

Final recommendations on the
future electoral arrangements
for Ashford in Kent

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

May 2001

LOCAL GOVERNMENT COMMISSION FOR ENGLAND

This report sets out the Commission's final recommendations on the electoral arrangements for the borough of Ashford in Kent.

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)

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



Local Government Commission for England

9 May 2001

Dear Secretary of State

On 9 May 2000 the Commission began a periodic electoral review of Ashford under the Local Government Act 1992. We published our draft recommendations in October 2000 and undertook an eight-week period of consultation.

We have now prepared our final recommendations in the light of the consultation. We have substantially confirmed our draft recommendations, although some modifications have been made (see paragraph 130) in the light of further evidence. This report sets out our final recommendations for changes to electoral arrangements in Ashford.

We recommend that Ashford Borough Council should be served by 43 councillors representing 35 wards, and that changes should be made to ward boundaries in order to improve electoral equality, having regard to the statutory criteria. We recommend that the Council should continue to be elected as a whole every four years.

The Local Government Act 2000 contains provisions relating to changes to local authority electoral arrangements. However, until such time as orders are made implementing those arrangements we are obliged to conduct our work in accordance with current legislation, and to continue our current approach to periodic electoral reviews.

I would like to thank members and officers of the Borough Council and other local people who have contributed to the review. Their co-operation and assistance have been very much appreciated by Commissioners and staff.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Malcolm Grant'.

PROFESSOR MALCOLM GRANT
Chairman

SUMMARY

The Commission began a review of Ashford on 9 May 2000. We published our draft recommendations for electoral arrangements on 17 October 2000, after which we undertook an eight-week period of consultation.

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

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

- **in 34 of the 45 wards the number of electors represented by each councillor varies by more than 10 per cent from the average for the borough, and 23 wards vary by more than 20 per cent from the average;**
- **by 2005 electoral equality 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 38 wards and by more than 20 per cent in 29 wards.**

Our main final recommendations for future electoral arrangements (Figures 1 and 2 and paragraphs 130-131) are that:

- **Ashford Borough Council should have 43 councillors, six fewer than at present;**
- **there should be 35 wards, instead of 45 as at present;**
- **the boundaries of 42 of the existing wards should be modified, and three wards should retain their existing boundaries;**
- **elections should continue to take place every four years.**

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

- **In 19 of the proposed 35 wards the number of electors per councillor would vary by no more than 10 per cent from the borough average.**
- **This improved level of electoral equality is forecast to improve further, with the number of electors per councillor in all 35 wards expected to vary by no more than 10 per cent from the average for the borough in 2005.**

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

- **revised warding arrangements and the redistribution of councillors for the parishes of Great Chart with Singleton, Kingsnorth, Sevington, Stanhope and Tenterden.**

All further correspondence on these recommendations and the matters discussed in this report should be addressed to the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, who will not make an order implementing the Commission's recommendations before 19 June 2001:

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

Figure 1: The Commission's Final Recommendations: Summary

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Constituent areas	Map reference
1	Aylesford Green (Ashford)	1	Ashford South Willesborough ward (part); Ashford Twelve Acres ward (part); Ashford Waterside ward (part)	Map 2 and large map
2	Beaver (Ashford)	2	Ashford Brookfield ward (part); Ashford Hampden ward (part); Ashford Musgrove ward (part); Ashford Singleton ward (part); Ashford Woolreeds ward	Map 2 and large map
3	Biddenden	1	<i>Unchanged</i> (Biddenden parish)	Map 2
4	Bockhanger (Ashford)	1	Ashford Bockhanger ward (part); Ashford Warren ward (part)	Map 2 and large map
5	Boughton Aluph & Eastwell	1	Ashford Kennington Lees ward (part); Boughton Aluph ward (part - the parishes of Boughton Aluph and Eastwell)	Map 2 and large map
6	Bybrook (Ashford)	1	Ashford Bockhanger ward (part); Ashford Bybrook ward (part); Ashford Henwood ward (part); Ashford Queens ward (part); Ashford Warren ward (part)	Map 2 and large map
7	Charing	1	Charing ward (part - Charing parish ward of Charing parish)	Maps 2 and A3
8	Downs North	1	Boughton Aluph ward (part - Molash parish); Chilham ward	Map 2
9	Downs West	1	Ashford Warren ward (part); Boughton Aluph ward (part - Challock parish); Hothfield ward	Map 2 and large map
10	Godinton (Ashford)	2	Ashford Central ward (part); Ashford Queens ward (part)	Map 2 and large map
11	Great Chart with Singleton North	1	Great Chart ward (part - the proposed Great Chart with Singleton North parish ward of Great Chart with Singleton parish)	Map 2 and large map
12	Highfield (Ashford)	1	Ashford Willesborough Lees ward (part); Mersham ward (part - the proposed North parish ward of Sevington parish)	Map 2 and large map
13	Isle of Oxney	1	Appledore ward (the parishes of Kenardington and Appledore); Wittersham ward (the parishes of Stone-cum-Ebony and Wittersham)	Map 2
14	Kennington (Ashford)	1	Ashford Bockhanger ward (part); Ashford Bybrook ward (part); Kennington Lees ward (part); Ashford Spearpoint ward (part)	Map 2 and large map
15	Little Burton Farm (Ashford)	1	Ashford Spearpoint ward (part)	Map 2 and large map
16	Norman (Ashford)	1	Ashford Eastmead ward (part); Ashford Hampden ward (part)	Map 2 and large map

Ward name	Number of councillors	Constituent areas	Map reference
17 North Willesborough (Ashford)	2	Ashford Waterside ward (part); Ashford Willesborough Lees ward (part); Ashford Windmill ward	Map 2 and large map
18 Park Farm North	1	Kingsnorth ward (part - the proposed Park Farm North parish ward of Kingsnorth parish)	Map 2 and large map
19 Park Farm South	1	Kingsnorth ward (part - the proposed Park Farm South parish ward of Kingsnorth parish)	Map 2 and large map
20 Rolvenden & Tenterden West	1	Rolvenden ward (the parishes of Newenden and Rolvenden); Tenterden South East ward (part - part of Tenterden South East parish ward of Tenterden parish); Tenterden West ward (part - part of Tenterden West parish ward of Tenterden parish)	Maps 2 and A2
21 Saxon Shore	2	Aldington ward (the parishes of Aldington, Bilsington and Bonnington); Brabourne ward (the parishes of Brabourne, Brook and Hastingleigh); Hamstreet ward (part - Ruckinge parish); Mersham ward (part - Smeeth parish)	Map 2
22 Singleton South	1	Great Chart ward (part - the proposed Singleton South parish ward of Great Chart with Singleton parish)	Map 2 and large map
23 South Willesborough (Ashford)	1	Ashford South Willesborough ward (part); Ashford Twelve Acres ward (part); Ashford Willesborough Lees ward (part)	Map 2 and large map
24 St Michaels	1	<i>Unchanged</i> (St Michaels ward)	Maps 2 and A2
25 Stanhope (Ashford)	1	Ashford Stanhope ward (part)	Map 2 and large map
26 Stour (Ashford)	2	Ashford Queens ward (part); Ashford Henwood ward (part); Ashford Warren ward (part)	Map 2 and large map
27 Tenterden North	1	Tenterden East ward (part); Tenterden West ward (part)	Map 2 and large map
28 Tenterden South	1	Tenterden South East ward (part - part of Tenterden South East parish ward of Tenterden parish)	Maps 2 and A2
29 Victoria (Ashford)	2	Ashford Brookfield ward (part); Ashford Central ward (part); Ashford Eastmead ward (part); Ashford Musgrove ward (part); Ashford Queen's ward (part); Ashford Victoria Park ward (part)	Map 2 and large map
30 Washford	1	Kingsnorth ward (part - the proposed Washford Farm parish ward of Kingsnorth parish); Stanhope ward (part - the proposed Speldhurst parish ward of Stanhope parish)	Map 2 and large map

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Constituent areas	Map reference
31	Weald Central	2	Bethersden ward (Bethersden parish); Charing ward (part - Charing Heath parish ward of Charing parish); High Halden ward (High Halden parish); Pluckley ward (the parishes of Little Chart and Pluckley)	Maps 2 and A3
32	Weald East	1	Kingsnorth ward (part - Kingsnorth Village parish ward of Kingsnorth parish); Mersham ward (part - Mersham parish and the proposed South parish ward of Sevington parish)	Map 2 and large map
33	Weald North	1	<i>Unchanged</i> - Smarden ward (the parishes of Egerton & Smarden)	Map 2
34	Weald South	2	Hamstreet ward (part - the parishes of Orlestone and Warehorne); Kingsnorth ward (part - Stubbs Cross parish ward of Kingsnorth parish and Shadoxhurst parish); Woodchurch ward (Woodchurch parish)	Map 2 and large map
35	Wye	1	Wye ward (Wye with Hinxhill parish),	Map 2

Notes: 1 The borough is parished except Ashford town where only Stanhope ward is parished.

2 Ashford town comprises the 14 wards indicated above.

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

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.

Figure 2: The Commission's Final Recommendations for Ashford

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 Aylesford Green	1	1,946	1,946	9	1,946	1,946	-3
2 Beaver	2	4,204	2,102	17	4,231	2,116	5
3 Biddenden	1	1,949	1,949	9	1,978	1,978	-2
4 Bockhanger	1	1,912	1,912	7	1,912	1,912	-5
5 Boughton Aluph & Eastwell	1	1,115	1,115	-38	1,936	1,936	-4
6 Bybrook	1	1,987	1,987	11	1,991	1,991	-1
7 Charing	1	1,899	1,899	6	1,971	1,971	-2
8 Downs North	1	1,922	1,922	7	1,951	1,951	-3
9 Downs West	1	1,931	1,931	8	1,966	1,966	-2
10 Godinton	2	2,667	1,334	-26	4,323	2,162	8
11 Great Chart with Singleton North	1	1,366	1,366	-24	2,140	2,140	7
12 Highfield	1	1,937	1,937	8	1,937	1,937	-4
13 Isle of Oxney	1	2,024	2,024	13	2,073	2,073	3
14 Kennington	1	1,884	1,884	5	1,911	1,911	-5
15 Little Burton Farm	1	1,363	1,363	-24	1,993	1,993	-1
16 Norman	1	2,027	2,027	13	2,024	2,024	1
17 North Willesborough	2	3,983	1,992	11	4,057	2,029	1
18 Park Farm North	1	1,283	1,283	-28	1,931	1,931	-4
19 Park Farm South	1	594	594	-67	1,944	1,944	-3
20 Rolvenden & Tenterden West	1	1,971	1,971	10	1,986	1,986	-1
21 Saxon Shore	2	3,935	1,968	10	3,998	1,999	0
22 Singleton South	1	1,893	1,893	6	2,163	2,163	8
23 South Willesborough	1	1,564	1,564	-13	1,920	1,920	-4
24 St Michaels	1	1,932	1,932	8	1,937	1,937	-4

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 %
25 Stanhope	1	2,104	2,104	18	2,106	2,106	5
26 Stour	2	3,578	1,789	0	4,021	2,011	0
27 Tenterden North	1	1,713	1,713	-4	1,890	1,890	-6
28 Tenterden South	1	1,832	1,832	2	1,902	1,902	-5
29 Victoria	2	3,927	1,964	10	4,278	2,139	6
30 Washford	1	1,466	1,466	-18	1,916	1,916	-5
31 Weald Central	2	3,728	1,864	4	3,782	1,891	-6
32 Weald East	1	1,509	1,509	-16	2,153	2,153	7
33 Weald North	1	1,877	1,877	5	1,915	1,915	-5
34 Weald South	2	4,044	2,022	13	4,214	2,107	5
35 Wye	1	1,928	1,928	8	1,989	1,989	-1
Totals	43	76,994	-	-	86,385	-	-
Averages	-	-	1,791	-	-	2,009	-

Source: Electorate figures are based on information provided by Ashford 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 Ashford in Kent. We have now reviewed the 12 two-tier districts of Kent 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 2005.

