

Final recommendations on the
future electoral arrangements
for Mid Suffolk

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

June 2001

LOCAL GOVERNMENT COMMISSION FOR ENGLAND

This report sets out the Commission's final recommendations on the electoral arrangements for the district of Mid Suffolk.

Members of the Commission are:

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Local Government Commission for England

26 June 2001

Dear Secretary of State

On 27 June 2000 the Commission began a periodic electoral review of Mid Suffolk under the Local Government Act 1992. We published our draft recommendations in January 2001 and undertook an eight-week period of consultation.

We have now prepared our final recommendations in the light of the consultation. We have substantially confirmed our draft recommendations, although some modifications have been made (see paragraphs 160-161) in the light of further evidence. This report sets out our final recommendations for changes to electoral arrangements in Mid Suffolk.

We recommend that Mid Suffolk District Council should be served by 40 councillors representing 30 wards, and that changes should be made to ward boundaries in order to improve electoral equality, having regard to the statutory criteria. We recommend that the District Council should continue to hold elections of the whole council.

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

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

Yours sincerely

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

PROFESSOR MALCOLM GRANT
Chairman

SUMMARY

The Commission began a review of Mid Suffolk on 27 June 2000. We published our draft recommendations for electoral arrangements on 9 January 2001, after which we undertook an eight-week period of consultation.

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

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

- **in 15 of the 34 wards the number of electors represented by each councillor varies by more than 10 per cent from the average for the district, and eight wards vary by more than 20 per cent from the average;**
- **by 2005 this unequal representation is not expected to improve, with the number of electors per councillor forecast to vary by more than 10 per cent from the average in 17 wards and by more than 20 per cent in nine wards.**

Our main final recommendations for future electoral arrangements (Figures 1 and 2 and paragraphs 160–161) are that:

- **Mid Suffolk District Council should have 40 councillors, the same as at present;**
- **there should be 30 wards, instead of 34 as at present;**
- **the boundaries of 26 of the existing wards should be modified and eight wards should retain their existing boundaries;**
- **whole-council elections should continue to take place every four years.**

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

- **In 28 of the proposed 30 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, Rattlesden, 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 Haughley and Combs and for Stowmarket Town Council.**

All further correspondence on these recommendations and the matters discussed in this report should be addressed to the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, who will not make an Order implementing the Commission's recommendations before 7 August 2001:

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

Figure 1: The Commission's Final Recommendations: Summary

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

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

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

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

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

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 Bacton & Old Newton	1	1,766	1,766	5	1,790	1,790	2
2 Badwell Ash	1	1,859	1,859	10	1,946	1,946	10
3 Barking & Somersham	1	1,666	1,666	-1	1,724	1,724	-2
4 Bramford & Blakenham	2	3,214	1,607	-5	3,260	1,630	-8
5 Claydon & Barham	2	3,304	1,652	-2	3,536	1,768	0
6 Debenham	1	1,681	1,681	0	1,869	1,869	6
7 Elmswell & Norton	2	3,461	1,731	2	3,572	1,786	1
8 Eye	1	1,536	1,536	-9	1,633	1,633	-7
9 Fressingfield	1	1,781	1,781	5	1,839	1,839	4
10 Gislingham	1	1,844	1,844	9	1,905	1,905	8
11 Haughley & Wetherden	1	1,608	1,608	-5	1,649	1,649	-6
12 Helmingham & Coddenham	1	1,587	1,587	-6	1,640	1,640	-7
13 Hoxne	1	1,560	1,560	-8	1,620	1,620	-8
14 Mendlesham	1	1,705	1,705	1	1,801	1,801	2
15 Needham Market	2	3,562	1,781	5	3,639	1,820	3
16 Onehouse	1	1,717	1,717	2	1,742	1,742	-1
17 Palgrave	1	1,581	1,581	-6	1,658	1,658	-6
18 Rattlesden	1	1,528	1,528	-9	1,553	1,553	-12
19 Rickingham & Walsham	2	3,363	1,682	0	3,451	1,726	-2
20 Ringshall	1	1,889	1,889	12	1,935	1,935	10
21 Stowmarket Central	2	3,657	1,829	8	3,823	1,912	8
22 Stowmarket North	3	4,183	1,394	-17	5,055	1,685	-4
23 Stowmarket South	2	3,717	1,859	10	3,719	1,860	6

Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2000)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2005)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
24 Stowupland	1	1,733	1,733	3	1,782	1,782	1
25 Stradbroke & Laxfield	1	1,781	1,781	5	1,855	1,855	5
26 The Stonhams	1	1,799	1,799	7	1,835	1,835	4
27 Thurston & Hissett	2	3,384	1,692	0	3,481	1,741	-1
28 Wetheringsett	1	1,784	1,784	6	1,848	1,848	5
29 Woolpit	1	1,576	1,576	-7	1,585	1,585	-10
30 Worlingworth	1	1,706	1,706	1	1,756	1,756	0
Totals	40	67,532	-	-	70,501	-	-
Averages	-	-	1,688	-	-	1,763	-

Source: Electorate figures are based on Mid Suffolk District Council's submission.

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

1 INTRODUCTION

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

2 This was our first review of the electoral arrangements of Mid Suffolk. The last such review was undertaken by our predecessor, the Local Government Boundary Commission (LGBC), which reported to the Secretary of State in August 1977 (Report No. 236). The electoral arrangements of Suffolk County Council were last reviewed in June 1982 (Report No. 429). We 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, ie the need to:
 - (a) reflect the identities and interests of local communities; and
 - (b) secure effective and convenient local government;
- the *Rules to be Observed in Considering Electoral Arrangements* contained in Schedule 11 to the Local Government Act 1972.

4 We are required to make recommendations to the Secretary of State on the number of councillors who should serve on the District Council, and the number, boundaries and names of wards. We can also make recommendations on the electoral arrangements for parish and town councils in the district.

5 We have also had regard to our *Guidance and Procedural Advice for Local Authorities and Other Interested Parties* (fourth edition published in December 2000), which sets out our approach to the reviews.

6 In our *Guidance*, we state that we wish wherever possible to build on schemes which have been prepared locally on the basis of careful and effective consultation. Local interests are normally in a better position to judge what council size and ward configuration are most likely to secure effective and convenient local government in their areas, while allowing proper reflection of the identities and interests of local communities.

7 The broad objective of PERs is to achieve, so far as practicable, equality of representation across the district as a whole. Having regard to the statutory criteria, our aim is to achieve as low a level of electoral imbalance as is practicable. We will require particular justification for schemes which would result in, or retain, an electoral imbalance of over 10 per cent in any ward. Any imbalances of 20 per cent or more should only arise in the most exceptional circumstances, and will require the strongest justification.

8 We are not prescriptive on council size. We start from the general assumption that the existing council size already secures effective and convenient local government in that district but we are willing to look carefully at arguments why this might not be so. However, we have found it necessary to safeguard against upward drift in the number of councillors, and we believe that any proposal for an increase in council size will need to be fully justified: in particular, we do not accept that an increase in a district's electorate should automatically result in an increase in the number of councillors, nor that changes should be made to the size of a district council simply to make it more consistent with the size of other districts.

9 In July 1998, the Government published a White Paper, *Modern Local Government – In Touch with the People*, which set out legislative proposals for local authority electoral arrangements. In two-tier areas, it proposed introducing a pattern in which both the district and county councils would hold elections every two years, i.e. in year one, half of the district council would be elected, in year two, half the county council would be elected, and so on. The Government stated that local accountability would be maximised where every elector has an opportunity to vote every year, thereby pointing to a pattern of two-member wards (and divisions) in two-tier areas. However, it stated that there was no intention to move towards very large electoral areas in sparsely populated rural areas, and that single-member wards (and electoral divisions) would continue in many authorities. The proposals have been taken forward in the Local Government Act 2000 which, among other matters, provides that the Secretary of State may make Orders to change authorities' electoral cycles. However, until such time as the Secretary of State makes any Orders under the 2000 Act, we will continue to operate on the basis of existing legislation, which provides for elections by thirds or whole-council elections in the two-tier district areas, and our current *Guidance*.

10 This review was in four stages. Stage One began on 27 June 2000, when we wrote to Mid Suffolk District Council inviting proposals for future electoral arrangements. We notified Suffolk County Council, Suffolk Constabulary, the local authority associations, Suffolk Local Councils Association and parish and town councils in the district. We also notified the Members of Parliament with constituency interests in the district, the Members of the European Parliament for the Eastern Region, and the headquarters of the main political parties. We placed a notice in the local press, issued a press release and invited the District Council to publicise the review further. The closing date for receipt of representations, the end of Stage One, was 2 October 2000. At Stage Two we considered all the representations received during Stage One and prepared our draft recommendations.

11 Stage Three began on 9 January 2001, with the publication of our report, *Draft recommendations on the future electoral arrangements for Mid Suffolk*, and ended on 5 March 2001. Comments were sought on our preliminary conclusions. In light of representations received regarding the north-west area of the district, we carried out a further period of consultation in relation to the most appropriate warding arrangements for the existing Rickinghall and Walsham-le-Willows wards. On 4 April 2001, we wrote to the District Council, the relevant parish councils and other interested parties outlining our draft recommendations and an alternative option for that part of the district, and invited further evidence and submissions by 2 May 2001. Finally, during Stage Four we reconsidered our draft recommendations in the light of the Stage Three consultation and our further consultation, and now publish our final recommendations.

