	1,608	1,608	-5	1,649	1,649	-6
12	Helmingham & Coddington	1	1,587	1,587	-6	1,640	1,640	-7
13	Hoxne	1	1,560	1,560	-8	1,620	1,620	-8
14	Mendlesham	1	1,705	1,705	1	1,801	1,801	2
15	Needham Market	2	3,562	1,781	5	3,639	1,820	3
16	Onehouse	1	1,717	1,717	2	1,742	1,742	-1
17	Palgrave	1	1,581	1,581	-6	1,658	1,658	-6
18	Rattlesden	1	1,528	1,528	-9	1,553	1,553	-12
19	Rickinghall	1	1,896	1,896	12	1,946	1,946	10
20	Ringshall	1	1,889	1,889	12	1,935	1,935	10
21	Stowmarket Central	2	3,657	1,829	8	3,823	1,912	8
22	Stowmarket North	3	4,183	1,394	-17	5,055	1,685	-4
23	Stowmarket South	2	3,717	1,859	10	3,719	1,860	6

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 %
24 Stowupland	1	1,733	1,733	3	1,782	1,782	1
25 Stradbroke & Laxfield	1	1,781	1,781	5	1,855	1,855	5
26 The Stonhams	1	1,799	1,799	7	1,835	1,835	4
27 Thurston & Hessett	2	3,384	1,692	0	3,481	1,741	-1
28 Walsham-le-Willows	1	1,535	1,535	-9	1,573	1,573	-11
29 Wetheringsett	1	1,784	1,784	6	1,848	1,848	5
30 Woolpit	1	1,576	1,576	-7	1,585	1,585	-10
31 Worlingworth	1	1,706	1,706	1	1,756	1,756	0
<b>Totals</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>67,532</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>70,501</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>
<b>Averages</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>1,688</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>1,763</b>	<b>-</b>

Source: Electorate figures are based on Mid Suffolk 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 Mid Suffolk on which we are now consulting. We are reviewing the seven districts in Suffolk 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 Mid Suffolk. The last such review was undertaken by our predecessor, the Local Government Boundary Commission (LGBC), which reported to the Secretary of State in August 1977 (Report No. 236). The electoral arrangements of Suffolk County Council were last reviewed in June 1982 (Report No. 429). 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 B).

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* (third edition published in October 1999). 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.

11 Following publication of the White Paper, we advised all authorities in our 1999/2000 PER programme, including the Suffolk districts, that the Commission would continue to maintain its current approach to PERs as set out in the October 1999 *Guidance*. Nevertheless, we considered that local authorities and other interested parties might wish to have regard to the Secretary of State’s intentions and legislative proposals in formulating electoral schemes as part of PERs of their areas. The proposals have been taken forward in the Local Government Act 2000 which, among other matters, provides that the Secretary of State may make Orders to change authorities’ electoral cycles. However, until such time as the Secretary of State makes any 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*.

12 Stage One began on 27 June 2000, when we wrote to Mid Suffolk District Council inviting proposals for future electoral arrangements. We also notified Suffolk County Council, Suffolk Constabulary, the local authority associations, Suffolk Local Councils Association, 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 Eastern Region, and the headquarters of the main political parties. We placed a notice in the local press, issued a press release and invited the District Council to publicise the review further. The closing date for receipt of representations, the end of Stage One, was 3 October 2000.

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

14 Stage Three began on 9 January 2001 and will end on 5 March 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.**

15 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 Mid Suffolk covers the central part of the county of Suffolk, adjoining the county of Norfolk to the north. The district covers an area of some 87000 hectares with a population of approximately 80,000. The district is predominantly rural in nature, but contains various centres of population including the small market towns of Stowmarket, Eye and Needham Market. It is a district of rich architectural diversity, containing a large number of historically important medieval churches. The district is well served by road and rail links. The A14 trunk road runs north-west from Ipswich to St Edmundsbury via Stowmarket and provides transportation links to the Midlands and the Haven Ports.

17 The district is entirely parished and contains 122 parishes, including Stowmarket Town Council, which comprises 17 per cent of the district's total electorate. The electorate is projected to increase by 4 per cent over the next five years, with Stowmarket town forecast to be the main area of growth, increasing by some 8 per cent.

18 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'.

19 The electorate of the district is 67,532 (February 2000). The Council presently has 40 members who are elected from 34 wards, three of which, in Stowmarket, are relatively urban and the remainder being predominantly rural. Six of the wards are each represented by two councillors and 28 are single-member wards. The whole Council is elected every four years.

20 Since the last electoral review there has been a significant increase in the electorate in Mid Suffolk District, with around 29 per cent more electors than two decades ago as a result of new housing developments.

21 At present, each councillor represents an average of 1,688 electors, which the District Council forecasts will increase to 1,763 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 15 of the 34 wards varies by more than 10 per cent from the district average, of which eight wards vary by more than 20 per cent and three wards by more than 30 per cent. The worst imbalance is in Thurston ward, where the councillor represents 50 per cent more electors per councillor than the district average.

*Map 1: Existing Wards in Mid Suffolk*

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 Badwell Ash	1	1,356	1,356	-20	1,419	1,419	-19
2 Barham	1	1,723	1,723	2	1,731	1,731	-2
3 Barking	1	1,570	1,570	-7	1,614	1,614	-8
4 Bramford	2	3,310	1,655	-2	3,370	1,685	-4
5 Claydon	1	1,581	1,581	-6	1,805	1,805	2
6 Creeting	1	1,165	1,165	-31	1,196	1,196	-32
7 Debenham	1	1,803	1,803	7	1,993	1,993	13
8 Elmswell	1	2,514	2,514	49	2,603	2,603	48
9 Eye	1	1,536	1,536	-9	1,633	1,633	-7
10 Fressingfield	1	1,505	1,505	-11	1,544	1,544	-12
11 Gislingham	1	1,844	1,844	9	1,905	1,905	8
12 Haughley & Wetherden	1	1,700	1,700	1	1,741	1,741	-1
13 Helmingham	1	1,194	1,194	-29	1,223	1,223	-31
14 Hoxne	1	1,546	1,546	-8	1,581	1,581	-10
15 Mendlesham	1	1,705	1,705	1	1,801	1,801	2
16 Needham Market	2	3,562	1,781	5	3,639	1,820	3
17 Norton	1	1,802	1,802	7	1,847	1,847	5
18 Onehouse	1	1,717	1,717	2	1,742	1,742	-1
19 Palgrave	1	1,581	1,581	-6	1,658	1,658	-6
20 Rattlesden	1	1,528	1,528	-9	1,553	1,553	-12
21 Rickinghall	1	2,148	2,148	27	2,210	2,210	25
22 Ringshall	1	2,064	2,064	22	2,110	2,110	20
23 Stonham	1	1,352	1,352	-20	1,396	1,396	-21
24 Stowmarket Central	2	3,747	1,874	11	3,918	1,959	11
25 Stowmarket North	2	4,001	2,001	18	4,868	2,434	38
26 Stowmarket South	2	3,542	1,771	5	3,544	1,772	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 %
27 Stowupland	2	3,319	1,660	-2	3,388	1,694	-4
28 Stradbroke	1	1,203	1,203	-29	1,263	1,263	-28
29 Thurston	1	2,529	2,529	50	2,603	2,603	48
30 Walsham-le-Willows	1	1,718	1,718	2	1,768	1,768	0
31 Wetheringsett	1	1,369	1,369	-19	1,422	1,422	-19
32 Weybread	1	1,387	1,387	-18	1,447	1,447	-18
33 Woolpit	1	1,576	1,576	-7	1,585	1,585	-10
34 Worlingworth	1	1,335	1,335	-21	1,381	1,381	-22
<b>Totals</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>67,532</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>70,501</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>
<b>Averages</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>1,688</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>1,763</b>	<b>-</b>

Source: Electorate figures are based on information provided by Mid Suffolk 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 Weybread ward were relatively over-represented by 18 per cent, while electors in Stowmarket Central ward were relatively under-represented by 11 per cent. Figures have been rounded to the nearest whole number.

