

Final recommendations on the
future electoral arrangements
for Cherwell in Oxfordshire

Report to the Secretary of State for Transport,
Local Government and the Regions

August 2001

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A large map illustrating the proposed ward boundaries for Banbury, Bicester and Kidlington is inserted inside the back cover of the report.

WHAT IS THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT COMMISSION FOR ENGLAND?

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

Members of the Commission are:

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

Barbara Stephens (Chief Executive)

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

This report sets out the Commission's final recommendations on the electoral arrangements for the district of Cherwell in Oxfordshire.

SUMMARY

We began a review of Cherwell's electoral arrangements on 25 July 2000. We published our draft recommendations for electoral arrangements on 20 February 2001, after which we undertook a nine-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 arrangements provide unequal representation of electors in Cherwell:

- **in 23 of the 31 wards the number of electors represented by each councillor varies by more than 10 per cent from the average for the district and 13 wards vary by more than 20 per cent from the average;**
- **by 2005 this unequal representation is not expected to improve, with the number of electors per councillor forecast to vary by more than 10 per cent from the average in 24 wards and by more than 20 per cent in 14 wards.**

Our main final recommendations for future electoral arrangements (see Tables 1 and 2 and paragraphs 94-95) are that:

- **Cherwell District Council should have 50 councillors, two fewer than at present;**
- **there should be 28 wards, instead of 31 as at present;**
- **the boundaries of 29 of the existing wards should be modified, resulting in a net reduction of three, and two wards should retain their existing boundaries;**
- **elections should continue to take place by thirds.**

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

- **In 20 of the proposed 28 wards the number of electors per councillor would vary by no more than 10 per cent from the district average.**
- **This improved level of electoral equality is forecast to continue, with the number of electors per councillor in only one ward, Yarnton, Gosford & Water Eaton, expected to vary by more than 10 per cent from the average for the district in 2005.**

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

- **revised warding arrangements and the redistribution of councillors for the parishes of Banbury, Bicester and Kidlington.**

All further correspondence on these final recommendations and the matters discussed in this report should be addressed to the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, who will not make an Order implementing them before 18 September 2001:

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

Table 1: Final Recommendations: Summary

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Constituent areas	Map reference
1	Adderbury	1	the parishes of Adderbury and Milton	Map 2
2	Ambrosden & Chesterton	1	the parishes of Ambrosden, Chesterton, Middleton Stoney and Wendlebury	Map 2
3	Bicester East	2	part of Bicester parish (the proposed Bicester East parish ward)	Map 2 and large map
4	Bicester North	2	part of Bicester parish (the proposed Bicester North parish ward)	Map 2 and large map
5	Bicester South	2	part of Bicester parish (the proposed Bicester South parish ward)	Map 2 and large map
6	Bicester Town	2	part of Bicester parish (the proposed Bicester Town parish ward)	Map 2 and large map
7	Bicester West	3	part of Bicester parish (the proposed Bicester West parish ward)	Map 2 and large map
8	Bloxham & Bodicote	2	the parishes of Bloxham, Bodicote and Milcombe	Map 2
9	Calthorpe (Banbury)	2	part of Banbury parish (the proposed Calthorpe parish ward)	Map 2 and large map
10	Caversfield	1	the parishes of Ardley, Bucknell, Caversfield and Stoke Lyne	Map 2
11	Cropredy	1	the parishes of Bourton, Claydon with Clattercot, Cropredy, Mollington, Prescote and Wardington	Map 2
12	Deddington	1	<i>unchanged</i> – the parishes of Barford St John & St Michael and Deddington	Map 2
13	Easington (Banbury)	3	part of Banbury parish (the proposed Easington parish ward)	Map 2 and large map
14	Fringford	1	the parishes of Cottisford, Finmere, Fringford, Godington, Hardwick with Tusmore, Hethe, Mixbury, Newton Purcell with Shelswell and Stratton Audley	Map 2
15	Grimsbury & Castle (Banbury)	3	part of Banbury parish (the proposed Grimsbury & Castle parish ward)	Map 2 and large map
16	Hardwick (Banbury)	3	part of Banbury parish (the proposed Hardwick parish ward)	Map 2 and large map
17	Hook Norton	1	the parishes of Hook Norton, South Newington and Wigginton	Map 2
18	Kidlington North	2	part of Kidlington parish (the proposed parish wards of Roundham and St Mary's)	Map 2 and large map

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Constituent areas	Map reference
19	Kidlington South	3	part of Kidlington parish (the proposed parish wards of Dogwood, Exeter and Orchard)	Map 2 and large map
20	Kirtlington	1	the parishes of Bletchington, Hampton Gay & Poyle, Kirtlington, Shipton-on-Cherwell & Thrupp and Weston-on-the-Green	Map 2
21	Launton	1	the parishes of Arncott, Blackthorn, Launton and Piddington	Map 2
22	Neithrop (Banbury)	2	part of Banbury parish (the proposed Neithrop parish ward)	Map 2 and large map
23	Otmoor	1	the parishes of Charlton-on-Otmoor, Fencott & Murcott, Horton-cum-Studley, Islip, Merton, Noke and Oddington	Map 2
24	Ruscote (Banbury)	3	part of Banbury parish (the proposed Ruscote parish ward)	Map 2 and large map
25	Sibford	1	the parishes of Broughton, Epwell, North Newington, Sibford Ferris, Sibford Gower, Swalcliffe and Tadmarton	Map 2
26	The Astons & Heyfords	2	the parishes of Duns Tew, Fritwell, Lower Heyford, Middle Aston, North Aston, Somerton, Souldern, Steeple Aston and Upper Heyford	Map 2
27	Wroxton	1	the parishes of Drayton, Hanwell, Horley, Hornton, Shenington with Alkerton, Shutford and Wroxton	Map 2
28	Yarnton, Gosford & Water Eaton	2	the parishes of Begbroke, Gosford & Water Eaton and Yarnton	Map 2

Notes: 1 The whole district is parished.

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

Table 2: Final Recommendations for Cherwell

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 Adderbury	1	2,232	2,232	14	2,256	2,256	9
2 Ambrosden & Chesterton	1	2,144	2,144	10	2,136	2,136	3
3 Bicester East	2	4,445	2,223	14	4,418	2,209	7
4 Bicester North	2	2,908	1,454	-26	4,209	2,105	2
5 Bicester South	2	2,687	1,344	-31	3,887	1,944	-6
6 Bicester Town	2	4,044	2,022	3	4,044	2,022	-2
7 Bicester West	3	5,951	1,984	2	5,946	1,982	-4
8 Bloxham & Bodicote	2	4,506	2,253	15	4,529	2,265	10
9 Calthorpe (Banbury)	2	4,273	2,137	9	4,301	2,151	4
10 Caversfield	1	1,894	1,894	-3	1,886	1,886	-9
11 Cropredy	1	2,160	2,160	11	2,192	2,192	6
12 Deddington	1	2,144	2,144	10	2,240	2,240	8
13 Easington (Banbury)	3	6030	2,010	3	6,085	2,028	-2
14 Fringford	1	1,832	1,832	-6	1,849	1,849	-10
15 Grimsbury & Castle (Banbury)	3	6,336	2,112	8	6,504	2,168	5
16 Hardwick (Banbury)	3	4,407	1,469	-25	5,947	1,982	-4
17 Hook Norton	1	2,044	2,044	5	2,079	2,079	1
18 Kidlington North	2	4,225	2,113	8	4,222	2,111	2
19 Kidlington South	3	6,447	2,149	10	6,460	2,153	4
20 Kirtlington	1	2,141	2,141	10	2,136	2,136	3
21 Launton	1	1,994	1,994	2	2,007	2,007	-3
22 Neithrop (Banbury)	2	4,129	2,065	6	4,130	2,065	0

Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2000)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2005)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
23 Otmoor	1	1,871	1,871	-4	1,936	1,936	-6
24 Ruscote (Banbury)	3	5,809	1,936	-1	5,929	1,976	-4
25 Sibford	1	1,937	1,937	-1	2,057	2,057	0
26 The Astons & Heyfords	2	3,326	1,663	-15	4,098	2,049	-1
27 Wroxton	1	2,080	2,080	6	2,092	2,092	1
28 Yarnton, Gosford & Water Eaton	2	3,706	1,853	-5	3,671	1,836	-11
Totals	50	97,702	-	-	103,246	-	-
Averages	-	-	1,954	-	-	2,065	-

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

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

1 INTRODUCTION

1 This report contains our final recommendations on the electoral arrangements for the district of Cherwell in Oxfordshire. We have now reviewed all five districts in Oxfordshire as part of our programme of periodic electoral reviews (PERs) of all 386 principal local authority areas in England. Our programme started in 1996 and is currently expected to finish in 2004.