2 CURRENT ELECTORAL ARRANGEMENTS

12 The district of Mid Suffolk covers the central part of the county of Suffolk, and adjoins the county of Norfolk to the north. The district covers an area of some 87,000 hectares and has a population of approximately 80,000. The district is predominantly rural in nature, but contains various centres of population including the small market towns of Stowmarket, Eye and Needham Market. It is a district of rich architectural diversity, containing a large number of historically important medieval churches. The district is well served by road and rail links. The A14 trunk road runs north-west from Ipswich to St Edmundsbury via Stowmarket and provides transportation links to the Midlands and the Haven Ports.

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

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

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

17 At present, each councillor represents an average of 1,688 electors, which the District Council forecasts will increase to 1,763 by the year 2005 if the present number of councillors is maintained. However, due to demographic and other changes over the past two decades, the number of electors per councillor in 15 of the 34 wards varies by more than 10 per cent from the district average, of which eight wards vary by more than 20 per cent and three wards by more than 30 per cent. The worst imbalance is in Thurston ward, where the councillor represents 50 per cent more electors than the district average.

Map 1: Existing Wards in Mid Suffolk

Figure 3: Existing Electoral Arrangements

Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2000)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2005)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
1 Badwell Ash	1	1,356	1,356	-20	1,419	1,419	-19
2 Barham	1	1,723	1,723	2	1,731	1,731	-2
3 Barking	1	1,570	1,570	-7	1,614	1,614	-8
4 Bramford	2	3,310	1,655	-2	3,370	1,685	-4
5 Claydon	1	1,581	1,581	-6	1,805	1,805	2
6 Creeting	1	1,165	1,165	-31	1,196	1,196	-32
7 Debenham	1	1,803	1,803	7	1,993	1,993	13
8 Elmswell	1	2,514	2,514	49	2,603	2,603	48
9 Eye	1	1,536	1,536	-9	1,633	1,633	-7
10 Fressingfield	1	1,505	1,505	-11	1,544	1,544	-12
11 Gislingham	1	1,844	1,844	9	1,905	1,905	8
12 Haughley & Wetherden	1	1,700	1,700	1	1,741	1,741	-1
13 Helmingham	1	1,194	1,194	-29	1,223	1,223	-31
14 Hoxne	1	1,546	1,546	-8	1,581	1,581	-10
15 Mendlesham	1	1,705	1,705	1	1,801	1,801	2
16 Needham Market	2	3,562	1,781	5	3,639	1,820	3
17 Norton	1	1,802	1,802	7	1,847	1,847	5
18 Onehouse	1	1,717	1,717	2	1,742	1,742	-1
19 Palgrave	1	1,581	1,581	-6	1,658	1,658	-6
20 Rattlesden	1	1,528	1,528	-9	1,553	1,553	-12
21 Rickinghall	1	2,148	2,148	27	2,210	2,210	25
22 Ringshall	1	2,064	2,064	22	2,110	2,110	20
23 Stonham	1	1,352	1,352	-20	1,396	1,396	-21
24 Stowmarket Central	2	3,747	1,874	11	3,918	1,959	11
25 Stowmarket North	2	4,001	2,001	18	4,868	2,434	38
26 Stowmarket South	2	3,542	1,771	5	3,544	1,772	1

Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2000)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2005)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
27 Stowupland	2	3,319	1,660	-2	3,388	1,694	-4
28 Stradbroke	1	1,203	1,203	-29	1,263	1,263	-28
29 Thurston	1	2,529	2,529	50	2,603	2,603	48
30 Walsham-le-Willows	1	1,718	1,718	2	1,768	1,768	0
31 Wetheringsett	1	1,369	1,369	-19	1,422	1,422	-19
32 Weybread	1	1,387	1,387	-18	1,447	1,447	-18
33 Woolpit	1	1,576	1,576	-7	1,585	1,585	-10
34 Worlingworth	1	1,335	1,335	-21	1,381	1,381	-22
Totals	40	67,532	-	-	70,501	-	-
Averages	-	-	1,688	-	-	1,763	-

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

Note: The 'variance from average' column shows by how far, in percentage terms, the number of electors per councillor varies from the average for the district. The minus symbol (-) denotes a lower than average number of electors. For example, in 2000, electors in Creting ward were over-represented by 31 per cent, while electors in Thurston ward were substantially under-represented by 50 per cent. Figures have been rounded to the nearest whole number.

3 DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS

18 During Stage One we received 10 representations, including a district-wide scheme from the District Council. The Council also put forward three alternative schemes (Alternative Schemes One to Three) for consideration that were submitted in response to views expressed during its local consultation process. We also received representations from seven 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 Mid Suffolk*.

19 Our draft recommendations were largely based on the District Council's main proposals, which achieved substantial improvements in electoral equality across the district, and provided a pattern of one three-member, seven two-member and 23 single-member wards. However, we moved away from the District Council's main proposals in the north and east of the district and in Stowmarket town, using options generated by a District Councillor and a parish council (these representations had formed the basis of the proposals outlined in Alternative Scheme One), together with some of our own proposals. We proposed that:

- Mid Suffolk District Council should be served by 40 councillors, the same as at present, representing 31 wards, three fewer than at present;
- the boundaries of 26 of the existing wards should be modified, while eight wards should retain their existing boundaries;
- there should be new warding arrangements for Combs and Haughley parish councils and for Stowmarket Town Council.

Draft Recommendation

Mid Suffolk District Council should comprise 40 councillors, serving 31 wards. The whole council should continue to be elected every four years.

20 Our proposals would have resulted in significant improvements in electoral equality, with the number of electors per councillor in 28 of the 31 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 Rattlesden and Walsham-le-Willows wards varying by more than 10 per cent from the district average by 2005.

4 RESPONSES TO CONSULTATION

21 During the consultation on our draft recommendations report, 15 representations were received. A list of all respondents is available on request from the Commission. All representations may be inspected at the offices of Mid Suffolk District Council and the Commission.

Mid Suffolk District Council

22 The District Council substantially endorsed our draft recommendations, observing that a majority of our proposed wards were based upon options it had put forward at Stage One. In particular, the District Council noted that we had accepted its proposed parish warding arrangements in the Haughley and Combs areas. However, it opposed our revised boundary between Stowmarket Central ward and Stowmarket North ward. It argued that our proposals for these wards “placed too great an emphasis on electoral equality” and would not be in the interests of “continuity or local opinion”.

Suffolk County Council

23 Suffolk County Council made some general comments on our draft recommendations. It noted that our proposals would reduce the number of wards that have significant levels of electoral variation, and endorsed our proposed amendments to the district wards of Stowmarket. However, it urged the District Council to commence a parish boundary review in order that parish boundaries in this area reflect our proposed district warding arrangements. The County Council also queried the Stage One electorate forecast of Stowmarket Town Council for the east of the town.

24 Councillor Craven (Hoxne Division) noted that we had adopted her proposals for the north and east of the district and considered that the revised warding structure would “respect many of the existing community links”. She therefore strongly endorsed our draft recommendations.

Suffolk Constabulary

25 Suffolk Police Constabulary considered that while our draft recommendations for Mid Suffolk would require some changes to policing arrangements in the District, there were no issues that were “insurmountable”.

Parish and Town Councils

26 We received nine submissions from parish and town councils. Stowmarket Town Council broadly supported our draft recommendations in respect of Stowmarket. However, it opposed our proposed boundary between Stowmarket Central and Stowmarket North wards, arguing that local electors were familiar with the existing electoral arrangements in this area. Haughley Parish Council argued that the parish boundary between Haughley and Stowmarket should be promptly revised in order that it reflect our proposed district warding arrangements in the Chilton Hall area

of the parish. It also opposed our proposed electoral arrangements for the parish. Hemingstone Parish Council supported our draft recommendations in relation to its area.

27 Henley Parish Council opposed our draft recommendations and proposed alternative warding arrangements for six of the existing wards in the south and east of the district. It considered that its proposals would better reflect the preferences of communities in this area. Its proposals would necessitate an increase in council size of one to 41. Coddendam Parish Council was “sympathetic” to the concerns of Henley Parish Council and was supportive of its proposed Coddendam ward, although it considered that such a ward would cover a relatively large geographical area. Debenham Parish Council queried our electorate figures for the parish.

28 Botesdale, Hinderclay and Rickinghall parish councils opposed our revised Walsham-le-Willows and Rickinghall wards. Hinderclay Parish Council strongly objected to our proposal to incorporate it in a revised Walsham-le-Willows ward. It argued that the parish shared long-standing links with the communities of Rickinghall ward and considered its interests would be less effectively represented should it be included in a district ward with the larger settlement of Walsham-le-Willows. Botesdale and Rickinghall parish councils reiterated this view.

Other Representations

29 Councillor Aves (Hinderclay Parish) expressed strong opposition to our proposals for Hinderclay Parish and urged the Commission to retain the existing boundaries of Rickinghall ward. A local resident argued that our proposed warding arrangements for Stowmarket and its environs would prejudice the deliberations of the District Council in a subsequent parish boundary review. He also argued that the Commission should “seek assurances” from the District Council as to the timing of such a review.