### 3 REPRESENTATIONS RECEIVED

22 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 Mid Suffolk District Council and its constituent parish and town councils.

23 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 10 representations during Stage One, including a district-wide scheme from the District Council, all of which may be inspected at the offices of the District Council and the Commission.

#### **Mid Suffolk District Council**

24 The District Council proposed a council of 40 members, as at present, serving 31 wards, compared to the existing 34. It proposed changes to 26 of the existing wards and that there should be one three-member, seven two-member and 23 single-member wards. The Council had regard to the aim of achieving electoral equality across the district but had sought to “construct wards which retain, as far as possible, the sense of local community identity and relationships developed since the last review”. Under the District Council’s proposal, 26 of the proposed 31 wards would have an electoral imbalance of no more than 10 per cent from the district average, with no wards exceeding 20 per cent from the average.

25 The Council consulted widely on its proposals and received a total of 28 representations from interested parties, including the Suffolk Constabulary which stated that, since a review in 1999, the policing boundaries and district boundaries had been coterminous and considered that it was desirable that this situation be retained, and the Central Suffolk Primary Care Group who stated that their “major concern was that the ward boundaries remain unchanged”. The remainder of the submissions were received from parish and town councils and local residents and commented on particular areas of the district. As a result of comments from Councillor Craven (Hoxne ward) and Stonham Aspal Parish Council, the District Council submitted a modified scheme (Alternative Scheme One) for consideration. This scheme outlined different warding arrangements to the District Council’s main proposal in 8 of the existing wards to the north-east of the district and would provide for 40 councillors serving 31 wards.

26 Two further schemes were submitted for consideration. Alternative Scheme Two outlined different warding arrangements for Stowmarket, with the retention of a two-member Stowmarket North ward and the creation of a single-member Stowmarket East ward in response to anticipated housing development in the east of the town over the next five years. Alternative Scheme Three reflected the District Council’s scheme subject to the amended warding arrangements outlined in the combined arrangements of Alternative Schemes One and Two. The second and third alternative schemes would provide for 40 councillors serving 32 wards. All three alternative schemes were broadly similar to the District Council’s main proposal and would achieve similar levels of electoral equality. The District Council’s proposals and the three alternative schemes are summarised in Appendix A.

## **Parish and Town Councils**

27 We received representations from seven parish and town councils. Stowmarket Town Council supported the District Council's main proposal to retain three district wards for the town, but disputed the Council's electorate projections. It argued that the growth in the electorate would not be sufficient to justify the creation of a fourth ward in Stowmarket (as outlined in Alternative Schemes Two and Three). Stonham Aspal Parish Council supported Alternative Scheme One with regard to the existing Stonham, Helmingham and Creting wards. Buxhall, Great Finborough, Onehouse and Woolpit parish councils supported the Council's main proposal although Onehouse parish stated that it opposed the inclusion of parts of rural parishes adjoining Stowmarket in the urban wards of the town. Mendlesham Parish Council expressed no views regarding the review.

## **Other Representations**

28 We received two representations from local residents. One suggested that the geographical size of an area should be taken into consideration when allocating council numbers to wards and argued that this would ensure adequate representation of rural views. He opposed including any other parished areas within the district wards of Stowmarket. Another resident favoured the abolition of all district councils in Suffolk and the creation of one county-wide authority. He supported a significant reduction in council size should the current local government structure be maintained.

## 4 ANALYSIS AND DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS

29 As described earlier, our prime objective in considering the most appropriate electoral arrangements for Mid Suffolk 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”.

30 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.

31 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.

32 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.

### **Electorate Forecasts**

33 The District Council submitted electorate forecasts for the year 2005, projecting an increase in the electorate of some 4 per cent from 67,532 to 70,501 over the five-year period from 2000 to 2005. It expects most of the growth to be in Stowmarket North ward, although a significant rate of growth is also expected in the more rural Claydon and Debenham wards. 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.

34 In its submission, Stowmarket Town Council provided alternative electoral projections for the next five years for Stowmarket, forecasting an increase in the town’s electorate of some 6 per cent. This compared with the District Council’s projection of approximately 8 per cent. It argued that the District Council had over-estimated likely housing development and probable occupancy rates in the existing Stowmarket North ward. It projected that the number of electors in the District Council’s proposed Stowmarket North ward would increase by 617 over the next five

years, 250 fewer electors than the District Council has forecast. The Town Council argued that under its projection there would not be a sufficient increase in electors to justify the creation of a fourth ward in the east of the town, as outlined in Alternative Schemes Two and Three.

35 In the light of these arguments we sought further clarification from the District Council with regard to its forecasts in Stowmarket. We also carefully considered the alternative electorate projections, together with supporting argumentation put forward. The District Council stated that it had re-examined the data and was satisfied that its electorate forecasts for Stowmarket remained the best estimate available. It further stated that should the current developers not meet the anticipated rate of property completions and sales, that it anticipated another developer would be expected to make up any shortfall on the site in question. We consider that the District Council's projections for Stowmarket North take account of all residential development that can reasonably be expected to be occupied by electors over the next five years. 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 the assumed occupancy rates.

36 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. However, we would welcome further evidence on electorate forecasts during Stage Three of our review.

## **Council Size**

37 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.

38 Mid Suffolk District Council currently has 40 members. The District Council proposed the retention of a council of 40 members and stated that this was the "unanimous conclusion" of its electoral review panel. A council size of 40 was also proposed in the three alternative schemes submitted by the Council. A local resident favoured a proposal that each councillor should represent between 3,000 and 3,500 electors, approximately twice the current level. In the district of Mid Suffolk this would result in a reduction in council size to between 19 and 23. He argued that this would save on administration costs but did not submit detailed proposals for consideration.

39 The Commission will not generally seek a substantial increase or decrease in council size but will be prepared to consider the case for change where there is persuasive evidence. Having considered the size and distribution of the electorate, the geography and other characteristics of the area, together with the representations received, we have concluded that the achievement of electoral equality and the statutory criteria would best be met by the continuance of a council of size of 40 members. We have not received sufficient evidence to persuade us that the electors of Mid Suffolk should be represented by a significantly larger or smaller number of councillors than at present and note that there was all party support for a council size of 40 and that the proposals submitted would provide for much improved levels of electoral equality.

40 Having considered the size and distribution of the electorate, the geography and other characteristics of the area, together with the representations received, we have concluded that the achievement of electoral equality and the statutory criteria would be best met by a council size of 40 members.

## **Electoral Arrangements**

41 We have carefully considered the District Council's proposed scheme for Mid Suffolk, as well as the three alternative schemes it submitted. From the representations received at Stage One, some considerations have emerged that have informed us when preparing our draft recommendations.

42 The District Council's proposals and its three alternative schemes were based on the retention of the existing council size of 40 members. The District Council proposed that a pattern of single-member wards be largely retained in the rural area, and that multi-member wards be formed for the more urban areas. Under the Council's main proposal and Alternative Scheme One, the number of wards would be reduced from 34 to 31. Under Alternative Schemes Two and Three, the number of wards would be reduced from 34 to 32, as a result of the proposal to provide for a fourth ward in Stowmarket. The District Council's proposals have been subject to extensive public consultation and would appear to have a significant degree of local support. The Council stated that every effort had been made to "construct wards which retain, as far as possible, the sense of local community identity and relationships developed since the last review". All four schemes provide for significant improvement in levels of electoral equality across the district.