2 This was our first review of the electoral arrangements of Ashford. The last such review was undertaken by our predecessor, the Local Government Boundary Commission (LGBC), which reported to the Secretary of State in August 1975 (Report No. 61). The electoral arrangements of Kent County Council were last reviewed in November 1980 (Report No. 402). We commenced a periodic electoral review of Medway in November 2000 and expect to commence a review of the County Council's electoral arrangements in 2002.

3 In undertaking these reviews, we have had 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.

4 We are required to make recommendations to the Secretary of State on the number of councillors who should serve on the Borough 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 borough.

5 We have also had regard to our *Guidance and Procedural Advice for Local Authorities and Other Interested Parties* (fourth edition published in December 2000), which 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, so far as practicable, 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 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, i.e. 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.

10 Following publication of the White Paper, we advised all authorities in our 2000/01 PER programme, including the Kent districts, that the Commission would continue to maintain its current approach to PERs as set out in our *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 orders 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 the two-tier district areas, and our current *Guidance*.

11 This review was in four stages. Stage One began on 9 May 2000, when we wrote to Ashford Borough Council inviting proposals for future electoral arrangements. We also notified Kent County Council, Kent Police Authority, the local authority associations, Kent Association of Parish Councils, parish and town councils in the borough, 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. We 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 31 July 2000. At Stage Two we considered all the representations received during Stage One and prepared our draft recommendations.

12 Stage Three began on 17 October 2000 with the publication of our report, *Draft recommendations on the future electoral arrangements for Ashford in Kent*, and ended on 11 December 2000. Comments were sought on our preliminary conclusions. Finally, during Stage

Four we reconsidered our draft recommendations in the light of the Stage Three consultation and now publish our final recommendations.

2 CURRENT ELECTORAL ARRANGEMENTS

13 The borough of Ashford is situated in East Kent and bounded by the North Downs, Weald of Kent and Romsey Marsh. The main centre of population is Ashford town; the borough also includes the town of Tenterden, together with a large rural area. The Regional Planning Guidance has identified Ashford as one of the major future growth areas in the South East and significant development is taking place, particularly on the periphery of the town, with more expected. The borough is served by good communication links, including the M20 and Ashford International railway station, serving the Channel Tunnel rail link, the continued development of which is having a major impact on the area. The borough contains 39 parishes; Ashford town is unparished, with the exception of Stanhope parish.

14 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 borough average in percentage terms. In the text which follows, this calculation may also be described using the shorthand term 'electoral variance'.

15 The electorate of the borough is 76,994 (February 2000). The Council presently has 49 members who are elected from 45 wards, 21 of which are relatively urban, covering Ashford town, and the remainder predominantly rural. Four of the wards are each represented by two councillors and 41 are single-member wards. The Council is elected as a whole every four years.

16 Since the last electoral review there has been an increase in the electorate in Ashford borough, with around 27 per cent more electors than two decades ago as a result of new housing developments. The most notable increases have been in the Ashford town area.

17 At present, each councillor represents an average of 1,571 electors, which the Borough 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 34 of the 45 wards varies by more than 10 per cent from the borough average, in 23 wards by more than 20 per cent and in nine wards by more than 30 per cent. The worst imbalance is in Kingsnorth ward where the councillor represents 205 per cent more electors than the borough average.

Map 1: Existing Wards in Ashford

Figure 3: 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 Aldington	1	1,125	1,125	-28	1,158	1,158	-34
2 Appledore	1	776	776	-51	785	785	-55
3 Ashford Bockhanger	1	2,361	2,361	50	2,361	2,361	34
4 Ashford Brookfield	1	1,347	1,347	-14	1,347	1,347	-24
5 Ashford Bybrook	1	1,379	1,379	-12	1,383	1,383	-22
6 Ashford Central	2	3,065	1,533	-2	4,779	2,390	36
7 Ashford Eastmead	1	1,609	1,609	2	1,856	1,856	5
8 Ashford Hampden	1	1,113	1,113	-29	1,120	1,120	-36
9 Ashford Henwood	1	1,375	1,375	-12	1,780	1,780	1
10 Ashford Kennington Lees	1	1,652	1,652	5	1,679	1,679	-5
11 Ashford Musgrove	1	1,275	1,275	-19	1,275	1,275	-28
12 Ashford Queens	1	1,485	1,485	-5	1,552	1,552	-12
13 Ashford Singleton	2	2,152	1,076	-32	2,179	1,090	-38
14 Ashford South Willesborough	1	2,140	2,140	36	2,496	2,496	42
15 Ashford Spearpoint	1	1,867	1,867	19	2,497	2,497	42
16 Ashford Stanhope	2	2,442	1,221	-22	2,444	1,222	-31
17 Ashford Twelve Acres	1	1,314	1,314	-16	1,314	1,314	-25
18 Ashford Victoria Park	1	1,231	1,231	-22	1,267	1,267	-28
19 Ashford Warren	1	1,595	1,595	2	1,566	1,566	-11
20 Ashford Waterside	1	1,193	1,193	-24	1,197	1,197	-32
21 Ashford Willesborough Lees	1	3,170	3,170	102	3,240	3,240	84
22 Ashford Windmill	1	1,382	1,382	-12	1,382	1,382	-22
23 Ashford Woolreeds	1	1,267	1,267	-19	1,267	1,267	-28
24 Bethersden	1	1,185	1,185	-25	1,194	1,194	-32

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 %
25 Biddenden	1	1,949	1,949	24	1,978	1,978	12
26 Boughton Aluph	1	1,558	1,558	-1	2,384	2,384	35
27 Brabourne	1	1,523	1,523	-3	1,545	1,545	-12
28 Charing	2	2,241	1,211	-29	2,293	1,147	-35
29 Chilham	1	1,731	1,731	10	1,755	1,755	0
30 Great Chart	1	2,477	2,477	58	3,521	3,521	100
31 Hamstreet	1	1,962	1,962	25	2,079	2,079	18
32 High Halden	1	1,182	1,182	-25	1,223	1,223	-31
33 Hothfield	1	1,237	1,237	-21	1,272	1,272	-28
34 Kingsnorth	1	4,798	4,798	205	7,301	7,301	314
35 Mersham	1	1,783	1,783	13	2,417	2,417	37
36 Pluckley	1	1,019	1,019	-35	1,043	1,043	-41
37 Rolvenden	1	1,362	1,362	-13	1,377	1,377	-22
38 Smarden	1	1,877	1,877	19	1,915	1,915	9
39 Tenterden East	1	1,574	1,574	0	1,749	1,749	-1
40 Tenterden St Michaels	1	1,932	1,932	23	1,937	1,937	10
41 Tenterden South East	1	1,484	1,484	-6	1,554	1,554	-12
42 Tenterden West	1	1,096	1,096	-30	1,098	1,098	-38
43 Wittersham	1	1,248	1,248	-21	1,288	1,288	-27
44 Woodchurch	1	1,533	1,533	-2	1,549	1,549	-12
45 Wye	1	1,928	1,928	23	1,989	1,989	13
Totals	49	76,994	-	-	86,385	-	-
Averages	-	-	1,571	-	-	1,763	-

Source: Electorate figures are based on information provided by Ashford 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 2000, electors in Appledore ward were relatively over-represented by 51 per cent, while electors in Kingsnorth ward were significantly under-represented by 205 per cent. Figures have been rounded to the nearest whole number.

3 DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS

18 During Stage One we received 12 representations, including borough-wide schemes from Ashford Borough Council, the Liberal Democrat Group on the Council, the Independent Group and the local Labour Party. In the light of these representations and evidence available to us, we reached preliminary conclusions which were set out in our report, *Draft recommendations on the future electoral arrangements for Ashford in Kent*.

19 Our draft recommendations were based on the Borough Council's proposals, which achieved some improvement in electoral equality, and provided a mix of single- and two-member wards across the borough. We proposed that:

- Ashford Borough Council should be served by 43 councillors, compared with the current 49, representing 34 wards, 11 fewer than at present;
- the boundaries of 42 of the existing wards should be modified, and three wards should retain their existing boundaries;
- there should be new warding arrangements for Great Chart with Singleton, Kingsnorth, Mersham & Sevington and Stanhope parish councils and Tenterden Town Council.

Draft Recommendation

Ashford Borough Council should comprise 43 councillors, serving 34 wards. The whole council should continue to be elected every four years.

20 Our proposals would have resulted in significant improvements in electoral equality, with the number of electors per councillor in 20 of the 34 wards varying by no more than 10 per cent from the borough average. This level of electoral equality was forecast to improve further, with no ward varying by more than 10 per cent from the average in 2005.

4 RESPONSES TO CONSULTATION

21 During the consultation on our draft recommendations report, 49 representations were received. A list of all respondents is available on request from the Commission. All representations may be inspected at the offices of Ashford Borough Council and the Commission.

Ashford Borough Council

22 The Borough Council generally supported the draft recommendations, but proposed a number of amendments. One concerned the allocation of councillors in Kingsnorth parish, while another concerned the renaming of Central, Downs South, Eastmead, Newtown and Queens wards. It proposed these be named Victoria, Downs North, Norman, Aylesford Green and Stour respectively. The Borough Council also proposed that the two-member Great Chart with Singleton ward should become two single-member wards of Great Chart with Singleton North and Singleton South, with the boundaries being coterminous with the parish boundary, to include all the Chilmington properties in the same borough ward.

Ashford Borough Council Liberal Democrats

23 The Liberal Democrats opposed the draft recommendations, regarding them as based on flawed arguments and limited consultation. They were prepared to accept some minor late amendments, notably the proposal to split Great Chart and Singleton ward into two wards. The Liberal Democrats requested that the Commission look again at their original proposals, particularly the single-member ward alternatives. They also expressed support for a number of changes to ward names.

Ashford & Tenterden Constituency Labour Party

24 The Ashford & Tenterden Constituency Labour Party complained that the proposals contained in the draft recommendations broke the Commission's own rules, and outlined perceived breeches in them. It requested that the scheme originally submitted by the Party be fully reconsidered since it achieved "the requirements of Schedule 11 to the Local Government Act 1972, so far as is reasonably practicable, which the LGCE proposal no longer does." In a further letter, the Party requested that, should its original submission still be rejected, it wished to propose an amendment to the draft proposals. This would entail increasing the number of councillors in Ashford town by one, thus bringing the average electorate in the urban wards closer to that in the rural wards.