Further Consultation

30 In the light of representations received in response to our draft recommendations for Rickinghall and Walsham-le-Willows wards, we carried out a further period of consultation on the most appropriate warding arrangements for the area. On 4 April 2001, we wrote to the District Council, the relevant parish councils and other interested parties outlining our draft recommendations (Option A) and alternative arrangements (Option B) that would result in the creation of a new two-member ward comprising the existing Rickinghall ward and the parishes of Walsham-le-Willows and Wattisfield, and the retention of Langham parish in a revised Badwell Ash ward. We invited respondents to express a preference by 2 May 2001 and invited further evidence as to an appropriate name for the revised ward outlined in Option B. As part of this consultation, we received 18 representations.

31 Mid Suffolk District Council noted that both Options would have no consequential affect upon our proposals for adjoining wards and were therefore supportive of either proposal. Councillor Saunders (Badwell Ash), and Badwell Ash, Finningham, Stowlangtoft and Wyverstone parish councils expressed a preference for our draft recommendations (Option A) Councillor Saunders argued that the District Council’s Electoral Review Panel had considered

that two-member wards should be avoided where possible. Wyverstone Parish Council stated that it was opposed to two-member wards.

32 Councillor Russell (Walsham-le-Willows), Councillor Michell (Rickinghall) and Botesdale, Great Ashfield, Hinderclay, Redgrave, Rickinghall, Walsham-le-Willows, Wattisfield and Westhorpe parishes, and two local residents expressed a preference for Option B. Councillor Michell, Botesdale and Rickinghall parish councils suggested that the new two-member ward be named Rickinghall & Walsham. Wattisfield Parish Council argued that a “generic” ward name such as Ouse & Blackbourne would be most appropriate. Two local residents suggested that this ward be named Rickinghall.

5 ANALYSIS AND FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS

33 As described earlier, our prime objective in considering the most appropriate electoral arrangements for Mid Suffolk is, so far as reasonably practicable and consistent with the statutory criteria, to achieve electoral equality. In doing so we have regard to section 13(5) of the Local Government Act 1992 – the need to secure effective and convenient local government, and reflect the identities and interests of local communities – and Schedule 11 to the Local Government Act 1972, which refers to the number of electors per councillor being “as nearly as may be, the same in every ward of the district or borough”.

34 In relation to Schedule 11, our recommendations are not intended to be based solely on existing electorate figures, but also on assumptions as to changes in the number and distribution of local government electors likely to take place within the ensuing five years. We also must have regard to the desirability of fixing identifiable boundaries and to maintaining local ties which might otherwise be broken.

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

36 Our *Guidance* states that we accept that the achievement of absolute electoral equality for the authority as a whole is likely to be unattainable. However, we consider that, if electoral imbalances are to be kept to the minimum, such an objective should be the starting point in any review. We therefore strongly recommend that, in formulating electoral schemes, local authorities and other interested parties should start from the standpoint of absolute electoral equality and only then make adjustments to reflect relevant factors, such as community identity and interests. Regard must be had to five-year forecasts of changes in electorates and we would aim to recommend a scheme which provides improved electoral equality over this five-year period.

Electorate Forecasts

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

38 Stowmarket Town Council provided alternative five-year electorate projections for Stowmarket, forecasting an increase in the town’s electorate of some 6 per cent. This compared with the District Council’s projection of approximately 8 per cent. It argued that the District Council had over-estimated likely housing development and probable occupancy rates in the existing Stowmarket North ward. It projected that the number of electors in the District Council’s

proposed Stowmarket North ward would increase by 617 over the next five years, 250 fewer electors than the District Council had forecast. The Town Council argued that under its projection there would not be a sufficient increase in electors to justify the creation of a fourth ward in the east of the town, as outlined in Alternative Schemes Two and Three.

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

40 In our draft recommendations, we accepted that forecasting electorates is an inexact science and, having given consideration to the District Council's figures, were content that they represented the best estimates that could reasonably be made. We welcomed further evidence on electorate forecasts during Stage Three of the review.

41 At Stage Three of the review, Stowmarket Town Council made no further comment in respect of electorate projections for the town. Suffolk County Council considered that Stowmarket Town Council's Stage One electorate forecast for Stowmarket had under-estimated the likely increase in electorate for the east of the town. It stated that the new development site was situated in a prime location and would continue to grow "regardless of the construction company". Debenham Parish Council queried the electorate projections for the parish, but provided no detailed evidence. Having sought clarification from Debenham Parish Council and the District Council, it was established that the Parish Council was referring to the forecast growth in population for the parish and not the electorate projection. Therefore, we consider our electorate projections for Debenham to be accurate. Having given further consideration to our electorate forecasts for the District as a whole, we remain of the view that they take account of all residential development that can reasonably be expected to be occupied by electors over the next five years. We therefore remain satisfied that they represent the best estimates presently available and endorse them as final.

Council Size

42 As already explained, the Commission's starting point is to assume that the current council size facilitates effective and convenient local government, although we are willing to carefully look at arguments why this might not be the case. Mid Suffolk District Council currently has 40 members. At Stage One, the District Council proposed the retention of a council of 40 members and stated that this was the "unanimous conclusion" of its Electoral Review Panel. A council size of 40 was also proposed in the three alternative schemes submitted by the Council. A local resident favoured a proposal that each councillor should represent between 3,000 and 3,500 electors, approximately twice the current level. In the district of Mid Suffolk this would result

in a reduction in council size to between 19 and 23. He argued that this would save on administration costs but did not submit detailed proposals for consideration.

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

44 At Stage Three, the District Council supported our draft recommendations in relation to council size. Henley Parish Council put forward alternative warding arrangements for six of the existing wards in the south and east of the district. Its proposals would necessitate an increase in council size to 41. The Council argued that its proposals would have greater regard to existing community ties and identities in the south of the district than our draft recommendations and would ensure the more effective representation of rural views on the District Council.

45 Having considered the size and distribution of the electorate, the geography and other characteristics of the area, together with the representations received, we remain of the view that Mid Suffolk District Council would be best served by the retention of a council size of 40. Under Henley Parish Council's proposals, which would necessitate a council size of 41, the area of the district for which it put forward alternative arrangements would be entitled to 6.2 councillors, both now and in 2005. However, Henley Parish Council proposed that these wards be represented by seven councillors. Under our proposed council size of 40, this area is entitled to 6.0 councillors now and 6.1 councillors by 2005, and in our draft recommendations, we proposed that these wards be represented by six councillors.

46 We therefore remain of the view that the balance of evidence supports the retention of a council size of 40. We consider that the current council size facilitates the most equitable distribution of councillors between the primary areas of the district and achieves the best balance between the number of members required to facilitate effective and convenient local government, and the need to reflect the identities and interests of the local community. Having considered the evidence received at Stage Three of the review, we intend confirming our draft recommendation for a council size of 40 as final.

Electoral Arrangements

47 As set out in our draft recommendations report, we carefully considered the District Council's main proposal for Mid Suffolk, as well as its three alternative schemes and other representations received at Stage One of the review. From these representations, some considerations emerged that informed us when preparing our draft recommendations.

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

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

50 At Stage Three, our draft recommendations received a significant degree of local support. We therefore intend that our draft recommendations should be substantially endorsed, subject to a number of boundary modifications. In the light of the representations received at Stage Three, and the further consultation exercise we undertook, we have modified our draft recommendations for several wards in the north-west of the district in order to better reflect community identities and interests and to provide for more clearly identifiable ward boundaries.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

57 A local resident suggested the amalgamation of Rickingham Superior, Rickingham Inferior and Botesdale parishes into one parish. In our draft recommendations, we stated that the Commission does not have the power to effect such a change under the terms of the current electoral review and that any such proposal would need to be considered as part of a future parishing review.

58 In our draft recommendations report, we noted the concerns of Hinderclay, Rickingham and Botesdale parish councils at the District Council's proposed Rickingham and Walsham-le-Willows wards. However, we considered that retention of the existing Rickingham ward would result in an unacceptably high level of electoral inequality. Under existing arrangements,

Rickingham ward has 27 per cent more electors per councillor than the district average with little improvement forecast to take place over the course of the next five years. Moreover, we noted that our options for change were somewhat limited due to the relatively isolated nature of rural communities in these wards, located on the north-western border of the district. In view of the lack of an alternative proposal which would effectively address the issue of electoral equality, we considered that the Council's proposals provided the best balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria. We therefore put forward the District Council's proposals for Badwell Ash, Gislingham, Rickingham and Walsham-le-Willows wards as part of our draft recommendations.

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

60 At Stage Three of the review, the District Council supported our draft recommendations for this area in their entirety. Hinderclay Parish Council opposed our draft recommendations. It strongly objected to being combined in our proposed Walsham-le-Willows ward and reiterated the view that it shared numerous social, educational and economic ties with the parishes that comprise the existing Rickingham ward. It further argued that few common ties or interests existed between itself and the parishes that comprise the existing Walsham-le-Willows ward and stated that poor communication and transport links would "prohibit any valid dialogue" between the two areas. The Parish Council considered that it was being used as a "make weight" to facilitate our proposed warding arrangements in other areas of the district, and that our draft recommendations "had no logical basis".

