

Final recommendations on the
future electoral arrangements
for Reading

Report to the Electoral Commission

June 2002

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A large map illustrating the proposed ward boundaries for Reading is inserted inside the back cover of this report.

WHAT IS THE BOUNDARY COMMITTEE FOR ENGLAND?

The Boundary Committee for England is a committee of the Electoral Commission, an independent body set up by Parliament under the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000. The functions of the Local Government Commission for England were transferred to the Electoral Commission and its Boundary Committee on 1 April 2002 by the Local Government Commission for England (Transfer of Functions) Order 2001 (SI 2001 No 3692). The Order also transferred to the Electoral Commission the functions of the Secretary of State in relation to taking decisions on recommendations for changes to local authority electoral arrangements and implementing them.

Members of the Committee are:

Pamela Gordon (Chair)
Professor Michael Clarke
Kru Desai
Robin Gray
Joan Jones
Ann M Kelly
Professor Colin Mellors

Archie Gall (Director)

We are required by law to review the electoral arrangements of every principal local authority in England. Our aim is to ensure that the number of electors represented by each councillor in an area is as nearly as possible the same, taking into account local circumstances. We can recommend changes to ward boundaries, the number of councillors and ward names. We can also recommend changes to the electoral arrangements of parish and town councils.

This report sets out our final recommendations on the electoral arrangements for the borough of Reading.

SUMMARY

The Local Government Commission for England (LGCE) began a review of Reading's electoral arrangements on 12 June 2001. It published its draft recommendations for electoral arrangements on 15 January 2002, after which it undertook an eight-week period of consultation. As a consequence of the transfer of functions referred to earlier, it falls to us, the Boundary Committee for England, to complete the work of the LGCE and submit final recommendations to the Electoral Commission.

- **This report summarises the representations received by the LGCE during consultation on its draft recommendations, and contains our final recommendations to the Electoral Commission.**

We found that the existing arrangements provide unequal representation of electors in Reading:

- **in five of the 15 wards the number of electors represented by each councillor varies by more than 10 per cent from the average for the borough and two wards vary by more than 20 per cent;**
- **by 2006 this situation 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 five wards and by more than 20 per cent in two wards.**

Our main final recommendations for future electoral arrangements (see Tables 1 and 2 and paragraphs 82 – 83) are that:

- **Reading Borough Council should have 46 councillors, one more than at present;**
- **there should be 16 wards, instead of 15 as at present;**
- **the boundaries of 15 of the existing wards should be modified, resulting in a net increase of one;**
- **elections should continue to take place by thirds.**

The purpose of these proposals is to ensure that, in future, each councillor represents approximately the same number of electors, bearing in mind local circumstances.

- **The number of electors per councillor in all 16 wards would vary by no more than 10 per cent from the borough average.**
- **This improved level of electoral equality is forecast to continue with the number of electors per councillor in all of the proposed 16 wards expected to vary by no more than 7 per cent from the average for the borough in 2006.**

All further correspondence on these final recommendations and the matters discussed in this report should be addressed to the Electoral Commission, to arrive no later than 18 July 2002:

**The Secretary
Electoral Commission
Trevelyan House
Great Peter Street
London SW1P 2HW**

Table 1: Final Recommendations: Summary

Ward name	Number of councillors	Constituent areas	Map reference
1 Abbey	3	part of Abbey ward.	Large Map
2 Battle	3	part of Abbey ward; part of Battle ward.	Large Map
3 Caversham	3	part of Caversham ward; part of Thames ward.	Large Map
4 Church	3	part of Church ward; part of Redlands ward.	Large Map
5 Katesgrove	3	part of Abbey ward; part of Katesgrove ward.	Large Map
6 Kentwood	3	part of Battle ward; part of Kentwood ward.	Large Map
7 Mapledurham	1	part of Thames ward.	Large Map
8 Minster	3	part of Minster ward.	Large Map
9 Norcot	3	part of Battle ward; part of Norcot ward; part of Tilehurst ward	Large Map
10 Park	3	part of Abbey ward; part of Park ward.	Large Map
11 Peppard	3	part of Caversham ward; part of Peppard ward.	Large Map
12 Redlands	3	part of Redlands ward.	Large Map
13 Southcote	3	part of Minster ward; part of Southcote ward.	Large Map
14 Thames	3	part of Caversham ward; part of Peppard ward; part of Thames ward.	Large Map
15 Tilehurst	3	part of Norcot ward; part of Tilehurst ward.	Large Map
16 Whitley	3	part of Katesgrove ward; part of Whitley ward.	Large Map

Notes: 1 The whole borough is unparished.

2 The wards in the above table are illustrated on Map 2 and the Large Map at the back of the report.

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

Table 2: Final Recommendations for Reading

Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2001)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2006)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
1 Abbey	3	6,435	2,145	-7	7,358	2,453	3
2 Battle	3	6,568	2,189	-6	7,277	2,426	2
3 Caversham	3	6,928	2,309	0	6,963	2,321	-2
4 Church	3	7,087	2,362	2	7,154	2,385	0
5 Katesgrove	3	6,694	2,231	-4	6,910	2,303	-3
6 Kentwood	3	6,988	2,329	0	7,026	2,342	-1
7 Mapledurham	1	2,348	2,348	1	2,348	2,348	-1
8 Minster	3	6,893	2,298	-1	7,248	2,416	2
9 Norcot	3	7,238	2,413	4	7,265	2,422	2
10 Park	3	7,111	2,370	2	7,161	2,387	0
11 Peppard	3	7,217	2,406	4	7,257	2,419	2
12 Redlands	3	7,234	2,411	4	7,240	2,413	2
13 Southcote	3	6,620	2,207	-5	6,634	2,211	-7
14 Thames	3	7,149	2,383	3	7,274	2,425	2
15 Tilehurst	3	7,230	2,410	4	7,278	2,426	2
16 Whitley	3	6,882	2,294	-1	6,935	2,312	-3
Totals	46	106,622	-	-	109,328	-	-
Averages	-	-	2,318	-	-	2,377	-

Source: Electorate figures are based on information provided by Reading Borough 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 borough. The minus symbol (-) denotes a lower than average number of electors. Figures have been rounded to the nearest whole number.

