

Final recommendations on the
future electoral arrangements
for Oxford 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 Oxford City is inserted inside the back cover of this 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 City of Oxford.

SUMMARY

We began a review of Oxford'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 Oxford.

- **In six of the 17 wards the number of electors represented by each councillor varies by more than 10 per cent from the average for the city and two wards vary by more than 20 per cent.**
- **By 2005 this situation is not expected to improve, with the number of electors per councillor forecast to vary by more than 10 per cent from the average in six wards and by more than 20 per cent in two wards.**

Our main final recommendations for future electoral arrangements (see Tables 1 and 2 and paragraphs 108-109) are that:

- **Oxford City Council should have 48 councillors, three less than at present;**
- **there should be 24 wards, instead of 17 as at present;**
- **the boundaries of all 17 of the existing wards should be modified, resulting in a net increase of seven;**
- **elections should continue to take place by thirds.**

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

- **In 21 of the proposed 24 wards the number of electors per councillor would vary by no more than 10 per cent from the city average.**
- **This improved level of electoral equality is forecast to continue, with the number of electors per councillor in one ward, Marston, expected to vary by more than 10 per cent from the average for the city 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 Blackbird Leys, Littlemore and Risinghurst & Sandhills.**

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	Abingdon Road	2	part of East ward; part of Iffley ward; part of South ward; part of West ward	Map 2 and Large map
2	Barton & Sandhills	2	part of Headington ward; part of Old Marston & Risinghurst ward detached no.2; part of Risinghurst & Sandhills parish (the proposed Sandhill parish ward)	Map 2 and Large map
3	Blackbird Leys	2	part of Blackbird Leys parish (the proposed Blackbird Leys parish ward)	Map 2 and Large map
4	Carfax	2	part of Central ward; part of South ward; part of West ward	Map 2 and Large map
5	Churchill	2	part of Old Marston & Risinghurst ward (part- the proposed Wood Farm parish ward of Risinghurst & Sandhills parish); part of Risinghurst & Sandhills parish (the proposed Wood Farm Parish ward); part of Quarry ward; part of St Clement's ward; part of Wood Farm ward	Map 2 and Large map
6	Cowley & Lye Valley	2	part of Temple Cowley ward; part of Wood Farm ward	Map 2 and Large map
7	Cowley Marsh	2	part of East ward; part of Temple Cowley ward; part of Wood Farm ward	Map 2 and Large map
8	Headington	2	part of Headington ward; part of Marston ward; part of Quarry ward; Wood Farm ward	Map 2 and Large map
9	Headington Hill & Northway	2	part of Headington ward; part of Marston ward; part of St Clement's ward	Map 2 and Large Map
10	Iffley & Rose Hill	2	part of Iffley ward; part of Littlemore parish (the proposed Rose Hill parish ward); part of South ward	Map 2 and Large map
11	Iffley Fields	2	part of East ward; part of South ward	Map 2 and Large map
12	Jericho & Osney	2	part of West ward	Map 2 and Large map
13	Littlemore	2	part of Iffley ward; part of Littlemore parish (the proposed Littlemore parish ward; the proposed Sandy Lane West parish ward of Littlemore parish)	Map 2 and Large map
14	Magdalen	2	part of Central ward; part of East ward; part of St Clement's ward	Map 2 and Large map
15	Manor	2	part of Central ward; part of North ward; part of West ward	Map 2 and Large Map
16	Marston	2	part of Central ward; part of Marston ward and part of the parish of Old Marston	Map 2 and Large map
17	Northfield Brook	2	part of Blackbird Leys parish (the proposed Greater Leys parish ward)	Map 2 and Large map

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Constituent areas	Map reference
18	Quarry & Risinghurst	2	part of Risinghurst & Sandhills parish (the proposed Risinghurst parish ward); part of Quarry ward; part of Wood Farm ward	Map 2 and Large map
19	St Clement's	2	part of East ward; part of St Clement's ward	Map 2 and Large map
20	St Margaret's	2	part of Cherwell ward; part of North ward; part of Wolvercote ward	Map 2 and Large map
21	Summertown	2	part of Cherwell ward; part of Wolvercote ward	Map 2 and Large map
22	Templars Square	2	part of Iffley ward; part of Temple Cowley ward	Map 2 and Large map
23	University	2	part of Central ward; part of South ward	Map 2 and Large map
24	Wolvercote	2	part of Cherwell ward; part of West ward; part of Wolvercote ward	Map 2 and Large map

Notes: 1 Oxford City is largely unparished except for the four parishes of Blackbird Leys, Littlemore, Old Marston and Risinghurst & Sandhills.

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

Table 2: Final Recommendations for Oxford

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 Abingdon Road	2	4,212	2,106	-1	4,304	2,152	-1
2 Barton & Sandhills	2	4,318	2,159	1	4,483	2,242	3
3 Blackbird Leys	2	4,131	2,066	-3	4,131	2,066	-5
4 Carfax	2	4,152	2,076	-3	4,434	2,217	2
5 Churchill	2	4,509	2,255	6	4,509	2,255	4
6 Cowley & Lye Valley	2	4,534	2,267	6	4,534	2,267	5
7 Cowley Marsh	2	4,080	2,053	-4	4,080	2,053	-6
8 Headington	2	4,382	2,191	3	4,542	2,271	5
9 Headington Hill & Northway	2	3,574	1,787	-16	3,951	1,976	-9
10 Iffley & Rose Hill	2	4,237	2,119	-1	4,237	2,119	-2
11 Iffley Fields	2	4,275	2,138	0	4,275	2,138	-1
12 Jericho & Osney	2	4,475	2,238	5	4,475	2,238	3
13 Littlemore	2	4,224	2,112	5	4,249	2,125	-2
14 Magdalen	2	4,122	2,061	-3	4,122	2,061	-5
15 Manor	2	4,358	2,179	2	4,358	2,179	0
16 Marston	2	4,886	2,443	15	4,886	2,443	13
17 Northfield Brook	2	3,938	1,969	-8	3,938	1,969	-9
18 Quarry & Risinghurst	2	4,561	2,281	7	4,561	2,281	5
19 St Clement's	2	4,445	2,223	4	4,458	2,229	3
20 St Margaret's	2	3,585	1,793	-16	4,157	2,079	-4
21 Summertown	2	4,665	2,333	9	4,765	2,383	10

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 %
22 Templars Square	2	4,180	2,090	-2	4,180	2,090	-4
23 University	2	4,093	2,047	-4	4,132	2,066	-5
24 Wolvercote	2	4,368	2,184	2	4,368	2,184	1
Totals	48	102,304	-	-	104,129	-	-
Averages	-	-	2,131	-	-	2,169	-

Source: Electorate figures are based on information provided by Oxford City 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 city. 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 City of Oxford. We have now reviewed the five districts in Oxfordshire as part of our programme of periodic electoral reviews (PERs) of all 386 principal local authority areas in England. Our programme started in 1996 and is currently expected to finish in 2004.

2 This was our first review of the electoral arrangements of Oxford. The last review was undertaken by our predecessor, the Local Government Boundary Commission (LGBC), which reported to the Secretary of State in May 1977 (Report no. 215). Since then the LGBC also undertook a Principal Area Boundary Review of the City's external boundary in June 1987 (Report No 536.), which was followed by a consequential review in August 1988 (Report No. 561). The electoral arrangements of Oxfordshire County Council were last reviewed in June 1982 (Report no. 428). We intend reviewing 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, 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 city.