61 Botesdale Parish Council also objected to our revised Rickingham ward. Whilst acknowledging that our proposals would improve electoral equality in the area, it argued that the educational and policing requirements of Hinderclay parish would be adversely affected under our proposals. It considered our draft recommendations may impede the effective representation of Hinderclay parish on the District Council and urged the Commission to give further consideration to warding arrangements in this area. Rickingham Parish Council also expressed concern at our proposals to incorporate Hinderclay Parish in a revised Walsham-le-Willows ward. It argued that it would prove difficult for a district councillor to effectively represent our proposed ward, due to its geographical extent as well as the diverse interests and identities of its constituent communities. Whilst acknowledging the need to address the issue of electoral equality in this area, the Council argued that our proposals would "prove to be less democratic and representative than the existing ward structure".

62 Councillor Aves (Hinderclay Parish) strongly objected to the proposed transfer of Hinderclay parish to a revised Walsham-le-Willows ward and argued that the parishes' educational, medical and policing needs are identical to the other communities of Rickingham ward. Councillor Aves considered that the isolated location of Hinderclay in relation to other communities in our proposed Walsham-le-Willows ward would have an adverse effect upon the effective representation of the parish on the District Council and considered that the parish would be best served if the current warding arrangements were retained.

63 A local resident reiterated his support for the amalgamation of Botesdale and the Rickinghall parishes. He argued that the Commission should seek a firm assurance from the District Council as to the timing of such a review. As stated above, the Commission does not have the power to effect such a change under the terms of the current electoral review or to direct the District Council to commence such a review. It is for the District Council to consider the necessity and timing of a review of parish boundaries, subsequent to us completing the current Periodic Electoral Review in this area.

64 Having considered the representations received at Stage Three, we note that our draft recommendations for this area have been the subject of some local opposition. In particular, our proposal to incorporate Hinderclay parish in a revised Walsham-le-Willows ward was strongly opposed by a majority of the parishes that comprise the existing Rickinghall ward. We do not consider that change to the existing ward boundaries of Rickinghall will have an adverse effect upon the educational and policing needs of this area and note in particular that the Suffolk Constabulary did not consider there to be any issues arising from our draft recommendations that were “insurmountable”. However, due to the degree of opposition to our proposed warding arrangements in this area, we have re-examined our draft recommendations. As stated above, our ability to consider alternative arrangements for these wards is somewhat limited due to their proximity to the northern border of the district and the relatively isolated nature of their constituent communities. Furthermore, any substantial amendment to our draft recommendations would have a significant consequential affect upon our draft recommendations for adjoining district wards. We do, however, recognise the long-standing communities ties that exist between Hinderclay parish and the other communities of Rickinghall ward.

65 While we remain of the view that, due to considerations of electoral equality, it is not possible for us to consider the retention of the existing Rickinghall ward, we carefully considered alternative warding arrangements for this area and identified one viable alternative to our draft recommendations. This alternative would ensure that the grouping of parishes that comprise the existing Rickinghall ward would remain in the same district ward. Furthermore, it would provide a comparable improvement in levels of electoral equality to our draft recommendations while having no significant impact upon our proposals for the rest of the district.

66 Our alternative proposal would result in the creation of a new two-member ward comprising the existing Rickinghall ward and the parishes of Walsham-le-Willows and Wattisfield. This alternative proposal would also result in a revised single-member Badwell Ash ward with boundaries identical to those outlined in our draft recommendations, except for the inclusion of Langham parish which, as stated above, we had proposed be incorporated in the revised single-member Walsham-le-Willows ward.

67 As this alternative option had not been consulted on locally, we were not aware of the degree of support it would receive in preference to our draft recommendations. We therefore conducted a further period of consultation focused specifically on the area covered by the proposed Badwell Ash, Rickinghall and Walsham-le-Willows wards during the period from 4 April 2001 to 2 May 2001. We outlined our draft recommendations (Option A) and the alternative proposal for this area (Option B), and requested that respondents express a preference for one or other scheme. We also requested that respondents provide suggestions as to the most appropriate name for the two-member ward proposed in Option B.

68 We received 18 representations during this period of further consultation. Mid Suffolk District Council noted that both Options would have no consequential affect upon our proposals for adjoining wards. The Council stated that the decision should be taken “on the basis of the views of residents of the wards affected and the District Council members of the wards affected”. Councillor Saunders (Badwell Ash), and Badwell Ash, Finningham, Stowlangtoft and Wyverstone parish councils expressed a preference for our draft recommendations in this area (Option A). Councillor Saunders noted that the District Council’s Electoral Review Panel had considered that two-member wards should be avoided where possible. Wyverstone Parish Council stated its opposition to two-member wards. It argued that confusion may result as to the representative responsibilities of district councillors in multi-member wards.

69 Councillor Russell (Walsham-le-Willows), Councillor Michell (Rickinghall), Botesdale, Great Ashfield, Hinderclay, Redgrave, Rickinghall, Walsham-le-Willows, Wattisfield and Westhorpe parishes, and two local residents expressed a preference for Option B. Councillor Michell, Botesdale and Rickinghall parish councils suggested that the new two-member ward be named Rickinghall & Walsham. Wattisfield Parish Council considered the proposed ward name of Rickinghall & Walsham to be “acceptable”. However, it argued that a “generic” title was more appropriate. It suggested that the proposed two-member ward be named Ouse & Blackbourne as local communities in this area are linked to each other via these water systems. A local resident suggested that the proposed ward be named Rickinghall ward. Another resident supported this ward name due to the central location of Rickinghall parish to other communities in the area. He considered Option B would retain the links between Hinderclay and the other parishes of the existing Rickinghall ward and would “foster existing common interests”.

70 Having carefully considered the evidence received at Stage Three and the responses to our further consultation, a number of considerations have emerged. First, we note that in respect of Gislingham ward, the District Council supported our proposals. Having received no further submissions in relation to this ward, we intend confirming our draft recommendations for Gislingham ward as final.

71 In respect of our proposals for the existing Rickinghall and Walsham-le-Willows wards, we acknowledge that our draft recommendations may not have sufficiently recognised local community identities. We note that during our further consultation process a clear majority of respondents favoured Option B. While we note that several respondents were opposed to the creation of more two-member wards in the district, we consider that this alternative proposal would more accurately reflect the wishes of the communities affected and would not have an adverse affect upon electoral equality in this area. We also note that a majority of the parishes who expressed opposition to multi-member district wards were geographically localised in areas that would continue to be represented by a single councillor. Therefore, having noted the clear support for the alternative warding arrangements outlined in Option B, we have been persuaded to modify our draft recommendations in this area.

72 We propose substantially confirming our draft recommendations for a revised single-member Badwell Ash ward. However, we propose moving away from our draft recommendations in respect of Langham parish. In our draft recommendations we proposed that Langham parish be transferred to a revised single-member Walsham-le-Willows ward. Having considered the responses to our further consultation exercise, we consider that the retention of Langham parish

within a revised single-member Badwell Ash ward would reflect the statutory criteria and provide an acceptable level of electoral equality in this ward.

73 In relation to our proposed Rickinghall and Walsham-le-Willows ward, we have noted the clear support among the parishes affected for the warding arrangements outlined in Option B. We consider that this proposal would more readily reflect the preferences of local communities and provide for further improvements in electoral equality. We therefore intend departing from our draft recommendations and adopting the warding arrangements outlined in Option B as part of our final recommendations. We propose a new two-member ward comprising the existing Rickinghall ward and the parishes of Walsham-le-Willows and Wattisfield, with the transfer of Westhorpe and Finningham parishes to a revised single-member Badwell Ash ward. In respect of the most appropriate ward name for this area, we have recognised the clear preference among respondents that this new two-member ward be named Rickinghall & Walsham. We consider that this proposed name has merit in that it accurately reflects the constituent communities and the geographical extent of the proposed ward. We therefore intend that this ward be named Rickinghall & Walsham.

74 Under our final recommendations, Badwell Ash and Gislingham wards would have 10 per cent more and 9 per cent more electors per councillor than the district average respectively (10 per cent more and 8 per cent more than average by 2005). Rickinghall & Walsham ward would have an equal number of electors per councillor to the district average initially and 2 per cent fewer than average by 2005. Our proposals for this area are illustrated on Map 2.

Eye, Palgrave and Woolpit wards

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

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

77 In our draft recommendations, we were persuaded that the existing arrangements reflected community ties well and provided a reasonable level of electoral equality. We noted that both Eye and Woolpit wards contain relatively large and cohesive communities and have electorates of a size able to sustain coterminous single-member wards. We were therefore content to put forward the District Council's proposals for Eye, Palgrave and Woolpit wards as part of our draft recommendations.

78 At Stage Three of the review, the District Council fully supported our draft recommendations for these wards. We received no further representations in relation to this area and having given

further consideration to our draft recommendations, we remain of the view that the retention of the existing Eye, Palgrave and Woolpit wards would respect the identities and interests of these communities as well as providing for reasonable levels of electoral equality, both now and in five years time. We therefore intend confirming our draft recommendations for Eye, Palgrave and Woolpit wards as final.

79 Under our final recommendations, Eye, Palgrave and Woolpit wards would have 9 per cent, 6 per cent and 7 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the district average respectively (7 per cent, 6 per cent and 10 per cent fewer than average by 2005). Our proposals for this area are illustrated on Map 2.