1 INTRODUCTION

1 This report contains our final recommendations on the electoral arrangements for the borough of Reading. The six districts in Berkshire have now been reviewed as part of the programme of periodic electoral reviews (PERs) of all 386 principal local authority areas in England started by the LGCE in 1996. We have inherited that programme, which we currently expect to complete in 2004.

2 Reading's last review was undertaken by the Local Government Boundary Commission for England, which reported to the Secretary of State in April 1979 (Report no. 331). Since undertaking that review, Reading has become a unitary authority (1998). The change in unitary status has led to the loss of 15 county councillors, bringing the total number of councillors for Reading from 60 to 45.

3 In making final recommendations to the Electoral Commission, we have had regard to:

- the statutory criteria contained in section 13(5) of the Local Government Act 1992 (as amended by SI 2001 No 3692), i.e. the need to:
 - a) reflect the identities and interests of local communities;
 - b) secure effective and convenient local government; and
 - c) achieve equality of representation.

4 Details of the legislation under which the review of Reading was conducted are set out in a document entitled *Guidance and Procedural Advice for Local Authorities and Other Interested Parties* (LGCE, fourth edition, published in December 2000). This *Guidance* sets out the approach to the review.

5 Our task is to make recommendations on the number of councillors who should serve on a council, and the number, boundaries and names of wards.

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

7 The LGCE was not prescriptive on council size. Insofar as Reading is concerned, it started from the assumption that the size of the existing council already secures effective and convenient local government, but was willing to look carefully at arguments why this might not be so. However, the LGCE found it necessary to safeguard against upward drift in the number of councillors, and that any proposal for an increase in council size would need to be fully justified. In particular, it did not accept that an increase in electorate should automatically result in an increase in the number of councillors, nor that changes should be made to the size of a council simply to make it more consistent with the size of other similar councils.

8 This review was in four stages. Stage One began on 12 June 2001, when the LGCE wrote to Reading Borough Council inviting proposals for future electoral arrangements. It also notified Thames Valley Police, the Local Government Association, Berkshire Association of Local Councils, the Members of Parliament with constituency interests in the borough, the Members of the European Parliament for the South East Region, and the headquarters of the main political parties. It placed a notice in the local press, issued a press release and invited the Borough Council to publicise the review further. The closing date for receipt of representations, the end of Stage One, was 17 September 2001. At Stage Two it considered all the representations received during Stage One and prepared its draft recommendations.

9 Stage Three began on 15 January 2002 with the publication of the LGCE's report, *Draft recommendations on the future electoral arrangements for Reading*, and ended on 11 March 2002. During this period it sought comments from the public and any other interested parties on its preliminary conclusions. Finally, during Stage Four it reconsidered its draft recommendations in the light of the Stage Three consultation and we now publish the final recommendations agreed by the LGCE. We are content to adopt these final recommendations as our own.

2 CURRENT ELECTORAL ARRANGEMENTS

10 Reading is a unitary authority, situated 30 miles to the west of London. Comprising 4,044 hectares, the borough has a population of 147,840 and is unparished. The borough is urban in character and has a strong retail and business economy. Reading is bisected by the River Thames.

11 Since 1975 the electorate in Reading has grown by 13 per cent from 93,260 to 106,622, and is forecast to rise by a further 2.5 per cent to 109,306 over then next five years. A significant amount of this growth is expected to be in the centre of the borough, in the wards of Abbey and Battle. The Council currently has 45 members and is elected by thirds from a uniform pattern of 15 three-member wards.

12 At present, each councillor represents an average of 2,369 electors, which the Council forecasts will increase to 2,430 by the year 2006 if the present number of councillors is maintained. However, due to demographic change and migration since the last review, the number of electors per councillor in five of the 15 wards varies by more than 10 per cent from the borough average, and in two wards by more than 20 per cent. The worst imbalance is in Caversham ward, where the councillor represents 25 per cent more electors than the borough average.

13 To compare levels of electoral inequality between wards, the LGCE 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'.

Map 1: Existing Wards in Reading

Table 3: Existing Electoral Arrangements

Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2001)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2006)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
1 Abbey	3	8,305	2,768	17	9,228	3,076	27
2 Battle	3	6,661	2,220	-6	7,370	2,457	1
3 Caversham	3	8,905	2,968	25	8,940	2,980	23
4 Church	3	5,759	1,920	-19	5,826	1,942	-20
5 Katesgrove	3	6,417	2,139	-10	6,633	2,211	-9
6 Kentwood	3	6,665	2,222	-6	6,703	2,234	-8
7 Minster	3	7,507	2,502	6	7,862	2,621	8
8 Norcot	3	6,821	2,274	-4	6,848	2,283	-6
9 Park	3	6,847	2,282	-4	6,897	2,299	-5
10 Peppard	3	7,541	2,514	6	7,581	2,527	4
11 Redlands	3	8,687	2,896	22	8,693	2,898	19
12 Southcote	3	6,052	2,017	-15	6,066	2,022	-17
13 Thames	3	7,211	2,404	1	7,336	2,445	1
14 Tilehurst	3	6,565	2,188	-8	6,613	2,204	-9
15 Whitley	3	6,679	2,226	-6	6,732	2,244	-8
Totals	45	106,622	-	-	109,328	-	-
Averages	-	-	2,369	-	-	2,430	-

Source: Electorate figures are based on information provided by Reading Borough 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 borough. The minus symbol (-) denotes a lower than average number of electors. For example, in 2001, electors in Tilehurst ward were relatively over-represented by 8 per cent, while electors in Redlands ward were relatively under-represented by 22 per cent. Figures have been rounded to the nearest whole number.