43 In view of the degree of consensus behind large elements of the Council's proposals, and the thorough consultation exercise which it undertook with interested parties, we have concluded that we should substantially base our draft recommendations on the District Council's main scheme. We acknowledge the improved level of electoral equality achieved by the Council's main proposal and its regard for the statutory criteria. However we have sought to build upon these proposals in order to put forward electoral arrangements which would achieve better electoral equality, while having regard to community ties and identities. On this basis, we have decided to move away from the District Council's proposals in the north and east of the district and in Stowmarket town.

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

- (a) Badwell Ash, Gislingham, Rickingham and Walsham-le-Willows wards;
- (b) Eye, Palgrave and Woolpit wards;
- (c) Debenham, Mendlesham, Wetheringsett and Worlingworth wards;
- (d) Fressingfield, Hoxne, Stradbroke and Weybread wards;
- (e) Creeting, Helmingham, Stonham and Stowupland wards;
- (f) Barham, Barking, Bramford and Claydon wards;
- (g) Haughley & Wetherden, Needham Market, Onehouse and Ringshall wards;
- (h) Stowmarket Central, Stowmarket North and Stowmarket South wards;
- (i) Elmswell, Norton, Rattlesden and Thurston wards.

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

### **Badwell Ash, Gislingham, Rickingham and Walsham-le-Willows wards**

46 The existing wards of Badwell Ash, Gislingham, Rickingham and Walsham-le-Willows are situated in the north-western corner of the district and are currently each represented by a single councillor. Badwell Ash ward contains the parishes of Badwell Ash, Great Ashfield, Hunston, Langham, Stowlangtoft and Wyverstone. Gislingham ward contains the parishes of Burgate, Gislingham, Mellis, Thornham Magna, Thornham Parva and Wortham. Rickingham ward contains the parishes of Botesdale, Hinderclay, Redgrave, Rickingham Inferior and Rickingham Superior and Walsham-le-Willows ward contains the parishes of Finningham, Walsham-le-Willows, Wattisfield and Westhorpe.

47 Under existing arrangements, Gislingham, Rickingham and Walsham-le-Willows wards have 9 per cent, 27 per cent and 2 per cent more electors per councillor than the district average respectively (8 per cent more, 25 per cent more and equal to the district average by 2005). Badwell Ash ward has 20 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the district average (19 per cent fewer by 2005).

48 The District Council proposed changes to the existing Badwell-Ash, Rickingham and Walsham-le-Willows wards but proposed the retention of the existing Gislingham ward. It proposed that Langham and Hinderclay parishes should be combined with Wattisfield and Walsham-le-Willows parishes to form a revised single-member Walsham-le-Willows ward. Finningham and Westhorpe parishes would be transferred from Walsham-le-Willows ward to a revised single-member Badwell Ash ward. It proposed the retention of the existing Rickingham ward, subject to the transfer of Hinderclay parish, as detailed above.

49 Under the District Council's proposals, Badwell Ash, Gislingham and Rickingham wards would have 6 per cent, 9 per cent and 12 per cent more electors per councillor than the district average respectively (7 per cent, 8 per cent and 10 per cent more by 2005). Walsham-le-Willows ward would have 9 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the district average, and 11 per cent fewer by 2005.

50 In response to the District Council's local consultation process, three parish councils made representations to the Council. Hinderclay Parish Council opposed the District Council's proposals. It argued that the parish had "no commonality or dealings" with any of the parishes contained within the revised Walsham-le-Willows ward, and that there was "more at stake than merely electorate numbers". Botesdale and Rickingham parish councils reiterated this view. They stated that the constituent communities of the existing Rickingham ward shared many local amenities and facilities, and strongly urged the District Council to reconsider its proposal. The District Council argued that the current location of educational and health facilities used by the residents of Hinderclay parish, and the historic and close links between Hinderclay and Botesdale, Redgrave and the Rickinghams, would not be affected by their proposals. In addition, it noted that the retention of the current ward would produce a ward with 27 per cent more electors per councillor than the district average.

51 A local resident suggested the amalgamation of Rickinghall Superior, Rickinghall Inferior and Botesdale parishes into one parish. The Commission does not have the power to effect such a change under the terms of the current electoral review. Any such proposal would need to be considered as part of a future parishing review.

52 We have carefully considered the representations received in this area and have noted the concerns of Hinderclay, Rickinghall and Botesdale parish councils at the District Council's proposed Rickinghall and Walsham-le-Willows wards. However, we consider that retention of the existing Rickinghall ward would result in an unacceptably high level of electoral inequality. Under existing arrangements, Rickinghall ward has 27 per cent more electors per councillor than the district average and little improvement is forecast to take place by 2005. Moreover, our options for change are limited due to the relatively isolated nature of rural communities in these wards, located on the north-western border of the district. In view of the lack of an alternative proposal which effectively addresses the issue of electoral equality, we consider that the Council's proposals provide the best balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria. We are therefore content to adopt the District Council's proposals for Badwell Ash, Gislingham, Rickinghall and Walsham-le-Willows wards as part of our draft recommendations.

53 Under our draft recommendations, Badwell Ash, Gislingham and Rickinghall wards would have 6 per cent, 9 per cent and 12 per cent more electors per councillor than the district average respectively (7 per cent, 8 per cent and 10 per cent more by 2005). Walsham-le-Willows ward would have 9 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the district average, and 11 per cent fewer by 2005.

### **Eye, Palgrave and Woolpit wards**

54 The existing wards of Eye and Palgrave are situated in the north of the district and are each represented by a single councillor. Eye ward is coterminous with Eye parish while Palgrave ward contains the parishes of Brome & Oakley, Palgrave, Stuston, Thrandeston and Yaxley. Woolpit ward is situated in the south-west of the district and is coterminous with Woolpit parish. It is also represented by a single councillor. Under the existing arrangements, Eye, Palgrave and Woolpit wards have 9 per cent, 6 per cent and 7 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the district average respectively (7 per cent, 6 per cent and 10 per cent fewer by 2005).

55 The District Council proposed the retention of the existing arrangements for Eye, Palgrave and Woolpit wards and that they be served by the same number of councillors as at present. We received one submission from Woolpit Parish Council, endorsing the District Council's proposals to retain the existing arrangements for Woolpit ward.

56 Having considered the representations received, we are persuaded that the existing arrangements reflect community ties well and would provide a reasonable level of electoral equality by 2005. Both Eye and Woolpit wards contain relatively large and cohesive communities and have electorates that are able to sustain coterminous single-member wards. We are therefore content to put forward the District Council's proposals for Eye, Palgrave and Woolpit wards as part of our draft recommendations. Under our draft recommendations, Eye, Palgrave and Woolpit wards would have 9 per cent, 6 per cent and 7 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the

district average respectively (and 7 per cent, 6 per cent and 10 per cent fewer respectively by 2005).

### **Debenham, Mendlesham, Wetheringsett, and Worlingworth wards**

57 Debenham, Wetheringsett and Worlingworth wards are situated in the east of the district with Mendlesham situated towards the centre of the district. Each represented by a single councillor. Debenham ward contains the parishes of Ashfield-cum-Thorpe, Debenham and Winston; Mendlesham ward contains the parishes of Cotton, Mendlesham and Wickham Skeith. Wetheringsett ward contains the parishes of Aspall, Braiseworth, Rishangles, Stoke Ash, Thorndon, Thwaite and Wetheringsett-cum-Brockford; and Worlingworth ward contains the parishes of Bedfield, Bedingfield, Kenton, Monk Soham, Southolt, Tannington and Worlingworth.