Kent County Council

25 The County Council expressed concern at the recommendation that Central ward should straddle the main railway line, which it regarded as a clear dividing line between north and south Ashford in both physical and community terms. As the current boundary between Ashford North and Ashford South county electoral divisions utilises the railway line, it was thought that it would

be difficult to create workable county electoral divisions should the draft recommendations be accepted. The County Council forwarded a letter from County Councillor D. Smyth requesting that the Commission review its proposals in the light of this, and making his own proposals for central Ashford.

Parish and Town Councils

26 At Stage Three we received representations from 17 parish councils and Tenterden Town Council. Charing Parish Council was opposed to Charing Heath being annexed to Weald Central ward. In the event that there has to be a change the council would prefer the current ward being retained with two councillors. Appledore, Kenardington and Stone-cum-Ebony parish councils supported being part of the proposed Isle of Oxney ward, whereas Wittersham Parish Council was opposed to the inclusion of Kenardington on the grounds that it is some distance from the Isle of Oxney, and may be better included in Weald South ward.

27 The parish councils of Orlestone, Ruckinge and Warehorne were opposed to Ruckinge being included in the proposed Saxon Shore ward on the grounds that the three villages have a natural association, with Hamstreet (Orlestone) providing shops and social amenities for the other two. Ruckinge Parish Council was also concerned that the summary of its objections in the draft recommendations did not mention the M20 and A20 (T). It put forward alternative proposals for warding in the area. Aldington & Bonnington, Brabourne and Smeeth parish councils, which would be included in the proposed Saxon Shore ward, all expressed their opposition to its size. Two single-member wards were favoured, with Brabourne and Smeeth supporting the Liberal Democrat proposal for a single-member Brabourne ward to include the parishes of Brabourne, Hastingleigh and Smeeth.

28 Great Chart with Singleton Parish Council, while accepting the proposal for the parish, requested that Chilmington East should be left with Great Chart & Singleton ward. Boughton Aluph & Eastwell Parish Council requested that its original submission for a two-member ward covering Boughton Aluph, Eastwell, Challock, Westwell and Hothfield be reconsidered. Kingsnorth Parish Council agreed with the draft recommendations for two new single-member wards of Park Farm North and Park Farm South, to the inclusion of Kingsnorth Village in the proposed Weald East ward and to there being five parish wards. However, it was opposed to Washford ward including Speldhurst Close and part of Great Chart & Singleton ward, and to the inclusion of Stubbs Cross in the proposed Weald East ward.

29 Mersham & Sevington Parish Council objected to Sevington parish being divided between two borough wards. It also considered the borough ward name of Weald East to be inappropriate. Bethersden Parish Council objected to the proposal for Weald Central ward, preferring a smaller ward with one councillor. Rolvenden Parish Council regarded it as “unfortunate and sad” that the name of the parish of Newenden was to be lost in the creation of the proposed new ward of Rolvenden & Tenterden West. Tenterden Town Council suggested that the allocation of parish councillors should be reconsidered.

Other Representations

30 A further 27 representations were received in response to our draft recommendations from one county councillor, seven borough councillors, three parish councillors and 15 residents.

31 Councillor Smyth, County Councillor for Ashford South Division, expressed his concern that the proposed ward boundaries in central Ashford would bring together electors from both north and south Ashford in a way that would cut across communities illogically. This would also create problems for county council divisions created on the new ward boundaries. He proposed a new scheme for the area, utilising the railway line as a boundary between north and south Ashford. Councillor Brannan, member for Bethersden ward, objected to the draft recommendations' two-member rural wards, suggesting alternative possible arrangements for the proposed Weald Central ward, recognising that these would necessitate higher electoral variances than the draft recommendations. Councillor Mrs English, member for Pluckley ward, also objected to the size, and name, of Weald Central ward, preferring a one-member ward.

32 Councillor Hayes, Leader of the Labour Group, complained that the procedures used were not in accordance with the rules set down in Schedule 11 of the Local Government Act and raised the possibility of a legal challenge. Councillor Hawes, member for Boughton Aluph ward, expressed concern at the inclusion of part of the existing Kennington Lees ward in the proposed Boughton Aluph & Eastwell ward, stating that the people living in the area related to Kennington rather than Boughton Aluph. This view was shared by Councillor Graves, member for Boughton Aluph & Eastwell parish ward, who supported the parish council's proposal. Councillor O'Sullivan, also member for Boughton Aluph & Eastwell parish ward, expressed similar views.

33 Councillor Davison, member for Hamstreet, Warehorne & Ruckinge ward, supported local objections to splitting Ruckinge from Hamstreet and Warehorne by including it in the proposed two-member Saxon Shore ward. Mrs Davidson, chair of Ashford Liberal Democrats Town Branch, and Councillor Davidson, member for Windmill ward, had no objections to the draft recommendations, but suggested new ward names. Councillor Harrington, member for Kingsnorth, proposed that Kingsnorth Parish Council should have 12 councillors rather than 10. Councillor Fletcher, member for Hothfield parish ward, supported the proposals for the new Downs West ward.

34 We also received 14 further representations from local residents. Six were opposed to the proposed ward of Weald Central because of its size; three of these would prefer a single-member ward comprising Bethersden and High Halden. Two were opposed to part of the existing Kennington Lees ward being included in the proposed Boughton Aluph & Eastwell ward. One was opposed to the proposed two-member Saxon Shore ward on the grounds of its size and lack of local representation. One was opposed to the proposed new ward of Downs West, while another supported the Liberal Democrat proposal for Calehill ward. One submission expressed concern that representation in Ashford would not be improved, while another regarded splitting rural parishes as unnecessary and reducing rural representation. One Biddenden respondent was pleased with the recommendation that the ward should continue to be coterminous with the parish.

5 ANALYSIS AND FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS

35 As described earlier, our prime objective in considering the most appropriate electoral arrangements for Ashford 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”.

36 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 ensuing five years. We must also have regard to the desirability of fixing identifiable boundaries and to maintaining local ties which might otherwise be broken.

37 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.

38 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, such an objective should be the starting point in any review. We therefore strongly recommend that, in formulating electoral schemes, local authorities and other interested parties should start from the standpoint of absolute electoral equality and only then make adjustments to reflect relevant factors, such as community identity and interests. Regard must also be had to five-year forecasts of change in electorates.

Electorate Forecasts

39 At Stage One the Borough Council submitted electorate forecasts for the year 2005, projecting an increase in the electorate of some 12 per cent from 76,994 to 86,385 over the five-year period from 2000 to 2005. Ashford has been identified in the local planning guidance as one of the three major growth areas in the South East, and a large amount of development is expected, particularly in the wards on the edge of town. The Council estimated rates and locations of housing development with regard to structure and local plans, and the expected rate of building over the five-year period and assumed occupancy rates. In our draft recommendations report we accepted that this is an inexact science and, having given consideration to the forecast electorates, we were satisfied that they represented the best estimates that could reasonably be made at the time.

40 We received no comments on the Council’s electorate forecasts during Stage Three, and remain satisfied that they represent the best estimates presently available.

Council Size

41 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 carefully look at arguments why this might not be the case.

42 Ashford Borough Council is at present served by 49 councillors. At Stage One the Borough Council proposed a reduction in council size from 49 to 43, which would provide for good representation across the borough, taking account of the areas under development. Both the Liberal Democrats and the Labour Party agreed with a council size of 43. The Independent Group proposed a council size of 47 (with a second preference for 49), which it stated would retain an appropriate level of representation taking account of the imminent increase in electorate.

43 In our draft recommendations report we stated that, having considered the size and distribution of the electorate, the geography and other characteristics of the area, together with the general agreement among the majority of the representations received, the achievement of electoral equality and the statutory criteria would best be met by a council of 43 members.

44 During Stage Three we received two further proposals regarding council size. Two identical schemes, from Ashford and Tenterden Labour Party (Ashford Constituency) and Councillor Smyth, proposed a council size of 44, achieved through changes to representation in Ashford town which would reinstate the railway line as a ward boundary in central Ashford. It was stated that increasing the number of councillors in the urban area would reduce the discrepancy between the average electorate in the urban and rural wards. Having considered the Labour Party's proposals, we have noted that the small difference in the average electorate between Ashford town and the rural wards is less than the figures quoted, and does not justify an extra councillor in Ashford town. At Stage One, noting the general agreement between the Borough Council, the Labour Party and the Liberal Democrats, we concluded that the balance between urban and rural wards would be fair, and the statutory criteria would best be met, by a council size of 43. This remains our conclusion, and we are confirming our draft recommendation for a council of 43 members as final.

Electoral Arrangements

45 As set out in our draft recommendations report, we carefully considered all the representations received at Stage One, including the borough-wide schemes from the Borough Council, the Labour Party, the Liberal Democrats and the Independent Group. From these representations some considerations emerged which helped to inform us when preparing our draft recommendations. Firstly, while initially each of the 43-member proposals retained high levels of electoral inequality in some wards, each achieved excellent electoral equality by 2005, taking into account the projected growth in the areas concerned. Secondly, we did not consider that the Labour Party's proposals would provide the best balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria, and would result in a number of geographically large and diverse wards in the rural area. Therefore we did not propose to take forward any of the detailed warding proposals of this scheme.

46 Thirdly, in comparing the Liberal Democrats' and Borough Council's proposals in the urban area, we noted that the Council's proposals generally utilised clearer, more recognisable boundaries and had been subject to extensive consultation. In the rural area we found that, where there were differences, the issues were finely balanced. However, we were persuaded by the Borough Council's guiding principles in favour of a majority of single-member wards and retaining whole parishes in the wards in rural areas as far as possible.

47 Accordingly, and in view of the agreement between the two proposals for some elements of the Council's proposals, together with the consultation exercise which it undertook with interested parties, we concluded that we should adopt the Borough Council's scheme as the basis for our draft recommendations, with only minor amendments in some areas to ensure that the boundaries followed recognisable ground features. We considered that this scheme would provide a better balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria than the current arrangements or other schemes submitted at Stage One.

48 Following publication of the draft recommendations, a discrepancy concerning the boundary between the proposed ward of Weald East and Wye ward was brought to our attention by the Borough Council. The Council had understood the boundary to be coterminous with the boundary between Wye with Hinxhill parish and Mersham parish. Although the parishes of Hinxhill and Wye were combined in 1987, the borough ward boundary continued to be coterminous with the former boundary between the two parishes. This has been noted, and the amendments have been incorporated in our final recommendations.

49 At Stage Three the Borough Council commented on our proposed ward of Great Chart & Singleton and proposed name changes in some other wards. The Labour Party and the Liberal Democrats both submitted proposals during Stage Three, which included reiterating their Stage One submissions and proposing amendments to the draft recommendations. As their original proposals were discussed at Stage One, when the Borough Council's scheme was adopted, we have already given them our considered opinion. However, where appropriate, the proposed amendments have been taken into consideration. The Labour Party's alternative proposals for Ashford town were identical to those submitted by County Councillor Smyth. Because of this the two submissions have been treated as one and referred to as the Labour Party's proposals in the rest of this report.