2 This was our first review of the electoral arrangements of Cherwell. Cherwell's last review was undertaken by our predecessor, the Local Government Boundary Commission (LGBC), which reported to the Secretary of State in August 1977 (Report No. 243). The electoral arrangements of Oxfordshire County Council were last reviewed in June 1982 (Report No. 428). We expect to review the County Council's electoral arrangements in 2002.

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

- the statutory criteria contained in section 13(5) of the Local Government Act 1992, i.e. 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 Full details of the legislation under which we work are set out in a document entitled *Guidance and Procedural Advice for Local Authorities and Other Interested Parties* (fourth edition published in December 2000). This *Guidance* sets out our approach to the reviews.

5 Our task is to make recommendations to the Secretary of State on the number of councillors who should serve on a council, and the number, boundaries and names of wards. We can also propose changes to the electoral arrangements for parish and town councils in the district.

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 also reflecting the identities and interests of local communities.

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

8 We are not prescriptive on council size. We start from the assumption that the size of the existing council already secures effective and convenient local government, 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 electorate should automatically result in an increase in the number of councillors, nor that changes should be made to the size of a council simply to make it more consistent with the size of other similar councils.

9 In July 1998, the Government published a White Paper called *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. The proposals were 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*.

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

11 Stage Three began on 20 February 2001 with the publication of our report, *Draft recommendations on the future electoral arrangements for Cherwell in Oxfordshire*, and ended on 23 April 2001. During this period we sought comments from the public and any other interested parties 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

12 The district of Cherwell is the most northerly of the Oxfordshire districts. The district is mainly rural in character but has three urban centres, Banbury, Bicester and Kidlington. The River Cherwell and the Oxford Canal both run through the district. Cherwell has good communication links, including strong rail and road links with London and the Midlands as well as Oxford Airport which is situated in the south-west of the district.

13 The district contains 78 parishes, and is wholly parished. The towns of Banbury, Bicester and Kidlington comprise 32 per cent, 22 per cent and 10 per cent respectively of the district's total electorate.

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 district 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 district is 97,702 (February 2000). The Council presently has 52 members who are elected from 31 wards, 11 of which are relatively urban, covering the towns of Banbury, Bicester and Kidlington, and the remainder are predominantly rural. Eight of the wards are represented by three councillors each, five are represented by two councillors each and 18 are single-member wards. The Council is elected by thirds.

16 At present, each councillor represents an average of 1,879 electors, which the District Council forecasts will increase to 1,986 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 23 of the 31 wards varies by more than 10 per cent from the district average, in 13 wards by more than 20 per cent and in five wards by more than 30 per cent. The worst imbalance is in Bicester East ward where the councillor represents 131 per cent more electors than the district average.

Map 1: Existing Wards in Cherwell

Table 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 Adderbury	1	2,092	2,092	11	2,114	2,114	6
2 Ambrosden	1	2,055	2,055	9	2,110	2,110	6
3 Ardley	1	1,894	1,894	1	1,886	1,886	-5
4 Bicester East	2	8,667	4,334	131	9,843	4,922	148
5 Bicester South	2	3,225	1,613	-14	3,211	1,606	-19
6 Bicester West	2	8,155	4,078	117	9,449	4,725	138
7 Bloxham	2	3,207	1,604	-15	3,229	1,615	-19
8 Bodicote	1	1,685	1,685	-10	1,684	1,684	-15
9 Calthorpe (Banbury)	3	5,200	1,733	-8	5,228	1,743	-12
10 Chesterton	1	980	980	-48	977	977	-51
11 Cropredy	1	1,654	1,654	-12	1,694	1,694	-15
12 Deddington	1	2,146	2,146	14	2,240	2,240	13
13 Easington (Banbury)	3	5,031	1,677	-11	5,087	1,696	-15
14 Fringford	1	1,474	1,474	-22	1,489	1,489	-25
15 Gosford	1	1,057	1,057	-44	1,036	1,036	-48
16 Grimsbury (Banbury)	3	6,774	2,258	20	6,942	2,314	17
17 Hardwick (Banbury)	3	5,394	1,798	-4	6,921	2,307	16
18 Heyford	1	1,974	1,974	5	2,729	2,729	37
19 Hook Norton	1	1,799	1,799	-4	1,837	1,837	-7
20 Hornton	1	1,257	1,257	-33	1,260	1,260	-37
21 Kirtlington	1	2,104	2,104	12	2,098	2,098	6
22 Launton	1	1,472	1,472	-22	1,479	1,479	-26
23 Neithrop (Banbury)	3	4,120	1,373	-27	4,248	1,416	-29
24 North West Kidlington	3	6,244	2,081	11	6,219	2,073	4
25 Otmoor	1	1,607	1,607	-14	1,626	1,626	-18

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 %
26 Ruscote (Banbury)	3	4,455	1,485	-21	4,468	1,489	-25
27 Sibford	1	1,421	1,421	-24	1,539	1,539	-22
28 South East Kidlington	3	4,422	1,474	-22	4,463	1,488	-25
29 Steeple Aston	1	1,352	1,352	-28	1,369	1,369	-31
30 Wroxton	1	1,845	1,845	-2	1,848	1,848	-7
31 Yarnton	2	2,940	1,470	-22	2,923	1,462	-26
Totals	52	97,702	-	-	103,246	-	-
Averages	-	-	1,879	-	-	1,986	-

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

Note: The 'variance from average' column shows by how far, in percentage terms, the number of electors per councillor varies from the average for the district. The minus symbol (-) denotes a lower than average number of electors. For example, in 2000, electors in Chesterton ward were relatively over-represented by 48 per cent, while electors in Bicester East ward were relatively under-represented by 131 per cent. Figures have been rounded to the nearest whole number.

3 DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS

17 During Stage One we received 15 representations, including a district-wide scheme from Cherwell District Council, as well as submissions from Oxfordshire County Council, Banbury Constituency Liberal Democrats, 10 parish councils and two local residents. 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 Cherwell in Oxfordshire*.

18 Our draft recommendations were based on the District Council's proposals, which achieved improvements in electoral equality, and were the subject of local consultation. However, we moved away from the District Council's scheme in some areas, in particular the town of Banbury where we put forward our own proposals. We also proposed minor modifications in the towns of Bicester and Kidlington and regrouped parishes in three wards in the centre of the district. We proposed that:

- Cherwell District Council should be served by 50 councillors, compared with the current 52, representing 28 wards, three fewer than at present;
- the boundaries of 30 of the existing wards should be modified, while one ward should retain its existing boundaries;
- there should be new parish warding arrangements for Banbury, Bicester and Kidlington.

Draft Recommendation

Cherwell District Council should comprise 50 councillors, serving 28 wards. The Council should continue to hold elections by thirds.

19 Our proposals would have resulted in significant improvements in electoral equality, with the number of electors per councillor in 20 of the 28 wards varying by no more than 10 per cent from the district average. This level of electoral equality was forecast to improve further, with only one ward, Yarnton, Gosford & Water Eaton, varying by more than 10 per cent from the average in 2005.