58 Under existing arrangements, Debenham and Mendlesham wards have 7 per cent and 1 per cent more electors per councillor than the district average respectively (13 per cent and 2 per cent more by 2005). Wetheringsett and Worlingworth wards have 19 per cent and 21 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the district average respectively (19 per cent and 22 per cent fewer in 2005).

59 The District Council proposed retaining the existing Mendlesham ward but modifying the existing Debenham, Wetheringsett and Worlingworth wards. It proposed a revised single-member Debenham ward comprising the existing ward less Ashfield-cum-Thorpe parish, together with Aspall parish from the existing Wetheringsett ward. The Council recommended a revised single-member Worlingworth ward, which would contain the existing ward together with Rishangles parish from Wetheringsett ward. It also proposed a revised single-member Wetheringsett ward containing the parishes of Braiseworth, Stoke Ash, Thorndon, Thwaite and Wetheringsett-cum-Brockford, and including Mickfield parish (from the existing Stonham ward) and Occold parish (from the existing Hoxne ward).

60 Under the District Council's proposals, Debenham and Worlingworth wards would have equal to and 7 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the district average respectively and 6 per cent more and 8 per cent fewer electors than the district average by 2005. Mendlesham and Wetheringsett wards would have 1 per cent and 6 per cent more electors per councillor than the district average respectively, and 2 per cent and 5 per cent more by 2005.

61 The Council's Alternative Scheme One would make minor changes to the proposed Worlingworth ward. The revised single-member ward would be identical to the District Council's main proposal subject to the inclusion of Brundish parish from the existing Stradbroke ward. Under Alternative Scheme One, Worlingworth ward would have 1 per cent more electors per councillor than the district average, improving to equal to the district average by 2005.

62 As part of the District Council's own consultation process, Councillor Craven (Hoxne ward) argued that Brundish parish contains very scattered communities and has much more in common with the relatively small parishes contained in Worlingworth ward. She therefore proposed the changes outlined in Alternative Scheme One. A submission was also received from Mendlesham Parish Council offering no comments on the periodic electoral review of the district.

63 We have carefully considered the submissions received and note that both proposals for the area provide a much improved level of electoral equality. However, on balance, we consider that the arrangements outlined in Alternative Scheme One would give greater regard to the commonality of the parishes involved and would provide a much improved level of electoral equality in Worlingworth ward. We therefore propose endorsing the District Council's main proposal for Debenham, Mendlesham and Wetheringsett wards as part of our draft recommendations and propose adopting the arrangements outlined in Alternative Scheme One for Worlingworth ward.

64 Under our draft recommendations, Mendlesham and Wetheringsett wards would have 1 per cent and 6 per cent more electors per councillor than the district average respectively, and 2 per cent and 5 per cent more than the district average by 2005. Debenham and Worlingworth wards would each have the equal to and 1 per cent more electors per councillor than the district average respectively and 6 per cent more and equal to the district average by 2005.

### **Fressingfield, Hoxne, Stradbroke and Weybread wards**

65 The existing wards of Fressingfield, Hoxne, Stadbroke and Weybread are situated in the north-eastern corner of the district and are each represented by a single councillor. The ward of Fressingfield contains the parishes of Fressingfield and Laxfield and Hoxne ward contains the parishes of Athelington, Denham, Horham, Hoxne, Occold and Redlingfield. Stadbroke ward contains the parishes of Brundish, Stradbroke and Wilby; and Weybread ward contains the parishes of Mendham, Metfield, Syleham, Weybread and Wingfield.

66 Under existing arrangements, Fressingfield and Hoxne wards have 11 per cent and 8 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the district average respectively (12 per cent and 10 per cent fewer by 2005). Stadbroke and Weybread wards have 29 per cent and 18 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the district average respectively (28 per cent and 18 per cent fewer by 2005).

67 Under the District Council's main proposal, Metfield parish would be transferred from the existing Weybread ward to a revised Fressingfield ward. The Council also proposed a new single-member Hoxne & Weybread ward containing the parishes of Denham and Hoxne from the existing Hoxne ward, and Mendham, Syleham, Weybread and Wingfield parishes from the existing Weybread ward. The District Council also proposed a single-member Stradbroke ward containing the existing ward together with Athelington, Horham and Redlingfield parishes from the existing Hoxne ward. The Council considered that this proposal, while providing worse electoral equality than its alternative, would score highly in terms of community identity. Under the District Council's proposals, Fressingfield and Hoxne & Weybread wards would have 7 per cent and 12 per cent more electors per councillor than the district average respectively, improving to 5 per cent and 11 per cent more by 2005. Stradbroke ward would contain 8 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the district average both now and in 2005.

68 The District Council submitted Alternative Scheme One in response to comments from Councillor Craven as part of its local consultation process. This option would provide different warding arrangements for all four wards in this area. It would provide for a single-member Hoxne ward, as at present, subject to the inclusion of Syleham and Wingfield parishes from the existing Weybread ward. A single-member Fressingfield ward would comprise the parishes of

Fressingfield, Metfield, Mendham and Weybread and a single-member Stadbroke & Laxfield ward would contain the parishes of Laxfield, Stradbroke and Wilby. Under these alternative proposals, Fressingfield and Stradbroke & Laxfield wards would both have 5 per cent more electors per councillor than the district average. This level is projected to remain constant over the next five years. Hoxne & Weybread ward would have 8 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the district average, and retain the same level of electoral variation by 2005.

69 A number of representations were made in response to the District Council's local consultation process. Hoxne Parish Council supported Alternative Scheme One and stated that this would help to maintain long-standing community ties in this area. Weybread and Mendham parish councils submitted a joint representation supporting the alternative scheme. They considered that the proposal would link parishes with close associations and cover a smaller geographical area than the District Council's main proposal, ensuring more convenient and effective representation. They also expressed "extreme dissatisfaction" with the District Council's main proposal.

70 Wingfield Parish Council opposed both proposals for its area and stated that the parish had long-standing links with parishes located in the existing Weybread ward. It argued that the District Council's proposed Hoxne & Weybread ward would cover too large a geographical area to facilitate effective representation. It suggested the Council's main proposal could however be adopted subject to the transfer of Denham parish to the proposed Stradbroke ward. Councillor Craven opposed the District Council's main proposals for a new Hoxne ward stating that, in the light of the isolated nature of the communities, they would create a geographically larger ward and hinder effective representation by the elected member. She outlined an alternative proposal which forms the basis of Alternative Scheme One, which she argued would respect many of the existing community ties and alliances. Councillors Frost (Fressingfield ward) and Gemmill (Stradbroke ward) argued that the linking of Laxfield and Stradbroke parishes in one ward, as outlined in Alternative Scheme One would create extra pressures on the member due to its geographical size and both endorsed the District Council's original proposal.

71 We have carefully considered the representations received and consider that both schemes submitted by the District Council have considerable merit. We note that the District Council's main proposal provides for a much improved level of electoral equality, but consider that on the balance of evidence submitted at Stage One, the proposals outlined in Alternative Scheme One would provide a better balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria. In particular, we note the concerns expressed that the District Council's main proposal for the existing Hoxne ward would result in the creation of a ward encompassing a large geographical area and consisting of relatively isolated communities. We are of the opinion that the proposals outlined in Alternative Scheme One would provide for more effective representation of these local communities on the District Council.