50 We have reviewed our draft recommendations in the light of further evidence and the representations received during Stage Three. For borough warding purposes, the following areas, based on existing wards, are considered in turn:

Ashford Town

- (a) Ashford Bockhanger, Ashford Bybrook, Ashford Kennington Lees, Ashford Spearpoint and Ashford Warren wards;
- (b) Ashford Central, Ashford Henwood, Ashford Queens and Ashford Victoria Park wards;
- (c) Ashford South Willesborough, Ashford Twelve Acres, Ashford Waterside, Ashford Willesborough Lees and Ashford Windmill wards;

- (d) Ashford Brookfield, Ashford Eastmead, Ashford Hampden, Ashford Musgrove, Ashford Singleton, Ashford Stanhope and Ashford Woolreeds wards.

Outside Ashford Town

- (e) Rolvenden, Tenterden East, Tenterden St Michaels, Tenterden South East and Tenterden West wards;
- (f) Boughton Aluph, Chilham, Great Chart and Hothfield wards;
- (g) Aldington, Brabourne, Hamstreet, Kingsnorth, Mersham and Wye wards;
- (h) Appledore Wittersham and Woodchurch wards;
- (i) Bethersden, Biddenden, Charing, High Halden, Pluckley and Smarden wards.

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

Ashford Town

Ashford Bockhanger, Ashford Bybrook, Ashford Kennington Lees, Ashford Spearpoint and Ashford Warren wards

52 These single-member wards are situated in the north of Ashford town. The number of electors per councillor in Bockhanger, Bybrook, Kennington Lees, Spearpoint and Warren wards is 50 per cent above, 12 per cent below, 5 per cent above, 19 per cent above and 2 per cent above the borough average respectively (34 per cent above, 22 per cent below, 5 per cent below, 42 per cent above and 11 per cent below in 2005).

53 At Stage One the Borough Council proposed that there should be four new wards covering this area. It proposed a single-member Kennington ward, which would include much of the existing Kennington Lees ward, together with parts of Bockhanger and Bybrook wards. The Council also proposed a new single-member Little Burton Farm ward comprising part of the existing Spearpoint ward (including the Little Burton Farm development site). The Council further proposed a single-member Bybrook ward, which would include most of the existing Bybrook ward together with the parts of Henwood and Queens wards that lie north of the M20. It would also include properties on the western side of Bybrook Road, together with Bybrook Court and Nine Acres from Bockhanger ward. Finally, the Council proposed a single-member Bockhanger ward comprising most of the existing Bockhanger ward, together with the north-western part of the existing Warren ward (except a small part of Westwell Lane to be included in Downs West ward).

54 Under the Borough Council's proposals the number of electors per councillor in Bockhanger, Bybrook, Kennington and Little Burton Farm wards would be 8 per cent above the average, 9 per cent above, 5 per cent above and 24 per cent below respectively (3 per cent below, 2 per cent below, 5 per cent below and 1 per cent below respectively by 2005).

55 The Liberal Democrats also proposed four wards broadly covering this area, each represented by a single member. They proposed a new Spearpoint ward which would comprise parts of the current Kennington Lees and Spearpoint wards. To the south, they also proposed a Little Burton ward with the western boundary following the back of Bybrook Road and the southern boundary following the River Stour. They also proposed a Bockhanger ward comprising the majority of the current ward, but also including the whole of Bybrook Road from Bybrook ward. Additionally, they proposed a Gore Hill ward covering a large part of the existing Warren ward. In each of these wards the number of electors represented by the councillor would vary by no more than 5 per cent by 2005.

56 We carefully considered both these proposals and noted that they would both provide excellent levels of electoral equality. However, we considered that the Borough Council's proposals would give better boundaries in this area, particularly as they utilised the M20 for the southern boundaries of the wards as far as possible. Additionally, having visited the area we considered that the ward pattern would provide a good reflection of the statutory criteria and would have the advantage of having been consulted on locally. We therefore adopted the Borough Council's proposals as our draft recommendations in this area.

57 At Stage Three the Borough Council supported our draft recommendations for this area while requesting a minor change to the Bockhanger/Bybrook ward boundary which would incorporate the whole of The Pasture in Bybrook ward. The number of electors per councillor would then be 7 per cent above the average in Bockhanger ward (5 per cent below in 2005) and 11 per cent above the average in Bybrook ward (1 per cent below in 2005). The Labour Party supported our recommendations for the proposed Kennington and Little Burton Farm wards, but proposed minor changes to the boundaries of Bybrook and Bockhanger wards. Under their proposals the number of electors per councillor in Bockhanger ward would be 8 per cent above the average (4 per cent below in 2005) and 5 per cent above the average in Bybrook ward (7 per cent below in 2005).

58 Having carefully considered the representations received, we have noted that the Labour Party's proposals do not improve electoral equality and so have decided to endorse our draft recommendation for Kennington and Little Burton Farm wards, as it would achieve good electoral equality and has received some local support. However, we have decided to move away from our draft recommendation and modify the proposed boundary between Bockhanger and Bybrook wards to include the whole of The Pasture in Bybrook ward.

59 Under our final recommendations, the number of electors per councillor in Bockhanger, Bybrook, Kennington and Little Burton Farm wards would be 7 per cent above, 11 per cent above, 5 per cent above and 24 per cent below the borough average respectively (5 per cent below, 1 per cent below, 5 per cent below and 1 per cent below in 2005). Our final recommendations are shown on the large map at the back of the report.

Ashford Central, Ashford Henwood, Ashford Queens and Ashford Victoria Park wards

60 The number of electors per councillor in the two-member Central ward is 2 per cent below the borough average (36 per cent above in 2005). In the single-member Henwood, Queens and Victoria Park wards the number of electors per councillor is 12 per cent below, 5 per cent below

and 22 per cent below the average respectively (1 per cent above, 2 per cent below and 28 per cent below in 2005).

61 At Stage One the Borough Council proposed three wards broadly covering this area. It proposed a two-member Queens ward covering part of the current Queens ward to the north of Albert Road and Somerset Road, part of Henwood ward (south of the M20), and the part of Warren ward to the south-east of Warren Lane. The Council also proposed a two-member Godinton ward, covering most of the current Central ward, with the exception of the area to the east of Forge Lane, West Street and Gasworks Lane but including the four significant development sites in the area. It further proposed a two-member Central ward, including the existing Victoria Park ward, part of Queens ward south of Albert Road, the part of the existing Central ward between Park Street and the Channel Tunnel railway line, part of Eastmead ward north of Lower Denmark Road and west of Beaver Road, and part of Musgrove ward east of Jemmett Road and north of Beaver Drive. Under the Borough Council's proposals the number of electors per councillor in Central, Godinton and Queens wards would be 10 per cent above, 26 per cent below and equal to the borough average respectively (6 per cent above, 8 per cent above and equal to the average by 2005).

62 The Liberal Democrats proposed three wards broadly covering this area, together with an alternative which would include separate Warren and Godinton wards. Specifically, they proposed a single-member Henwood ward covering most of the existing Henwood ward, together with part of the existing Queens and Central wards. They also proposed a Central ward comprising part of the current Central ward, situated entirely north of the Channel Tunnel railway line. In the north-west of the town they proposed a two-member Godinton ward covering much of the existing Warren and Central wards. Under their proposals electoral equality would be significantly improved, with the number of electors per councillor in each ward varying by no more than 1 per cent from the average in 2005.

63 Having carefully considered the representations received, we noted that both proposals would significantly improve electoral equality. Of particular note was the Liberal Democrats' proposal to utilise the Channel Tunnel railway as a boundary. However, having visited this part of the town we noted that both sides of the railway have a similar community identity, with Ashford International station acting as a focal point. Accordingly, we considered that the Borough Council's proposals, which included a Central ward crossing the railway line, provided a good reflection of the statutory criteria while improving electoral equality, and also had the advantage of having been consulted upon locally. Moreover, given that we were adopting the Borough Council's ward pattern to the north of this area, its proposals for these wards were compatible. Accordingly, we adopted the Borough Council's proposals for Central, Godinton and Queens wards as part of our draft recommendations.

64 Under our draft recommendations the number of electors per councillor in Central, Godinton and Queens wards would be 10 per cent above, 26 per cent below and equal to the borough average respectively (6 per cent above, 8 per cent above and equal to the average by 2005).

65 At Stage Three the Borough Council supported our draft recommendations for this area. However, in response to a request from Councillor Davidson that new wards should have new names, the Council requested that the proposed Central ward be called Victoria ward and the

proposed Queens ward be called Stour ward. The Labour Party proposed four wards in this area, and favoured utilising the railway line as a boundary rather than crossing it, as in the draft recommendations. Its two-member Godinton ward would be similar to that proposed but with its south-eastern corner transferred to a proposed two-member Queens ward, which would include the town centre, but not the existing Henwood ward. This single-member ward would be retained with its eastern boundary extended over the railway line to include a small part of the existing Waterside ward. The fourth ward proposed in this area would be Victoria ward, south of the railway line. Under these proposals the number of councillors per elector in Godington, Henwood, Queens and Victoria wards would be 38 per cent below the average, 10 per cent below, 5 per cent above and 2 per cent above respectively (2 per cent below, 1 per cent above, 4 per cent below and 2 per cent below in 2005).

66 We have given careful consideration to the evidence and representations received. We have noted the comments made by Kent County Council, Councillor Smyth (member for Ashford South Division), the Liberal Democrats and the Labour Party expressing concerns at Central ward crossing the railway line in our draft recommendations. Councillor Smyth objected on the grounds that the proposed ward “cuts across communities in a wholly illogical way”. The County Council and the Liberal Democrats regarded the railway as a clear dividing line between north and south Ashford. Having visited the area again we noted that both sides of the railway have similar community identity, with Ashford International station acting as a focal point. We see no reason to depart from our draft recommendations in the interest of community identity. Although the Labour Party’s proposals would achieve better electoral equality for this area than the draft proposals, this is achieved through having an extra ward in the centre of Ashford town which would mean a council size of 44. We have already stated our preference for a council of 43 members, as originally proposed by the Borough Council, the Labour Party and the Liberal Democrats, and see no reason to change this. Accordingly, we have decided to endorse our draft recommendations for this area, with the exception of changing the names of Central ward and Queens ward to Victoria ward and Stour ward respectively.

67 Under our final recommendations the number of electors per councillor in Godington, Stour and Victoria wards would be 26 per cent below, equal to the average and 10 per cent above respectively (8 per cent above, equal to the average and 6 per cent above in 2005). Our final recommendations are shown on the large map at the back of the report.

Ashford South Willesborough, Ashford Twelve Acres, Ashford Waterside, Ashford Willesborough Lees and Ashford Windmill wards

68 The number of electors per councillor in the single-member wards of South Willesborough, Twelve Acres, Waterside, Willesborough Lees and Windmill is 36 per cent above, 16 per cent below, 24 per cent below, 102 per cent above and 12 per cent below the average for the borough respectively (42 per cent above, 25 per cent below, 32 per cent below, 84 per cent above and 22 per cent below in 2005).