3 DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS

14 During Stage One the LGCE received nine representations, including borough-wide schemes from Reading Borough Council and Reading Borough Conservative Group. In the light of these representations and evidence available to it, the LGCE reached preliminary conclusions which were set out in its report, *Draft recommendations on the future electoral arrangements for Reading*.

15 The LGCE's draft recommendations were based on the Borough Council's proposals, which achieved some improvement in electoral equality, and provided a pattern of 15 three-member wards, and a single-member ward. However, it moved away from the Borough Council's scheme in a number of areas. It proposed that:

- Reading Borough Council should be served by 46 councillors, compared with the current 45, representing 16 wards, one more than at present;
- the boundaries of 15 of the existing wards should be modified, resulting in a net increase of one.

Draft Recommendation

Reading Borough Council should comprise 46 councillors, serving 16 wards. The Council should continue to hold elections by thirds.

16 The LGCE's proposals would have resulted in significant improvements in electoral equality, with the number of electors per councillor in all 16 wards varying by no more than 10 per cent from the borough average. This improved level of electoral equality was forecast to continue, with all 16 wards varying by no more than 7 per cent from the average in 2006.

4 RESPONSES TO CONSULTATION

17 During the consultation on its draft recommendations report, the LGCE received 21 representations. A list of all respondents is available from us on request. All representations may be inspected at our offices and those of Reading Borough Council.

Reading Borough Council

18 The Borough Council supported the draft recommendations.

Reading Borough Conservative Group

19 Reading Borough Conservative Group supported the proposals for a 46-member council, representing 16 wards. However, it did not agree with the proposal to create a single-member ward in the area north of the river. Instead, it supported Councillor Richard Willis's Stage One proposal for two two-member wards and two three-member wards for the area north of the river. It also added that it believed the Council's initial consultation was flawed, since it did not consult Warren & District Residents Association, which covers the proposed Mapledurham area. In addition, it objected to the proposed boundary between Abbey and Battle wards.

Reading East Liberal Democrats

20 Reading East Liberal Democrats supported the proposal to increase the representation for the area north of the river, but did not believe that Thames ward should stretch as far east as Mayfield Drive. Instead, they suggested that "at the very least" the Mayfield Drive and Chiltern Road areas should form part of Caversham ward, utilising the existing boundary. In addition, they proposed including Derby and Grosvenor Roads in Caversham ward, in exchange for the block between Prospect and Church streets. They also objected to the proposed boundaries for Church and Redlands wards.

Reading West Liberal Democrats

21 Reading West Liberal Democrats suggested "retaining the village community in Tilehurst within a single ward and not extending it eastwards to take in areas that have a more natural affinity with Reading town centre". In addition, they objected to the proposed Battle and Minster ward boundaries.

Reading West Conservative Association

22 Reading West Conservative Association supported the proposals for Southcote and Minster wards. However, it opposed the transfer of the area around Stone Street to the proposed Kentwood ward.

Reading West Conservative Association - Kentwood Branch

23 Reading West Conservative Association - Kentwood Branch supported the changes to Minster and Southcote wards.

Warren & District Residents Association

24 Warren & District Residents Association questioned the Council's consultation process. They supported the additional councillor for the area north of the river, but objected to the creation of a single-member ward, and expressed support for Councillor Richard Willis's proposal for two two-member and two three-member wards in that area.

Other Representations

25 A further 14 representations were received from local residents in response to the LGCE's draft recommendations. Three residents supported the draft recommendations. Eleven objected to the creation of a single-member ward, opting instead to support the creation of two two-member and two three-member wards.

5 ANALYSIS AND FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS

26 As described earlier, our prime objective in considering the most appropriate electoral arrangements for Reading 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 (as amended) – the need to secure effective and convenient local government; reflect the identities and interests of local communities; and secure the matters referred to in paragraph 3(2)(a) of Schedule 11 to the Local Government Act 1972 (equality of representation). Schedule 11 to the Local Government Act 1972 refers to the number of electors per councillor being “as nearly as may be, the same in every ward of the district or borough”.

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

28 It is therefore impractical to design an electoral scheme which results in exactly the same number of electors per councillor in every ward of an authority. There must be a degree of flexibility. However, our approach, in the context of the statutory criteria, is that such flexibility must be kept to a minimum.

29 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 minimised, the aim of electoral equality should be the starting point in any review. We therefore strongly recommend that, in formulating electoral schemes, local authorities and other interested parties should make electoral equality their starting point, and then make adjustments to reflect relevant factors such as community identity and interests. Five-year forecasts of changes in electorate must also be considered and we would aim to recommend a scheme which provides improved electoral equality over this five-year period.

Electorate Forecasts

30 Since 1975 the electorate in Reading has grown by 13 per cent from 93,260 to 106,622. The Council submitted electorate forecasts for the year 2006, projecting an increase in the electorate of approximately 2.5 per cent to 109,328. A significant amount of this growth is expected to be in the centre of the borough, in the wards of Abbey and Battle. In order to prepare these forecasts, the Council 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.