72 We recognise the concerns expressed by Wingfield Parish Council regarding what it perceived as the break up of long-standing communities into different district wards. However, we are not persuaded that its proposal to transfer Denham parish to Stradbroke ward would be desirable. While this may help to ensure that Wingfield, Weybread and Mendham parishes continue to be linked in a single ward, we are of the opinion that Denham parish has close ties with the parishes in Hoxne ward. The transfer of Denham parish into Stradbroke ward under the

Council's main proposals would provide for a somewhat improved level of electoral equality, but would also create a ward covering a relatively large geographical area. Furthermore, we note that both Weybread and Mendham parish councils support Alternative Scheme One and have not expressed the same concerns as Wingfield Parish Council with regard to their division between separate district wards.

73 Our options for this area are somewhat limited due to the close proximity of these wards to the north-eastern boundary of the district, but we consider that the proposals for Stradbroke and Fressingfield wards, as outlined in Alternative Scheme One, combine similar communities in district wards while providing reasonable levels of electoral equality. Therefore, we consider that Alternative Scheme One would provide the best balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria and propose adopting these warding arrangements for Fressingfield, Hoxne, Stradbroke and Weybread wards as part of our draft recommendations.

74 Under our draft recommendations, Fressingfield and Stradbroke & Laxfield wards would both have 5 per cent more electors per councillor than the district average ( 4 per cent and 5 per cent more by 2005). Hoxne ward would have 8 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the district average, both now and in 2005.

### **Creting, Helmingham, Stonham and Stowupland wards**

75 The existing wards of Creting, Helmingham, Stonham and Stowupland are situated to the east of Stowmarket. Creting ward contains the parishes of Coddenham, Creting St Mary and Creting St Peter (or West Creting). Helmingham ward contains the parishes of Ashbocking, Crowfield, Framsdon, Gosbeck, Helmingham and Pettaugh, and Stonham ward contains the parishes of Earl Stonham, Stonham Parva, Mickfield and Stonham Aspal. All three wards are currently represented by a single councillor. Stowupland ward contains the parishes of Bacton, Gipping, Old Newton with Dagworth and Stowupland and is currently represented by two councillors. Under the existing arrangements, Creting and Helmingham wards contain 31 per cent and 29 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the district average respectively (32 per cent and 31 per cent fewer in 2005). Stonham and Stowupland wards contain 20 per cent and 2 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the district average (21 per cent and 4 per cent fewer in 2005).

76 The District Council proposed the retention of the existing single-member Helmingham ward, subject to the inclusion of Stonham Aspal parish from the existing Stonham ward. It proposed that the new ward be renamed Helmingham & Stonham Aspal. It also proposed the creation of a new single-member Creting St Mary ward containing the parishes of Coddenham, Creting St Mary, Earl Stonham and Stonham Parva. It proposed that Mickfield parish be transferred to Wetheringsett ward (as outlined above). The District Council also proposed a revised single-member Stowupland ward containing Stowupland and Creting St Peter (or West Creting) parishes. It recommended that the parishes of Bacton, Gipping and Old Newton with Dagworth, which are currently part of Stowupland ward, should form a new single-member Bacton & Old Newton ward.

77 Under the District Councils proposals, Bacton & Old Newton, Creting St Mary and Stowupland wards would have 5 per cent, 7 per cent and 3 per cent more electors per councillor

than the district average respectively (2 per cent, 4 per cent and 1 per cent more by 2005). Helmingham & Stonham Aspal ward would have 6 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the district average and 7 per cent fewer by 2005.

78 Alternative Scheme One differed from the District Council's main proposals for two of the proposed wards. It would provide for a new single-member ward of The Stonhams containing Creeting St Mary parish (from Creeting ward), Earl Stonham, Stonham Parva and Stonham Aspal (from Stonham ward). It proposed that the existing Helmingham ward be expanded to include Coddenham parish from Creeting ward, and be renamed Helmingham & Coddenham ward. Under this proposal, The Stonhams and Helmingham & Coddenham wards would contain 7 per cent more and 6 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the district average respectively (4 per cent more and 7 per cent fewer by 2005).

79 We received a submission from Stonham Aspal Parish Council supporting the warding arrangements outlined in Alternative Scheme One. It stated that this arrangement would maintain "the historical links between the three Stonham parishes" and would have little adverse effect on electoral equality when compared to the District Council's main proposal.

80 In response to the District Council's local consultation process, Coddenham Parish Council stated that, while it accepted the proposals outlined in Alternative Scheme One, it was concerned that the ward would cover a relatively large geographical area and would have a small electorate with no clear growth point.

81 Having carefully considered the representations received, we note that both proposed schemes would result in improved levels of electoral equality while having regard to local community interests and identities. The District Council's proposals for a revised Stowupland ward and a new Bacton & Old Newton ward provide acceptable levels of electoral equality and have aroused little opposition for those parishes affected. We are therefore content to adopt the District Council's main recommendation for the proposed Bacton & Old Newton and Stowupland wards as part of our draft recommendations.

82 We have noted that the District Council's proposals for a revised Helmingham & Stonham Aspal ward and Creeting St Mary ward provide very similar levels of electoral equality to the arrangements outlined in Alternative Scheme One. However, we consider that the proposals outlined in Alternative Scheme One better reflect the interests and identities of communities in this area while continuing to provide an acceptable level of electoral equality. We also note that the alternative scheme has the support of Stonham Aspal Parish Council and is accepted by Coddenham Parish Council, the two parishes affected by the alternative proposals. We are therefore content to adopt the proposals outlined in Alternative Scheme One for the proposed Helmingham & Coddenham and The Stonhams wards.

83 Under our draft recommendations, Bacton & Old Newton and Stowupland wards would contain 5 per cent and 3 per cent more electors per councillor than the district average respectively. This is forecast to improve to 2 per cent and 1 per cent more by 2005. The Stonhams and Helmingham & Coddenham wards would contain 7 per cent more and 6 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the district average respectively, and 4 per cent more and 7 per cent fewer by 2005.

## **Barham, Barking, Bramford and Claydon wards**

84 The existing wards of Barham, Barking, Bramford and Claydon are situated in the southern corner on the district. Barham ward contains the parishes of Barham, Hemingstone and Henley. Barking ward contains the parishes of Barking, Flowton, Nettlestead, Offton, Somersham and Willisham. Claydon ward contains the parishes of Akenham, Claydon and Whitton. All three are currently each represented by a single councillor. Bramford ward contains the parishes of Baylham, Bramford, Great Blakenham and Little Blakenham and is currently represented by two councillors.

85 Under existing arrangements, Barking, Bramford and Claydon wards have 7 per cent, 2 per cent and 6 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the district average respectively (8 per cent and 4 per cent fewer, and 2 per cent more by 2005). Barham ward contains 2 per cent more electors per councillor than the district average (2 per cent fewer in 2005).

86 The District Council proposed substantially retaining the existing Barking and Bramford wards, subject to the transfer of Flowton parish from Barking ward to Bramford ward, and Baylham parish from Bramford ward to Barking ward. The Council also recommended ward name changes to identify more accurately the constituent communities of these proposed wards. It proposed that Barking ward should be renamed Barking & Somersham and should continue to be represented by a single councillor, and that Bramford ward should be renamed Bramford & Blakenham and should continue to be represented by two councillors. The District Council proposed that the existing wards of Barham and Claydon be combined in a new two-member ward of Claydon & Barham.

87 Under the District Council's proposals, Barking & Somersham and Bramford & Blakenham wards would contain 1 per cent and 5 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the district average respectively (2 per cent and 8 per cent fewer by 2005). Claydon & Barham ward would contain 2 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the district average, and equal to the district average by 2005.