69 At Stage One the Borough Council proposed four new wards broadly covering this area. It proposed a new two-member North Willesborough ward to include the whole of the existing Waterside and Windmill wards and most of the existing Willesborough Lees ward, except the part that lies south of Hythe Road, which it included in Sevington ward, so that all the area north of

Bad Munstereifel Road would form part of a new single-member Highfield ward. The Council also proposed a revised single-member South Willesborough ward which would include most of the current ward south of the stream running east/west adjacent to Maunsell Place, Baxendale Court and Bentley Road together with transferring Boys Hall Road and Ash Meadows from Willesborough Lees ward to South Willesborough ward. The remainder of South Willesborough ward would be merged with the existing Twelve Acres ward to form a new single-member Newtown ward.

70 Under the Borough Council's proposals the number of electors per councillor in Highfield, Newtown, North Willesborough and South Willesborough wards would be 8 per cent above the borough average, 9 per cent above, 11 per cent above and 13 per cent below respectively (4 per cent below, 3 per cent below, 1 per cent above and 4 per cent below in 2005).

71 The Liberal Democrats proposed a two-member North Willesborough ward covering much of the current Willesborough Lees ward and part of Windmill ward, but also put forward an alternative of two single-member wards: a Windmill ward covering most of Willesborough Lees and Windmill wards, and a North Willesborough ward covering the existing Waterside ward. They also proposed a new single-member Highfield ward similar to that proposed by the Borough Council, but also including Boys Hall Road. They further proposed a two-member South Willesborough ward covering the existing South Willesborough and Twelve Acres wards, together with an alternative for two single-member wards covering these areas. Under the Liberal Democrats' proposals for Highfield, North Willesborough and South Willesborough wards the electoral variances would be no more than 5 per cent by 2005.

72 In arriving at our draft recommendations we carefully considered the representations received for this area and noted that both proposals would provide significant improvements to electoral equality and that there were significant similarities between them. We considered that, while under both proposals the wards would cross either the M20 or the Channel Tunnel railway in this area, those put forward by Borough Council would include whole community areas and therefore provide a coherent ward pattern, which would meet the statutory criteria. Moreover, we noted that the Borough Council's proposals were consulted on locally. We therefore adopted the Borough Council's proposals for four wards covering the area as part of our draft recommendations.

73 Under our draft recommendations the number of electors per councillor in Highfield, Newtown, North Willesborough and South Willesborough wards would be 8 per cent above the borough average, 9 per cent above, 11 per cent above and 13 per cent below respectively (4 per cent below, 3 per cent below, 1 per cent above and 4 per cent below in 2005).

74 At Stage Three the Borough Council supported our proposals for these wards, but requested that the proposed Newtown ward be renamed Aylesford Green ward, an amendment supported by the Labour Party and the Liberal Democrats. The Labour Party also broadly supported the draft recommendations with a small amendment, namely that its proposed North Willesborough ward would lose the properties in the existing Waterside ward, which it instead transferred to its proposed Henwood ward. The Liberal Democrats also broadly supported the proposals. Having given careful consideration to the views we have received in this area, we note the agreement between the parties and so are confirming our draft recommendations for this area, while changing the name of Newtown ward to Aylesford Green ward.

75 Under our final recommendations the number of electors per councillor would be 9 per cent above the average in Aylesford Green ward (3 per cent below in 2005), 8 per cent above in Highfield ward (4 per cent below in 2005), 11 per cent above in North Willesborough (1 per cent above in 2005) and 13 per cent below the average in South Willesborough (4 per cent below in 2005). Our final recommendations are illustrated on the large map at the back of the report.

Ashford Brookfield, Ashford Eastmead, Ashford Hampden, Ashford Musgrove, Ashford Singleton, Ashford Stanhope and Ashford Woolreeds wards

76 The number of electors per councillor for the single-member wards of Brookfield, Eastmead, Hampden, Musgrove and Woolreeds is 14 per cent below, 2 per cent above, 29 per cent below, 19 per cent below and 19 per cent below the borough average respectively (24 per cent below, 5 per cent above, 36 per cent below, 28 per cent below and 28 per cent below in 2005). The number of electors per councillor in the two-member Singleton ward and the two-member Stanhope ward (covering the parish of the same name) is 32 per cent below and 22 per cent below the average respectively (38 per cent below and 31 per cent below in 2005).

77 At Stage One the Borough Council proposed three wards broadly covering this area. It proposed a single-member Eastmead ward which would comprise part of the current Eastmead ward, bounded by Beaver Road, Denmark Road and Norman Road, together with the existing Hampden ward, less a small area around Beaver Court which would be transferred to its proposed two-member Beaver ward. Beaver ward would also include the existing Brookfield and Singleton wards, together with part of Musgrove ward bounded by Jemmet Road to the east. Finally the Council proposed a revised single-member Stanhope ward, with the boundary following Stanhope Road, thereby including the Speldhurst Close area in the proposed Washford ward (discussed below).

78 Under the Borough Council's proposals the number of electors per councillor in Beaver, Eastmead and Stanhope wards would be 17 per cent above the average, 12 per cent above and 18 per cent above respectively (5 per cent above, 1 per cent above and 5 per cent above by 2005).

79 The Liberal Democrats proposed four wards broadly covering this area. They proposed a single-member Eastmead ward comprising parts of the current Eastmead and Hampden wards. They also proposed a single-member Victoria Park ward covering Musgrove ward and parts of Eastmead and Victoria Park wards. Additionally, they proposed a two-member Stanhope ward, covering Stanhope ward and parts of Hampden and Woolreeds wards, and a two-member Brookfield ward comprising the existing Brookfield ward and parts of Woolreeds and Victoria Park wards. They also proposed an alternative of two single-member wards for the Brookfield area, with a Brookfield ward covering the northern area and Beaver Green ward covering the southern area. Under the Liberal Democrats' proposals for Brookfield, Eastmead, Stanhope and Victoria Park wards, there would be no electoral variance greater than 4 per cent by 2005.

80 We carefully considered the proposals we received for this part of the town and noted that they each provided considerable improvements to electoral equality. However, we noted that the Borough Council's proposals were more generally based on existing whole wards. In particular, we considered that its proposal to retain most of the Stanhope area in a single ward would be a good reflection of community identity and this, in turn, would have a bearing on the ward pattern

for the neighbouring areas. Moreover, the Borough Council's proposals were subject to local consultation. We therefore adopted the Borough Council's proposals for this area as part of our draft recommendations.

81 Under our draft recommendations the number of electors per councillor in Beaver, Eastmead and Stanhope wards would be 17 per cent above the average, 13 per cent above and 18 per cent above respectively (5 per cent above, 2 per cent above and 5 per cent above by 2005).

82 At Stage Three the Borough Council supported our draft recommendations for this area, but requested that the proposed Eastmead ward be renamed Norman ward, a suggestion supported by the Labour Party and the Liberal Democrats. The Labour Party proposed alternative boundaries for the three wards, with Stanhope ward losing its south-eastern fringe to Norman ward, which would in turn lose its north-western fringe to a proposed Victoria ward covering central Ashford south of the railway line. The Labour Party's proposed Beaver ward would be larger than the Council's, taking in part of the Council's Central (Victoria) ward. The Liberal Democrats had no new proposals covering this area. Under the Labour Party's proposals the number of electors per councillor in Beaver, Norman and Stanhope wards would be 16 per cent above the borough average, 9 per cent above and 12 per cent above respectively (4 per cent above, 2 per cent below and equal to the average in 2005).

83 We have given careful consideration to the views which we have received for this area. We see little to be gained in terms of electoral equality or community identity from the Labour Party's proposals. Moreover, given that we are endorsing our draft recommendations for the centre of Ashford town, the draft proposals for these wards are compatible. We therefore confirm our draft recommendations for these wards as final. Under our final recommendations the number of electors per councillor in Beaver ward would be 17 per cent above the average (5 per cent above in 2005), 13 per cent above in Norman ward (2 per cent above in 2005) and 18 per cent above in Stanhope ward (5 per cent above in 2005). Our final recommendations are illustrated on the large map at the back of the report.

Outside Ashford Town

Rolvenden, Tenterden East, Tenterden St Michaels, Tenterden South East and Tenterden West wards

84 The number of electors per councillor for the existing single-member wards of Rolvenden (comprising the parishes of Newenden and Rolvenden), Tenterden East, Tenterden South East, Tenterden St Michaels and Tenterden West is 13 per cent below, equal to, 6 per cent below, 23 per cent above and 30 per cent below the borough average respectively (22 per cent below, 1 per cent below, 12 per cent below, 10 per cent above and 38 per cent below the average in 2005). The four Tenterden wards together cover the area of Tenterden Town Council.

85 At Stage One both the Borough Council and the Liberal Democrats proposed the same pattern of four single-member wards for this area. First, both proposed no change to Tenterden St Michaels ward. They proposed that part of the current Tenterden West ward be included with Rolvenden and Newenden parishes to form a new Rolvenden & Tenterden West ward. They also proposed new Tenterden North and Tenterden South wards which would include parts of the

current Tenterden South East and Tenterden East wards. Under these proposals good levels of electoral equality would be achieved, with the number of electors per councillor varying by 6 per cent or less in each ward by 2005.

86 In considering the proposals from the Borough Council and the Liberal Democrats we noted the good electoral equality achieved under the new warding arrangements for the Tenterden area and, in the light of the consensus between these two proposals, together with the fact that they have been the subject of local consultation, we adopted them as part of our draft recommendations, with some minor amendments to the boundary between Tenterden North and Tenterden South wards to ensure that it followed recognisable ground features, which would not affect any electors.

87 Under our draft recommendations the number of electors per councillor in Rolvenden & Tenterden West, St Michaels, Tenterden North and Tenterden South wards would be 10 per cent above the average, 8 per cent above, 4 per cent below and 2 per cent above respectively (1 per cent below, 4 per cent below, 6 per cent below and 5 per cent below respectively in 2005).

88 At Stage Three we received no opposition to our draft recommendations. Tenterden Town Council expressed views concerning the proposed parish wards, which are discussed later, while Rolvenden Parish Council said it had no comment to make on the proposal to include the parishes of Newenden and Rolvenden with part of Tenterden West, but considered the loss of the name of the parish of Newenden from the list of wards as “very unfortunate and sad.” We received no further representations regarding our proposals for Tenterden and we have therefore decided to confirm our draft recommendations in this area as final. Our final recommendations for the Tenterden area are illustrated on Map A2.

Boughton Aluph, Chilham, Great Chart and Hothfield wards

89 The number of electors per councillor for the single-member wards of Boughton Aluph (comprising the parishes of Boughton Aluph and Eastwell), Chilham (comprising the parishes of Chilham, Crundale and Godmersham), Great Chart (covering the parish of Great Chart with Singleton) and Hothfield (comprising the parishes of Challock, Hothfield and Westwell) is 1 per cent below, 10 per cent above, 58 per cent above and 21 per cent below the average for the borough respectively (35 per cent above, equal to, 100 per cent above and 28 per cent below the average in 2005).