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 city 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 Oxford City Council inviting proposals for future electoral arrangements. We also notified Oxfordshire County Council, Thames Valley Police Authority, the local authority associations, Oxfordshire Association of Local Councils, parish councils in the city, the Members of Parliament with constituencies in the city, 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 City 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 Oxford 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 City of Oxford is situated in the centre of Oxfordshire and covers some 4,560 hectares. The city is predominantly urban and includes a variety of residential housing, including historic university buildings at the centre of the town and large modern estates surrounding the BMW car plant in the south-east of the city. The BMW Cowley car works is the largest employer in the area and there has been significant recent development in the surrounding part of the city, although employment at the plant has decreased dramatically over the last 20 years. The universities and related printers and publishers are also significant employers in the city.

13 Oxford City currently has an electorate of 102,304 (February 2000), and this is forecast to increase to 104,129 by 2005. The main area of population growth is expected to be in the existing Wolvercote ward. The city is largely unparished, containing only four parishes, which were all incorporated into the city in 1991.

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

15 The electorate of the city is 102,304 (February 2000). The Council presently has 51 members who are elected from 17 wards, three of which are in parished areas. Each ward is represented by three members. The Council is elected by thirds as a whole every four years.

16 At present, each councillor represents an average of 2,006 electors, which the City Council forecasts will increase to 2,042 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 six of the 17 wards varies by more than 10 per cent from the city average and in two wards by more than 20 per cent. The worst imbalance is in Blackbird Leys ward where each of the three councillors represents 34 per cent more electors than the city average.

Map 1: Existing Wards in Oxford

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 Blackbird Leys	3	8,074	2,691	34	8,074	2,691	32
2 Central	3	6,365	2,122	6	6,379	2,126	4
3 Cherwell	3	5,210	1,737	-13	5,434	1,811	-11
4 East	3	6,014	2,005	0	6,014	2,005	-2
5 Headington	3	6,532	2,177	9	6,687	2,229	9
6 Iffley	3	5,908	1,969	-2	5,908	1,969	-4
7 Littlemore	3	5,209	1,736	-13	5,224	1,741	-15
8 Marston	3	4,898	1,633	-19	5,298	1,766	-14
9 North	3	5,804	1,935	-4	5,804	1,935	-5
10 Old Marston & Risinghurst	3	4,977	1,659	-17	5,089	1,696	-17
11 Quarry	3	6,125	2,072	3	6,282	2,094	3
12 South	3	6,280	2,093	4	6,373	2,124	4
13 St Clement's	3	7,675	2,558	28	7,675	2,558	25
14 Temple Cowley	3	5,698	1,899	-5	5,698	1,899	-7
15 West	3	5,890	1,963	-2	6,168	2,056	1
16 Wolvercote	3	5,602	1,867	-7	6,069	2,056	1
17 Wood Farm	3	5,953	1,984	-1	5,953	1,984	-3
Totals	51	102,304	-	-	104,129	-	-
Averages	-	-	2,006	-	-	2,042	-

Source: Electorate figures are based on information provided by Oxford City 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 city. The minus symbol (-) denotes a lower than average number of electors. For example, in 2000, electors in Old Marston & Risinghurst ward were relatively over-represented by 17 per cent, while electors in Blackbird Leys ward were significantly under-represented by 34 per cent. Figures have been rounded to the nearest whole number.

3 DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS

17 During Stage One we received 10 representations, including city-wide schemes from the City Council, Oxford City Conservative Group, Oxford City Labour Party and Oxford Liberal Democrat Group and representations from the County Council and five 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 Oxford in Oxfordshire*.

18 Our draft recommendations were based on the City Council's proposals, which achieved some improvement in electoral equality, and provided a pattern of two-member wards across the whole city. However, we moved away from the City Council's scheme in a number of areas, affecting five wards, utilising some of our own proposals. We proposed that:

- Oxford City Council should be served by 48 councillors, compared with the current 51, representing 24 wards, seven more than at present;
- the boundaries of all 17 of the existing wards should be modified;
- there should be new warding arrangements and the redistribution of councillors for the parishes of Blackbird Leys, Littlemore and Risinghurst & Sandhills.

Draft Recommendation

Oxford City Council should comprise 48 councillors, serving 24 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 all of the 24 wards varying by no more than 10 per cent from the city average. This level of electoral equality was forecast to continue further, with no ward varying by more than 7 per cent from the average in 2005.

4 RESPONSES TO CONSULTATION

20 During the consultation on our draft recommendations report, we received 102 representations. A list of all respondents is available from us on request. All representations may be inspected at our offices and those of Oxford City Council.

Oxford City Council

21 The City Council suggested boundary amendments to our proposed St Clement's and Northfield Brook wards and expressed concern at a number of our draft recommendations. It argued that the Commission's proposals would break up a number of natural communities across the city, including Cowley, Lye Valley, the Risinghurst and Sandhills areas, the Marston area, the Littlemore area, the Jericho area and the Cutteslowe area. The City Council also made a number of recommendations for alternative ward names across the city.

Oxfordshire County Council

22 Oxfordshire County Council made a general response to all the Oxfordshire districts and stated that the proposed warding arrangements for some areas could create difficulties for the County Council when a future review of its electoral divisions is carried out. These comments were not specific to Oxford City.

The Conservatives

23 Oxford East Conservative Association and Oxford West & Abingdon Conservative Association both supported our proposal to reduce the number of members on Oxford City council size from 51 to 48. However, they both objected to our proposed warding arrangement of 24 two-member wards and proposed an alternative warding arrangement of 16 three-member wards. Oxford East Conservative Association objected to our proposal to maintain the present electoral cycle of elections by thirds and Oxford West & Abingdon Conservative Association supported our proposal to continue the current electoral cycle of elections by thirds.

The Labour Party

24 Oxford City Labour Party, Oxford Labour Party and Oxford University Labour Club all supported our draft recommendations. However, Oxford City Labour Party expressed concern over our proposed Marston and Headington Hill & Northway wards and expressed a preference for biennial elections rather than the present electoral cycle of elections by thirds.

The Liberal Democrats

25 The Liberal Democrat Group on Oxford City Council, Oxford East Liberal Democrat Constituency Party and the Oxford Branch of Oxford West & Abingdon Liberal Democrat Constituency Party (hereafter referred to as the Liberal Democrats) objected to our proposed draft recommendations. They objected to the forecast electorate figures for 2005 provided by the City Council, arguing that the Council has significantly underestimated the probable increase in Oxford's population. In the light of this they proposed an alternative city-wide scheme comprising 24 two-member wards. This scheme contained significant boundary amendments to our proposed wards in the Cowley area and the centre

of the city. The Liberal Democrats argued that their alternative scheme would better reflect community identity in these parts of the city.

The Liberal Party

26 The Liberal Party objected to our proposed Quarry & Risinghurst and Headington wards and argued that an area north of Old Road should not be split between the two wards of Quarry and Headington. They argued that York Road does not constitute a good boundary between our proposed Quarry and Headington wards. They also argued that our proposed Churchill ward should be renamed Churchill & Wood Farm ward or Wood Farm & Churchill ward.

Parish Councils

27 Blackbird Leys Parish Council supported our proposed Blackbird Leys ward, but objected to our proposed Northfield Brook ward arguing that the Sandy Lane West parish ward has nothing in common with the rest of the ward and that the area should be included in a district ward with the rest of the existing Littlemore parish.

28 Littlemore Parish Council objected to our proposed Littlemore and Northfield Brook wards, arguing that the proposed Sandy Lane West parish ward should be included in a district ward with the rest of the proposed Littlemore ward rather than our proposed Northfield Brook ward.

29 Old Marston Parish Council supported our proposed Marston ward. It argued that the proposed ward served to unite the two areas of New and Old Marston in a single ward.

Other Representations

30 A further 90 representations were received in response to our draft recommendations from local organisations, councillors and residents.