31 Having accepted that this is an inexact science and, having considered the forecast electorates, the LGCE stated in its draft recommendations report that it was satisfied that they represented the best estimates that could reasonably be made at the time.

32 During Stage Three, Reading West Conservative Association queried the projected electorate for Kentwood ward, stating that this was understated “as planning permission has been granted for flats adjacent to Tilehurst Station as well as dwellings in Oak Tree Road, with further possible development possible in Kentwood Hill, and also disregarding potential development on the Kentwood allotments”. We have sought clarification from the Council. Since calculating its electoral projections, planning permission for 14 flats has been granted at the Tilehurst Station site. It is calculated that this will amount to an additional 22 electors for this site. The Oak Tree Road dwellings were already contained in the Council’s electoral predictions. At this time the other aforementioned developments do not have planning permission and therefore cannot be considered; we can only consider developments that will be completed and

contain electors within the next five years, not sites of “possible development”. We have therefore made a slight amendment to the electoral projections for Kentwood ward.

Council Size

33 As already explained, the LGCE started its review by assuming that the current council size facilitates effective and convenient local government, although it was willing to look carefully at arguments why this might not be the case.

34 Reading is currently represented by 45 members, 36 members to the south of the River Thames and nine to the north. Under these arrangements the area north of the river is under-represented. To address this issue, at Stage One the Council put two schemes forward for public consultation. ‘Option 1’ would maintain the current 45-member council by creating a ward straddling the River Thames. ‘Option 2’ addressed the issue of representation by proposing a 46-member council, with the creation of an additional single-member ward for the area north of the river. Both schemes were similar in the remaining wards to the south of the river.

35 As a result of the consultation the Council put forward a third option, based on a council size of 46 members, and similar to its consultation scheme ‘Option 2’. The Council proposed a council of 46 members, one more than at present, serving 16 wards, compared to the existing 15. Under its proposals there would be significant improvement to the current high electoral variances and the area north of the river would receive its correct level of representation.

36 The LGCE also considered the schemes put forward by Reading Borough Conservative Group, based on either a 36- or 54-member council. It was noted that under these schemes there would be a dramatic change in council size. Changes in council size, either increases or decreases, can be detrimental to the functioning of local democracy. Too few councillors can mean that the interests of residents are not adequately represented; too many can lead to difficulties in the internal management of the council. It is therefore important that such proposals are supported by sufficient argumentation and evidence of public consultation. The Conservative scheme did not provide any particular argumentation for these alternative council sizes, nor were they the subject of any local consultation. Accordingly, the LGCE was not persuaded to adopt either of the Conservative proposals for council size.

37 A further seven representations were received, all supporting the creation of a 46-member council.

38 Following consideration of all the representations received at Stage One and having looked at the size and distribution of the electorate, the geography and other characteristics of the area, together with the responses received, the LGCE concluded that the achievement of electoral equality and the statutory criteria would best be met by a council of 46 members.

39 At Stage Three all representations supported the creation of a 46-member council. Therefore, having looked at the size and distribution of the electorate, the geography and other characteristics of the area, together with the responses received, we have concluded that the achievement of electoral equality and the statutory criteria would best be met by a council of 46 members.

Electoral Arrangements

40 At Stage One the LGCE gave careful consideration to the views received, including the borough-wide schemes received from the Council and the Reading Borough Conservative Group. As already explained, the LGCE considered that there was insufficient evidence of consultation or detailed argument for the LGCE to adopt the Reading Borough Conservative Group’s proposals for a change in council size. The submissions received showed that there was strong support for the creation of a 46-member council, with 36 councillors for the area

south of the river and 10 councillors for the area to the north. The LGCE received three submissions, including one from Councillor Richard Willis, all put forward independently, proposing differing arrangements of two two-member wards and two three-member wards for the area north of the river. It also received four submissions supporting the Council's consultation 'Option 2', on which its Stage One submission to the LGCE, 'Option 3', was broadly based. Furthermore, the Council forwarded just under 100 responses that it received during its own consultation, the significant majority of which supported 'Option 2' and the creation of an additional single-member ward for the area north of the river.

41 The LGCE therefore proposed basing its recommendations on the Council's scheme. It considered that this would provide a better balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria than the current arrangements or other schemes submitted at Stage One. However, to improve electoral equality further, and having regard to local community identities and interests, it decided to move away from the Council's proposals in number of areas.

42 In response to the LGCE's draft recommendations report, Reading Borough Conservative Group did not pursue its original proposals, but objected to the proposals to create three three-member wards and a single-member ward in the area north of the river. Instead, it supported Councillor Richard Willis's Stage One submission, which proposed two two-member and two three-member wards for the area north of the river; this utilised the Council's proposals for the area south of the river. Warren & District Residents Association, which represents residents covered by the proposed single-member ward, also supported Councillor Richard Willis's Stage One submission. It also provided the results of a survey of local residents which showed concern over the creation of a single-member ward, and a preference for two two-member and two three-member wards for the area north of the river. This view was supported by the submissions of eleven local residents.

43 Reading Borough Conservative Group questioned the Council's initial consultation process, stating that "the Commission repeatedly refers to 'strong support for the creation of a single member ward' but it also acknowledges that the proposal for a ward that straddled the River Thames had little support. Since only the two options were consulted on by the Council, it is not surprising that the option that did not straddle the river received more support". In addition, it expressed concern that few of the responses were from residents affected, which it attributed to the Council's failure to inform or consult with the Warren & District Residents Association. Warren & District Residents Association supported this view, stating that the "proposal that a single-member Mapledurham ward should be created is deeply flawed and [the Council's] 'consultation' ignored those most affected". We note the concerns of Reading Borough Conservative Group and Warren & District Residents Association regarding the Council's consultation process.