88 In response to the District Council's local consultation exercise, two parish councils made representations. Henley Parish Council opposed the District Council's proposed Claydon & Barham ward, stating that Henley is of a rural nature, quite different to the more urban Claydon, Barham and Whitton parishes. It proposed that either the current Barham ward be retained or that Henley and Hemingstone be contained within more rural wards to the north. Hemingstone Parish Council expressed initial concern at what it understood to be the District Council's proposal to combine it with Helmingham ward to the north, but it supported the District Council's proposal to maintain the grouping of Hemingstone, Henley and Barham parishes in the same ward. The District Council, in response to these submissions considered that "Henley Parish Council's concerns about a two-member ward were unfounded."

89 We have carefully considered the representations received in this area and note the concern of Henley Parish Council with regard to the proposed Claydon & Barham ward. However, we note that the current Claydon and Barham wards combine rural areas with the larger settlements of Claydon and Barham respectively and that these two in particular share significant links. We also note that a two-member Claydon & Barham ward would provide for a marginal improvement

in electoral equality when compared to the existing arrangements. We consider that the District Council's proposals would secure improved levels of electoral equality and have regard to community identities and we are consequently content to endorse the Council's proposed Claydon & Barham ward as part of our draft recommendations. However, we would welcome further representations with regard to our proposals for this area at Stage Three. In the light of the representations received, we have also decided to adopt the District Council's proposals for Barking & Somersham and Bramford & Blakenham wards as part of our draft recommendations.

90 Under our draft recommendations, Barking & Somersham and Bramford & Blakenham wards would have 1 per cent and 5 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the district average respectively (2 per cent and 8 per cent fewer by 2005). Claydon & Barham ward would have 2 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the district average, and is projected to have equal to the district average by 2005.

### **Haughley & Wetherden, Needham Market, Onehouse and Ringshall wards**

91 Haughley & Wetherden, Needham Market, Onehouse and Ringshall wards are situated in the south of the district, immediately to the south and west of Stowmarket. Haughley & Wetherden contains the parishes of Haughley and Wetherden. Onehouse ward contains the parishes of Buxhall, Great Finborough, Harleston, Onehouse and Shelland. Ringshall ward contains the parishes of Battisfield, Combs, Great Bricett, Little Finborough and Ringshall. Needham Market ward contains the parishes of Badley and Needham Market. Haughley & Wetherden, Onehouse and Ringshall wards are each represented by a single councillor while Needham Market ward is represented by two councillors.

92 Under existing arrangements, Haughley & Wetherden and Onehouse wards have 1 per cent and 2 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the district average respectively. This is projected to remain relatively constant over the next five years. Needham Market and Ringshall wards have 5 per cent and 22 per cent more electors per councillor than the district average respectively (3 per cent and 20 per cent more by 2005).

93 The District Council proposed retaining the existing Onehouse and Needham Market wards. It also proposed minimal change to Haughley & Wetherden and Ringshall wards. In particular, it proposed that the part of Haughley parish known as Chilton Hall (bounded to the north by Shepherds Lane, to the south and west by Haughley parish boundary and to the east by the A14 trunk road) containing 92 electors, be transferred from Haughley & Wetherden ward to Stowmarket North ward. It also proposed that the Lindsey Way area of Combs parish (bounded to the west by Lindsey Way, to the north by Combs parish boundary and to the east by the perimeter of the school playing field) containing 175 electors be transferred from Ringshall ward to Stowmarket South ward. Although these areas form part of the parishes of Haughley and Combs respectively, they are effectively areas of urban overspill from Stowmarket town. Under the District Council's proposal, Needham Market, Ringshall and Onehouse wards would have 5 per cent, 12 per cent and 2 per cent more electors per councillor than the district average respectively (3 per cent more and 10 per cent more, and 1 per cent fewer respectively by 2005). Haughley & Wetherden ward would have 5 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the district average initially and 6 per cent fewer in 2005.

94 We received submissions from Buxhall, Great Finborough and Onehouse parish councils expressing support for the District Council's proposal for the retention of the current Onehouse ward. However, Onehouse Parish Council stated that Stowmarket wards should not include any part of a rural parish. A local resident opposed the amalgamation of the Chilton Hall area of Haughley parish and the Lindsey Way area of Combs parish into the district wards of Stowmarket town. He considered that this would adversely effect the ratio of councillors representing rural wards when compared to urban areas. He argued that this would artificially enhance the number of councillors serving the "urban" district wards of Stowmarket.

95 As part of the District Council's local consultation process, Haughley Parish Council was opposed to the District Council's proposal and expressed concern that the Chilton Hall area of the parish would remain within the parish but be represented by a different district councillor. They supported the integration of this area into the Stowmarket Town Council area. Combs Parish Council expressed support for the District Council's proposal.

96 We have carefully considered the representations received and note the large measure of consensus in support of the District Council's proposals. We are persuaded that the Chilton Hall area of Haughley & Wetherden ward and the Lindsey Way area of Ringshall ward should form part of Stowmarket district wards. We consider that this proposal will remove the current anomaly whereby two areas of urban overspill from Stowmarket town are contained within two rural wards with which they share few ties or local amenities. We are not persuaded that this will adversely affect the representation of more rural wards, with Haughley & Wetherden and Ringshall wards remaining single-member wards.

97 We note that under the Council's proposals, Ringshall ward would have 12 per cent more electors per councillor than the district average. However, we note that this level is expected to improve over the next five years to 10 per cent more electors per councillor than the district average, and we have received no alternative proposals which would achieve better electoral equality. We are therefore content to endorse the District Council's proposals for Haughley & Wetherden, Needham Market, Onehouse, and Ringshall wards as part of our draft recommendations.

98 Under our draft recommendations, Needham Market, Ringshall and Onehouse wards would have 5 per cent, 12 per cent and 2 per cent more electors per councillor than the district average respectively (3 per cent more and 10 per cent more and 1 per cent fewer respectively by 2005). Haughley & Wetherden would have 5 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the district average and 6 per cent fewer in 2005.

### **Stowmarket Central, Stowmarket North and Stowmarket South wards**

99 The wards of Stowmarket Central, Stowmarket North and Stowmarket South cover the town of Stowmarket which, as a small market town of some 11,000 electors, is the largest settlement in the district. All three wards are currently represented by two councillors each on the District Council and are coterminous with Town Council wards. Under existing arrangements, Stowmarket Central, North and South wards have 11 per cent, 18 per cent and 5 per cent more electors per councillor than the district average respectively (11 per cent, 38 per cent and 1 per cent more by 2005).

100 The District Council proposed retaining the existing Stowmarket North and South wards, subject to the inclusion of the Chilton Hall area of Haughley parish in Stowmarket North ward and the Lindsey Way area of Combs parish within Stowmarket South ward (as discussed earlier). These parish areas largely constitute areas of urban overspill from Stowmarket town itself and arguably have greater community ties with Stowmarket than the district wards in which they are currently located. The Council recommended that Stowmarket South ward and Stowmarket Central ward should both continue to be represented by two councillors, and that Stowmarket North ward should be represented by three members.

101 Under the District Council's main proposal, Stowmarket Central and South wards would have 11 per cent and 10 per cent more electors per councillor than the district average (11 per cent and 6 per cent more by 2005). Stowmarket North ward would have 19 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the district average, improving to 6 per cent fewer by 2005.

102 The District Council's Alternative Scheme Two would provide for a four-ward scheme for Stowmarket. In anticipation of new residential development in the east of the town, it proposed the creation of a single-member Stowmarket East ward encompassing those areas currently in Stowmarket North, to the east of the Ipswich to Norwich railway line. Under Alternative Scheme Two, Stowmarket North and Stowmarket East ward would have 6 per cent and 46 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the district average currently, improving to 5 per cent and 9 per cent fewer by 2005. Under this scheme, Stowmarket Central, North and South wards would remain two-member wards.