31 We received representations from five City Councillors. Councillor Clarkson objected to our proposed Marston ward, arguing that Marston ward should stretch across the Marston Road to include a number of roads to the east of it. Councillor Cockayne objected to our proposed Cowley & Lye Valley and Cowley Marsh wards, arguing that the areas of Cowley and Lye Valley have nothing in common and that Old Cowley and the Cowley Marsh area should be warded together, thus ensuring that Cowley is warded within one city ward. Councillor Johnson supported our draft recommendations for the whole of Oxford City. Councillor Pope objected to our proposed Cowley & Lye Valley ward, arguing that the two areas have nothing in common and expressing support for a warding arrangement for the city consisting of 16 three-member wards. Councillor Pressel supported our draft recommendations, expressing particular support for our proposed Jericho & Osney ward.

32 We received representations from five local organizations. The Divinity Road Residents Association proposed an amendment to the boundary of our proposed St Clement's and Cowley Marsh wards. They argued that the proposed St Clement's and Cowley Marsh wards would split the Bartlemas Conservation area between two wards. They suggested amending the boundary of the proposed St Clement's ward so that the whole of the conservation area is contained within St Clements ward. Horspath Road Area Residents and Tennants Association and Old Temple Cowley Residents Association both objected to our proposed Cowley & Lye Valley and Cowley Marsh wards arguing that such a warding arrangement would split the area of Cowley between two wards and result in Cowley

and Lye Valley, two areas with nothing in common, being warded together. New Marston (South) Residents Association objected to our proposed Marston ward and argued that it should stretch across the Marston Road to take in William Street, Moody Road, Peacock Road, Pritchard Road and John Garne Way. St Ebbe's Residents Association supported our proposed Carfax ward. The Sure Start group suggested an amendment to the boundary of our proposed Iffley & Rose Hill wards, arguing that the revised wards would reflect the areas covered by the Council's Sure Start programme.

33 We received a large number of representations from local residents. Fifty-eight local residents took part in a write-in campaign objecting to the boundaries of our proposed Headington Hill & Northway and Marston wards. They argued that Marston ward should stretch across the Marston Road and take in a number of roads on the east side of Marston Road. We received six representations from local residents and a 46-person petition objecting to our proposed Littlemore & Northfield Brook wards. All the respondents objected to the proposed Sandy Lane West parish ward of Littlemore parish being included in the city ward of Northfield Brook. We received four representations from residents concerning our proposed Sunnymead ward. Three local residents objected to the name of the proposed ward, arguing that it should be renamed Summertown rather than Sunnymead as this would better reflect community identity in the area. Another resident in the area argued that the boundary of our proposed Sunnymead ward should be amended to extend further southwards in order to take in Beechcroft and Thorncliffe Roads. She argued that these two streets are part of the community of Summertown and as such should be included in a ward of that name. We received a representation from a local resident who suggested amendments to our proposed University ward to include more of the university colleges in the ward. A further resident agreed with the submission of the Divinity Road Residents Association and argued that the Bartlemas Conservation area should be included within one ward. A local resident also suggested a number of ward name changes across the City of Oxford.

5 ANALYSIS AND FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS

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

35 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.

36 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.

37 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

38 Since 1977 there has been a 28 per cent increase in the electorate of Oxford City. At Stage One the City Council submitted electorate forecasts for the year 2005, projecting an increase in the electorate of approximately 2 per cent from 102,304 to 104,129 over the five-year period from 2000 to 2005. It expects most of the growth to be in Wolvercote ward. To prepare these forecasts, the Council estimated rates and locations of housing development with regard to structure and local plans, the expected rate of building over the five-year period and assumed occupancy rates. 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.

39 At Stage Three the Liberal Democrats queried the electoral forecasts for 2005 provided by the City Council. They stated that the City Council had underestimated the size of the increase of electorate in Oxford City and arguing that it had failed to take account of a number of new developments around the city. We consulted with the City Council over the objections from the Liberal Democrats. In reply it stated that at the time the electoral figures were produced the County Council’s Demographics Officer estimated that the City Council electorate would drop by 1 per cent. However, the Council’s Liaison Review Group thought this unlikely due to the expanding student population of Oxford and the rise in the private rented sector. Therefore they decided to agree upon a static electorate unless there was any identifiable new build. The Council also added that the new builds identified by the Liberal Democrats are “very speculative” and could not be taken into account at the time the forecasts were being prepared.

The City Council further pointed out that the Liberal Democrats were represented on the liaison group which produced the forecasts. Having considered the City Council's response we remain satisfied that the electoral forecasts provided by the City Council represent the best estimates which can currently be made.

Council Size

40 As already explained, we start by assuming 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.

41 In our draft recommendations report we adopted the Council's proposal for a council of 48-members as we considered, following consideration of all schemes submitted and representations received, that the best balance between the achievement of electoral equality and the statutory criteria would be met by a council of this size.

42 During Stage Three we received representations from Oxford East Conservative Association and Oxford West & Abingdon Conservative Association agreeing with our proposed council size of 48 members but suggesting an alternative warding arrangement of 16 three-member wards as opposed to our proposed 24 two-member ward scheme. Both groups argued that this particular council size would provide for better electoral equality and allow for elections by thirds. The City Council reiterated its support for a council size of 48. Oxford University Labour Club supported our proposed council size of 48 members.

43 Having considered the representations received at Stage Three we remain of the opinion that the best balance between the achievement of electoral equality and the statutory criteria would be best met by a council of 48 members.

Electoral Arrangements

44 At Stage One we received four city-wide schemes, one from each of the three major political parties and the City Council. The Conservatives, Labour and the Liberal Democrats proposed council sizes of 51, 48, 45 respectively. After considering the representations received at Stage One we proposed substantially adopting the City Council's scheme. We considered that this scheme, which had been consulted on locally by the City Council and which received the majority of local support, offered the best balance between the statutory criteria and electoral equality. We felt that the proposed wards had good electoral equality, utilized clearly identifiable boundaries and reflected the small communities of which Oxford is comprised. The City Council addressed a number of existing anomalies such as the detached ward of Old Marston & Risinghurst. Its proposals also ensured that the whole of the Rose Hill estate would be contained within a single ward. We agreed with the way that the City Council's scheme proposed using the city's key arterial roads as the centre of wards and asserted that these particular roads form the focus of surrounding communities. We were also convinced by the way in which the City Council proposed using the clearly identifiable boundaries of the rivers Cherwell and Thames, which divide the city. However, we moved away from its scheme in a number of areas, affecting eight wards and utilised our own proposals to address anomalies where the proposed ward boundaries varied marginally from the existing parish boundaries and would improve levels of electoral equality.

45 At Stage Three the City Council made specific recommendations for the wards of Churchill, Littlemore, Northfield Brook and St Clement's and expressed reservations over a number of other areas in the city. The Conservatives, The Labour Party and the Liberal Democrats submitted proposals during

Stage Three, in many cases reiterating their Stage One submissions. We also received a number of submissions from local political groups, local councillors, residents associations and local residents. Having considered the representations we received at Stage Three we have decided to substantially confirm our draft recommendations as final.

46 We have not been persuaded by the representations of the Oxford East Conservative Association and Oxford West & Abingdon Conservative Association regarding the warding arrangements in the City. Both groups failed to provide evidence that a pattern of three-member wards would provide for more effective and convenient local government. We therefore remain of the opinion that a uniform pattern of two-member wards would best represent the smaller communities within the City. However, we have decided to make a number of changes to our draft recommendations in areas where we received well argued representations commenting on our proposals. We received a large number of representations regarding Marston, Littlemore, Blackbird Leys, Summertown and Cowley. Having carefully considered the representations received and having visited the area, we are of the opinion that the objections raised to our Marston ward are valid and that the boundary of our proposed Marston ward should be amended to extend across the Marston Road. We have been persuaded by the representations regarding the name of Sunnymead ward being changed to Summertown ward. We have also decided to take note of the representations received regarding Littlemore and Blackbird Leys and include our proposed Sandy Lane West parish ward in a city ward with the rest of Littlemore city ward. However, we have not been persuaded by the arguments of the Liberal Democrats and others regarding the geographical integrity of Cowley and have decided to make no amendments to our proposed wards in this area.