4 RESPONSES TO CONSULTATION

20 During the consultation on our draft recommendations report, we received 21 representations. A list of all respondents is available from us on request. All representations may be inspected at our offices and those of Cherwell District Council.

Cherwell District Council

21 Cherwell District Council supported the majority of our draft recommendations for the district. However it put forward boundary modifications in the towns of Banbury and Bicester as well as reiterating its Stage One proposals for the rural area. The Council's submission included comments which it had received from parish councils during Stage Three.

Oxfordshire County Council

22 The County Council's submission made comments on all five of the Oxfordshire districts. It stated that the proposals for warding the towns of Banbury and Bicester could cause difficulties in the forthcoming review of the County Council's electoral arrangements.

Parish & Town Councils

23 During Stage Three we received submissions from 15 parish and town councils and one parish meeting. Banbury Town Council supported Cherwell District Council's Stage Three proposals for Banbury. We received representations from Ambrosden, Arncott, Bloxham, Bodicote, Chesterton, Lower Heyford, Middleton Stoney, Upper Heyford and Wendlebury parish councils, stating their opposition to our draft recommendations in their areas. Launton Parish Council put forward an alternative grouping of parishes in its area, but stated that if its proposals could not be adopted then it would prefer to see our draft recommendations implemented. Adderbury, Caversfield, Islip and Stratton Audley parish councils and Noke Parish Meeting wrote in support of our proposals in their areas.

Other Representations

24 A further three representations were received in response to our draft recommendations from local residents. Two residents of Ambrosden village stated their opposition to our proposed Ambrosden & Chesterton ward. A resident of Hempton supported our proposed Deddington ward and also queried our electorate projections across the district.

5 ANALYSIS AND FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS

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

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

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

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

Electorate Forecasts

29 Since 1975 there has been a 51 per cent increase in the electorate of Cherwell district. At Stage One the District Council submitted electorate forecasts for the year 2005, projecting an increase in the electorate of some 6 per cent, from 97,702 to 103,246, over the five-year period from 2000 to 2005. It expected most of the growth to be in the wards of Bicester East and Bicester West, although a significant amount is also expected in Hardwick ward. The Council estimated rates and locations of housing development with regard to structure and local plans, the expected rate of building over the five-year period and assumed occupancy rates. Advice from the District Council on the likely effect on electorates of changes to ward boundaries was obtained. We accept that this is an inexact science and, having considered the forecast electorates, we stated in our draft recommendations report that we were satisfied that they represented the best estimates that could reasonably be made at the time.

30 During Stage Three a resident of Hempton queried our electorate projections for the proposed Calthorpe ward, in Banbury town, and the parish of Upper Heyford. The resident stated that although “these developments may well go beyond 2005 ... in the case of Calthorpe [ward] I would have expected a bigger increase.”

31 In the light of these comments, before formulating our final recommendations, we asked Cherwell District Council to re-examine its original electorate forecast for Calthorpe ward and the parish of Upper Heyford. The District Council stated that “the figures this Council has provided, with the assistance of the County Council’s demographer, were based on the best estimate that could be made at the time.” The Council also stated that although discussions about future developments were taking place these should not be considered in providing a ‘best estimate’ for the projected electorate for February 2005.

32 We carefully considered the representation received during Stage Three regarding electorate forecasts. While we note the comments put forward by the resident of Hempton, we believe that the District Council, as local planning authority, is best placed to make a judgement on its future electorate. Therefore we remain satisfied that the District Council’s electorate projections for February 2005 represent the best estimates that can reasonably be made at this time.

Council Size

33 As already explained, we start by assuming that the current council size facilitates effective and convenient local government, although we are willing to look carefully at arguments why this might not be the case.

34 In our draft recommendations report we adopted the Council’s proposal for a council of 50 members, a reduction of two. We were pleased to note that the Council had tested alternative council sizes and had consulted widely on its proposed council size of 50.

35 During Stage Three Bodicote Parish Council stated that “an increase in the [total] number of councillors may lead to a change in the current proposals for Bodicote”. When formulating our recommendations for electoral arrangements in a district we have to consider the district as a whole, and therefore we are unable to adopt a council size for Cherwell in order to facilitate electoral arrangements affecting only Bodicote parish.

36 Having considered the size and distribution of the electorate, the geography and other characteristics of the area, together with the representations received during Stages One and Three, we have concluded that the achievement of electoral equality and the statutory criteria would best be met by a council of 50 members.

Electoral Arrangements

37 As set out in our draft recommendations report, we carefully considered all the representations received during Stage One, including the district-wide scheme put forward by Cherwell District Council.

38 When formulating our draft recommendations we examined alternative configurations of parishes to those put forward by the District Council in order to assess whether further improvements to electoral equality could be obtained. We proposed a reconfiguration of parishes in the middle of the district; our modifications affected the wards of Ambrosden & Chesterton, Caversfield and The Astons & Heyfords, and would have provided improved levels of electoral equality in this area overall. However, we concluded that further improvements to electoral equality in the remainder of the district’s rural wards would be at the expense of the statutory criteria, namely the need to reflect community identities and secure effective and convenient local government. In the towns of the district we decided to move away

from the District Council's proposals in Banbury, while making minor modifications to its proposals in Bicester and Kidlington. These modifications would have provided improved levels of electoral equality as well as facilitating effective and convenient local government and attempting to reflect community identities in Banbury, Bicester and Kidlington.

39 During both Stage One and Stage Three, Oxfordshire County Council stated that the proposed warding arrangements for the towns of Banbury and Bicester could create difficulties for the County Council when a future review of its electoral divisions is carried out. However, the Commission's approach in two-tier county areas is first to review the electoral arrangements of the district councils and then, once the necessary electoral change orders have been made for the districts, to review those of the county council. Our future recommendations for electoral division boundaries in all counties, including Oxfordshire, will utilise the new district wards as building blocks. We therefore cannot have any regard for existing or future county council divisions during this review.

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

- (a) Calthorpe, Easington, Grimsbury, Hardwick, Neithrop and Ruscote wards (Banbury);
- (b) Bicester East, Bicester South and Bicester West wards (Bicester);
- (c) North West Kidlington and South East Kidlington wards (Kidlington) and Gosford, Kirtlington and Yarnton wards;
- (d) Cropredy, Hornton, Sibford and Wroxton wards;
- (e) Adderbury, Bloxham, Bodicote and Hook Norton wards;
- (f) Ardley, Deddington, Heyford and Steeple Aston wards;
- (g) Ambrosden, Chesterton, Fringford, Launton and Otmoor wards.

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

Calthorpe, Easington, Grimsbury, Hardwick, Neithrop and Ruscote wards (Banbury)

42 These six wards cover the town of Banbury, which is situated in the north of the district. Under the existing arrangements these six wards return three councillors each. The wards of Calthorpe, Easington, Hardwick, Neithrop and Ruscote have councillor:elector ratios 8 per cent, 11 per cent, 4 per cent, 27 per cent and 21 per cent below the district average respectively (12 per cent below, 15 per cent below, 16 per cent above, 29 per cent below and 25 per cent below by 2005). Grimsbury ward has a councillor:elector ratio 20 per cent above the district average (17 per cent by 2005).

43 At Stage One Cherwell District Council proposed that the overall representation of Banbury should be reduced from 18 to 16 councillors, representing six wards as at present. The District Council proposed using Southam Road and Oxford Road as a boundary dividing the town, north to south. East of this boundary it put forward a two-member Calthorpe ward, broadly covering the area south of Dashwood Road and west of Oxford Canal, and a three-member Grimsbury & Castle ward covering the remainder of the east of the town. To the west of the Southam Road/Oxford Road boundary the Council proposed three three-member wards: Easington ward covering broadly the same area as the existing Easington ward and parts of Grimsbury and Neithrop wards; Ruscote ward covering the majority of the existing Ruscote ward and that part of Neithrop ward west of Woodgreen Avenue; and Hardwick ward covering that part of the existing Hardwick ward north of the former Mineral Railway

footpath and west of Ruscote School, and that part of Ruscote ward north of Sinclair Avenue. The Council also put forward a two-member Neithrop ward comprising the remainder of Grimsbury, Hardwick and Neithrop wards. We received no further submissions concerning Banbury at Stage One.