103 We received a submission from Stowmarket Town Council supporting the District Council's main proposal and the continuance of three district wards for the town. It was strongly opposed to the creation of a fourth ward of Stowmarket East, arguing that the District Council's electorate projections for 2005 overestimated the rate of growth in the east of the town. The Town Council provided its own electorate growth projections and stated that according to its figures, the actual rate of growth in the east of Stowmarket was not sufficient to justify the creation of a new ward in the town. The Town Council's own projections for the proposed Stowmarket East ward suggested an electorate of 1,353 by 2005, compared to the District Council's figure of 1,603. It also argued that single-member wards present the electorate with a lack of sufficient choice and consequently depress rates of turnout in local elections.

104 A local resident expressed concern at the absorption of parts of the adjoining parishes of Haughley & Wetherden and Combs into the district wards of Stowmarket, stating that this would hinder the representation of rural views on the District Council. As part of the District Council's own consultation exercise, Haughley Parish Council opposed the inclusion of the Chilton Hall area in a Stowmarket district ward whilst continuing to form part of Haughley parish. It argued that the area should form part of the Stowmarket Town Council area. Combs Parish Council supported the District Council's proposals which would transfer the Lindsey Way area to Stowmarket South ward.

105 We have considered the representations received and note that there is a large measure of support for the retention of three wards in Stowmarket. We do not consider that the transfer of the Chilton Hall area of Haughley & Wetherden ward to Stowmarket North ward and the transfer of the Lindsey Way area from Ringshall ward to Stowmarket South ward will have a negative

impact upon rural representation as one local resident suggested. The rural wards will continue to be represented by one councillor each, and the Stowmarket area would be entitled to seven members under a council size of 40, whether or not these areas of urban overspill are included in Stowmarket district wards. We consider that the Chilton Hill and Lindsey Lane areas have greater ties with Stowmarket town and share local amenities. It would also be open for the District Council at some time in the future to consider the most appropriate parish boundaries in this area as part of a parishing review

106 With regard to electorate projections in Stowmarket, on the evidence currently available, as outlined above, we are content to endorse the District Council's projections. We do not consider there is sufficient evidence to suggest that the establishment of single-member wards has an adverse effect upon turnout at elections. However, we recognise the level of electoral equality in the proposed Stowmarket East ward would be high, particularly on the basis of current figures, and observe that there appears to be little support for the creation of a fourth ward in the town. We therefore propose the retention of three district wards in Stowmarket town. On the evidence of the representations received, we are content to endorse the District Council's proposals for Stowmarket Central, Stowmarket North and Stowmarket South wards subject to one amendment. In order to provide further improvement in the levels of electoral equality in the town, we propose the transfer of 90 electors in Kingsmead Road and Wolsey Road, Kingsmead Close and Silverdale Avenue from Stowmarket Central ward to Stowmarket North ward. We have also proposed several minor boundary changes to all three wards in Stowmarket, affecting no electors, to provide more clearly identifiable boundaries.

107 Under our draft recommendations, Stowmarket Central and Stowmarket South ward would have 8 per cent and 10 per cent more electors per councillor than the district average respectively (8 per cent and 6 per cent more by 2005). Stowmarket North would initially have 17 fewer electors per councillor than the district average. However, this level of electoral equality is forecast to improve to 4 per cent fewer electors per councillor than average by 2005. Our proposals for this area are illustrated on the large map at the back of this report.

### **Elmswell, Norton, Rattlesden and Thurston wards**

108 The wards of Elmswell, Norton, Rattlesden and Thurston are situated in the western corner of the district and are each represented by a single councillor. Elmswell ward is coterminous with Elmswell parish, while Norton ward contains the parishes of Beyton, Hessett, Norton and Tostock. Rattlesden ward contains the parishes of Drinkstone, Felsham, Gedding and Rattlesden, and Thurston ward is coterminous with the parish of Thurston. Under the existing arrangements, Elmswell and Thurston wards have 49 per cent and 50 per cent more electors per councillor than the district average, with minimal change forecast over the next five years. Norton and Rattlesden wards have 7 per cent more and 9 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the district average respectively and are forecast to have 5 per cent more and 12 per cent fewer by 2005.

109 The District Council proposed no change to the existing Rattlesden ward, and proposed that Elmswell ward be combined with Norton and Tostock parishes (from Norton ward) in a new two-member ward of Elmswell & Norton. The Council also proposed that Thurston ward be combined with parishes of Beyton and Hessett (from Norton ward) in a new two-member ward of Thurston & Hessett. Under the District Council's proposals, Elmswell & Norton and Rattlesden ward

would have 2 per cent more and 9 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the district average respectively (1 per cent more and 12 per cent fewer than the district average by 2005). Thurston & Hessett ward would have equal to the average number of electors per councillor and 1 per cent fewer by 2005.

110 As a result of the District Council's local consultation process, two parish councils made representations to the District Council. Thurston Parish Council supported the District Council's proposed two-member Thurston & Hessett ward. Norton Parish Council was opposed to the proposed Elmswell & Norton ward. It stated that the proposal did not reflect the distinct identities of communities in the area, and that the small parishes of Norton and Tostock had little in common with the large village of Elmswell.

111 Having considered the representations received, we recognise that there is a measure of local support for the District Council's proposals in this area. Furthermore, we consider that they provide for a much improved level of electoral equality. We note the concerns of Norton Parish Council regarding the proposed Elmswell & Norton ward. However, our ability to consider alternative warding arrangements is limited by of the number of the parishes in this area that lie on or near to the district boundary and the significant imbalances in the current Elmswell ward. We acknowledge that the existing Norton ward does have a reasonable level of electoral equality, but when making our recommendations we are unable to look at areas in isolation and must have regard to the electoral impact on adjacent wards.

112 We are therefore content to adopt the District Council's proposals for Elmswell & Norton, Rattlesden and Thurston & Hessett wards as part of our draft recommendations. Under our draft recommendations, Elmswell & Norton and Rattlesden wards would have 2 per cent more and 9 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the district average respectively (1 per cent more and 12 per cent fewer than the district average by 2005). Thurston & Hessett ward would have equal to the average number of electors per councillor currently, and 1 per cent fewer by 2005.

## **Electoral Cycle**

113 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**

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

- a council of 40 members should be retained;
- there should be 31 wards;

- the boundaries of 26 of the existing wards should be modified, resulting in a net reduction of three wards;
- elections should continue to be held for the whole council every four years

115 As already indicated, we have based our draft recommendations on the District Council's main proposals, but propose to depart from them in the following area:

- in Stowmarket, we propose a minor boundary change between Stowmarket Central ward and Stowmarket North ward affecting 90 electors;
- we propose several minor amendments to the ward boundaries of Stowmarket (affecting no electors) in order to tie them to ground detail and provide more clearly identifiable boundaries;
- we have adopted the recommendations outlined in Alternative Scheme One for six proposed wards. These are Fressingfield, Helmingham & Coddenham, Hoxne, Stradbroke & Laxfield, The Stonhams and Worlingworth wards;

116 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	40	40	40	40
Number of wards	34	31	34	31
Average number of electors per councillor	1,688	1,688	1,763	1,763
Number of wards with a variance more than 10 per cent from the average	15	3	17	2
Number of wards with a variance more than 20 per cent from the average	8	0	9	0

117 As shown in Figure 5, our draft recommendations for Mid Suffolk District Council would result in a reduction in the number of wards varying by more than 10 per cent from the district average from 15 to three. By 2005 two wards are forecast to vary by more than 10 per cent from the average for the district compared to 17 under the existing arrangements.