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

- (a) Cherwell, North and Wolvercote wards;
- (b) Central, South and West wards;
- (c) Headington, Marston, Old Marston & Risinghurst and Quarry wards;
- (d) East, St Clement's and Wood Farm wards;
- (e) Blackbird Leys, Iffley, Littlemore and Temple Cowley wards.

48 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.

Cherwell, North and Wolvercote wards

49 The existing three-member wards of Cherwell, North and Wolvercote cover the northern part of the city. Under the current arrangements of a 51-member council, the number of electors per councillor in the three wards varies from the city average by 13 per cent, 4 per cent and 7 per cent respectively. This level of electoral equality is projected to deteriorate over the next five years in North ward, to vary by 5 per cent from the city average in 2005, while the level of electoral equality is projected to improve in Cherwell and Wolvercote ward, to vary by 11 per cent and 1 per cent respectively.

50 After considering the representations we received at Stage One we were of the opinion that the City Council's proposals which put forward four two-member wards in this area of the city, represented the best balance between electoral equality and community identity. In particular, we considered that the City Council's proposals would take account of the communities which straddle the Banbury and

Woodstock roads from west to east. We considered that this would better reflect community identity than the Conservatives' proposal which would divide the area along horizontal lines using these roads. We proposed that the City Council's wards 1-4 should be named Wolvercote, Sunnymead, St Margaret's and Manor respectively to reflect the areas contained in each ward.

51 Under our draft recommendations, the number of electors per councillor in our proposed Wolvercote, Sunnymead, St Margaret's and Manor wards would vary from the city average by 2 per cent, 3 per cent, 10 per cent and 2 per cent respectively. This level of electoral equality is expected to improve over the next five years with the number of electors per councillor varying by 1 per cent and 2 per cent in Wolvercote and St Margaret's wards and equalling the city average in Manor ward. The level of electoral equality in Sunnymead ward would deteriorate marginally to vary by 4 per cent from the city average in 2005.

52 At Stage Three the City Council expressed broad support for our draft recommendations. It suggested a number of alternative ward names, Summertown ward for Sunnymead ward and North ward for Manor ward. We also received representations from four local residents objecting to the name of our proposed Sunnymead ward and suggesting the alternative name of Summertown ward. One of these local residents also suggested that the boundary of our proposed Sunnymead ward should be moved southwards to include Beechcroft Road, Thorncliffe Road and part of Woodstock Road. The resident argued that this would ensure that the whole community of Summertown is represented within a single ward. We received no other representations regarding this area.

53 We did not receive detailed representations regarding Wolvercote ward and received no representations regarding Manor ward. Given that we believe that these wards achieve good electoral equality and adequately reflect community identity, we have decided to confirm our draft recommendations for these wards as final.

54 However, in the light of the representations received we have decided to move away from our draft recommendations and modify the proposed boundary between St Margaret's and Sunnymead wards. We propose that the boundary between these two wards should run southwards along Woodstock Road, eastwards along Beechcroft Road until No. 51 and then eastwards to the rear of the houses on the south side of Beechcroft Road, northwards to the rear of the houses on the west side of Banbury Road to rejoin the original proposed boundary between Sunnymead and St Margaret's wards. We consider that extending the boundary in this way would bring two roads which are locally considered to be part of the Summertown community into the ward containing the rest of that community. We have also been persuaded that a change in the name of our proposed Sunnymead ward to Summertown ward would better reflect the community contained within the ward.

55 Under our final recommendations, the number of electors per councillor in Manor, St Margaret's, Summertown and Wolvercote wards would be 2 per cent above, 16 per cent below, 9 per cent above and 2 per cent above the city average respectively (equal to the average, 4 per cent below, 10 per cent above and 1 per cent in 2005). Our final recommendations are set out in Tables 1 and 2, and illustrated on Map 2 and on the large map at the back of this report.

Central, South and West wards

56 The existing wards of Central, South and West cover the centre, south and west of Oxford, to the west of the River Thames. Under the current arrangements of a 51-member council, the number of electors per councillor in the three wards varies from the city average by 6 per cent, 4 per cent and 2 per cent respectively. This level of electoral equality is projected to improve over the next five years in Central and West wards to vary by 4 per cent and 1 per cent respectively, while continuing to vary by 4 per cent from the city average in South ward in 2005.

57 After considering the representations received at Stage One we were of the opinion that we should adopt the City Council's proposals for this area. Having decided to adopt a 24-ward scheme with a uniform pattern of two-member wards, we were limited in the alternative warding arrangements we could adopt in this area. We noted that the Council's proposals for Ward 6 were the subject of agreement among all the political parties. We also noted that the City Council's proposals ensured that the city centre and the university were represented in separate wards. Given this and the fact that the Conservatives' proposals involved straddling the River Cherwell, which we considered to be a significant boundary in the city, and that their proposed St Aldate's and Oxford South ward necessitated linking areas of the City centre with areas on the edge of the city, we decided to adopt the City Council's recommendations in this area. However, we made one minor boundary amendment to the City Council's proposed Ward 8 and transferred part of the east bank of the Thames to the City Council's proposed Ward 17, a change which involved no electors. We proposed that the City Council's proposed Wards 5 to 8 should be named Carfax, Jericho & Osney, University and Abingdon Road after the key areas and roads contained in each of the proposed wards. Whilst we noted that there are colleges of the university elsewhere in the City, we also noted that the proposed Ward 7 contains little besides colleges, university land and buildings and that the population in this area is largely comprised of students. Therefore we considered that the proposed title would best reflect the composition of this area.

58 Under our draft recommendations the number of electors per councillor in our proposed Carfax, Jericho & Osney, University and Abingdon Road wards would vary from the city average by 3 per cent 5 per cent, 4 per cent and 1 per cent respectively. In 2005 the number of electors per councillor is expected to vary from the city average by 2 per cent, 3 per cent, 5 per cent and 1 per cent respectively.

59 At Stage Three the City Council expressed broad support for our draft recommendations. However, it expressed concern over the separation of Jericho and Walton Street from the rest of the north-west city centre area and suggested alternative names for Abingdon Road, Carfax and University wards, proposing South, Castle and Holywell respectively.

60 The Liberal Democrats suggested amendments to the boundary of University ward which would involve moving the western boundary of the ward to the other side of Parks Road to include more of the university colleges in exchange for some properties on the east side of Lower St Aldate's. The Liberal Democrats argued that this would help to transfer non-student areas out of the proposed University ward and would move parts of the university colleges into the University ward. They stated that "the boundary of the proposed University ward can be changed to improve both electoral equality and community identity, by first removing from this predominantly student ward the east side of St Aldate's Street, and incorporating the circa.350 electors in Keble College...As a university college, it clearly has a greater community of interest with the rest of University ward."

61 The Liberal Democrats also proposed creating two new wards from our proposed Carfax and Jericho & Osney wards: Osney & St Ebbe's and Jericho & St Giles. They argued that this would unite

the similar areas of St Ebbe's, St Thomas and the areas around Oxford Railway Station and Botley Road in one ward and would unite the Jericho community and the colleges west of the Parks Road in the other ward ensuring that areas with similar community identity would be unified within the same city wards.

62 Councillor Pressel supported our recommendations in the area, particularly our proposed Jericho & Osney ward, arguing that the two areas have much in common and stating that, "I feel particularly strongly that Jericho and the Botley Road need to remain in the same ward because they are linked in many ways."