44 When formulating our draft recommendations we carefully considered the District Council's proposals for Banbury. We endorsed its proposal to reduce the overall representation of the town to 16 councillors, which the town would merit under a 50-member scheme. The Commission considers that in most cases it is possible to have lower electoral variances in urban areas than in rural areas, while still having regard to the statutory criteria. We therefore looked to improve on what we considered to be the relatively high electoral variances in Banbury provided under the District Council's scheme. We proposed significant alterations to the District Council's proposed Calthorpe and Easington wards. We proposed that Calthorpe ward should return three councillors and should include the electors south of, and including, Farmfield Road, south of Banbury School and east of Salt Way, currently in Easington ward. We proposed that the remainder of the District Council's proposed Easington ward, with the exception of 74 electors situated north of People's Park, who would be transferred into Neithrop ward, should form a new two-member Easington ward. We put forward an amendment to the District Council's proposed boundary between Calthorpe and Grimsbury & Castle wards to provide a more identifiable boundary. We also proposed a modification to the boundary between Neithrop and Ruscote wards. We adopted the District Council's proposed Hardwick ward without modification as it would provide good electoral equality in the ward by 2005. The modifications we put forward to the District Council's proposals in Banbury would provide much improved levels of electoral equality in the town as a whole.

45 Under our draft recommendations the wards of Calthorpe, Easington, Grimsbury & Castle, Neithrop and Ruscote would have councillor:elector ratios 5 per cent, 3 per cent, 4 per cent, 4 per cent and 7 per cent above the district average respectively (equal to the district average, 1 per cent below, 1 per cent above, 2 per cent below and 3 per cent above by 2005). Hardwick ward would have a councillor:elector ratio 25 per cent below the district average (4 per cent by 2005).

46 At Stage Three we received two submissions commenting on our draft recommendations for Banbury town. Cherwell District Council did not support our draft recommendations for Banbury town, stating that our proposals did not provide the best reflection of community identity. The District Council noted that we had been concerned with the relatively high levels of electoral inequality provided under its Stage One submission and consequently it made modifications to its Stage One proposals in order to improve electoral equality in the town. It proposed that Easington ward should continue to return three members and should include all the electors to the south of Bath Road and Cope Road inclusively, who were included in Neithrop ward under our draft recommendations. It proposed that the boundary between the proposed two-member Neithrop ward and the proposed three-member Ruscote ward should be Woodgreen Avenue, as it put forward at Stage One. It also proposed a minor boundary modification between a two-member Calthorpe ward and a three-member Grimsbury & Castle ward, to include all properties of Gatteridge Street and those to the north of Newland Road and Old Parr Road in Grimsbury & Castle ward. The District Council stated that these proposals would produce good levels of electoral equality while providing a better reflection of community identity than our draft recommendations. It made no comments on the proposed Hardwick ward. Cherwell District Council also proposed new parish warding arrangements for Banbury, outlined later in the chapter. Banbury Town Council supported the District Council's proposals for Banbury in full. We received no further representations concerning Banbury during Stage Three.

47 Having carefully considered the representations received, we have decided to adopt the District Council's Stage Three proposals for Banbury. We consider that these locally generated proposals will provide a better reflection of community identity and interests than our draft recommendations, while still providing high levels of electoral equality. We are also pleased to note that the District Council's proposals have the full support of Banbury Town Council.

48 Under our final recommendations, Calthorpe, Easington, Grimsbury & Castle and Neithrop wards would have councillor:elector ratios 9 per cent, 3 per cent, 8 per cent and 6 per cent above the district average respectively (4 per cent above, 2 per cent below, 5 per cent above and equal to the district average by 2005). Hardwick and Ruscote wards would have councillor:elector ratios 25 per cent and 1 per cent below the district average respectively (4 per cent in both wards by 2005). Our final recommendations are illustrated on Map 2 and the large map inserted at the back of this report.

Bicester East, Bicester South and Bicester West wards (Bicester)

49 These three wards cover the town of Bicester, which is situated in the south-east of the district. Currently these three wards return two councillors each. Under the existing arrangements the wards of Bicester East and Bicester West have councillor:elector ratios 131 per cent and 117 per cent above the district average respectively (148 per cent and 138 per cent by 2005). Bicester South ward currently has a councillor:elector ratio 14 per cent below the district average (19 per cent by 2005).

50 During Stage One Cherwell District Council proposed that the overall representation of Bicester should be increased from six to 11 councillors, representing five wards, two more than at present. It proposed that the area to the north of the Banbury to London railway line should be divided into two two-member wards, Bicester East and Bicester North, using the A421 Buckingham Road as the boundary between the two wards. It proposed a two-member Bicester South ward covering the area to the east of the Oxford to Bedford railway line. The Council proposed a two-member Bicester Town ward covering the area east of Leach Road, south of George Street and east of the A421; and a three-member Bicester West ward covering the remainder of the town. We received no further submissions concerning Bicester at Stage One.

51 When formulating our draft recommendations we carefully considered the District Council's proposals for Bicester and we endorsed the District Council's proposal to increase the overall representation of the town to 11 councillors, which the town would merit under a 50-member scheme. When formulating our draft recommendations we looked to improve on what we considered to be the relatively high electoral variances in Bicester provided under the District Council's scheme. In the proposed Bicester East, Bicester North and Bicester South wards we were unable to improve on the levels of electoral equality due to the strength of the boundaries put forward, i.e. the railways and the A421. Consequently we adopted the District Council's proposed Bicester East, Bicester North and Bicester South wards without amendment. However, we put forward a modification to the District Council's proposed boundary between Bicester Town and Bicester West wards. We proposed running the boundary along the rear of the properties on Ashby Road, including those electors to the east in Bicester West ward so that all electors would have direct access to the ward in which they would be registered to vote. This modification would have had an adverse affect on the electoral equality in both wards and we consequently proposed a further modification to the boundary. We proposed including the electors to the north of Bicester Community College and east of the Bure stream in Bicester Town ward rather than in Bicester West ward, as proposed by the District Council. We considered that these modifications provided strong boundaries and effective and convenient local government for the electors of both wards while providing marginally better electoral equality.

52 Under our draft recommendations Bicester East, Bicester Town and Bicester West wards would have councillor:elector ratios 14 per cent, 3 per cent and 2 per cent above the district average respectively (7 per cent above, 2 per cent below and 4 per cent below by 2005). Bicester North and Bicester South wards would have councillor:elector ratios 26 per cent and 31 per cent below the district average respectively (2 per cent above and 6 per cent below by 2005).

53 In response to our draft recommendations we received one submission, from Cherwell District Council, concerning Bicester town. The Council supported our draft recommendations for Bicester East, Bicester North and Bicester South wards; however, it stated that our proposed boundary between Bicester Town and Bicester West wards “resulted in a less clearly defined boundary”. The District Council proposed a modification returning the boundary to the A4421 and George Street, as proposed at Stage One, but running the boundary along the centre of Leach Road. It stated that this modification would maintain a high level of electoral equality while reflecting the statutory criteria.

54 We have given careful consideration to the District Council’s Stage Three proposals for Bicester. We are pleased to note the support for our proposed Bicester East, Bicester North and Bicester South wards and we are endorsing our draft recommendations as final. Consequently our final recommendations for these three wards would provide the same levels of electoral equality as our draft recommendations. We have concluded that the District Council’s Stage Three proposal would provide a stronger boundary between Bicester Town and Bicester West wards. We consider that the locally generated proposal for a modification to the boundary between Bicester Town and Bicester West wards will provide a better reflection of community identity and interests and effective and convenient local government in the area than our draft recommendations, while still providing high levels of electoral equality. We therefore propose adopting the District Council’s Stage Three proposals for these two wards.