90 At Stage One the Borough Council proposed that part of Kennington Lees ward be included with the current Boughton Aluph ward in a new single-member Boughton Aluph & Eastwell ward, which would include the Goat Lees development site. It also proposed a new single-member Downs South ward comprising the parishes of Chilham, Crundale and Godmersham, and a single-member Downs West ward comprising the parishes of Challock, Hothfield and Westwell, together with a small part of Westwell Lane from Ashford Warren ward. The Council also proposed a two-member Great Chart & Singleton ward which would include most of the current Great Chart and Singleton wards, although a small area in the south, covering part of the future Brisley Farm development site, would be included in a new Washford ward, described in paragraph 101 below. Under the Borough Council’s proposals the number of electors per councillor in Boughton Aluph & Eastwell, Downs South, Downs West and Great Chart &

Singleton wards would be 38 per cent below the average, 7 per cent above, 8 per cent above and 9 per cent below respectively (4 per cent below, 3 per cent below, 2 per cent below and 7 per cent above respectively in 2005).

91 The Liberal Democrats proposed that the parishes of Challock, Eastwell, Molash, Westwell and part of Boughton Aluph should form a new single-member North Downs ward, with the remainder of the parish being included with part of Ashford town. They also proposed that the parishes of Charing, Little Chart, Hothfield and Pluckley should form a new two-member Calehill ward. They also proposed that the parishes of Brook, Chilham, Crundale, Godmersham and Wye with Hinxhill should form a new two-member Stour Valley ward. However, they stated that they supported the Council's two-member Great Chart & Singleton ward. Under the Liberal Democrats' proposals good levels of electoral equality would be achieved by 2005, with none of their proposed wards varying by more than 7 per cent from the average. The Liberal Democrats stated that their proposed Calehill ward "recreates the ancient hundred of Calehill, centred on Calehill Park [and] brings together a number of communities sharing problems along the M20/CTRL".

92 Boughton Aluph & Eastwell Parish Council objected to the Borough Council's proposal to include the parish with part of the urban area. It considered that the parish could form a ward on its own, or a two-member ward with neighbouring parishes.

93 In considering the proposals from the Borough Council and the Liberal Democrats, we noted that both would provide good levels of electoral equality. However, in this mainly rural area we were persuaded that a pattern of predominantly single-member wards would provide the best reflection of the statutory criteria. Moreover, we considered that they were, in part, determined by proposals which incorporated the areas under development. In looking at the specific configurations of these wards, we considered that the proposal for new Washford and Boughton Aluph & Eastwell wards, which would both cover large areas under development, and the retention of Wye ward were good reflections of community identities in the areas concerned.

94 Therefore, having carefully considered the representations received, we adopted the Borough Council's proposals for Boughton Aluph & Eastwell, Downs West, Downs South, Great Chart & Singleton wards as part of our draft recommendations, with a minor amendment to the boundary of Washford ward, in the southern area of Great Chart with Singleton parish, to ensure that the ward boundary followed recognisable ground features and that there were sufficient electors to form a parish ward in the area.

95 Under our draft recommendations the number of electors per councillor in Boughton Aluph & Eastwell, Downs South, Downs West and Great Chart & Singleton wards would be 38 per cent below the average, 7 per cent above, 8 per cent above and 9 per cent below respectively (4 per cent below, 3 per cent below, 2 per cent below and 7 per cent above respectively in 2005).

96 At Stage Three the Borough Council, in response to a request from Councillor Maltby, member for Great Chart ward, proposed that the ward of Great Chart & Singleton revert to its existing boundary and become two-single member wards of Great Chart with Singleton North and Singleton South. The boundaries of Singleton South ward would be the Beaver ward boundary in the east, Chart Road in the south, Bucksford Lane, Singleton Hill in the west and part of

Bucksford Lane in the north. The Borough Council maintained that there was no need to amend the boundary with the proposed Washford ward as there were no plans to extend new building development into Great Chart with Singleton parish ward at this stage. This amendment was supported by the Liberal Democrats and both Great Chart with Singleton and Kingsnorth parish councils. The Labour Party proposed a two-member Great Chart and Singleton ward utilising the existing ward boundary. Under the Borough Council's Stage Three proposal the number of electors per councillor would be 24 per cent below the borough average (7 per cent above in 2005) in Great Chart with Singleton North ward and 6 per cent above (8 per cent above in 2005) in Singleton South ward.

97 Elsewhere, while supporting our other draft recommendations, the Borough Council proposed changing the name of Downs South ward to Downs North. The Labour Party supported the proposals for Boughton Aluph & Eastwell, Downs South and Downs West wards. Councillor Fletcher (ward member for Hothfield Parish Council) found the proposal for a Downs West ward "readily acceptable", saying that Westwell has much in common with Hothfield and Challock. A Challock resident was opposed to the proposals on the grounds that Challock has no sociological or geographical link with the other two parishes. There were six objections to the proposal for a Boughton Aluph & Eastwell ward from the parish council, the borough councillor, two parish councillors and two residents. All were opposed to the parish being joined to an urban area. The point was made that when this area was last subject to a review the opposite view was taken, namely that the urban area would be better linked with Kennington. While we note this view, we are aware that there has been significant change since 1975. In this review we have to take into account proposed development in the area. In the light of this, bearing in mind the need to balance electoral quality with the statutory criteria, we remain of the opinion that the proposals put forward in the draft recommendations are good reflections of community identity.

98 Having given careful consideration to the evidence and the representations received, we have decided to confirm our draft recommendations for Boughton Aluph & Eastwell, Downs South and Downs West wards, while accepting the proposed change of name from Downs South to Downs North. We propose incorporating in our final recommendations the amendment from the Borough Council, supported by the Liberal Democrats and the two parish councils, for two single-member wards, instead of a two-member Great Chart & Singleton ward, and that the boundary with Washford ward should be the existing boundary. This has necessitated a small change to the boundary between Washford ward and Weald South ward, which does not affect any electors.

99 Under our final recommendations the number of electors per councillor would be 38 per cent below the borough average in Boughton Aluph & Eastwell ward (4 per cent below in 2005), 7 per cent above in Downs North ward (3 per cent below in 2005), 8 per cent above in Downs West ward (2 per cent below in 2005), 24 per cent below in Great Chart with Singleton North ward (7 per cent above in 2005) and 6 per cent above in Singleton South ward (8 per cent above in 2005). Our recommendations for these wards are shown on Map 2 and the large map at the back of this report.

Aldington, Brabourne, Hamstreet, Kingsnorth, Mersham and Wye wards

100 The number of electors represented by the councillor for the single-member wards of Aldington (comprising the parishes of Aldington, Bilsington and Bonnington), Brabourne (comprising the parishes of Brabourne, Brook and Hastingleigh), Hamstreet (comprising the parishes of Orlestone, Ruckinge and Warehorne), Kingsnorth (comprising the parishes of Kingsnorth and Shadoxhurst), Mersham (comprising the parishes Mersham, Sevington and Smeeth, together with part of Wye with Hinxhill parish) and Wye (covering most of Wye with Hinxhill parish) is 28 per cent below, 3 per cent below, 25 per cent above, 205 per cent above, 13 per cent above and 23 per cent above the borough average respectively. By 2005 there would be no significant improvement in these wards, and in Kingsnorth ward electoral equality would worsen further, varying by 314 per cent, due to the continuing extensive development in the area.

101 At Stage One the Borough Council proposed significant changes to the ward pattern in the area around Kingsnorth parish. In order to reflect the new development sites in the Park Farm area, the Council proposed two new single-member wards of Park Farm North and Park Farm South. It also proposed that the Washford Farm part of Kingsnorth parish, containing an area identified for new development, be included in a new single-member Washford ward with part of Great Chart with Singleton parish and part of Stanhope parish around Speldhurst Close. The Council further proposed that the Stubbs Cross part of Kingsnorth parish be included in a new two-member Weald South ward with the parishes of Orlestone, Shadoxhurst, Warehorne and Woodchurch. In addition, it proposed that the Kingsnorth village part of Kingsnorth parish be included in a new single-member Weald East ward with Mersham parish, part of Wye with Hinxhill parish and the part of Sevington parish situated south-east of the Ring Road.

102 In the rural eastern part of the borough, the Borough Council proposed a new two-member Saxon Shore ward, comprising the parishes of Aldington, Bilsington, Bonnington, Brabourne, Brook, Hastingleigh, Ruckinge and Smeeth. It also proposed no change to the single-member Wye ward.

103 Under the Council's proposals the number of electors per councillor in Park Farm North, Park Farm South, Saxon Shore, Washford, Weald East, Weald South and Wye wards would be 28 per cent below, 67 per cent below, 10 per cent above, 18 per cent below, 16 per cent below, 5 per cent above and 8 per cent above the borough average respectively (4 per cent below, 3 per cent below, equal to, 5 per cent below, 7 per cent above, 5 per cent above and 1 per cent below the average in 2005).

104 The Liberal Democrats agreed with the Borough Council's proposals for Park Farm North and Park Farm South wards. They proposed a new two-member Hamstreet ward combining the parishes of Orleston, Shadoxhurst and Warehorne together with the Stubbs Cross and Washford Farm parts of Kingsnorth parish. Additionally, they proposed a new two-member Saxon Shore ward, comprising the parishes of Aldington, Bonnington, Bilsington, Ruckinge and Sevington together with the Kingsnorth village part of Kingsnorth parish, and a single-member Brabourne ward including the parishes of Brabourne, Hastingleigh and Smeeth. Finally in this area, the Liberal Democrats proposed a two-member Stour Valley ward, comprising the parishes of Brook, Chilham, Crundale, Godmersham and Wye. Under the Liberal Democrats' proposals good

electoral equality would be achieved, with none of the wards varying by more than 6 per cent from the average by 2005.

105 Ruckinge and Warehorne parish councils objected to the Borough Council's proposals as they affected their respective parishes since they would include parts of the current Hamstreet ward in neighbouring wards. A resident of Smeeth supported a single-member ward covering Smeeth which, he stated, had been proposed by Smeeth Parish Council.

106 We carefully considered these options in detail and noted that there was a degree of consensus regarding the ward pattern on the periphery of the town in the areas covered by new development. Having visited the areas concerned, we considered that the Borough Council's and the Liberal Democrats' proposals provided a good balance between achieving improvements to electoral equality and reflecting the statutory criteria. In particular, we were reassured that, although there would be significant imbalances in these wards initially, large-scale development was already taking place on the sites concerned. For the wards outside the areas affected by the new development, we noted that the configurations proposed were, in part, dictated by the proposals for the wards which would contain new housing. However, in evaluating the Borough Council's proposals, we considered that the groupings of parishes which it had proposed would secure improvements to electoral equality, reflect community identities and provide convenient and effective local government. In particular, in the cases where the Council had proposed single-member wards, we considered that these provided a better reflection of the statutory criteria than the larger two-member wards proposed by the Liberal Democrats. Moreover, we considered that the Borough Council's proposal to retain Wye ward offered a better balance between the statutory criteria than the Liberal Democrats' proposal, which would link Wye with neighbouring parishes.

107 We therefore proposed adopting the Borough Council's proposals for this area as part of our draft recommendations, with minor amendments to ensure that boundaries followed recognisable ground features. Under our draft recommendations the number of electors per councillor in Park Farm North, Park Farm South, Saxon Shore, Washford, Weald East, Weald South and Wye wards would be 28 per cent below, 67 per cent below, 10 per cent above, 17 per cent below, 16 per cent below, 13 per cent above and 8 per cent above the average respectively (4 per cent below, 3 per cent below, equal to, 4 per cent below, 7 per cent above, 5 per cent above and 1 per cent below the average in 2005).