63 Three local residents expressed support for our draft recommendations in this area, in particular for our proposed Jericho & Osney ward, arguing that it accurately reflects the community identity in this part of the city. One local resident also expressed particular support for our proposed Carfax ward stating that this "rightly draws together the historically connected communities of St Thomas and St Ebbe's." Another local resident expressed support for our proposed University ward stating that, "the creation of a university ward is also a sensible step forward". Another local resident suggested some amendments to our proposed University and Carfax wards. He argued that transferring some of the university colleges in the existing Carfax ward to our proposed University ward would help to place most of the university and its students in a single ward. We also received a representation from a local resident who objected to the name of our proposed Jericho & Osney ward and suggested that the ward should be known as West ward.

64 A local resident suggested a number of alternative ward names across the city. He suggested that our proposed Abingdon Road ward should be renamed Grandpoint & New Hinksey, our proposed Manor Park ward should be renamed Manors ward and Wolvercote ward should be renamed Wolvercote with Cutteslowe ward.

65 We have given careful consideration to the evidence and representations received. We have noted the alternative warding arrangements suggested by the Liberal Democrats for the area and their arguments regarding the community links between Jericho and the St Giles area and St Thomas and St Ebbe's areas and the Botley Road and Osney areas. However, we remain persuaded by the case made at Stage One by the City Council, in which it argued that there are historical links between Jericho and Osney, and stressed that the two areas are also linked by the new Rewley Road development. We also noted that our draft recommendations were also supported by a number of local residents at Stage Three.

66 We noted the boundary amendments proposed for University ward by a local resident and the Liberal Democrats. However the proposal of the local resident would result in poorer levels of electoral equality for Carfax and University ward than under our draft recommendations. While we recognise that the Liberal Democrats proposals for the University area would result in good levels of electoral equality while reflecting community identity, we are unable to consider any one area in isolation from the rest of the city. Furthermore we noted that we received a number of representations expressing support for our proposed wards in this area of the City and in particular expressing support for our proposed Jericho & Osney and University wards. We also noted the alternative ward names suggested for the area but we have not been persuaded that there is widespread support for the proposed names. Given all these factors we have decided to confirm our draft recommendations as final in this area. Our proposed wards would have the same electoral variances as our draft recommendations. Our final recommendations are set out in Tables 1 and 2, and illustrated on Map 2 and on the large map at the back of this report.

Headington, Marston, Old Marston & Risinghurst and Quarry wards

67 The existing wards of Headington, Marston, Old Marston & Risinghurst (comprising the parishes of Old Marston and Risinghurst & Sandhills) and Quarry cover the north-eastern part of the city. Under the current arrangements of a 51-member council, the number of electors per councillor in the four wards varies from the city average by 9 per cent, 19 per cent, 17 per cent and 3 per cent respectively. This level of electoral equality is projected to improve over the next five years in Marston ward, to vary by 14 per cent, while continuing to vary by 9 per cent, 17 per cent and 3 per cent from the city average in Headington, Old Marston & Risinghurst and Quarry wards in 2005.

68 At Stage One we considered that the City Council's scheme improved the representation of Marston as a whole by linking the two areas of New and Old Marston. While we also noted that the City Council's scheme ensured that the two areas of Old and New Headington were united in a single ward. We also noted that the City Council's proposals would involve dividing Sandhills from Risinghurst, with which it is historically linked, we considered that it was necessary to divide Risinghurst & Sandhills parish and place part of it in wards with adjacent areas to provide reasonable levels of electoral equality. We were of the view that the City Council's proposals offered the best division of this parish by using the clear boundary of the London Road and by respecting the community links between Barton and Sandhills and between Headington Quarry and Risinghurst. However, we also proposed some minor amendments to the City Council's proposals. We proposed a minor amendment to the proposed boundary of Marston ward to include the part of Marsh Lane which lies within Old Marston parish and the remainder of Marsh Lane to the north of Brookfield Crescent. This ensured that the city ward boundary was aligned with the parish ward boundary, while avoiding dividing this part of Marsh Lane between wards. To address the resulting levels of electoral inequality, we proposed that William Street should be transferred to Headington Hill & Northway ward, where it would be combined in a ward with other areas to the east of Marston Road. We proposed that the City Council's proposed Wards 9, 10, 12, 13, 14 and 15 should be named Headington Hill & Northway, Marston, Headington, Barton & Sandhills, Quarry & Risinghurst and Churchill respectively, to reflect the constituent areas of each of the proposed wards and in the case of Churchill ward, after the Churchill Hospital, which is central to the Council's proposed Ward 15.

69 Under our draft recommendations, the number of councillors per elector would vary from the city average by 9 per cent, 7 per cent, 3 per cent, 1 per cent, 7 per cent and 6 per cent in Headington Hill & Northway, Marston, Headington, Barton & Sandhills, Quarry & Risinghurst and Churchill ward respectively. By 2005 the number of electors is expected to vary from the city average by 2 per cent, 5 per cent, 5 per cent, 3 per cent, 5 per cent and 4 per cent respectively.

70 At Stage Three the City Council expressed broad support for our draft recommendations, However it proposed amending the boundary between Churchill ward and St Clement's ward to include South Park in our proposed St Clement's ward. In this particular area it expressed concern at the separation of the William Street area from the rest of New Marston.

71 Oxford City Labour Party objected to our proposed Marston ward. It considered that the boundary of Marston ward should be amended so as to include William Street, Pritchard Road, Peacock Road, Moody Road, Purcell Road and John Garne Way, arguing that this would better reflect community identity in this area and stating that "we hope that you will be willing to reconsider your division of this area should any representations be made from local residents in this regard."

72 Oxford Liberal Party made mention of a city-wide warding arrangement consisting of 12 larger

wards. It had sent this particular proposal to the Commission a year earlier, before the PER process had started. However, it went on to state that it accepted that this was no longer on the Commission's agenda. It objected to our proposed Headington and Quarry & Risinghurst wards, arguing that the area north of Old Road should not be split between Quarry & Risinghurst ward and Headington ward; that the 'Rock Edge' is a mini community which should not be split; and that York Road is not a suitable ward boundary. It also argued that our proposed Churchill ward should be given the alternative name of 'Wood Farm & Churchill' or 'Churchill & Wood Farm', preferably the former, stating that "most of the proposed new ward is recognisably Wood Farm and the ward should retain that name or at least be called 'Wood Farm and Churchill'".

73 Councillor Clarkson also objected to our proposed Marston ward, arguing that the boundary of the ward should be extended eastwards across the Marston Road to take in William Street, Pritchard Road, Peacock Road, Moody Road, Purcell Road and John Garne Way. She argued that this would better reflect community identity in this area.

74 Old Marston Parish Council supported our proposed Marston Ward, stating that it approved of the way the ward, "amalgamated the Parish of Old Marston with part of New Marston."

75 Risinghurst & Sandhills Parish Council objected to our proposed Barton & Sandhills and Quarry & Risinghurst wards arguing that the consequent warding of the parish would be detrimental to the balanced representation of Risinghurst and Sandhills. It also argued that the parish of Risinghurst & Sandhills should be contained fully within one city ward, represented by three councillors.

76 New Marston (South) Residents Association objected to our proposed Marston ward, arguing that William Street, Pritchard Road, Peacock Road, Moody Road, Purcell Road and John Garne Way should be included in Marston ward rather than in our proposed Headington Hill & Northway ward. It argued that these particular roads had more in common with the rest of our proposed Marston ward citing the fact that the area covered by the New Marston (South) Residents Association stretched across the Marston Road.