44 With regard the creation of a single-member ward, Warren & District Residents Association stated "Mapledurham would become an 'orphan' ward being the only one in Reading with a single councillor, having a local election only once every three years, against 15 wards with three members each and annual elections. Moreover, the electors would no longer have a choice of which councillor to consult and the councillor would have no natural backup for holidays, sickness or business absence". Reading Borough Conservative Group supported this, stating that "to have every ward voting every year and Mapledurham residents voting every four years does not give residents the same opportunity to express their views". It added that "the existing Thames ward is electorally sound with the projections to 2006 showing that it will still be well within a reasonable variance from the average. There is no justification for tampering with its boundaries". Eleven local residents broadly supported proposals for two two-member and two three-member wards for the area north of the river.

45 We have given careful consideration to the views that we received during Stage Three and note the concerns about the creation of a single-member ward in an area of three-member wards. However, this must be weighed against the considerable support that the Council

received for its proposed pattern of wards for the area north of the River Thames during its local consultation exercise. The suggestion that single-member wards in authorities which elect by thirds are detrimental to local democracy is not one to which we subscribe. There are many such authorities with single-member wards. Indeed, it is often put to us that single-member wards enhance the accountability of councillors to their ward electorate. Neither do we consider that the issues of representation during periods of illness or holiday or less frequent opportunities to vote can be considered, as this would call into question the whole notion of single-member wards in areas with elections by thirds. In addition, the arguments we received did not make reference to how this specific single-member ward would not reflect the statutory criteria; rather, they opposed single-member wards in general. There were no arguments put forward as to whether or not the proposed Mapledurham ward was reflective of communities.

46 A number of other responses were received regarding the proposed wards south of the river. However, we were not persuaded by the argumentation received or convinced that the proposals received local support.

47 The draft recommendations have been reviewed in the light of further evidence and the representations received during Stage Three. We are of the view that the draft recommendations secure good levels of electoral equality, while having regard to local community identities and interests. For district warding purposes, the following areas, based on existing wards, are considered in turn:

- (a) Caversham, Peppard and Thames wards;
- (b) Abbey, Battle and Park wards;
- (c) Kentwood, Norcot and Tilehurst wards;
- (d) Minster; Southcote and Whitley wards;
- (e) Church; Katesgrove and Redlands wards.

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

Caversham, Peppard and Thames wards

49 These three three-member wards are situated in the north of the borough, north of the River Thames. Caversham ward is currently 25 per cent under-represented (23 per cent by 2006). Peppard ward is currently 6 per cent under-represented (4 per cent by 2006). Thames ward is currently 1 per cent under-represented (1 per cent by 2006).

50 At Stage One the Council proposed the creation of a new single-member Mapledurham ward and a realignment of the existing Caversham, Peppard and Thames wards. Under these proposals the new single-member Mapledurham ward, comprising the west section of the existing Thames ward, would be 1 per cent under-represented (1 per cent over-represented by 2006). Caversham ward would comprise the southern section of the existing Caversham ward and a small section of the south-eastern part of the existing Thames ward. It would initially have a variance of zero per cent, but would be 2 per cent over-represented by 2006. Peppard ward would comprise the majority of the existing Peppard ward. It would initially be 4 per cent under-represented (2 per cent by 2006). Thames ward would comprise the eastern section of the existing Thames ward, but would additionally include the northern section of the existing Caversham ward and a small area of the existing Peppard ward. It would initially be 3 per cent under-represented (2 per cent by 2006).

51 The Council's public consultation and the responses that the LGCE received indicated that there was strong support for the creation of an additional single-member ward for the area north of the river and that to create a ward straddling the river would not reflect community identity, as it would be crossing a very distinct boundary. However, three respondents (including Councillor Richard Willis) questioned the creation of single-member ward, suggesting alternative proposals

for the area north of the river, involving the creation of two two-member wards and two three-member wards. Jane Griffiths MP, in response to the Council's initial consultation scheme, expressed support for the creation of a single-member ward, but was concerned about a number of small areas. The Council reflected her views in their final submission. As already explained, having adopted a council size of 46, the LGCE were unable to make a detailed ward-by-ward comparison with the proposals from Reading East Conservative Association.

52 The LGCE considered there to be insufficient evidence to suggest that the creation of a single-member ward would be detrimental to the interests of electors within this ward. It also noted the considerable support for a scheme involving the creation of a single-member Mapledurham ward in response to the Council's own consultation. In light of the evidence, the LGCE adopted the Council's proposals for these wards without modification. However, it did ask for comments on a possible alternative boundary that would maintain the existing Caversham/Thames boundary along St Anne's Road and include the Chiltern Road and Mayfield Drive area in Caversham ward.

53 At Stage Three the Council supported the draft recommendations. Reading Borough Conservative Group objected to the proposals to create three three-member wards and a single-member ward in the area north of the river. Instead, it supported Councillor Richard Willis's Stage One submission, which proposed two two-member and two three-member wards for the area north of the river. Warren & District Residents Association, which represents residents covered by the single-member ward, also objected to the draft recommendations, opting to support Richard Willis's Stage One submission. It also provided the results of a survey of local residents that showed concern over the creation of a single-member ward, and a preference for two two-member and two three-member wards for the area north of the river. This view was supported by the submissions of eleven local residents. Two other respondents fully supported the draft recommendations.