108 At Stage Three the Borough Council drew to our attention an anomaly with regard to Wye ward, namely that their proposal at Stage One was for the whole of Wye with Hinxhill parish to be retained in Wye ward. This proposal was based on an understanding that the southern boundary of Wye with Hinxhill parish was coterminous with the ward boundary, which has been regarded as the boundary by all political parties in the borough of Ashford. We are happy to accept this and, in view of there being no new proposals at Stage Three regarding this ward, to make it part of our final recommendations.

109 The Labour Party proposed extending Washford ward to the west to include part of Great Chart & Singleton ward. Our recommendations for Great Chart & Singleton ward have been discussed above. Kingsnorth Parish Council agreed with the proposal to create the two single-member wards of Park Farm North and Park Farm South and to the inclusion of Kingsnorth Village in Weald East ward. It was opposed to part of the existing Great Chart ward and

Speldhurst Close being included in the proposed Washford Farm ward, believing they should be in Great Chart & Singleton ward, and to Stubbs Cross being included in the proposed Weald South ward, believing it should be included with Kingsnorth Village in Weald East ward. When deciding on the final recommendations for the Great Chart and Singleton wards, we noted the parish council's views. While agreeing with them concerning retaining the existing ward boundary between the Great Chart & Singleton and Washford wards we cannot agree that including Speldhurst Close in Great Chart with Singleton ward would best reflect community identities as it is separated from that ward by part of Washford ward, with which it shares a similar profile. Similarly, we consider the draft recommendations for the rest of the Washford and Weald East wards would secure improvements to electoral equality, reflect community identities and provide convenient and effective local government. For these reasons we are endorsing our draft recommendations for these wards as part of our final recommendations.

110 All of the parish councils in the proposed two-member ward of Saxon Shore were opposed to this part of our draft recommendations. One resident also expressed opposition. Brabourne Parish Council favoured the Liberal Democrats' proposal for a single-member ward covering the parishes of Brabourne, Hastingleigh and Smeeth. This was supported by Smeeth Parish Council which also stated it was "totally opposed to any splitting of the parish". Mersham & Sevington Parish Council was opposed to the parish being divided between two borough wards, but otherwise considered the proposals to be reasonable. Aldington & Bonnington Parish Council supported the concept of a Saxon Shore ward but queried the appropriateness of its size, favouring two single-member wards, which would necessitate dividing Smeeth parish. Ruckinge Parish Council preferred that Hamstreet and Aldington wards remained as single-member wards. Alternatively it proposed a two-member ward comprising the parishes of Aldington & Bonnington, Ruckinge, Hamstreet (Orlestone) and Warehorne and a single-member ward comprising the parishes of Smeeth, Hastingleigh, Brabourne and Brook. Orlestone Parish Council opposed the break-up of the current Orlestone ward, stating that Hamstreet provides facilities for Warehorne and Ruckinge. Warehorne Parish Council favoured staying in the same ward as Orlestone but was opposed to the removal of Ruckinge. This view was supported by Councillor Davison.

111 We have given careful consideration to the views expressed during our consultation period and have carefully looked into the possibility of two single-member wards for the area covered by the proposed Saxon Shore ward. In order to achieve reasonable electoral equality we would have to divide Smeeth parish, a move opposed by Smeeth Parish Council. We are unable to consider any area in isolation, but must consider the impact of any changes on the borough as a whole. To change the boundaries of the proposed ward and achieve good electoral equality would necessitate changing the boundaries of other adjacent wards. Our conclusion is that the proposal contained in our draft recommendations gives the best balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria currently available. For these reasons we are endorsing our draft recommendation for Saxon Shore ward as part of our final recommendations.

112 The only comments we received concerning the proposed Weald South ward were from Orlestone and Warehorne parish councils about Ruckinge, as described above. We are therefore confirming our draft recommendations for this ward as final.

113 Under our final recommendations the number of electors per councillor in Park Farm North, Park Farm South, Saxon Shore, Washford, Weald East, Weald South and Wye wards would be 28 per cent below, 67 per cent below, 10 per cent above, 18 per cent below, 16 per cent below, 13 per cent above and 8 per cent above the borough average respectively (4 per cent below, 3 per cent below, equal to the average, 5 per cent below, 7 per cent above, 5 per cent above and 1 per cent below the average in 2005). Our final recommendations for these wards are shown on Map 2 and the large map at the back of this report.

Appledore, Wittersham and Woodchurch wards

114 The number of electors per councillor for the single-member wards of Appledore (comprising the parishes of Appledore and Kenardington), Wittersham (comprising the parishes of Stone-cum-Ebony and Wittersham) and Woodchurch (covering Woodchurch parish) is 51 per cent below, 21 per cent below and 2 per cent below the borough average respectively (55 per cent below, 27 per cent below and 12 per cent below in 2005).

115 At Stage One the Borough Council proposed a new single-member Isle of Oxney ward comprising the parishes of Appledore, Kenardington, Stone-cum-Ebony and Wittersham. Woodchurch parish would be included in a two-member Weald South ward together with the parishes of Orlestone, Warehorne and Shadoxhurst, and the Stubbs Cross part of Kingsnorth parish, as described in paragraph 101 above. Under the Borough Council's proposals the number of electors per councillor in Isle of Oxney ward would be 13 per cent above the average (3 per cent above in 2005).

116 The Liberal Democrats agreed with the Borough Council's proposal for Isle of Oxney ward. They, however, proposed a two-member Weald Central ward, comprising the parishes of Bethersden, High Halden and Woodchurch, with an electoral variance of 1 per cent by 2005, stating that it was not possible to create single-member wards in this area "unless a very artificial line was drawn, the effect of which would have been to split Bethersden". The Liberal Democrats also proposed an alternative configuration for Hamstreet ward, comprising Orlestone, Shadoxhurst and Wareham together with the Stubbs Cross part of Kingsnorth parish, as described in the above section. We also received representations from Appledore and Kenardington parish councils, who expressed support for the Borough Council's proposals.

117 Having considered the representations received we considered that, on balance, the Borough Council's proposal for Isle of Oxney ward provided the best balance between improving electoral equality and the statutory criteria. In particular, we noted that this proposal was in part dictated by its proposed warding configurations affecting Kingsnorth parish, where substantial new development is taking place. We also noted that its proposed Isle of Oxney ward was supported by the Liberal Democrats and two of the parish councils affected. We therefore proposed adopting the agreed proposal from the Borough Council and the Liberal Democrats for Isle of Oxney ward as part of our draft recommendations. The number of electors per councillor for Isle of Oxney ward would be 13 per cent above the borough average (3 per cent above in 2005).

118 At Stage Three Appledore, Kenardington and Stone-cum-Ebony parish councils supported our proposals; Wittersham Parish Council, while supporting the joining of Wittersham and Appledore, thought that Kenardington would be better included in Weald South ward since it was

some distance from Appledore. After considering this point we concluded that our draft recommendations continued to provide the best balance between improving electoral equality and the statutory criteria, and so are endorsing them as our final recommendation for this area. The number of electors per councillor for Isle of Oxney ward would be 13 per cent above the average (3 per cent above in 2005). Our final recommendations are illustrated on Map 2.

Bethersden, Biddenden, Charing, High Halden, Pluckley and Smarden wards

119 The number of electors per councillor for the single-member wards of Bethersden, Biddenden, High Halden (each covering the parish of the same name), Pluckley (comprising the parishes of Little Chart and Pluckley) and Smarden (comprising the parishes of Egerton and Smarden) is 25 per cent below, 24 per cent above, 25 per cent below, 35 per cent below and 19 per cent above the borough average respectively (32 per cent below, 12 per cent above, 31 per cent below, 41 per cent below and 9 per cent above in 2005). The number of electors per councillor in the two-member Charing ward (covering Charing parish) is 29 per cent below the average (35 per cent below in 2005).

120 At Stage One the Borough Council, supported by the Liberal Democrats, proposed retaining the current single-member Biddenden ward together with the current composition of the single-member Smarden ward, although both agreed that this latter ward should be renamed Weald North. The Borough Council also proposed a two-member Weald Central ward comprising the parishes of Bethersden, High Halden, Little Chart and Pluckley together with Charing Heath parish ward of Charing parish. The Borough Council also proposed a single-member Charing ward, comprising Charing parish ward of Charing parish only.

121 Under the Borough Council's proposals the number of electors per councillor in Biddenden, Charing, Weald Central and Weald North wards would be 9 per cent above the average, 6 per cent above, 4 per cent above and 5 per cent above respectively (2 per cent below, 2 per cent below, 6 per cent below and 5 per cent below respectively in 2005).

122 The Liberal Democrats supported the Council's proposal for Biddenden but proposed a new two-member Weald Central ward and a new two-member Calehill ward, which would include the whole of Charing parish in one ward.

123 In the light of the good levels of electoral equality achieved and the consensus between the Borough Council and the Liberal Democrats, we adopted the Borough Council's proposals for Biddenden and Weald North wards as part of our draft recommendations. Having carefully considered the proposals received for the remainder of this area, we considered that the Borough Council's configuration, which would lead to the inclusion of the two Charing parish wards in different borough wards, would not adversely affect community identity in the area. In fact, having visited the area, we noted that the two communities of Charing and Charing Heath are separate, and accordingly each has its own community identity. Moreover, we were unable to look at specific areas in isolation but aim to achieve the best balance between achieving electoral equality and reflecting the statutory criteria throughout the borough. The Liberal Democrats had stated that their proposed Weald Central ward "brings together three large Wealden villages with much in common. The resultant ward is rather large, but because the shape is fairly square the distances are rather less than in some other two-member wards." However, in the light of our

proposals elsewhere, the Borough Council's proposals for Charing and Weald Central wards would help facilitate a coherent ward pattern in this and the surrounding area. We therefore adopted them as part of our draft recommendations, with minor amendments to ensure boundaries followed recognisable ground features.

124 Under our draft recommendations the number of electors per councillor in Biddenden, Charing, Weald Central and Weald North wards would be 9 per cent above the average, 6 per cent above, 4 per cent above and 5 per cent above respectively (2 per cent below, 2 per cent below, 6 per cent below and 5 per cent below respectively in 2005).

125 At Stage Three the Labour Party supported our recommendations. Bethersden Parish Council opposed the proposed Weald Central ward, preferring a smaller area with one councillor. Charing Parish Council was opposed to Charing Heath being part of the proposed Weald Central ward, stressing the close links with Charing. If Charing Heath could not remain in the same ward as Charing, the parish council would prefer it to be part of Weald North ward. Councillor Brannan (Bethersden) was opposed to the proposed Weald Central ward, and put forward an alternative proposal for single-member wards for Charing, Egerton/Pluckley/Little Chart, High Halden/Smarden and Bethersden/Great Chart, and also for two single-member Singleton wards. Six Bethersden residents and a resident of Pluckley expressed opposition to the proposed Weald Central ward on the grounds of size and electoral representation. A resident of Biddenden approved of the draft recommendation for Biddenham ward.