55 Under our final recommendations Bicester Town and Bicester West wards would have councillor:elector ratios 3 per cent and 2 per cent above the district average respectively (2 per cent and 4 per cent below by 2005). Our final recommendations are illustrated on Map 2 and the large map inserted at the back of this report.

North West Kidlington and South East Kidlington wards (Kidlington) and Gosford, Kirtlington and Yarnton wards

56 These five wards are situated in the south-west of the district. The wards of North West Kidlington and South East Kidlington cover the town of Kidlington; Gosford ward comprises the parish of Gosford & Water Eaton; Kirtlington ward covers the parishes of Bletchington, Hampton Gay & Poyle, Kirtlington, Middleton Stoney and Weston-on-the-Green. Yarnton ward is currently a detached ward, with the parishes of Begbroke and Yarnton separated from the parish of Shipton-on-Cherwell & Thrupp by the town of Kidlington. North West Kidlington and South East Kidlington wards are both represented by three councillors each, Yarnton is a two-member ward, while Gosford and Kirtlington are both single-member wards. The wards of Gosford, South East Kidlington and Yarnton currently have councillor:elector ratios 44 per cent, 22 per cent and 22 per cent below the district average respectively (48 per cent, 25 per cent and 26 per cent by 2005). Kirtlington and North West Kidlington currently have councillor:elector ratios 12 per cent and 11 per cent above the district average respectively (6 per cent and 4 per cent by 2005).

57 At Stage One Kidlington Parish Council stated that the boundaries of wards covering Kidlington should be coterminous with the parish boundary, as they are in the towns of Banbury and Bicester. It

consequently proposed a two-member Kidlington North ward and a three-member Kidlington South ward covering the parish of Kidlington. It also proposed a two-member Yarnton, Gosford & Water Eaton ward comprising the parishes of Begbroke, Gosford & Water Eaton and Yarnton. These proposals were supported in full by Gosford & Water Eaton Parish Council. Kidlington Parish Council also put forward proposals for new parish electoral arrangements, which are outlined later in the chapter. Cherwell District Council adopted the proposal put forward by Kidlington Parish Council as part of its Stage One submission.

58 The District Council also proposed that the existing single-member Kirtlington ward should be modified. It proposed that the parishes of Bletchingdon, Hampton Gay & Poyle, Kirtlington, Shipton-on-Cherwell & Thrupp and Weston-on-the-Green should form a new Kirtlington ward, while the parish of Middleton Stoney, currently in Kirtlington ward, should be included in Ambrosden & Chesterton ward. Bletchingdon Parish Council stated that it wished to see the existing electoral arrangements retained.

59 When formulating our draft recommendations we carefully considered all representations received during Stage One. We concluded that the proposals put forward by Kidlington Parish Council and Cherwell District Council for these wards would provide the best levels of electoral equality while having regard to the statutory criteria. We were pleased to note that the District Council's proposals were consulted on locally and the views expressed during this consultation exercise had been incorporated, where possible, in its submission. However we proposed minor boundary modifications between Kidlington North and Kidlington South wards, to include all the electors of The Phelps and The Woodlands in Kidlington North ward. In order to maintain good levels of electoral equality in both wards, following this modification, we proposed transferring those electors north of School Road and west of The Town Green into Kidlington South ward from the proposed Kidlington North ward. We concluded that these modifications would provide strong, easily identifiable boundaries while providing effective and convenient local government and marginally improving electoral equality. We adopted in full Kidlington Parish Council's proposals for Yarnton, Gosford & Water Eaton ward and the District Council's proposed Kirtlington ward.

60 Under our draft recommendations Kidlington North, Kidlington South and Kirtlington wards would have councillor:elector ratios 8 per cent, 10 per cent and 10 per cent above the district average respectively (2 per cent, 4 per cent and 3 per cent by 2005). Yarnton, Gosford & Water Eaton ward would have a councillor:elector ratio 5 per cent below the district average (11 per cent by 2005).

61 During Stage Three we received general support from Cherwell District Council for our draft recommendations for the wards of Kidlington North, Kidlington South, Kirtlington and Yarnton, Gosford & Water Eaton. We received no further comments, and we have therefore decided to endorse fully our draft recommendations for these wards. Consequently our final recommendations would provide the same levels of electoral equality as our draft recommendations. Our final recommendations are illustrated on Map 2 and the large map inserted at the back of this report.

Cropredy, Hornton, Sibford and Wroxton wards

62 These four wards are situated to the north of the district and are all currently single-member wards. Cropredy ward comprises the parishes of Claydon with Clattercot, Cropredy, Mollington, Prescote and Wardington; Hornton ward comprises the parishes of Bourton, Hanwell, Horley and Hornton; Sibford ward comprises the parishes of Epwell, Sibford Ferris, Sibford Gower, Swalcliffe and Tadmarton; and Wroxton ward comprises the parishes of Broughton, Drayton, North Newington, Shennington with

Alkerton, Shutford and Wroxton. The wards of Cropredy, Hornton, Sibford and Wroxton currently have councillor:elector ratios 12 per cent, 33 per cent, 24 per cent and 2 per cent below the district average respectively (15 per cent, 37 per cent, 22 per cent and 7 per cent by 2005).

63 At Stage One Cherwell District Council proposed that these four wards should be modified to form three revised single-member wards. It proposed a modified Cropredy ward comprising the parishes of Bourton, Claydon with Clattercot, Cropredy, Mollington, Prescote and Wardington; Sibford ward comprising the parishes of Broughton, Epwell, North Newington, Sibford Ferris, Sibford Gower, Swalcliffe and Tadmarton; and Wroxton ward comprising the parishes of Drayton, Hanwell, Horley, Hornton, Shenington with Alkerton, Shutford and Wroxton. The District Council's proposed Cropredy ward was supported by a resident of Little Bourton.

64 When formulating our draft recommendations we carefully considered all representations received, and concluded that the District Council's proposals for these wards would provide the best levels of electoral equality currently available while having regard to the statutory criteria. We were also pleased to note that the District Council's proposals were consulted on locally and the views expressed during this consultation exercise were incorporated, where possible, in its submission. We therefore adopted the District Council's proposals without modification as part of our draft recommendations.

65 Under our draft recommendations the wards of Cropredy and Wroxton would have councillor:elector ratios 11 per cent and 6 per cent above the district average respectively (6 per cent and 1 per cent by 2005). Sibford ward would have a councillor:elector ratio 1 per cent below the district average (equal to the district average by 2005).

66 During Stage Three we received general support from Cherwell District Council for our draft recommendations for the wards of Cropredy, Sibford and Wroxton. We received no further comments, and we have therefore decided to endorse fully our draft recommendations for these wards. Consequently our final recommendations would provide the same levels of electoral equality as our draft recommendations. Our final recommendations are illustrated on Map 2.

Adderbury, Bloxham, Bodicote and Hook Norton wards

67 These four wards are situated in the centre of the district. Bloxham ward is currently a two-member ward while the wards of Adderbury, Bodicote and Hook Norton each return a single councillor. Adderbury and Bodicote wards are coterminous with the parishes of the same names, while Bloxham ward comprises the parishes of Bloxham, Milcombe, Milton and South Newington; and Hook Norton ward includes the parishes of Hook Norton and Wigginton. The wards of Bloxham, Bodicote and Hook Norton have councillor:elector ratios 15 per cent, 10 per cent and 4 per cent below the district average respectively (19 per cent, 15 per cent and 7 per cent by 2005). Adderbury ward has a councillor:elector ratio 11 per cent above the district average (6 per cent by 2005).