77 We also received representations from fifty-eight local residents who objected to our proposed Marston ward. They all argued that the ward should extend across the Marston Road and include William Street, Moody Road, Peacock Road, Pritchard Road, Purcell Road and John Garne Way. They argued that this would better reflect community identity in the area and that the roads concerned had no community links with the rest of our proposed Headington Hill & Northway ward.

78 We have considered the representations that we received at Stage Three and have reached a number of conclusions regarding our draft recommendations. Having visited the area covered by our proposed Marston and Headington Hill & Northway we have been persuaded by the argument that Marston ward should incorporate William Street, Pritchard Road, Peacock Road, Moody Road, Purcell Road and John Garne Way on the eastern side of Marston Road, all of which are currently in our proposed Headington Hill & Northway ward. We believe that these particular roads have an affinity with the rest of the Marston ward and including them with the rest of Marston would better reflect community identity and provide for effective and convenient local government. We also consider that these roads look to the rest of Marston ward, as they do not have direct access to the rest of Headington Hill & Northway ward. However, we believe that only the top half of John Garne Way should be warded with Marston ward. The other properties on John Garne Way are properties owned by Oxford Brooks University and therefore we consider that they will have less community identity with Marston Ward. We are aware that this will result in a slightly poorer level of electoral equality than our draft recommendations but

we consider that the level of electoral variance, 13 per cent by 2005, in Marston ward, is justified as it would offer the best balance between electoral equality and community identity.

79 We also noted the objections to our proposed Barton & Sandhills and Quarry & Risinghurst wards. We acknowledge that there is an historical link between Risinghurst and Sandhills. However, given that we are adopting a city-wide scheme of 24 two-member wards, we are unable to adopt the alternative suggestion of a three-member ward containing the whole of Risinghurst & Sandhills parish.

80 We have also noted the three alternative names suggested for Churchill ward; Wood Farm & Churchill, Churchill & Wood Farm or Cheney & Wood Farm. However, we have not received any evidence of local support for a change of ward name and consequently propose no change to our draft recommendation.

81 Therefore with the exception of Marston and Headington Hill & Northway wards we have decided to confirm our draft recommendation in this area as final. Under our final recommendations the number of councillors per elector would vary from the city average by 16 per cent, 15 per cent, 3 per cent, 1 per cent, 7 per cent and 6 per cent in Headington Hill & Northway, Marston, Headington, Barton & Sandhills, Quarry & Risinghurst and Churchill wards respectively. In 2005 the number of electors would vary from the city average by 9 per cent, 13 per cent, 5 per cent, 3 per cent, 5 per cent and 4 per cent respectively. Our final recommendations are set out in Tables 1 and 2, and illustrated on Map 2 and on the large map at the back of this report.

East, St Clement's and Wood Farm wards

82 The existing wards of East, St Clement's and Wood Farm cover the area to the south-east of the centre of the city centre. Under the current arrangements of a 51-member council the number of electors per councillor varies from the city average by 28 per cent and 1 per cent in St Clement's and Wood Farm wards while equalling the city average in East ward. This level of electoral equality is projected to deteriorate over the next five years in East and Wood Farm wards, varying by 2 per cent and 3 per cent respectively, while improving in St Clement's ward to vary by 25 per cent from the city average in 2005.

83 During Stage One we were persuaded that the City Council's proposals would address the anomaly under which the Donnington Bridge Road area is currently linked with areas to the west of the river instead of those adjoining areas with which it shares community links. The proposal also ensured that the Divinity Road area is contained within one ward, as supported by a local resident. However we proposed making a minor amendment to the City Council's proposed Iffley Fields ward to address an anomaly whereby it had moved away from using the River Thames as a ward boundary. We considered that the river forms a significant boundary, particularly in this area where there is no bridge. We therefore proposed transferring that part of the existing South ward to the east of the River Thames to Iffley Fields ward. This area contains only boat houses so our amendment did not affect any electors.

84 We proposed that the City Council's proposed Wards 11,16, 17, 18 and 19 should be named St Clement's, Magdalen, Cowley & Lye Valley, Cowley Marsh and Iffley Fields respectively to reflect the constituent areas contained in each of the proposed wards.

85 Under our draft recommendations our the number of electors per councillor in our proposed Cowley & Lye Valley, Cowley Marsh, Magdalen and St Clements would vary from the city average by 6 per cent, 4 per cent, 3 per cent and 4 per cent respectively. Iffley Fields ward would have equal to the

city average amount of electors per councillor. In 2005 the number of electors is expected to vary from the city average by 5 per cent, 5 per cent, 5 per cent and 2 per cent respectively. The number of electors per councillor would vary from the city average by 1 per cent in Iffley Fields ward by 2005.

86 At Stage Three The City Council expressed broad support for our draft recommendations. However, it proposed boundary amendments to our proposed St Clements ward. This would involve amending the boundary between Churchill ward and St Clement's ward to include South Park in our proposed St Clements ward. It expressed concerns regarding the Cowley and Lye Valley wards.

87 The Liberal Democrats proposed major boundary amendments in this area of the city. They argued that our proposed Cowley & Lye Valley ward resulted in part of Cowley being warded with Lye Valley with which it has no shared common identity. They stated that "the City Council's unsubstantiated claim that the part of the Cowley community included in the proposed Cowley & Lye Valley is 'clearly separate' from the older Temple Cowley area to the west of Hollow Way' (para 90) is demonstrably untrue" They also objected to our proposed Cowley Marsh wards arguing that this results in the splitting of the community of Cowley.

88 The Liberal Democrats proposed a new ward called Wood Farm consisting of that part of our existing Cowley & Lye Valley ward to the south west of the Slade and to the south of Mascall Avenue and that part of our proposed Churchill ward to the east of the Churchill Hospital. They argued that this would place similar areas in the same ward and enable the whole of Cowley to be placed in their proposed Temple Cowley ward which would consist of the remainder of Cowley & Lye Valley ward and that part of Cowley Marsh ward to the south east of Barracks Lane. As a consequence of these two wards, they proposed a further three wards for the area: Cowley St Johns, consisting of the remainder of Cowley Marsh ward and part of the existing Iffley Fields ward, between Magdalen Street and Howard Street; Iffley Fields ward, consisting of the remainder Iffley Fields ward less that part of our proposed Magdalen ward between Magdalen Road and Howard Street; St Clement's ward, consisting of the part of St Clements ward to the west of Chapel Street and the remainder of Magdalen ward and Cheney ward consisting of the remainder of Churchill and St Clements wards. The Liberal Democrats argued that all these wards resulted in areas with similar community identity being warded together.

89 Councillor Cockayne objected to our proposed Cowley & Lye Valley and Cowley Marsh wards arguing that the proposals failed to respect the community integrity of Cowley and would result in East Oxford and Cowley being linked within a single ward. He stated that "Paragraph 90, of the Commission's Draft recommendations for Oxford, quotes the City Council who state that these two areas are 'clearly separate' and that the proposed Ward 6 (Cowley & Lye Valley) combines a 'distinct community of the Lye Valley estate and the eastern part of Cowley'. This is most certainly not the case". Councillor Pope objected to our proposed Cowley & Lye Valley ward, arguing that the two areas have nothing in common. He further added that Lye Valley had more in common with the Headington and Wood Farm areas and that the area should be warded with Headington within a three-member ward.

90 Horspath Road Area Residents and Tenants Association and Old Temple Cowley Residents Association objected to our proposed Cowley & Lye Valley ward arguing that the two areas have nothing in common with each other and that the whole of Cowley should be united within one ward. Old Temple Cowley Residents Association stated that "we consider the split in this area does not take into account the strong natural and historical links between the Temple Cowley area of Crescent Road, Temple Road and Marsh Road with the Sunnyside Estate area i.e, the Fern Hill Road, Horspath Road, Cranmer Road area."