Debenham, Mendlesham, Wetheringsett and Worlingworth wards

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

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

82 At Stage One the District Council proposed retaining the existing Mendlesham ward but modifying the existing Debenham, Wetheringsett and Worlingworth wards. It proposed a revised single-member Debenham ward comprising the existing ward less Ashfield-cum-Thorpe parish, and including Aspell parish from the existing Wetheringsett ward. The Council proposed a revised single-member Worlingworth ward, which would contain the existing ward together with Rishangles parish from Wetheringsett ward. It also proposed a revised single-member Wetheringsett ward containing the parishes of Braiseworth, Stoke Ash, Thorndon, Thwaite and Wetheringsett-cum-Brockford, and including Mickfield parish (from the existing Stonham ward) and Occold parish (from the existing Hoxne ward). The Council's Alternative Scheme One would make minor changes to the proposed Worlingworth ward. The revised single-member ward would be identical to the District Council's main proposal subject to the inclusion of Brundish parish from the existing Stradbroke ward.

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

84 In our draft recommendations, we carefully considered the representations received and noted that both proposals for this area would provide significant improvement in levels of electoral equality for these wards. However, on balance, we considered that the arrangements outlined in Alternative Scheme One would have greater regard to the commonality of the parishes involved and would provide a much improved level of electoral equality, particularly in Worlingworth ward. We therefore endorsed the District Council's main proposal for Debenham, Mendlesham and Wetheringsett wards as part of our draft recommendations and proposed adopting the arrangements outlined in Alternative Scheme One for Worlingworth ward.

85 At Stage Three, the District Council noted that we had adopted its main proposals in respect of the existing Debenham, Mendlesham and Wetheringsett wards and the arrangements outlined in Alternative Scheme One for Worlingworth ward. The Council therefore supported our draft recommendations for warding arrangements in this area. Councillor Craven (Hoxne Division) noted that we had adopted her proposed Worlingworth ward, as outlined in Alternative Scheme One and therefore strongly endorsed our draft recommendations.

86 Henley Parish Council argued that our proposals for the south of the district had insufficient regard for community ties and identities. It proposed alternative arrangements for six of the existing wards in the south of the district. It proposed that Mickfield parish remain part of a revised Stonham ward rather than being incorporated in our proposed Wetheringsett ward, and that Winston parish be transferred from Debenham ward to a revised Helmingham ward (as discussed in detail later). The Parish Council did not put forward alternative arrangements for our proposed Worlingworth or Mendlesham wards. As stated earlier, the Parish Council's proposals would necessitate an increase in council size by one, to 41. Therefore, under Henley Parish Council's proposals, Debenham and Mendlesham wards would have 5 per cent fewer and 4 per cent more electors per councillor than the district average respectively (2 per cent more and 5 per cent more than average by 2005). Worlingworth and Wetheringsett wards would have 4 per cent more and equal to the average number of electors per councillor respectively (2 per cent more and 2 per cent fewer than average by 2005).

87 Debenham Parish Council queried our electorate forecasts for the parish but provided no detailed evidence. Having consulted the Parish Council, we established that it was referring to the forecast population growth of the parish rather than the projected electorate. As stated earlier, we are content that the electorate projection for the parish remains the most accurate five-year forecast that can reasonably be made at this time.

88 We have carefully considered the representations received at Stage Three of the review and acknowledge that the proposals put forward by Henley Parish Council for this area would provide significant improvement in levels of electoral equality. However, we are unable to consider any one area in isolation, but must seek to achieve the best warding arrangements for the district as a whole. As outlined in detail below, we are not persuaded that the proposals of Henley Parish Council provide as satisfactory a balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria as our draft recommendations. Moreover, we remain of the view that our proposed council size of 40 provides the best level of electoral equality obtainable while ensuring a fair allocation of councillors between district wards.

89 Having noted the degree of support for our draft recommendations in this area, we remain of the view that our proposals provide the best balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria. We therefore intend confirming our draft recommendations for Debenham, Mendlesham, Wetheringsett and Worlingworth wards as final. Under our final recommendations, Mendlesham and Wetheringsett wards would have 1 per cent more and 6 per cent more electors per councillor than the district average respectively (2 per cent and 5 per cent more than average by 2005). Debenham and Worlingworth wards would have equal to and 1 per cent more electors per councillor than the district average respectively (6 per cent more and equal to the district average by 2005).

Fressingfield, Hoxne, Stradbroke and Weybread wards

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

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

92 At Stage One, the District Council proposed that Metfield parish be transferred from the existing Weybread ward to a revised Fressingfield ward. The District Council also proposed a new single-member Hoxne & Weybread ward containing the parishes of Denham and Hoxne from the existing Hoxne ward, and Mendham, Syleham, Weybread and Wingfield parishes from the existing Weybread ward. The District Council also proposed a single-member Stradbroke ward containing the existing ward together with Athelington, Horham and Redlingfield parishes from the existing Hoxne ward. The District Council considered that this proposal, while providing less improvement in electoral equality than Alternative Scheme One, would score highly in terms of community identity.

93 The District Council submitted Alternative Scheme One in response to comments from Councillor Craven as part of its local consultation process. This option provided different warding arrangements for all four wards in this area. It provided for a single-member Hoxne ward, with the inclusion of Syleham and Wingfield parishes from the existing Weybread ward; a single-member Fressingfield ward comprising the parishes of Fressingfield, Metfield, Mendham and Weybread, and a single-member Stradbroke & Laxfield ward containing the parishes of Laxfield, Stradbroke and Wilby.

94 A number of representations were made in response to the District Council's local consultation process. Hoxne Parish Council supported Alternative Scheme One and stated that this would help to maintain long-standing community ties in this area. Weybread and Mendham parish councils submitted a joint representation supporting the alternative scheme. They

considered that the proposal would link parishes with close associations and establish wards that cover a smaller geographical area than the District Council's main proposal, thereby ensuring more convenient and effective representation. They expressed "extreme dissatisfaction" with the District Council's main proposal.

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

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

97 We recognised the concerns expressed by Wingfield Parish Council regarding what it perceived as the break up of long-standing communities into different district wards. However, we were not persuaded that its proposal to transfer Denham parish to Stradbroke ward would be desirable. While this may help to ensure that Wingfield, Weybread and Mendham parishes continue to be linked in a single district ward, we were of the opinion that Denham parish shared particularly close ties with the parishes in Hoxne ward. The transfer of Denham parish into Stradbroke ward under the District Council's main proposals provided for a somewhat improved level of electoral equality but created a ward covering a relatively large geographical area. Furthermore, we noted that both Weybread and Mendham parish councils supported Alternative Scheme One and did not express the same concerns as Wingfield Parish Council with regard to their division between separate district wards.

98 We acknowledged that our options for this area were somewhat limited due to the close proximity of these wards to the north-eastern boundary of the district, but we considered that the proposals for Stradbroke and Fressingfield wards, as outlined in Alternative Scheme One, combined similar communities in district wards while providing reasonable levels of electoral equality. We considered that Alternative Scheme One would provide the best balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria. We therefore proposed adopting these warding

arrangements for Fressingfield, Hoxne, Stradbroke and Weybread wards as part of our draft recommendations.

99 At Stage Three of the review, the District Council noted that we had adopted the proposals outlined in Alternative Scheme One and supported our draft recommendations for these wards. Councillor Craven (Hoxne Division) noted that we had adopted her proposals for this area, which had formed the basis of Alternative Scheme One. She considered that our draft recommendations would result in the establishment of geographically compact wards that respect community interests and identities. Having stated that our proposals met “the broad objective of achieving equality of representation across the district”, she strongly supported our draft recommendations in this area. We received no other representations concerning this area.

100 We have carefully considered the representations received at Stage Three, and have noted the large degree of support for our proposals in this area. We remain of the view that our draft recommendations would provide the best balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria. We therefore intend confirming our draft recommendations for Fressingfield, Hoxne, Stradbroke and Weybread wards as final.

101 Under our final recommendations, Fressingfield and Stradbroke & Laxfield wards would both have 5 per cent more electors per councillor than the district average (4 per cent and 5 per cent more by 2005). Hoxne ward would have 8 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the district average, both now and in 2005. Our proposals for this area are illustrated on Map 2.

Creeting, Helmingham, Stonham and Stowupland wards

102 The existing wards of Creeting, Helmingham, Stonham and Stowupland are situated to the east of Stowmarket. Creeting ward contains the parishes of Coddendam, Creeting St Mary and Creeting St Peter (or West Creeting). Helmingham ward contains the parishes of Ashbocking, Crowfield, Framsdan, Gosbeck, Helmingham and Pettaugh, and Stonham ward contains the parishes of Earl Stonham, Stonham Parva, Mickfield and Stonham Aspal. All three wards are currently represented by a single councillor. Stowupland ward contains the parishes of Bacton, Gipping, Old Newton with Dagworth and Stowupland, and is currently represented by two councillors.

103 Under the existing arrangements, Creeting and Helmingham wards contain 31 per cent and 29 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the district average respectively (32 per cent and 31 per cent fewer than average by 2005). Stonham and Stowupland wards contain 20 per cent and 2 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the district average respectively (21 per cent and 4 per cent fewer than average by 2005).

104 At Stage One, the District Council proposed the retention of the existing single-member Helmingham ward, subject to the inclusion of Stonham Aspal parish from the existing Stonham ward. It proposed that the new ward be renamed Helmingham & Stonham Aspal. It also proposed the creation of a new single-member Creeting St Mary ward containing the parishes of Coddendam, Creeting St Mary, Earl Stonham and Stonham Parva. It proposed that Mickfield parish be transferred to Wetheringsett ward (as outlined above). The District Council also proposed a revised single-member Stowupland ward containing Stowupland and Creeting St

Peter (or West Creeting) parishes. It recommended that the parishes of Bacton, Gipping and Old Newton with Dagworth, which are currently part of Stowupland ward, should form a new single-member Bacton & Old Newton ward.