54 Reading Borough Conservative Group questioned the Council's initial consultation process, stating that "the Commission repeatedly refers to 'strong support for the creation of a single member ward' but it also acknowledges that the proposal for a ward that straddled the River Thames had little support. Since only the two options were consulted on by the Council, it is not surprising that the option that did not straddle the river received more support". In addition, it expressed concern that few of the responses were from residents affected by the LGCE's proposals, which it attributed to the Council's failure to inform or consult with the Warren & District Residents Association. Warren & District Residents Association supported this view, stating that the "proposal that a single-member Mapledurham ward should be created is deeply flawed and [the Council's] 'consultation' ignored those most affected".

55 With regard to the creation of a single-member ward, Warren & District Residents Association stated "Mapledurham would become an 'orphan' ward being the only one in Reading with a single councillor, having a local election only once every three years, against 15 wards with three members each and annual elections. Moreover, the electors would no longer have a choice of which councillor to consult and the councillor would have no natural backup for holidays, sickness or business absence". Reading Borough Conservative Group supported this view, stating that "to have every ward voting every year and Mapledurham residents voting every four years does not give residents the same opportunity to express their views". It added, "The existing Thames ward is electorally sound with the projections to 2006 showing that it will still be well within a reasonable variance from the average. There is no justification for tampering with its boundaries".

56 We have given careful consideration to the views received during Stage Three and note the concerns of Reading Borough Conservative Group and Warren & District Residents Association regarding the creation of a single-member ward in an area of three-member wards. However, this must be weighed against the considerable support that the Council received for its proposed single member ward at Stage One. As indicated above, we have found no persuasive

evidence to support the view that single-member wards in areas that have elections by thirds are detrimental to local democracy.

57 We have therefore decided to confirm the draft recommendations for these wards as final. The levels of electoral equality would therefore be the same as under the draft recommendations. Our final recommendations for these wards are illustrated and named on Map 2 and the large map inserted at the back of this report.

Abbey, Battle and Park wards

58 These three three-member wards are all situated in the centre of the borough, to the south of the River Thames. Abbey ward is currently 17 per cent under-represented (27 per cent by 2006). Battle ward is currently 6 per cent over-represented (1 per cent under-represented by 2006). Park ward is currently 4 per cent over-represented (5 per cent by 2006).

59 The Council proposed a realignment of the boundaries of these three existing wards. Under these proposals Abbey ward would comprise the majority of the existing Abbey ward, less three small areas to the east, south and west. It would initially be 7 per cent over-represented (3 per cent under-represented by 2006). Battle ward would comprise the majority of the existing Battle ward, less three areas in the east, but additionally including an area of the existing Abbey ward. It would initially be 6 per cent over-represented (2 per cent under-represented by 2006). Park ward would comprise the existing Park ward and a small area of the existing Abbey ward. It would initially be 2 per cent under-represented (zero per cent by 2006). Jane Griffiths MP expressed concern that the proposed boundary between Battle and Abbey wards would move away from the railway line. As already explained, having adopted a council size of 46, the LGCE was unable to make a detailed ward-by-ward comparison with the proposals from Reading East Conservative Association. None of the remaining submissions made specific comments regarding the wards south of the river.

60 The LGCE noted the concerns of Jane Griffiths MP, but also noted that the current ward boundaries do not consistently utilise the railway line; the north west of Minster ward is divided by it. In addition, the LGCE examined a number of alternative warding arrangements, some utilising the railway line as a ward boundary, but concluded that there was insufficient evidence to justify the poor levels of electoral equality that would result. Following a visit to the area, LGCE officers were satisfied that there is sufficient access across the railway line via the Oxford Road, Tilehurst Road and Bath Road, so as not to be detrimental to community relationships. In light of the evidence, the LGCE adopted the Council's proposals for these wards in their entirety, subject to a minor modification to the Battle ward boundary to tie it to ground detail.

61 At Stage Three the Council supported the draft recommendations. Reading West Liberal Democrats expressed concern over the Battle ward boundary. Reading Borough Conservative Group objected to the proposed ward boundary between Abbey and Battle wards, stating that "the new boundary would divide two communities around Argyle and Baker Street and [the community] either side of George Street". It therefore proposed transferring a section of the existing Abbey ward, south of Oxford Road, to Minster ward, while retaining the area north of Oxford road, as far as the railway line, in Abbey ward. Finally, it proposed "balancing" this by transferring the section of the existing Minster ward west of the railway line to Battle ward. Two respondents fully supported the draft recommendations.

62 We have given careful consideration to the evidence and representations received. We note the comments of the Reading West Liberal Democrats and Reading Borough Conservative Group. We would agree that the railway line makes a clear boundary. However, as stated above, the LGCE considered a number of alternative proposals at Stage One, utilising the railway, and including the proposal put forward by Reading Borough Conservative Group, but concluded that there was insufficient evidence to justify the poor level of electoral equality that would result.

63 Accordingly, in the absence of any opposition from local residents, we have decided to confirm the draft recommendations for these wards as final. The levels of electoral equality would therefore be the same as under the draft recommendations. Our final recommendations for these wards are illustrated and named on Map 2 and the large map inserted at the back of this report.

Kentwood, Norcot and Tilehurst wards

64 These three three-member wards are situated in the west of the borough, to the south of the River Thames. Kentwood ward is currently 6 per cent over-represented (8 per cent by 2006). Norcot ward is currently 4 per cent over-represented (6 per cent by 2006). Tilehurst ward is currently 8 per cent over-represented (9 per cent by 2006).