**Draft Recommendation**

Mid Suffolk District Council should comprise 40 councillors serving 31 wards, as detailed and named in Figures 1 and 2, and illustrated on Map 2 and the large map inside the back cover. The Council should continue to hold elections of the whole council every four years.

**Parish and Town Council Electoral Arrangements**

118 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 Haughley, Combs and Stowmarket Town Council, to reflect the proposed district wards.

119 The parish of Haughley is currently served by 15 councillors and is not warded. In our draft recommendations, we propose that the parish should be divided between the two district wards of Haughley & Wetherden and Stowmarket North. We recognise that Haughley Parish Council have opposed the inclusion of the Chilton Hall area of Haughley parish in Stowmarket North ward, arguing that the parish boundary should be modified. As outlined above, we are not able to modify parish boundaries as part of this review. However, this issue could be addressed by the District Council as part of a future parishing review. As a consequence of our draft recommendations we propose that Haughley parish should be divided into two parish wards – Haughley North parish ward and Haughley South parish ward – to reflect the proposed district ward boundary. Haughley North parish ward would form part of the revised Haughley & Wetherden ward, while Haughley South parish ward would form part of a revised Stowmarket North ward.

**Draft Recommendation**

Haughley Parish Council should comprise 15 councillors, as at present, representing two wards: Haughley North ward (returning 14 councillors) and Haughley South ward (returning one councillor) The parish ward boundaries should reflect the proposed district ward boundaries in the area, as illustrated on the large map at the back of this report.

120 The parish of Combs is currently served by nine councillors and is not warded. In our draft recommendations, we propose that the parish should be divided between the two district wards of Ringshall and Stowmarket South. As a consequence of our draft recommendations we propose that Combs parish should be divided into two parish wards – Combs North parish ward and Combs South parish ward – as proposed by the District Council, reflecting the proposed district ward boundary. As a result, we propose that each ward should have separate representation on the Parish Council. Combs North parish ward would reflect the Lindsey Way area which we propose should form part of a revised Stowmarket South ward, while Combs South parish ward would contain the remainder of the parish and would form part of a revised Ringshall ward.

**Draft Recommendation**

Combs Parish Council should comprise nine councillors, as at present, representing two wards: Combs North ward (returning two councillors) and Combs South ward (returning seven councillors). The parish ward boundaries should reflect the proposed district ward boundaries in the area, as illustrated on the large map at the back of this report.

121 Stowmarket Town Council is currently represented by 15 town councillors and is divided into three parish wards whose boundaries are coterminous with the district wards of the town. All three wards are currently represented by five councillors each.

122 As part of our draft recommendations, we propose transferring 92 electors from Stowmarket Central to Stowmarket North district ward and combining parts of Haughley and Combs parishes in revised Stowmarket North and Stowmarket South wards respectively. We therefore propose a consequential change to the boundary between Stowmarket Central and North town wards. We propose for the purpose of consultation and in the absence of any locally generated proposal, that each Town Council ward continue to be represented by five town councillors. We note that this would provide relatively even representation currently, although we note that the significant forecast growth in North ward, as proposed, would result in the area's relative under-representation by 2005. We would welcome the views of local people during Stage Three.

**Draft Recommendation**

Stowmarket Town Council should comprise 15 councillors, as at present, representing three wards: Central ward (returning five councillors), North ward (returning five councillors) and South ward (returning five councillors). The parish ward boundaries should reflect the proposed district ward boundaries in the area, as illustrated on the large map at the back of this report.

123 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.

**124 We have not finalised our conclusions on the electoral arrangements for Mid Suffolk 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 Mid Suffolk*

## 5 NEXT STEPS

125 We are putting forward draft recommendations on future electoral arrangements for consultation. We will take fully into account all representations received by 5 March 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.

126 Views may be expressed by writing directly to us:

Review Manager  
Mid Suffolk 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](mailto:reviews@lgce.gov.uk)  
[www.lgce.gov.uk](http://www.lgce.gov.uk)

127 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

### Mid Suffolk District Council's Proposed Electoral Arrangements

Our draft recommendations detailed in Figures 1 and 2 differ from those put forward in the District Council's main proposal in only eight wards, where the Council's proposals were as follows:

*Figure A1: Mid Suffolk District Council's Main Proposal: Constituent Areas*

Ward name	Constituent areas
Creeting St Mary	Creeting ward (part – Coddenham and Creeting St Mary parishes); Stonham ward (part – Earl Stonham and Stonham Parva parishes)
Fressingfield	Fressingfield ward (Fressingfield and Laxfield parishes); Weybread ward (part – Metfield parish)
Hoxne & Weybread	Hoxne ward (part – Denham and Hoxne parishes); Weybread ward (part – Mendham, Syleham, Weybread and Wingfield parishes)
Helmingham & Stonham Aspal	Helmingham ward (Ashbocking, Crowfield, Framsdon, Gosbeck, Helmingham and Pettaugh parishes); Stonham ward (part – Stonham Aspal parish)
Stradbroke	Hoxne ward (part – Athelington, Horham and Redlingfield parishes); Stradbroke ward (part – Brundish, Stradbroke and Wilby parishes)
Stowmarket Central	<i>Unchanged</i> – Central ward of Stowmarket town
Stowmarket North	Stowmarket North ward (part – North ward of Stowmarket town); Haughley & Wetherden ward (part – South ward of Haughley parish as proposed)
Worlingworth	Debenham ward (part – Ashfield-cum-Thorpe parish); Wethereingsett ward (part – Rishangles parish); Worlingworth ward (Bedfield, Bedingfield, Kenton, Monk Soham, Southholt, Tannington and Worlingworth parishes)

*Figure A2: Mid Suffolk 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 %
Creeting St Mary	1	1,799	1,799	7	1,835	1,835	4
Fressingfield	1	1,808	1,808	7	1,859	1,859	5
Helmingham & Stonham Aspal	1	1,587	1,587	-6	1,640	1,640	-7
Hoxne & Weybread	1	1,890	1,890	12	1,960	1,960	11
Stradbroke	1	1,556	1,556	-8	1,628	1,628	-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 %
Stowmarket Central	2	3,747	1,874	11	3,918	1,959	11
Stowmarket North	3	4,093	1,364	-19	4,960	1,653	-6
Worlingworth	1	1,574	1,574	-7	1,623	1,623	-8

Source: Electorate figures are based on Mid Suffolk 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.

Our draft recommendations detailed in Figures 1 and 2 differ from those put forward by the District Council in its second alternative scheme in only in three wards, where the Council's proposals were as follows:

Figure A3: Mid Suffolk District Council's Second Alternative Proposal: Constituent Areas

Ward name	Constituent areas
Stowmarket Central	Unchanged – Central ward of Stowmarket town
Stowmarket East	Stowmarket North ward (part – North ward of Stowmarket town)
Stowmarket North	Stowmarket North ward (part – North ward of Stowmarket town); Haughley & Wetherden ward (part – South ward of Haughley parish as proposed)

Figure A4: Mid Suffolk District Council's Second Alternative Proposal: 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 %
Stowmarket Central	2	3747	1,874	11	3,918	1,959	11
Stowmarket East	1	907	907	-46	1,603	1,603	-9
Stowmarket North	2	3,186	1,593	-6	3,357	1,679	-5

Source: Electorate figures are based on Mid Suffolk 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 B

### 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 Wear<sup>1</sup>. 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:

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

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<sup>1</sup> 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:

- (e) the number of councillors;
- (f) the need for parish wards;
- (g) the number and boundaries of any such wards;
- (h) the number of councillors to be elected for any such ward or, in the case of a common parish, for each parish; and
- (i) 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.