105 Alternative Scheme One differed from the District Council's main proposals for two of the proposed wards. It would provide for a new single-member ward of The Stonhams that would comprise Creeting St Mary parish (from Creeting ward), and Earl Stonham, Stonham Parva and Stonham Aspal (from Stonham ward). It proposed that the existing Helmingham ward be expanded to include Coddenham parish from Creeting ward, and be renamed Helmingham & Coddenham ward.

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

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

108 In our draft recommendations, we noted that both proposed schemes would result in improved levels of electoral equality while having regard to local community interests and identities. The District Council's proposals for a revised Stowupland ward and a new Bacton & Old Newton ward provided acceptable levels of electoral equality and provoked little opposition from those parishes affected. We were therefore content to adopt the District Council's main recommendation for the proposed Bacton & Old Newton and Stowupland wards as part of our draft recommendations.

109 We noted that the District Council's proposals for a revised Helmingham & Stonham Aspal ward and Creeting St Mary ward provided very similar levels of electoral equality to the arrangements outlined in Alternative Scheme One. However, we considered that the proposals outlined in Alternative Scheme One better reflected the interests and identities of communities in this area while continuing to provide an acceptable level of electoral equality. We also noted that the alternative scheme had the support of Stonham Aspal Parish Council and was accepted by Coddenham Parish Council, the two parishes affected by the alternative proposals. We were therefore content to adopt the proposals outlined in Alternative Scheme One for the proposed Helmingham & Coddenham and The Stonhams wards as part of our draft recommendations.

110 At Stage Three of the review, the District Council noted that we had adopted the proposals outlined in its Alternative Scheme One for this area, and therefore fully endorsed our draft recommendations for these wards.

111 Henley Parish Council opposed our draft recommendations for this area. It argued that Henley parish shares greater ties with more rural parishes to its north and considered that the parish would not be effectively represented if it were combined in a two-member ward with the relatively urban parishes of Claydon and Barham, as proposed in our draft recommendations. The

Parish Council therefore put forward alternative arrangements for the existing district wards of Creeting, Helmingham and Stonham. It proposed a new single-member Coddendam ward containing the parishes of Henley and Hemingstone from the existing Barham ward, Ashbocking and Gosbeck parishes from the existing Helmingham ward and Coddendam parish from the existing Creeting ward. It also proposed a revised single-member Helmingham ward comprising the remainder of the existing Helmingham ward (Crowfield, Framsdan, Helmingham and Pettaugh parishes), Winston parish from the existing Debenham ward and Stonham Aspal parish from the existing Stonham ward. The Parish Council proposed that the remainder of Stonham ward (Earl Stonham, Little Stonham and Mickfield parishes) be combined with Creeting St Mary parish to form a revised single-member ward. Henley Parish Council did not put forward alternative arrangements for our proposed Bacton & Old Newton and Stowupland wards.

112 Henley Parish Council argued that its proposals reflected the preferences of rural communities in the area and would ensure that parishes of a similar nature and size were combined in the same district wards. Under Henley Parish Council's proposals, which would result in a council size of 41, Coddendam and Helmingham wards would both have 15 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the district average initially, and 17 per cent fewer and 19 per cent fewer than average by 2005. Stonham ward would have 8 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the district average currently and 10 per cent fewer than average by 2005. Bacton & Old Newton and Stowupland wards would have 7 per cent more and 5 per cent more electors per councillor than the district average respectively (both would have 4 per cent more than average by 2005).

113 Coddendam Parish Council were "sympathetic" to the concerns of Henley Parish Council. It considered it practical for Henley to be combined in a district ward with the "Coddendam Group" of parishes as they share many local interests and are connected by good transportation links. However, it stated that such a ward may cover a relatively large geographical area.

114 We have carefully considered the representations received at Stage Three of the review and note that our proposals have received the full endorsement of the District Council. While we recognise the concerns of Henley Parish Council with regard to our draft recommendations for these wards, we do not consider that its proposals would sufficiently address the issue of electoral inequality in this area. Moreover, its proposals are contingent upon us endorsing its proposed council size of 41. As stated earlier, we consider that our proposed council size of 40 provides the best balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria, and provides the most equitable distribution of councillors between district wards in Mid Suffolk. In addition, we are not persuaded that our proposals would have an adverse affect upon the effective representation of rural communities. As detailed below, we note that Hemingstone Parish Council, which is similar in a number of respects to Henley parish, did not express similar reservations with regard to our draft recommendations and supported its incorporation in a district ward with the more urban Barham parish. We are therefore not persuaded to adopt the proposals of Henley Parish Council for this area as part of our final recommendations.

115 Having considered all the representations received at Stage Three, we are confirming our draft recommendations for Bacton & Old Newton, Helmingham & Coddendam, The Stonhams and Stowupland wards as final. Under our final recommendations, Bacton & Old Newton and Stowupland wards would contain 5 per cent more and 3 per cent more electors per councillor than

the district average respectively (2 per cent and 1 per cent more than average by 2005). The Stonhams and Helmingham & Coddensham wards would contain 7 per cent more and 6 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the district average respectively (4 per cent more and 7 per cent fewer than average by 2005). Our proposals for this area are illustrated on Map 2.

Barham, Barking, Bramford and Claydon wards

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

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

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

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

120 In our draft recommendations, we noted the concern of Henley Parish Council with regard to the proposed Claydon & Barham ward. We noted that the current Claydon and Barham wards combine rural areas with the larger settlements of Claydon and Barham respectively and that these two in particular share significant links. We also noted that a two-member Claydon & Barham ward would provide for a marginal improvement in electoral equality when compared

to the existing arrangements. We considered that the District Council's proposals would secure improved levels of electoral equality and have sufficient regard to community identities and interests. We were therefore content to endorse the Council's proposed Claydon & Barham ward as part of our draft recommendations. In the light of the representations received, we also proposed to adopt the District Council's proposals for Barking & Somersham and Bramford & Blakenham wards as part of our draft recommendations.

121 At Stage Three of the review, the District Council fully supported our draft recommendations for this area. Hemingstone Parish Council also supported our draft recommendations to incorporate the parish in a new two-member Claydon & Barham ward.

122 Henley Parish Council reiterated the concerns expressed in its Stage One submission to the District Council and opposed our draft recommendations for this area. It argued that parishes of a more rural nature, such as itself and Hemingstone, would not be adequately represented if combined in a district ward with the relatively urban settlements of Barham and Claydon. It therefore put forward alternative warding arrangements for this area, proposing that the existing ward of Claydon be combined with Barham parish to form a new two-member Claydon & Barham ward. As detailed earlier, it proposed that Henley and Hemingstone parishes be transferred to a new single-member Coddensham ward to the north. It considered that its proposals would combine communities that share identities and interests and would ensure the effective representation of rural views on the District Council. The Parish Council did not put forward alternative proposals for our proposed Barking & Somersham and Bramford & Blakenham wards.

123 Under Henley Parish Council's proposals for a council size of 41, Claydon & Barham and Coddensham wards would have 19 per cent fewer and 15 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the district average respectively (15 per cent fewer and 17 per cent fewer than average by 2005). Bramford & Blakenham and Barking & Somersham wards would have 2 per cent fewer and 1 per cent more electors per councillor than the district average respectively (5 per cent fewer and equal to the district average by 2005).

124 Having considered the representations received at Stage Three, we remain of the view that our draft recommendations provide the best balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria. As stated earlier, we consider that our proposed council size of 40 provides a more equitable distribution of councillors between district wards than would be the case under a council size of 41. Under Henley Parish Council's proposals, the south-east of the district would be over-represented, with a resultant deterioration in the levels of electoral equality when compared to our draft recommendations. Furthermore, under the Parish Council's alternative proposals, no significant improvement in electoral equality is projected to occur over the course of the next five years.

125 We are not persuaded that our draft recommendations would adversely affect the identities and interests of local communities. We note that Hemingstone Parish Council, a community of similar size and nature to that of Henley, fully supported our proposed Claydon & Barham ward and did not express the same reservations as Henley Parish Council toward our draft recommendations. We remain of the view that our proposed warding arrangements for this area provide the best balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria and therefore intend

confirming our draft recommendations for Barking & Somersham, Bramford & Blakenham and Claydon & Barham wards as final.

126 Under our final recommendations, Barking & Somersham and Bramford & Blakenham wards would have 1 per cent fewer and 5 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the district average respectively (2 per cent and 8 per cent fewer by 2005). Claydon & Barham ward would have 2 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the district average, and is projected to have equal to the district average by 2005. Our proposals for this area are illustrated on Map 2.

Haughley & Wetherden, Needham Market, Onehouse and Ringshall wards

127 Haughley & Wetherden, Needham Market, Onehouse and Ringshall wards are situated in the south of the district. Needham Market ward is represented by two councillors and contains the parishes of Badley and Needham Market. Ringshall is a single-member ward and contains the parishes of Battsford, Combs, Great Bricett, Little Finborough and Ringshall. Both wards are located immediately to the south and west of Stowmarket town. Haughley & Wetherden and Onehouse wards are each represented by a single district councillor and abut the north and west boundary of Stowmarket. Haughley & Wetherden contains the parishes of Haughley and Wetherden and Onehouse ward contains the parishes of Buxhall, Great Finborough, Harleston, Onehouse and Shelland.