68 At Stage One Cherwell District Council proposed that these four wards should be modified to form two single-member wards and one two-member ward. It proposed a single-member Adderbury ward comprising the parishes of Adderbury and Milton; a two-member Bloxham & Bodicote ward comprising the parishes Bloxham, Bodicote and Milcombe; and a single-member Hook Norton ward comprising the parishes of Hook Norton, South Newington and Wigginton. At Stage One Banbury Constituency Liberal Democrats opposed the District Council's proposed Bloxham & Bodicote and Hook Norton wards.

69 We carefully considered all representations received, and concluded that the District Council's proposals for these wards would provide the best levels of electoral equality currently available while having regard to the statutory criteria. We considered the possibility of separating the parishes of Bloxham and Bodicote; however to place them in single-member wards coterminous with the parishes would provide high levels of electoral inequality. We were also pleased to note that the District Council's proposals were consulted on locally. We therefore adopted the District Council's proposals without modification.

70 Under our draft recommendations the wards of Adderbury, Bloxham & Bodicote and Hook Norton would have councillor:elector ratios 14 per cent, 15 per cent and 5 per cent above the district average respectively (9 per cent, 10 per cent and 1 per cent by 2005).

71 During Stage Three we received general support from Cherwell District Council for our draft recommendations for the wards of Adderbury, Bloxham & Bodicote and Hook Norton. Adderbury Parish Council stated that our draft recommendations "will result in little change from the present situation" for Adderbury parish and they consequently have "no objections to the proposals". Bloxham Parish Council stated that "the communities of Bloxham and Bodicote have little in common and are quite separate" and noted that "the numerical argument is very strong, but members now feel that their concern should be placed on record, if only for information at a future review." Bodicote Parish Council stated that "Bloxham and Bodicote are not a natural community ... allocating two councillors to a larger electorate will mean a weakness in accountability." It therefore proposed that Bodicote parish should be represented by a single-member district ward coterminous with the parish boundaries.

72 We have carefully considered all representations received during Stage Three. As stated earlier, when formulating our draft recommendations we considered separating the parishes of Bloxham and Bodicote into two single-member district wards, but this would have provided electoral variances of 44 per cent and 14 per cent respectively (38 per cent and 18 per cent by 2005). We were of the opinion, during Stage Two, that these were unacceptable levels of electoral inequality, especially as alternative proposals had been put forward by the District Council. We have not been convinced by the evidence put forward during Stage Three that such high levels of electoral inequality are justifiable. We are pleased to note the support of Cherwell District Council and Adderbury Parish Council and we have therefore decided to endorse fully our draft recommendations for these wards. Consequently our final recommendations for these three wards would provide the same levels of electoral equality as our draft recommendations. Our final recommendations are illustrated on Map 2.

Ardley, Deddington, Heyford and Steeple Aston wards

73 These four wards are situated in the centre of the district, and each returns a single councillor. Ardley ward covers the parishes of Ardley, Bucknell, Caversfield and Stoke Lyne; Deddington ward comprises the parishes of Barford St John & St Michael and Deddington; Heyford ward comprises the parishes of Fritwell, Lower Heyford, Somerton, Souldern and Upper Heyford; and Steeple Aston ward comprises the parishes of Duns Tew, Middle Aston, North Aston and Steeple Aston. The wards of Ardley, Deddington and Heyford currently have councillor:elector ratios 1 per cent, 14 per cent and 5 per cent above the district average respectively (5 per cent below, 13 per cent above and 37 per cent above by 2005). Steeple Aston ward has a councillor:elector ratio 28 per cent below the district average (31 per cent by 2005).

74 At Stage One Cherwell District Council proposed that Deddington ward should remain unchanged. It proposed that Steeple Aston ward should be expanded to form a new two-member The Astons &

Heyfords ward with the parishes of Lower Heyford, Upper Heyford, Somerton and Souldern, currently in Heyford ward. The Council proposed transferring Fritwell parish, currently in Heyford ward, into a new single-member Caversfield ward with the parishes of Ardley, Bucknell and Caversfield. It also proposed transferring Stoke Lyne parish from Ardley ward into a revised single-member Fringford ward. Banbury Constituency Liberal Democrats put forward comments on the District Council's proposed grouping of parishes in this area. The parish councils of Lower Heyford and Souldern and a resident of Souldern opposed the District Council's proposed two-member The Astons & Heyfords ward on community identity grounds. Caversfield Parish Council made no specific comments on the District Council's proposals.

75 When formulating our draft recommendations we carefully considered all representations received at Stage One. We adopted the District Council's proposal to retain the existing Deddington ward. However, we proposed a modification to the District Council's proposals for Caversfield and The Astons & Heyfords wards. We noted that the proposed The Astons & Heyfords ward would have an electoral variance of 13 per cent by 2005 under the District Council's proposal. Including the parish of Fritwell in the proposed The Astons & Heyfords ward, rather than in Caversfield ward, improved the electoral variance to 1 per cent by 2005. We therefore proposed a modified two-member The Astons & Heyfords ward, comprising the parishes of Duns Tew, Fritwell, Lower Heyford, Middle Aston, North Aston, Somerton, Souldern, Steeple Aston and Upper Heyford. We also proposed including Middleton Stoney parish in Caversfield ward, with the parishes of Ardley, Bucknell and Caversfield, rather than in Ambrosden & Chesterton ward as proposed by the District Council. These modifications would provide better levels of electoral equality in the area as a whole.

76 Under our draft recommendations the ward of Caversfield would have a councillor:elector ratio equal to the district average (6 per cent below by 2005). The Astons & Heyfords ward would have a councillor:elector ratio 15 per cent below the district average (1 per cent below by 2005). Deddington ward would have a councillor:elector ratio 10 per cent above the district average (8 per cent by 2005).

77 At Stage Three Cherwell District Council supported our proposals for Deddington ward, as did a resident of Hempton. The District Council stated that it had "received strong representations from Middleton Stoney Parish Council about its desire to remain in the proposed Ambrosden & Chesterton ward" as put forward by the District Council at Stage One. Consequently, "notwithstanding the support from Fritwell Parish Council" for the Commission's proposals, the District Council wished to see its Stage One proposals for Caversfield and The Astons & Heyfords wards adopted in our final recommendations.

78 Lower Heyford Parish Council opposed our proposal to include Lower Heyford parish in a two-member The Astons & Heyfords ward, stating that this would be "a contrived union". Upper Heyford Parish Council stated that rural communities should be represented by a single-member and it therefore opposed our proposed The Astons & Heyfords ward. It proposed including Souldern parish with the parishes of the existing Steeple Aston ward in a single-member ward with the remaining parishes of the existing Heyfords ward also forming a single-member ward. Middleton Stoney Parish Council stated that it did not wish its parish to be part of the proposed Caversfield ward and that it should be transferred into the proposed Ambrosden & Chesterton ward, stating that it has strong links with the villages of Chesterton and Wendlebury and no community links with Caversfield. Caversfield Parish Council stated it had no objection to our proposed Caversfield ward.

79 We have given careful consideration to the evidence and representations received during Stage Three. We considered the proposal put forward by Upper Heyford Parish Council to include Souldern

parish in a single-member ward with the existing Steeple Aston ward. However, this would provide very high levels of electoral inequality while creating a ‘detached ward’, made up of two geographically separate areas, as Souldern parish does not share any boundaries with the parishes of the existing Steeple Aston ward. The Commission will not normally recommend detached wards to the Secretary of State as they lend themselves to the creation of electoral areas which can lack community identity and fail to deliver effective and convenient local government. We have noted the comments put forward opposing the creation of a two-member ward. However, due to the size of the electorates of the individual parishes in our proposed The Astons & Heyfords ward, neither Cherwell District Council or the Commission has been able to identify groupings of parishes which would facilitate two single-member wards, provide acceptable levels of electoral equality and fit into a scheme which provides the most suitable electoral arrangements for the district as a whole.