126 We have given careful thought to the representations received. While understanding the strength of feeling of those who wish to retain a pattern of single-member wards in the area, we are unable to achieve the necessary balance between electoral equality and community identity with single-member wards unless a number of parishes were to be divided between borough wards. Councillor Brannan's proposals would necessitate variances in electoral equality of over 14 per cent and 11 per cent in 2005. There would also be large variances if Charing Heath became part of either Charing ward or Weald North ward. We do not consider there are grounds, within the scope of this review, to make changes to our draft recommendations. Consequently, we are confirming them as our final recommendations.

127 Under our final recommendations the number of electors per councillor in Biddenden, Charing, Weald Central and Weald North wards would be 9 per cent above the average, 6 per cent above, 4 per cent above and 5 per cent above respectively (2 per cent below, 2 per cent below, 6 per cent below and 5 per cent below respectively in 2005). Our final recommendations are illustrated on Map 2.

Electoral Cycle

128 At Stage One we received no representations proposing a change to the electoral cycle of the borough. Accordingly, we made no recommendation for change to the present system of whole-council elections every four years.

129 At Stage Three no further comments were received to the contrary, and we confirm our draft recommendation as final.

Conclusions

130 Having considered carefully all the representations and evidence received in response to our consultation report, we have decided substantially to endorse our draft recommendations, subject to the following amendments:

- renaming Central, Downs South, Eastmead, Newtown and Queens wards Victoria, Downs North, Norman, Aylesford Green and Stour respectively;
- changing the two-member Great Chart & Singleton ward to two single-member wards of Great Chart with Singleton North and Singleton South;
- including the whole of The Pasture in Bybrook ward, rather than Bockhanger ward.

131 We conclude that, in Ashford:

- there should be a reduction in council size from 49 to 43;
- there should be 35 wards, 10 fewer than at present;
- the boundaries of 42 of the existing wards should be modified;
- the Council should continue to hold whole-council elections every four years.

132 Figure 4 shows the impact of our final recommendations on electoral equality, comparing them with the current arrangements, based on 2000 and 2005 electorate figures.

Figure 4: Comparison of Current and Recommended Electoral Arrangements

	2000 electorate		2005 forecast electorate	
	Current arrangements	Final recommendations	Current arrangements	Final recommendations
Number of councillors	49	43	49	43
Number of wards	45	35	45	35
Average number of electors per councillor	1,571	1,791	1,763	2,009
Number of wards with a variance more than 10 per cent from the average	34	16	38	0
Number of wards with a variance more than 20 per cent from the average	23	6	29	0

133 As Figure 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 34 to 16, with six wards varying by more than 20 per cent from the borough average. This level of electoral equality would improve further in 2005, with no wards varying by more than 10 per cent from the average. We conclude that our recommendations would best meet the need for electoral equality, having regard to the statutory criteria.

Final Recommendation

Ashford Borough Council should comprise 43 councillors serving 35 wards, as detailed and named in Figures 1 and 2, and illustrated on Map 2 and in Appendix A, including the large map inside the back cover. The Council should continue to hold whole-council elections every four years.

Parish and Town Council Electoral Arrangements

134 In undertaking reviews of electoral arrangements we are required to comply as far as is reasonably practicable with the provisions set out in Schedule 11 to the 1972 Local Government Act. The Schedule provides that if a parish is to be divided between different borough wards it must also be divided into parish wards, so that each parish ward lies wholly within a single ward of the borough. Accordingly, in our draft recommendations report we proposed consequential changes to the warding arrangements for the parishes of Great Chart with Singleton, Kingsnorth, Sevington, Stanhope and Tenterden to reflect the proposed borough wards.

135 The parish of Great Chart with Singleton is currently served by 11 councillors and is not warded. In its submission the Borough Council proposed that the parish be included in two borough wards: Great Chart & Singleton and Washford. As this proposal formed part of our draft recommendations, we proposed that Great Chart with Singleton parish be divided into two parish wards, Chilmington Green East parish ward and Singleton parish ward, represented by one and 10 parish councillors respectively.

136 At Stage Three, the Borough Council proposed a change to our draft recommendation, namely that the parish be included in two new borough wards: Great Chart with Singleton North and Singleton South. This amendment was supported by Great Chart with Singleton and Kingsnorth parish councils. As this proposal forms part of our final recommendations, we confirm that Great Chart with Singleton parish should be divided into two parish wards, Great Chart with Singleton North parish ward and Singleton South parish ward, represented by five and six parish councillors respectively.

Final Recommendation

Great Chart with Singleton Parish Council should comprise 11 councillors, as at present, representing two wards: Great Chart with Singleton North (returning five councillors) and Singleton South (returning six councillors). The parish ward boundaries should reflect the proposed borough ward boundaries in the area, as illustrated and named on the large map at the back of the report.

137 The parish of Kingsnorth is currently served by 10 councillors and is divided into three wards. In its submission the Borough Council proposed that the parish should be divided between five borough wards: Park Farm North, Park Farm South, Washford, Weald East and Weald South. As this proposal formed part of our draft recommendations, we proposed that there should be five parish wards, Kingsnorth Village, Park Farm North, Park Farm South, Stubbs Cross and Washford, each represented by two parish councillors.

138 At Stage Three Councillor Harrington (member for Kingsnorth borough ward) proposed an increase in the number of councillors to 12 and that the number of councillors should reflect the electorate of each parish ward. This was supported by Ashford Borough Council in the interest of electoral equality, but opposed by Kingsnorth Parish Council on the grounds that the draft recommendation would give each ward a fairer representation. Having considered the evidence, we have decided to endorse the draft recommendation, particularly as it is supported locally by the parish.

Final Recommendation

Kingsnorth Parish Council should comprise 10 councillors, as at present, representing five wards: Kingsnorth Village, Park Farm North, Park Farm South, Stubbs Cross and Washford, each returning two councillors. The boundary between the five parish wards should reflect the proposed borough ward boundaries, as illustrated and named on the large map at the back of the report.

139 The parish of Sevington forms a joint parish council with Mersham parish. The parish is not warded and returns two out of a total of nine councillors for the joint parish. In its submission the Borough Council proposed that Sevington parish should be divided between two borough wards: Highfield and Weald East. As this proposal formed part of our draft recommendations we proposed that there should be two parish wards, Sevington North and Sevington South, served by one councillor each.

140 At Stage Three Mersham & Sevington Parish Council was opposed to the parish being divided between two borough wards with the consequence of it being warded. The parish council was concerned that Sevington would lose its identity. Having considered the evidence, we have concluded that any change to the draft recommendation for Mersham & Sevington parish would necessitate changes in a number of proposed wards in order to achieve electoral equality. For this

reason we are confirming our draft recommendation for warding Mersham & Sevington parish as final.

Final Recommendation
Mersham & Sevington Parish Council should comprise nine parish councillors, with Sevington parish comprising two wards: Sevington North and Sevington South, each returning one parish councillor, with Mersham parish returning seven. The parish ward boundaries should reflect the proposed borough ward boundaries as illustrated and named on the large map at the back of the report.

141 The parish of Stanhope is currently served by 11 councillors and is not warded. In its submission the Borough Council proposed that the parish should be divided between two borough wards: Stanhope and Washford. As this proposal formed part of our draft recommendations, we proposed that there should be two parish wards, Stanhope Central and Stanhope Speldhurst, served by 10 and one parish councillors respectively.

142 At Stage Three Kingsnorth Parish Council objected to Speldhurst Close being included in Washford ward. However, as the proposal forms part of our final recommendations we are confirming our draft recommendation as final.

Final Recommendation
Stanhope Parish Council should comprise 11 councillors, as at present, representing two wards: Stanhope Central (returning 10 councillors) and Stanhope Speldhurst (returning one councillor). The parish ward boundaries should reflect the proposed borough ward boundaries in the area, as illustrated and named on the large map at the back of the report.

143 The parish of Tenterden is currently served by 16 councillors and is divided into four parish wards. In its submission the Borough Council proposed that the parish should be divided between four borough wards: Rolvenden & Tenterden West, St Michaels (unchanged), Tenterden North and Tenterden South. As this proposal formed part of our draft recommendations, we proposed that there should be four parish wards, St Michaels, Tenterden North, Tenterden South and Tenterden West, each returning four parish councillors.

144 At Stage Three Tenterden Town Council supported the draft recommendation, but noted that Tenterden West parish ward would have a far smaller electorate than the town's other three wards and proposed an adjustment in the allocation of councillors to reflect the difference in the size of the electorates - St. Michaels (five), Tenterden North (four), Tenterden South (five) and Tenterden West (two). In the light of this we have decided to move away from our draft recommendation and adopted the town council's amendment as part of our final recommendation.

Final Recommendation

Tenterden Town Council should comprise 16 councillors, as at present, representing four wards: St Michaels (returning five councillors), Tenterden North (returning four councillors), Tenterden South (returning five councillors) and Tenterden West (returning two councillors). The parish ward boundaries should reflect the proposed borough ward boundaries in the area, as illustrated and named on Map A2 in Appendix A.

145 In our draft recommendations we proposed that there should be no change to the electoral cycle of parish and town councils in the borough, and we are confirming this as final.

Final Recommendation

Parish and town council elections should continue to take place every four years and should be held at the same time as elections for the district ward of which they are a part.

Map 2: The Commission's Final Recommendations for Ashford

6 NEXT STEPS

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

147 It now falls to the Secretary of State to decide whether to give effect to our recommendations, with or without modification, and to implement them by means of an order. Such an order will not be made before 19 June 2001.

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

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

APPENDIX A

Final Recommendations for Ashford: Detailed Mapping

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

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

Map A2 illustrates the proposed borough and parish warding of Tenterden.

Map A3 illustrates the proposed borough and parish warding of Charing.

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

Map A1: Final Recommendations for Ashford: Key Map

Map A2: Proposed Borough and Parish Warding of Tenterden

Map A3: Proposed Borough and Parish Warding of Charing

APPENDIX B

Draft Recommendations for Ashford

Our final recommendations, detailed in Figures 1 and 2, differ from those we put forward as draft recommendations in respect of only two wards, where our draft proposals are set out below. The only other change from draft to final recommendations, which is not included in Figures B1 and B2, is that we propose to rename Central ward as Victoria ward, Downs South ward as Downs North ward, Eastmead ward as Norman ward, Newton ward as Aylesford Green ward and Queens ward as Stour ward.

Figure B1: The Commission's Draft Recommendations: Constituent Areas

Ward name	Constituent areas
Great Chart & Singleton	Great Chart ward (part - the proposed Great Chart parish ward of Great Chart with Singleton parish); Singleton ward (part)
Washford	Great Chart ward (part - the proposed Chilmington Green parish ward of Great Chart with Singleton parish); Kingsnorth ward (part - Washford Farm parish ward of Kingsnorth parish); Stanhope ward (part - the proposed Speldhurst parish ward of Stanhope parish)

Figure B2: The Commission's Draft Recommendations: 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 %
Great Chart & Singleton	2	3,247	1,624	-9	4,291	2,146	7
Washford	1	1,478	1,478	-17	1,928	1,928	-4

Source: Electorate figures are based on information provided by Ashford 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.

APPENDIX C

Code of Practice on Written Consultation

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

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

Commission compliance with Code criteria

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