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

129 At Stage One, the District Council proposed retaining the existing Onehouse and Needham Market wards. It proposed only minimal change to Haughley & Wetherden and Ringshall wards. In particular, it proposed that the part of Haughley parish known as Chilton Hall and containing 92 electors, be transferred from Haughley & Wetherden ward to Stowmarket North ward. It also proposed that the Lindsey Way area of Combs parish (containing 175 electors), be transferred from Ringshall ward to Stowmarket South ward. Although these areas form part of the parishes of Haughley and Combs respectively, they are effectively areas of urban overspill from Stowmarket town.

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

131 As part of the District Council's local consultation process, Haughley Parish Council stated its opposition to the District Council's proposals and expressed concern that the Chilton Hall area

of the parish would remain within the parish but be represented by a different district councillor. They supported the integration of this area into the Stowmarket Town Council area. Combs Parish Council expressed support for the District Council's proposals.

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

133 We noted that under the Council's proposals, Ringshall ward would have 12 per cent more electors per councillor than the district average. However, that this level was expected to improve somewhat over the next five years to 10 per cent more electors per councillor than the district average. We were therefore content to endorse the District Council's proposals for Haughley & Wetherden, Needham Market, Onehouse, and Ringshall wards as part of our draft recommendations.

134 At Stage Three of the review, the District Council noted that we had adopted its proposal to transfer the Chilton Hall area of Haughley & Wetherden ward to a revised Stowmarket North ward and the Lindsey Way area of Ringshall ward to a revised Stowmarket South ward. It therefore supported our draft recommendations for these wards. While supporting our draft recommendations, Suffolk County Council supported a prompt review of parish boundaries to the north and south of Stowmarket Town, in order that they reflect our proposed district warding arrangements for Haughley and Wetherden and Ringshall wards (as discussed in detail later).

135 Haughley Parish Council reiterated the views expressed in its Stage One submission to the District Council. It expressed concern that the boundaries of our proposed Haughley & Wetherden and Stowmarket North wards would no longer be coterminous with parish boundaries in the area and argued that the Chilton Hall area of the parish should be permanently incorporated into the Stowmarket Town Council area. As detailed below, it also objected to our proposed electoral arrangements for the parish. Stowmarket Town Council supported our proposed amendment to the boundary between Stowmarket North and Haughley & Wetherden wards and Stowmarket South and Ringshall wards.

136 A local resident reiterated the views expressed in his Stage One submission and argued that our proposed ward boundaries in this area could result in local electors becoming "accustomed to regarding the new ward boundaries as the parish boundaries". He considered that our proposed ward boundaries in the area may prejudice the deliberations of the District Council in any subsequent parish boundary review.

137 Having considered the representations received at Stage Three, we note that both the District Council and Stowmarket Town Council supported our revised ward boundaries between Haughley & Wetherden and Stowmarket North wards, and Ringshall and Stowmarket South wards. We recognise that our proposals would result in district ward boundaries no longer being

coterminous with parish boundaries in this area. However, we would reiterate that the Commission does not have the power to either amend parish boundaries or to advise the District Council to commence such a review. It is for the District Council to decide whether to conduct a review of parish boundaries following the completion of this Periodic Electoral Review.

138 We note that the Chilton Hall area of Haughley & Wetherden ward and Lindsey Way area of Ringshall ward are areas of urban overspill from Stowmarket. We remain of the view that residents in these areas identify with Stowmarket and use the same local amenities and facilities as residents of the town. We remain of the view that the incorporation of these areas into the district wards of Stowmarket has sufficient regard for community identities and interests and will facilitate the more effective and convenient representation of these areas on the District Council. Moreover, we consider our proposals will result in the establishment of district wards that follow more clearly defined and logical boundaries.

139 Having noted the broad degree of consensus in support of our proposals, we therefore intend confirming our draft recommendations for Haughley & Wetherden, Needham Market, Onehouse and Ringshall wards as final. Under our final recommendations, Needham Market, Ringshall and Onehouse wards would have 5 per cent, 12 per cent and 2 per cent more electors per councillor than the district average respectively (3 per cent more and 10 per cent more and 1 per cent fewer than average respectively by 2005). Haughley & Wetherden would have 5 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the district average and 6 per cent fewer than average by 2005. Our proposals for this area are illustrated on Map 2 and on the large map at the back of this report.

Stowmarket Central, Stowmarket North and Stowmarket South wards

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

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

142 The District Council's Alternative Scheme Two provided for a four-ward scheme for Stowmarket. In anticipation of new residential development in the east of the town, it proposed

the creation of a single-member Stowmarket East ward encompassing those areas currently in Stowmarket North, to the east of the Ipswich to Norwich railway line.

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

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

145 In our draft recommendations, we noted the large measure of support for the retention of three wards in Stowmarket. We did not consider that the transfer of the Chilton Hall area of Haughley & Wetherden ward to Stowmarket North ward and the transfer of the Lindsey Way area from Ringshall ward to Stowmarket South ward would have a negative impact upon rural representation, as one local resident suggested. The rural wards would continue to be represented by one councillor each, and the Stowmarket area would be entitled to seven members under a council size of 40, whether or not these areas of urban overspill were included in Stowmarket district wards. We considered that the Chilton Hill and Lindsey Lane areas have a greater affinity with Stowmarket, and share local amenities and facilities with residents of the town. It would also be open for the District Council at some time in the future to consider the most appropriate parish boundaries in this area as part of a parishing review.

146 With regard to electorate projections in Stowmarket, on the evidence available, we were content to endorse the District Council's projections. We did not consider there was sufficient evidence to suggest that the establishment of single-member wards has an adverse effect upon turnout at elections. However, we recognised the level of electoral inequality in the proposed Stowmarket East ward would be high, particularly on the basis of current figures, and observed that there appears to be little support for the creation of a fourth ward in the town. We therefore proposed the retention of three district wards in Stowmarket town. On the evidence of the representations received, we were content to endorse the District Council's main proposals for Stowmarket Central, Stowmarket North and Stowmarket South wards subject to one amendment. In order to provide further improvement in the levels of electoral equality in the town, we proposed the transfer of 90 electors in Kingsmead Road, Wolsey Road, Kingsmead Close and Silverdale Avenue from Stowmarket Central ward to Stowmarket North ward. We also proposed

several minor boundary changes to all three wards in Stowmarket, affecting no electors, to provide more clearly identifiable boundaries.

147 At Stage Three of the review, the District Council broadly supported our draft recommendations for Stowmarket. In particular, it noted that we had endorsed its proposal to incorporate those areas of urban overspill that currently lie in Haughley & Wetherden and Ringshall wards into the district wards of Stowmarket. However, the District Council objected to our proposed transfer of 90 electors in the Kingsmead Road area from Stowmarket Central ward to Stowmarket North ward. While the Council acknowledged that our proposals would improve levels of electoral equality in the town, it argued that they would necessitate the establishment of an additional polling station at election time, which would incur an additional financial burden on the Council. Furthermore, it argued that the existing boundary between Stowmarket Central and Stowmarket North wards better reflected local community identities than our draft recommendations, and that our proposals would have an adverse affect upon the effective and convenient representation of this area on the District Council. It stated that “it would not be in the interests of continuity or local opinion” to amend the boundary between these two wards.

148 Stowmarket Town Council expressed broad support for our draft recommendations but stated that there was not “a pressing need” to amend the boundary between Stowmarket Central ward and Stowmarket North ward. It argued that the electorate is familiar with the existing arrangements that had been in place for many years. As outlined above, Haughley Parish Council objected to our proposed transfer of the Chilton Hall area of Haughley & Wetherden ward to our proposed Stowmarket North ward without a concurrent review of parish boundaries. It considered that the parish boundary should reflect our proposed district warding arrangements.

149 We have carefully considered the representations received at Stage Three of the review and note the broad degree of support for our draft recommendations in Stowmarket. We recognise that there was some opposition to our proposed boundary between Stowmarket Central and Stowmarket North wards. While we acknowledge that changes to ward boundaries may initially result in extra administrative costs to district councils, this is not an issue to which we can have regard as part of this review. While we accept that local electors may be familiar with existing ward boundaries in the town, we consider that both the existing and projected level of electoral variance in Stowmarket Central ward (11 per cent more electors per councillor than the average both now and in five years’ time) is unacceptable, particularly for an urban district ward. We therefore remain of the view that this relatively high level of electoral variance needs to be addressed as part of this review.

150 We remain of the view that our draft recommendations will secure the improvement of long-term levels of electoral equality for the district wards of Stowmarket. We do not consider that we have received sufficient evidence in support of retaining the existing boundary between Stowmarket Central and Stowmarket North wards. We consider that our proposed warding arrangements for Stowmarket provide the best balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria and we are therefore confirming them as final.

151 Under our final recommendations, Stowmarket Central ward and Stowmarket South ward would have 8 per cent more and 10 per cent more electors per councillor than the district average

respectively (8 per cent and 6 per cent more than average by 2005). Stowmarket North ward would initially have 17 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the district average. However, this level of electoral equality is forecast to significantly improve to 4 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the district average by 2005. Our proposals for this area are illustrated on Map 2 and on the large map at the back of this report.