80 We have noted the District Council’s and Middleton Stoney Parish Council’s opposition to including Middleton Stoney parish in Caversfield ward. The District Council stated it wished to see its Stage One proposals adopted in this area, and consequently it stated that Fritwell parish should be included in Caversfield ward as opposed to The Astons & Heyfords ward. As part of the District Council’s Stage Three submission it included comments from parish councils on our draft recommendations. Fritwell Parish Council agreed “wholeheartedly” with our draft recommendation to include the parish in The Astons & Heyfords ward, and therefore we propose retaining this ward as part of our final recommendations. However, we have noted Middleton Stoney Parish Council’s proposal to include its parish in Ambrosden & Chesterton ward in order to provide a better reflection of community interests. We therefore propose including Middleton Stoney parish in the proposed Ambrosden & Chesterton ward, as outlined later in the chapter. In order to provide an acceptable level of electoral equality in Caversfield ward, without the inclusion of Fritwell or Middleton Stoney parishes, we are proposing that Stoke Lyne parish should be transferred into Caversfield ward from the proposed Fringford ward. Caversfield ward would therefore comprise the four parishes of Ardley, Bucknell, Caversfield and Stoke Lyne, which constitute the existing Ardley ward. We consider that this modification, although not providing as good levels of electoral equality, would provide a better reflection of community identity in the area as a whole than our draft recommendations.

81 Under our final recommendations the wards of Deddington and The Astons & Heyfords would provide the same levels of electoral equality as under our draft recommendations. Our proposed Caversfield ward would have a councillor:elector ratio 3 per cent below the district average (9 per cent by 2005) Our final recommendations are illustrated on Map 2.

Ambrosden, Chesterton, Fringford, Launton and Otmoor wards

82 These five wards cover the south and east of the district, and each returns a single councillor. Ambrosden ward comprises the parishes of Ambrosden, Arncott, Merton and Piddington; Chesterton ward comprises the parishes of Chesterton and Wendlebury; Fringford ward comprises the parishes of Cottisford, Finmere, Fringford, Hardwick with Tusmore, Hethe, Mixbury and Newton Purcell with Shelswell; Launton ward comprises the parishes of Blackthorn, Godington, Launton and Stratton Audley; and Otmoor ward comprises the parishes of Charlton-on-Otmoor, Fencott & Murcott, Horton-cum-Studley, Islip, Noke and Oddington. Chesterton, Fringford, Launton and Otmoor wards currently have councillor:elector ratios 48 per cent, 22 per cent, 22 per cent and 14 per cent below the district average respectively (51 per cent, 25 per cent, 26 per cent and 18 per cent by 2005). Ambrosden ward has a councillor:elector ratio 9 per cent above the district average (6 per cent by 2005).

83 At Stage One Cherwell District Council proposed that the parishes in these five wards should be reconfigured to form four single-member wards. It proposed that the parishes of Stoke Lyne, currently in Ardley ward, and Stratton Audley and Godington, currently in Launton ward, should form a revised Fringford ward with the parishes of Cottisford, Fimmere, Fringford, Hardwick with Tusmore, Hethe, Mixbury and Newton Purcell with Shelswell. It proposed that Middleton Stoney parish, currently in Kirtlington ward, should be transferred into a new Ambrosden & Chesterton ward with the parishes of Ambrosden, Chesterton and Wendlebury. Finally it proposed that a revised Launton ward should comprise the parishes of Arncott, Blackthorn, Launton and Piddington; and that a revised Otmoor ward should comprise the parishes of Charlton-on-Otmoor, Fencott & Murcott, Horton-cum-Studley, Islip, Merton, Noke and Oddington. We received a further three submissions from parish councils concerning these wards. Launton Parish Council stated it did not wish to be warded with Caversfield parish. Piddington Parish Council stated that the existing electoral arrangements of Ambrosden ward should be retained and Stratton Audley Parish Council stated it had no comment to make.

84 When formulating our draft recommendations we carefully considered all representations received during Stage One. We concluded that the District Council's proposed Fringford, Launton and Otmoor wards would provide the best levels of electoral equality currently available while having regard to the statutory criteria. We were pleased to note that the District Council's proposals were consulted on locally and the views expressed during this consultation exercise were incorporated where possible in its submission. We adopted the District Council's proposals without modification for these three wards. However, we proposed transferring the parish of Middleton Stoney from Kirtlington ward into a new Caversfield ward, as outlined earlier, rather than in a new Ambrosden & Chesterton ward as proposed by the District Council. This modification would provide improved levels of electoral equality in the area as a whole.

85 Under our draft recommendations the wards of Fringford and Launton would have councillor:elector ratios 4 per cent and 2 per cent above the district average respectively (1 per cent and 3 per cent below by 2005). Ambrosden & Chesterton and Otmoor wards would have a councillor:elector ratios 3 per cent and 4 per cent below the district average (9 per cent and 6 per cent by 2005).

86 During Stage Three we received general support from Cherwell District Council for our draft recommendations for the wards of Fringford, Launton and Otmoor. However, the District Council supported Middleton Stoney Parish Council's proposal to be included in Ambrosden & Chesterton ward, as proposed by the District Council at Stage One. Middleton Stoney Parish Council stated that its parish has "cultural links [with] the villages of Chesterton and Wendlebury" which form part of our proposed Ambrosden & Chesterton ward. Ambrosden Parish Council opposed our proposed Ambrosden & Chesterton ward "due to the large distance between the villages and no direct road link", and consequently the Parish Council argued that the existing electoral arrangements of Ambrosden ward should be retained. Chesterton Parish Council opposed our proposed Ambrosden & Chesterton ward, stating "there is no natural link between the villages"; it proposed instead a new ward comprising the parishes of Bletchington, Kirtlington, Middleton Stoney, Wendlebury and Weston-on-the-Green. Wendlebury Parish Council stated that it "understood why [the Commission] has included part of Ambrosden with the Chestertons and our village", but it outlined a lack of community links between Ambrosden and the other parishes in the proposed ward. It also stated that Middleton Stoney parish should be included in Ambrosden & Chesterton ward, as the parishes of Chesterton, Middleton Stoney and Wendlebury "all share similar concerns and interests."

87 Arccott Parish Council opposed our proposed Launton ward, stating that the Parish Council “feel that they have strong geographical and historical links with Ambrosden and that they have nothing in common with residents of Launton”. Launton Parish Council stated that it would “prefer to be warded with Blackthorn, Stratton Audley, Newton Purcell, Godington and Piddington” parishes; if this is not possible it supported the Commission’s draft recommendation. Islip Parish Council and Noke Parish Meeting supported our draft recommendations for Otmoor ward. Stratton Audley Parish Council stated it “has no objections to the proposed composition of Fringford ward”.

88 We received a further two submissions from residents of Ambrosden, both opposing our proposed Ambrosden & Chesterton ward on community identity grounds.

89 We have given careful consideration to the evidence and representations received during Stage Three. When formulating our final recommendations we have investigated a number of alternative groupings of parishes in this area in an attempt to accommodate the views put forward by local parish councils opposing our draft recommendations. While investigating alternative electoral arrangements in this area we have had regard to the consultation process undertaken by Cherwell District Council at Stage One. During Stage One, the District Council consulted on a set of proposals which were modified to form its Stage One submission to us, in the light of comments from parish councils and local people. Therefore we have ensured that, while attempting to find an alternative grouping of parishes, we have not placed parishes in groupings which they have previously opposed at the start of the PER. We also must have regard for the district as a whole and we cannot consider one area in isolation. The proposals for alternative groupings put forward by Chesterton and Launton parish councils would have had a significant knock-on effect across the entire south of the district as well as providing poor levels of electoral equality. Consequently we have been unable to identify a grouping of parishes which would allow us to place Ambrosden parish in a separate ward from Chesterton and Wendlebury parishes, while still providing good electoral equality and having regard to the statutory criteria. We have also noted that our draft recommendations were predominantly based on the District Council’s proposals and that during Stage Three we have not received any viable alternative proposals for Ambrosden parish that fits into a scheme which provides the most suitable electoral arrangements for the district as a whole.