91 The Divinity Road Residents Association and a local resident suggested an amendment to the boundary of our proposed Cowley Marsh and St Clement's wards. They argued that the whole of the Bartlemas Conservation area should be included in a single ward rather than being split between the two wards of Cowley Marsh and St Clement's. The Divinity Road Residents Association stated that "it does not seem logical to split this very small area, comprising only four households, down the middle" and went on to state that "for the coherency of our area, and, more particularly, for the coherency of the Bartlemas Conservation area, we feel strongly that the new electoral ward boundary should follow the line of Bartlemas Close rather than dividing the Conservation area."

92 We have carefully considered the representations we received at Stage Three regarding this area. We have been persuaded that the boundary amendment suggested by The Divinity Road Residents Association would help to better reflect community identity in the area and ensure that the Bartlemas Conservation area is contained in a single ward. The boundary amendment would involve the transfer of only a small number of electors which would not substantially affect electoral equality in our proposed wards. We note the objections raised to our proposed Cowley & Lye Valley ward and Cowley Marsh ward. We are mindful of respecting the geographical integrity of the community of Cowley. However, having visited the area we are of the opinion that our proposed boundary between Temple Cowley and Cowley Marsh is an effective and easily identifiable boundary. We also consider that there is sufficient distance between the two areas of Cowley and sufficient links between the Cowley and Lye Valley areas to justify the placing of Cowley and Lye Valley in a single ward. We are unable to consider any area in isolation from the rest of the city and the adoption of the Liberal Democrats' proposals would necessitate extensive changes throughout the rest of east Oxford which we are not convinced would receive local support and provide good levels electoral equality. In the light of this we have decided to confirm our draft recommendations as final in this area. This would result in the same electoral variances as under our draft recommendations in most wards in this area apart from Cowley Marsh and St Clement's wards which would retain the same variances as under our draft recommendations for 2000 (both 4 per cent) but would vary by 6 per cent and 3 per cent by 2005. The variances for these wards are set out in Table 2 and illustrated on Map 2 and on the large map in the back of this report.

Blackbird Leys, Iffley, Littlemore and Temple Cowley wards

93 The existing wards of Blackbird Leys (comprising Blackbird Leys parish), Iffley, Littlemore (comprising Littlemore parish) and Temple Cowley cover the southern part of the city. Under the current arrangements of a 51-member council the number of electors per councillor varies from the city average by 34 per cent, 2 per cent, 13 per cent and 5 per cent respectively in these four wards. This level of electoral equality is projected to deteriorate over the next five years in Iffley, Littlemore and Temple Cowley wards, to vary by 4 per cent, 15 per cent and 7 per cent respectively, while improving slightly in Blackbird Leys ward, to vary by 32 per cent from the city average in 2005.

94 Due to the warding pattern that we adopted elsewhere in the city we were limited in the extent to which we could adopt alternative proposals in this area as part of our draft recommendations. We therefore based our draft recommendations on the City Council's scheme. We considered that the City Council's proposed changes would address the anomalies in the existing boundary of Iffley ward and ensure that the whole of Iffley village is contained within one ward, an issue which was raised by all political groups who responded at Stage One. The City Council's scheme also ensured that the Rose Hill estate would be included in a single ward, parts of the existing Iffley ward which have more in common with Cowley would be combined with adjoining parts of Cowley, and that the Iffley and Littlemore village communities would be combined in a single ward.

95 We proposed that the City Council's proposed Wards 22, 23 and 24 should be named Iffley & Rose Hill, Templars Square, Littlemore, Northfield Brook and Blackbird Leys wards in order to reflect the constituent areas in the proposed wards. Templars Square is the shopping centre which is the focus of the communities included in the proposed Ward 21.

96 Under our draft recommendations, the number of electors per councillor in our proposed Blackbird Leys, Iffley & Rose Hill, Littlemore, Northfield Brook and Templars Square would vary from the city average by 3 per cent, 1 per cent, 6 per cent, 2 per cent and 2 per cent respectively. In 2005 the number of electors is expected to vary from the city average by 5 per cent, 2 per cent, 7 per cent, 4 per cent and 4 per cent respectively.

97 At Stage Three the City Council expressed broad support for our draft recommendations. However it proposed that the proposed Sandy Lane West parish ward should be warded at city level with Littlemore city ward rather than Northfield Brook city ward.

98 Blackbird Leys Parish Council expressed broad support for our draft recommendations, especially the splitting of Blackbird Leys into two wards. However, it objected to the inclusion of the proposed Sandy Lane West parish ward in the Northfield Brook city ward and argued that the area should be included with the rest of Littlemore parish in Littlemore city ward. It cited the fact that the Sandy Lane West area has nothing in common with the Blackbird Leys area.

99 Littlemore Parish Council also objected to both our proposed Littlemore and Northfield Brook city wards. It argued that the proposed Sandy Lane West parish ward area should be included with the rest of Littlemore parish in Littlemore city ward. It cited the lack of community identity and common links between Sandy Lane West parish ward and Blackbird Leys parish.

100 The Sure Start group, a community group dealing with preschool education in the Oxford area, proposed that boundary of our proposed Iffley & Rose Hill ward should be amended to correspond more closely with the area covered by the Sure Start initiative. It argued that areas of Rose Hill and Iffley should be removed from our proposed Iffley & Rose Hill ward and parts of Littlemore should be placed in Iffley & Rose Hill ward. It argued that this would better reflect community identity in the area.

101 We also received representations from six local residents and a 46-signature petition objecting to the inclusion of the Sandy Lane West area with the parish of Blackbird Leys at city level rather than with the rest of Littlemore parish. All the residents argued that the Sandy Lane West area has nothing in common with the rest of Northfield Brook ward, with one of the local residents stating "we do not have any community links with Blackbird Leys or Greater Leys".

102 We have carefully considered the representations received at Stage Three. We are mindful of the arguments put forward by the Sure Start group. However we feel that our proposed Iffley & Rose Hill ward reflects community identity in the area. We remain persuaded by the arguments put forward by the City Council and remain convinced that the proposed Iffley & Rose Hill ward ensures that the communities of Rose Hill and Iffley Village are not divided between wards.

103 We are also mindful of the arguments against our proposed Littlemore and Northfield Brook wards. We recognise that all representations argue against the warding of the Sandy Lane West area with parts of Blackbird Leys at city level, in terms of a lack of shared community identity and ties. All the respondents argued that the Sandy Lane West parish ward should remain in a city ward with the remainder of Littlemore parish to reflect community identity in the area. We have been persuaded to

accept the arguments put to us, particularly as we note that the Sandy Lane area has no direct links with the Blackbird Leys parish area. We have therefore decided to include the Sandy Lane West area with the rest of the Littlemore parish in Littlemore city ward and consider that this particular boundary amendment would address the objections raised at Stage Three. Although it would result in poorer levels of electoral equality in Northfield Brook ward (9 per cent by 2005), we consider that this level of electoral equality is justified given the objections of residents and other interested parties at Stage Three. Elsewhere, we are confirming our draft recommendations as final. Under our final recommendations the number of electors per councillor in Littlemore and Northfield Brook wards would be 1 per cent above and 8 per cent below the city average respectively (2 per cent and 9 per cent in 2005). Our final recommendations are set out in Tables 1 and 2, and illustrated on Map 2 and on the large map at the back of this report.

Electoral Cycle

104 At Stage One we received three representations regarding the City Council's electoral cycle. The City Council supported biennial elections, arguing that this would ensure that the electorate would continue to have a regular say in the running of the council. The Labour Party also supported a scheme of biennial elections. The Conservative Group favoured retaining the existing system of election by thirds "for reasons of voter familiarity and electoral accountability".