Elmswell, Norton, Rattlesden and Thurston wards

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

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

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

155 In our draft recommendations, we recognised there was a measure of local support for the District Council's proposals in this area. Furthermore, we considered that they provided for a much improved level of electoral equality. We noted the concerns of Norton Parish Council regarding the proposed Elmswell & Norton ward. However, as stated in our draft recommendations, our ability to consider alternative warding arrangements is limited due to the number of the parishes in this area that lie on or near to the district boundary and the significant electoral imbalance in the current Elmswell ward. We acknowledged that the existing Norton ward does have a reasonable level of electoral equality, but when making our recommendations we are unable to look at areas in isolation and must have regard to the electoral impact on adjacent wards. We were therefore content to adopt the District Council's proposals for Elmswell & Norton, Rattlesden and Thurston & Hessett wards as part of our draft recommendations.

156 At Stage Three of the review, the District Council fully supported our draft recommendations for these wards. Having received no further representations in relation to this area, we remain of the view that our proposals provide a satisfactory balance between electoral

equality and the statutory criteria. We are therefore confirming our draft recommendations for Elmswell & Norton, Rattlesden and Thurston & Hessett wards as final.

157 Under our final recommendations, Elmswell & Norton and Rattlesden wards would have 2 per cent more and 9 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the district average respectively (1 per cent more and 12 per cent fewer than average by 2005). Thurston & Hessett ward would have equal to the average number of electors per councillor currently (1 per cent fewer than average by 2005). Our proposals for this area are illustrated on Map 2.

Electoral Cycle

158 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 whole-council elections every four years.

159 At Stage Three no further comments were received to the contrary, and we therefore intend confirming our draft recommendation to retain the existing electoral cycle as final.

Conclusions

160 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 a new two-member Rickingham & Walsham ward, as supported by respondents during our further consultation process;
- we also propose a revised single-member Badwell Ash ward, as proposed in our draft recommendations except for the inclusion of Langham parish.

161 We conclude that, in Mid Suffolk:

- a council size of 40 should be retained;
- there should be 30 wards, four fewer than at present;
- the boundaries of 26 of the existing wards should be modified;
- the Council should continue to hold whole-council elections every four years.

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

Figure 4: Comparison of Current and Recommended Electoral Arrangements

	2000 electorate		2005 forecast electorate	
	Current arrangements	Final recommendations	Current arrangements	Final recommendations
Number of councillors	40	40	40	40
Number of wards	34	30	34	30
Average number of electors per councillor	1,688	1,688	1,763	1,763
Number of wards with a variance more than 10 per cent from the average	15	2	17	1
Number of wards with a variance more than 20 per cent from the average	8	0	9	0

163 As Figure 4 shows, our recommendations would result in a reduction in the number of wards with an electoral variance of more than 10 per cent from 15 to two, with no 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, Rattlesden, varying by more than 10 per cent from the average, at 12 per cent. We conclude that our recommendations would best meet the need for electoral equality, while having regard to the statutory criteria.

Final Recommendation
 Mid Suffolk District Council should comprise 40 councillors serving 30 wards, as detailed and named in Figures 1 and 2, and illustrated on Map 2 and in the large map inside the back cover. The Council should continue to hold whole-council elections every four years.

Parish and Town Council Electoral Arrangements

164 In undertaking reviews of electoral arrangements, we are required to comply as far as is reasonably practicable with the provisions set out in Schedule 11 to the 1972 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, in our draft recommendations report we proposed consequential changes to the warding arrangements for the parishes of Combs and Haughley, and Stowmarket Town Council to reflect the proposed district wards.

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

166 In response to our consultation report, Mid Suffolk District Council supported our proposals for Combs parish. Suffolk County Council supported an amendment to parish boundary between Combs parish and Stowmarket town in order that district ward and parish boundaries are coterminous in this area. A local resident considered that electors in this area may come to regard our proposed district ward boundaries as the new parish boundary “to the detriment of an impartial view”, should a parish boundary review be undertaken by the District Council at a later date.

167 Aside from our proposed district warding arrangements for this area, we consider that the Lindsey Way area forms a distinct part of Combs parish and therefore warrants separate representation on the parish council. Having noted the broad support for our proposals in this area, we are confirming our draft recommendations for electoral arrangements for Combs Parish Council as final.

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

168 The parish of Haughley is currently served by 15 councillors and is not warded. In our draft recommendations, we proposed that the parish should be divided between the two district wards of Haughley & Wetherden and Stowmarket North. Haughley Parish Council were opposed to the inclusion of the Chilton Hall area of Haughley parish in Stowmarket North ward without modification to the parish boundary. As outlined above, we are not able to modify parish boundaries as part of this review. However, this issue could be addressed by the District Council as part of a future parishing review. As a consequence of our draft recommendations we proposed that Haughley parish should be divided into two parish wards – Haughley North parish ward and Haughley South parish ward – to reflect the proposed district ward boundary. Haughley North parish ward would form part of the revised Haughley & Wetherden ward, while Haughley South parish ward would form part of a revised Stowmarket North ward.

169 In response to our consultation report, the District Council endorsed our draft recommendations for electoral arrangements for the Haughley area. Haughley Parish Council reiterated its opposition to our proposed warding of the parish, and argued that the Chilton Hall community should be permanently transferred to the Stowmarket Town Council area. It considered the warding of the parish for the purpose of elections to the Parish Council “would hinder the democratic process” by limiting the proposed Chilton Hall ward to a single parish councillor. It argued that the parish ward boundary should reflect our proposed district warding arrangements and therefore supported an immediate amendment to the southern boundary of the parish.

170 Suffolk County Council supported an amendment to parish boundary between Haughley parish and Stowmarket town in order that district ward and parish boundaries are coterminous in this area. A local resident considered that electors in this area may come to regard our proposed district ward boundaries as the parish boundary “to the detriment of an impartial view” should a parish boundary review be undertaken by the District Council at a later date.

171 We carefully considered the representations received at Stage Three. Aside from our proposed district warding arrangements in this area, we consider the Chilton Hall community to be a distinct part of Haughley parish that warrants separate representation on the parish council. We remain of the view that our proposed electoral arrangements for Haughley will ensure the effective representation of its constituent communities, at both parish and district council level. We would reiterate that it is for the District Council to undertake a review of parish boundaries, subsequent to the completion of this Periodic Electoral Review. Having confirmed our proposed district warding arrangements for this area as final, we are therefore confirming our proposed electoral arrangements for Haughley parish as final.

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

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

173 As part of our draft recommendations, we proposed transferring 90 electors from Stowmarket Central to Stowmarket North district ward and combining parts of Haughley and Combs parishes in revised Stowmarket North and Stowmarket South district wards respectively. We therefore proposed a consequential change to the boundary between Stowmarket Central and North Town Council wards. We proposed for the purpose of consultation and in the absence of any locally generated proposal, that each Town Council ward continue to be represented by five town councillors. We noted that this would provide relatively even representation currently,

although we noted that the significant forecast growth in North ward, as proposed, would result in the area’s relative under-representation by 2005.

174 In response to our consultation report, Mid Suffolk District Council broadly supported our draft recommendations for electoral arrangements in Stowmarket as did Stowmarket Town Council. Notwithstanding their opposition to parts of our proposed district warding arrangements for the town, no objection was expressed to our proposed electoral arrangements for the Town Council. As detailed earlier, Haughley Parish Council requested an immediate revision of the parish boundary between Haughley and Stowmarket in order that the parish boundary between the two areas reflect our proposed district warding arrangements. A local resident considered that our proposed district warding arrangements for this area may prejudice the District Council in a subsequent review of parish boundaries.

175 Having noted a degree of support for our draft recommendations and in the absence of any further representations, we are confirming our draft recommendations for the electoral arrangements of Stowmarket Town Council as final.

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

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

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

Map 2: The Commission's Final Recommendations for Mid Suffolk

6 NEXT STEPS

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

178 It now falls to the Secretary of State to decide whether to give effect to our recommendations, with or without modification, and to implement them by means of an Order. Such an Order will not be made before 7 August 2001.

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

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

APPENDIX A

Draft Recommendations for Mid Suffolk

Our final recommendations, detailed in Figures 1 and 2, differ from those we put forward as draft recommendations in respect of only three wards, where our draft proposals are set out below.

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

Ward name	Constituent areas
Badwell Ash	Badwell Ash ward (part – Badwell Ash, Great Ashfield, Hunston, Stowlangtoft and Wyverstone parishes); Walsham-le-Willows ward (part – Finningham and Westhorpe parishes)
Rickingham	Rickingham ward (part – Botesdale, Redgrave, Rickingham Inferior and Rickingham Superior parishes)
Walsham-le-Willows	Walsham-le-Willows ward (part – Walsham-le-Willows and Wattisfield parishes); Badwell Ash ward (part – Langham parish); Rickingham ward (part – Hinderclay parish)

Figure B2: The Commission's Draft Recommendations: Number of Councillors and Electors by Ward

Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2000)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2005)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
Badwell Ash	1	1,791	1,791	6	1,878	1,878	7
Rickingham	1	1,896	1,896	12	1,946	1,946	10
Walsham-le-Willows	1	1,535	1,535	-9	1,573	1,573	-11

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

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

APPENDIX B

Code of Practice on Written Consultation

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

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

Commission compliance with Code criteria

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