65 The Council proposed some minor amendments to the boundaries of these three existing wards to improve electoral equality. Under these proposals Kentwood ward would comprise the existing Kentwood ward and the east section of the existing Battle ward. Norcot ward would comprise part of the existing Norcot ward, less a small area to the east, but additionally including a section of the existing Battle ward. Tilehurst ward would comprise the existing Tilehurst ward and the east section of the existing Norcot ward. As already explained, having adopted a council size of 46, the LGCE was unable to make a detailed ward-by-ward comparison with the proposals from Reading East Conservative Association. None of the remaining submissions made specific comments regarding the wards south of the river.

66 The LGCE was satisfied with the Council's proposals for Kentwood ward, but proposed a minor amendment to tie the boundary to ground detail. Under the draft recommendations Kentwood ward would initially have a variance of zero per cent, but would be 2 per cent over-represented by 2006. Norcot ward would initially be 4 per cent under-represented (2 per cent by 2006). Tilehurst ward would initially be 4 per cent under-represented (2 per cent by 2006).

67 At Stage Three the Council supported the draft recommendations. Reading West Liberal Democrats were "disappointed that the changes proposed by Reading Liberal Democrats seem to have been ignored almost entirely", and objected to the proposal to extend Tilehurst ward eastwards. Reading West Conservative Association supported the proposal to transfer an area of the existing Battle ward, around Scours Lane, to Kentwood ward. However, it was "unable to see the necessity for the further addition of the area to the North East of the Norcot Roundabout – Stone Street and the adjoining roads. This area has no geographical or neighbourhood affinity to the Kentwood ward; the natural relationship is to the Norcot Ward". It therefore suggested transferring the electors on Norcot Road, as far as Church End Lane, and those on Lawrence Road, Birch Avenue and Fairsted Close to Kentwood ward, to improve ward access, in exchange for those around Stone Street. It also questioned the electoral projections for Kentwood ward. Reading West Conservative Association – Kentwood Branch supported the changes to Minster and Southcote wards, but added, "We believe the other proposed changes are not necessary as the current projected figures for Battle, Kentwood, Norcot, Tilehurst and Whitely wards will be close to the projected figure of 2,376". Two respondents fully supported our draft recommendations.

68 We have given careful consideration to the evidence and representations received. We note the comments of Reading West Liberal Democrats. However, we are only required to consider submissions sent directly to us. We would also hope the Council has considered and represented submissions sent directly to it in its own submission. We were not convinced that the Council's proposal to run the northern boundary of its proposed Tilehurst ward along Amour Road would be detrimental to community identity in the area. Indeed, we note that the proposed boundary already runs along Amour Road. We also note the concerns of Reading West Conservative Association. While their proposal does not significantly worsen electoral equality, we have not been convinced that it would secure widespread support. In addition, addressing the issue of access for the electors around Lawrence Road ignores the issue of access for the

large number of electors who access the same way via Links Drive. To address this would involve transferring a large number of electors, breaking up communities. We have also sought clarification from the Council with regard the electoral projections for Kentwood ward. As stated above, the Council have amended its electoral projections, giving a rise of 22 electors for Kentwood ward. This actually improves the electoral variance for Kentwood ward, which would be 1 per cent over-represented. Reading West Conservative Association – Kentwood Branch argues that certain existing wards already have good electoral equality and that it is not expected to significantly worsen. However, this ignores the imbalances in adjoining wards, and the knock-on effect of correcting those imbalances.

69 We have therefore decided to confirm the draft recommendations for these wards as final. The levels of electoral equality for Norcot and Tilehurst wards would be the same as under the draft recommendations. As a result of the revised electoral projections, Kentwood ward would initially have a variance of zero per cent, but would be 1 per cent over-represented by 2006. Our final recommendations for these wards are illustrated and named on Map 2 and the large map inserted at the back of this report.

Minster, Southcote and Whitley wards

70 These three three-member wards are situated in the south of the borough. Minster ward is currently 6 per cent under-represented (8 per cent by 2006). Southcote ward is currently 15 per cent over-represented (17 per cent by 2006). Whitley ward is currently 6 per cent over-represented (8 per cent by 2006).

71 The Council proposed realigning the boundaries of these three existing wards. Under its proposals Minster ward would comprise the existing Minster ward, less a small area to the east of the ward. Minster ward would initially be 1 per cent over-represented (2 per cent under-represented by 2006). The proposed Southcote ward would comprise the existing Southcote ward and a section of the existing Minster ward. It would initially be 4 per cent over-represented (6 per cent by 2006). Whitley ward would comprise the existing Whitley ward and a small south eastern section of the existing Katesgrove ward. It would initially be 1 per cent over-represented (3 per cent by 2006). As already explained, having adopted a council size of 46, the LGCE was unable to make a detailed ward-by-ward comparison with the proposals from Reading East Conservative Association. None of the remaining submissions made specific comments regarding the wards south of the river.

72 As highlighted earlier, there was some concern that under these proposals the north west of the proposed Minster ward would be separated from the rest of that ward by the railway line. However, the LGCE examined a number of alternative warding arrangements and concluded that there was insufficient evidence to justify the poor levels of electoral equality that would result. In addition, following a visit to the area, LGCE officers were satisfied that there was sufficient access across the railway line via Oxford Road, Tilehurst Road and Bath Road, so as not to be detrimental to community relationships. In light of the evidence, the LGCE was broadly satisfied with the Council's proposals and proposed adopting them, subject to a minor modification to retain the existing boundary between Norcot and Southcote wards. Consequently, Southcote ward would initially be 5 per cent over-represented (7 per cent in 2006). Minster and Whitley wards would be unaffected by these changes.