105 We noted the support at Stage One for an electoral system of biennial elections, however until such time as the Secretary of State makes an Order under the Local Government Act 2000 we can only continue to operate on the basis of existing legislation, which provides for elections by thirds or whole-council elections in two-tier areas. Statutorily we have no power to recommend a change to biennial elections. Therefore, in our draft recommendations we proposed no change to the Council's present system of election by thirds.

106 At Stage Three the City Council reiterated its preference for biennial elections, arguing that the current system of elections by thirds would be confusing for the electorate who are represented in two-member wards. The City Council stated "the Secretary of State now has the power to authorise biennial elections". Oxford East Labour Party also expressed its support for biennial elections stating that "with two councillors per electoral ward, it is sensible for half the City Council to be elected every two years."

107 We note the support at Stage Three for an electoral system of biennial elections, however as stated earlier, until such time as the Secretary of State makes an Order under the Local Government Act 2000 we can only continue to operate on the basis of existing legislation, which provides for elections by thirds or whole-council elections in two-tier areas. We therefore confirm as final our draft recommendations for no change to the Council's present system of election by thirds.

Conclusions

108 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:

- We propose that the boundary between Summertown ward and St Margaret's ward be amended so that Beechcroft Road, Thorncliffe Road and part of Woodstock Road are included in Summertown ward;

- that the boundary between Marston ward and Headington Hill & Northway ward be extended eastwards across the Marston Road to include William Street, Moody Road, Peacock Road, Pritchard Road, Purcell Road and part of John Garne Way;
- that the Sandy Lane West area of Littlemore parish should be included with Littlemore rather than Northfield Brook ward;
- that the boundary between St Clement's and Cowley Marsh should be amended to include the whole of the Bartlemas Conservation area in the St Clement's ward.

109 We conclude that, in Oxford:

- there should be a reduction in council size from 51 to 48;
- there should be 24 wards, 7 more than at present;
- the boundaries of 17 of the existing wards should be modified;
- the Council should continue to hold elections by thirds.

110 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	51	48	51	48
Number of wards	17	24	17	24
Average number of electors per councillor	2,006	2,131	2,042	2,169
Number of wards with a variance more than 10 per cent from the average	6	3	6	1
Number of wards with a variance more than 20 per cent from the average	2	0	2	0

111 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 six to four, with no wards varying by more than 20 per cent from the city average. This level of electoral equality would improve further in 2005, with only one ward, Marston, varying by more than 10 per cent from the average, at 13 per cent. We conclude that our recommendations would best meet the need for electoral equality, having regard to the statutory criteria.

Final Recommendation

Oxford City Council should comprise 48 councillors serving 24 wards, as detailed and named in Tables 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 elections by thirds.

Parish Council Electoral Arrangements

112 In undertaking reviews of electoral arrangements we are required to comply as far as possible with the provisions set out in Schedule 11 to the 1972 Local Government Act. The Schedule provides that if a parish is to be divided between different district wards it must also be divided into parish wards, so that each parish ward lies wholly within a single ward of the district. Accordingly, we propose consequential warding arrangements for the parishes of Blackbird Leys, Risinghurst & Sandhills and Littlemore to reflect the proposed city wards.

113 The parish of Blackbird Leys is currently served by 15 parish councillors and is unwarded. We received no proposals regarding the parish warding arrangements at Stage One, although the City Council generally supported the parish being warded. As a result of our draft recommendations at a city level, we proposed that the parish should be divided into two parish wards, Blackbird Leys and Greater Leys, to be coterminous with those parts of the parish that lie within the proposed city wards of Blackbird Leys and Northfield Brook. Given that our proposals at city level divided the parish into two equally sized wards, we proposed increasing the size of the parish council by one, to create an even

number of parish councillors. We recommended that the proposed parish wards should each be represented by eight councillors in line with their proportion of the parish electorate.

114 At Stage Three, Blackbird Leys expressed support for our proposed warding of Blackbird Leys parish. Having considered all the evidence received, and in light of the confirmation of our proposed city wards of Blackbird Leys and Northfield Brook, we confirm our draft recommendation for warding Blackbird Leys parish as final.

Final Recommendation

Blackbird Leys Parish Council should comprise 16 councillors, one more than at present, representing two wards: Blackbird Leys and Greater Leys (each returning eight councillors). The parish ward boundaries should reflect the proposed city ward boundaries in the area, as illustrated and named on Map 2 and on the large map at the back of the report.

115 The parish of Littlemore is currently served by 21 councillors and is not warded. As a result of our draft recommendations at city level, we proposed that the parish should be divided into three parish wards, Littlemore, Rose Hill and Sandy Lane West, which would be coterminous with the proposed city wards of Littlemore, Iffley & Rose Hill and Northfield Brook respectively. We recommended that the proposed Littlemore parish ward should be represented by 15 councillors, Rose Hill parish ward should be represented by five councillors and Sandy Lane West parish ward should be represented by a single councillor in line with the proportion of the parish electorate in each of the proposed wards.

116 We received a number of representations at Stage Three from Blackbird Leys Parish Council, Littlemore Parish Council, six local residents and a 46-signature petition from local residents objecting to the warding of our proposed Sandy Lane West parish ward in our Northfield Brook city ward. All the representations received argued that the parish ward had no community links with the rest of Northfield Brook ward which contains parts of Blackbird Leys parish. They argued that the Sandy Lane parish ward should be included in the Littlemore City ward. After careful consideration of the representations received at Stage Three we have decided that given the arguments and evidence received Sandy Lane West parish ward should be warded with Littlemore parish at city level. We believe that such an arrangement would better reflect community ties within the area. However, we are still confirming our draft recommendations for the creation of three new parish wards in Littlemore parish as final.

Final Recommendation

Littlemore Parish Council should comprise 21 councillors, as at present, representing three wards: Littlemore (returning 15 councillors), Rose Hill (returning five councillors) and Sandy Lane West (returning one councillor). The boundaries between the three parish wards should reflect the three proposed city ward boundaries, as illustrated and named on Map 2 and on the large map at the back of this report.

117 The parish of Risinghurst & Sandhills is currently served by 15 councillors and is not warded. As a result of our proposals at city level, we suggested that the parish should be divided into three parish wards, Risinghurst, Sandhills and Wood Farm, to be coterminous with the proposed city wards of

Quarry & Risinghurst, Barton & Sandhills and Churchill respectively. In order to ensure an appropriate distribution of parish councillors between the parish wards, we proposed increasing the total number of councillors representing the parish to 16. We recommended that the proposed parish wards should be represented by eight, five and three councillors respectively in line with their proportion of the parish electorate.

118 At Stage Three we received a representation from Risinghurst & Sandhills Parish Council objecting to our proposed warding of their parish, arguing that this would separate two historically connected areas with significant community ties. It argued that the parish should be united within a single three-member city ward.

119 Having considered its representation we are mindful of community ties between the two parts of the parish. However, having concluded that a city-wide scheme consisting of 24 two-member wards would best represent the city as a whole, we are unable to pursue the alternative three-member scheme comprising the whole of the parish suggested by Risinghurst & Sandhills Parish Council. Therefore in the light of our confirmation of our draft recommendations at a city level in this area as final, we are content to confirm our draft recommendations at a parish level as final.

Final Recommendation

Risinghurst & Sandhills Parish Council should comprise 16 parish councillors, one more than at present, representing three wards: Risinghurst (returning eight councillors), Sandhills (returning five councillors), and Wood Farm (returning three councillors). The parish ward boundaries should reflect the proposed city ward boundaries in the area, as illustrated and named on Map 2 and on the large map at the back of the report.

120 In our draft recommendations report we proposed that there should be no change to the electoral cycle of parish councils in the city, and 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 city ward of which they are part.

Map 2: Final Recommendations for Oxford

6 WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

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

122 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.

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

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