90 However, we are proposing modifications to our draft recommendations for Ambrosden & Chesterton and Fringford wards. We are adopting Middleton Stoney Parish Council’s proposal to transfer its parish into Ambrosden & Chesterton ward from Caversfield ward, as this would provide a better reflection of community identity, and this proposal was supported by Cherwell District Council. We also propose transferring Stoke Lyne parish from our proposed Fringford ward into Caversfield ward, which would consequently be identical to the existing Ardley ward, in order to improve electoral equality as a whole. As already stated, we were unable to adopt Launton Parish Council’s preferred grouping of parishes as part of our final recommendations. Consequently, we propose endorsing our draft recommendation for Launton ward as final. We are pleased to note the support of Cherwell District Council, Islip Parish Council and Noke Parish Meeting for our proposed Otmoor ward and we are endorsing our draft recommendation for this ward as final. We consider that our final recommendations for these four wards, while not providing as high levels of electoral equality as under our draft recommendations, would provide a better reflection of community identities.

91 Our final recommendations for the wards of Launton and Otmoor would provide the same levels of electoral equality as under our draft recommendations. Ambrosden & Chesterton ward would have a councillor:elector ratio 10 per cent above the district average (3 per cent by 2005), Fringford ward would have a councillor:elector ratio 6 per cent below the district average (10 per cent below by 2005).

Electoral Cycle

92 At Stage One we received no proposals in relation to the electoral cycle of the district. Accordingly, we made no recommendation for change to the present system of elections by thirds.

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

Conclusions

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

- we propose adopting Cherwell District Council's Stage Three proposals in the towns of Banbury and Bicester;
- we propose transferring Middleton Stoney parish into Ambrosden & Chesterton ward and Stoke Lyne parish into Caversfield ward.

95 We conclude that, in Cherwell:

- there should be a reduction in council size from 52 to 50;
- there should be 28 wards, three fewer than at present;
- the boundaries of 29 of the existing wards should be modified;
- the Council should continue to hold elections by thirds.

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

Table 4: Comparison of Current and Recommended Electoral Arrangements

	2000 electorate		2005 forecast electorate	
	Current arrangements	Final recommendations	Current arrangements	Final recommendations
Number of councillors	52	50	52	50
Number of wards	31	28	31	28
Average number of electors per councillor	1,879	1,954	1,986	2,065
Number of wards with a variance more than 10 per cent from the average	23	8	24	1
Number of wards with a variance more than 20 per cent from the average	13	3	14	0

97 As Table 4 shows, our recommendations would result in a reduction in the number of wards with an electoral variance of more than 10 per cent from 23 to eight, with three wards varying by more than 20 per cent from the district average. This level of electoral equality would improve further in 2005, with only one ward, Yarnton, Gosford & Water Eaton, varying by more than 10 per cent from the average, at 11 per cent. We conclude that our recommendations would best meet the need for electoral equality, having regard to the statutory criteria.

Final Recommendation

Cherwell District Council should comprise 50 councillors serving 28 wards, as detailed and named in Tables 1 and 2, and illustrated on Map 2 and the large map inside the back cover. The Council should continue to hold elections by thirds.

Parish and Town Council Electoral Arrangements

98 When reviewing electoral arrangements, we are required to comply as far as is reasonably practicable with the rules set out in Schedule 11 to the 1972 Act. The Schedule states that if a parish is to be divided between different district wards, it must also be divided into parish wards, so that each parish ward lies wholly within a single ward of the district. Accordingly, in our draft recommendations report we proposed consequential changes to the warding arrangements for Banbury, Bicester and Kidlington parishes to reflect the proposed district wards.

99 The parish of Banbury is currently served by 22 councillors representing nine wards: Bretch Hill parish ward (returning four councillors); Grimsbury and Hardwick parish wards (returning three councillors each); Calthorpe, Cherwell Heights, Crouch Hill, Easington, Hill View and Neithrop parish wards (returning two councillors each). During Stage One, Cherwell District Council initially proposed

six parish wards coterminous with its proposed district wards. However, during Stage Two we held informal discussions with officers at the council concerning the implications of Schedule 11 in relation to the existing parish wards, which were created following a recent parish review which had been based on widespread consultation in Banbury, and the District Council's proposed district wards. Following these discussions we proposed creating 11 parish wards reflecting, as nearly as possible, the recently created parish wards. Under our draft recommendations we proposed that Banbury Town Council should comprise 22 councillors, as at present, representing 11 wards: Ruscote parish ward (returning four councillors); Calthorpe, Grimsbury and Hardwick parish wards (returning three councillors each); Crouch Hill and Neithrop parish wards (returning two councillors each); and Easington North, Easington South, Hill View, Longelandes and Town parish wards (returning one councillor each).

100 During Stage Three Cherwell District Council stated that, having given the parish warding arrangements of Banbury further consideration, it "would prefer to have six Town Council wards coterminous with the District wards and to add one member to each of the District ward representation to make up 22 members". This proposal was fully supported by Banbury Town Council. We therefore propose adopting these parish warding arrangements as part of our final recommendations.

Final Recommendation

Banbury Town Council should comprise 22 councillors, as at present, representing six wards: Easington, Grimsbury & Castle, Hardwick and Ruscote parish wards (returning four councillors each); and Calthorpe and Neithrop parish wards (returning three councillors each). The parish ward boundaries are illustrated on the large map inserted in the back of this report.

101 The parish of Bicester is currently served by 15 councillors representing three wards: East, South and West parish wards, each returning five councillors. Cherwell District Council proposed the creation of five parish wards coterminous with the five district wards it put forward for Bicester. Under our draft recommendations we adopted the District Council's proposals for Bicester with two modifications, as outlined earlier. Therefore we proposed that the parish ward boundaries for Bicester be coterminous with the proposed district ward boundaries for the same area.

102 During Stage Three Cherwell District Council proposed a modification to the boundary between Bicester Town and Bicester West district wards. We adopted this boundary modification as part of our final recommendations and consequently we propose modifying the parish ward boundaries so that they are coterminous with the modified district ward boundaries.

Final Recommendation

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

103 The parish of Kidlington is currently served by 16 councillors representing four wards: East, North, South and West parish wards, each returning four councillors. Kidlington Parish Council proposed a new pattern of three-member parish wards for Kidlington. It proposed new Dogwood,

Exeter and Orchard parish wards covering the proposed Kidlington South district ward; and Roundham and St Mary's parish wards covering the proposed Kidlington North parish ward. At Stage One Cherwell District Council adopted Kidlington Parish Council's proposals at both district and parish levels, and under our draft recommendations we adopted these proposals for Kidlington with three minor modifications at district ward level, as outlined earlier. We therefore adopted Kidlington Parish Council's parish wards with minor modifications to reflect our proposed district wards and a modification to the proposed boundary between the parish wards of Dogwood and Exeter, which would include all of the electors of Hardwick Avenue in Dogwood parish ward.

104 During Stage Three we received general support for our draft recommendations from Cherwell District Council, and having received no further comments, we have therefore decided to fully endorse as final our draft recommendations for Kidlington Parish Council.

Final Recommendation

Kidlington Parish Council should comprise 15 councillors, one less than at present, representing five wards: Dogwood, Exeter, Orchard, Roundham and St Mary's parish wards (each returning three councillors). The boundary between Roundham and St Mary's parish wards would run along the A2460, Banbury Road; all other proposed parish ward boundaries are illustrated on the large map inserted in the back of this report.

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

Final Recommendation

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

Map 2: Final Recommendations for Cherwell

6 WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

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

107 It is now up to the Secretary of State to decide whether to endorse our recommendations, with or without modification, and to implement them by means of an Order. Such an Order will not be made before 18 September 2001.

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

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