73 At Stage Three the Council supported the draft recommendations. Reading West Liberal Democrats expressed concern that the draft recommendations "ignored proposals to define [...] Minster ward within natural boundaries". Reading Borough Conservative Group, as described above, proposed exchanging an area of the existing Minster ward for an area of the existing Abbey ward, to give a more identifiable boundary. Reading West Conservative Association supported the draft recommendations for these wards. Reading West Conservative Association – Kentwood Branch supported the draft recommendations for Southcote ward but added, "We believe the other proposed changes are not necessary as the current projected figures for

Battle, Kentwood, Norcot, Tilehurst and Whitely wards will be close to the projected figure of 2,376". Two respondents fully supported the draft recommendations.

74 We have given careful consideration to the evidence and representations received. We note the comments of Reading West Liberal Democrats and Reading Borough Conservative Group. We agree that the railway line makes a clear boundary. However, as stated above, the LGCE considered a number of alternative proposals at Stage One, utilising the railway, and including that proposed by Reading Borough Conservative Group, but concluded that there was insufficient evidence to justify the poor level of electoral equality that would result. We concur with the LGCE's view. As indicated above, the comments by the Reading West Conservative Association – Kentwood Branch ignore the knock-on effect of correcting imbalances in adjoining wards.

75 We have therefore decided to confirm the draft recommendations for these wards as final. The levels of electoral equality would be the same as under the draft recommendations. Our final recommendations for these wards are illustrated and named on Map 2 and the large map inserted at the back of this report.

Church, Katesgrove and Redlands wards

76 These three three-member wards are situated in east of the borough, south of the River Thames. Church ward is currently 19 per cent over-represented (20 per cent by 2006). Katesgrove ward is currently 10 per cent over-represented (9 per cent by 2006). Redlands ward is currently 22 per cent under-represented (19 per cent by 2006).

77 The Council proposed realigning the boundaries of these three existing wards. Church ward would comprise the existing Church ward and the south eastern section of the existing Redlands ward. Under these proposals Church ward would initially be 2 per cent under-represented (zero per cent by 2006). Katesgrove ward would comprise the existing Katesgrove ward, less a small area in the south east, but additionally including an area to the south of the existing Abbey ward. It would initially be 4 per cent over-represented (3 per cent by 2006). Redlands ward would comprise the existing Redlands ward, less the south eastern area. Under these proposals Redlands ward would initially be 4 per cent under-represented (2 per cent by 2006). As already explained, having adopted a council size of 46, the LGCE was unable to make a detailed ward-by-ward comparison with the proposals from Reading East Conservative Association. None of the remaining submissions made specific comments regarding the wards south of the river.

78 The LGCE was satisfied with the Council's proposals for these wards and therefore adopted them in their entirety.

79 At Stage Three the Council supported the draft recommendations. Reading East Liberal Democrats stated that the "proposed boundaries for Church and Redlands wards totally ignore easily identifiable communities". Reading Borough Council Conservative Group supported the draft recommendations for these wards. Two respondents fully supported the draft recommendations.

80 We have given careful consideration to the evidence and representations received and remain satisfied that the draft recommendations provide the best balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria. We have therefore decided to confirm the draft recommendations for these wards as final. The levels of electoral equality would be the same as under the draft recommendations. Our final recommendations for these wards are illustrated and named on Map 2 and the large map inserted at the back of this report.

Electoral Cycle

81 In conducting its review the LGCE sought views in relation to the electoral cycle of the district. However, by virtue of the amendments made to the Local Government Act 1992 by the Local Government Commission for England (Transfer of Functions) Order 2001, we have no powers to make recommendations concerning electoral cycle.

Conclusions

82 Having considered carefully all the representations and evidence received in response to the LGCE's consultation report, we have decided to endorse those draft recommendations in their entirety.

83 We conclude that, in Reading:

- there should be a increase in council size from 45 to 46;
- there should be 16 wards, one more than at present;
- the boundaries of 15 of the existing wards should be modified.

84 Table 4 shows the impact of our final recommendations on electoral equality, comparing them with the current arrangements, based on 2001 and 2006 electorate figures.

Table 4: Comparison of Current and Recommended Electoral Arrangements

	2001 electorate		2006 forecast electorate	
	Current arrangements	Final recommendations	Current arrangements	Final recommendations
Number of councillors	45	46	45	46
Number of wards	15	16	15	16
Average number of electors per councillor	2,369	2,318	2,430	2,377
Number of wards with a variance more than 10 per cent from the average	5	0	5	0
Number of wards with a variance more than 20 per cent from the average	2	0	2	0

85 As Table 4 shows, our recommendations would result in a reduction in the number of wards with an electoral variance of more than 10 per cent from five to zero. By 2006 no ward is forecast to have an electoral variance of more than 7 per cent.

Final Recommendation

Reading Borough Council should comprise 46 councillors serving 16 wards, as detailed and named in Tables 1 and 2, and illustrated on Map 2 and the large map inside the back cover.

Map 2: Final Recommendations for Reading

6 WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

86 Having completed the review of electoral arrangements in Reading and submitted our final recommendations to the Electoral Commission, we have fulfilled our statutory obligation under the Local Government Act 1992 (as amended by SI 2001 No 3692).

87 It is now up to the Electoral Commission to decide whether to endorse our recommendations, with or without modification, and to implement them by means of an Order. Such an Order will not be made before 18 July 2002.

88 All further representations concerning our recommendations and the matters discussed in this report should be sent to the Electoral Commission at the address below, to arrive no later than 18 July 2002:

The Secretary
Electoral Commission
Trevelyan House
Great Peter Street
London SW1P 2HW