

Final recommendations on the
future electoral arrangements
for Middlesbrough

Report to The Electoral Commission

October 2002

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A large map illustrating the proposed ward boundaries for Middlesbrough is inserted at the back of the report.

WHAT IS THE BOUNDARY COMMITTEE FOR ENGLAND?

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

Members of the Committee are:

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

Archie Gall (Director)

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

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

SUMMARY

The Local Government Commission for England (LGCE) began a review of Middlesbrough's electoral arrangements on 16 October 2001. We took over the review following the transfer of functions on 1 April 2002. We published our draft recommendations for electoral arrangements on 14 May 2002, after which we undertook an eight-week period of consultation. We now submit final recommendations to The Electoral Commission.

- **This report summarises the representations that we received during consultation on our draft recommendations, and contains our final recommendations to The Electoral Commission.**

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

- **In 13 of the 25 wards the number of electors represented by each councillor varies by more than 10% from the average for the borough, and six wards vary by more than 20% from the average;**
- **By 2006 this situation is expected to improve slightly, with the number of electors per councillor forecast to vary by more than 10% from the average in 14 wards and by more than 20% in four wards.**

Our main final recommendations for future electoral arrangements (see Tables 1 and 2 and paragraphs 98–99) are that:

- **Middlesbrough Borough Council should have 48 councillors, five fewer than at present;**
- **there should be 23 wards, instead of 25 as at present;**
- **the boundaries of 23 of the existing wards should be modified, resulting in a net reduction of two, and two wards should retain their existing boundaries.**

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

- **In four of the proposed 23 wards the number of electors per councillor would vary by more than 10% from the borough average.**
- **This improved level of electoral equality is expected to improve further, with the number of electors per councillor in only one of the wards, Brookfield, expected to vary by more than 10% from the average for the borough in 2006.**

All further correspondence on these final recommendations and the matters discussed in this report should be addressed to The Electoral Commission, which will not make an Order implementing them before 26 November 2002:

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

**Fax: 020 7271 0505
Email: implementation@electoralcommission.org.uk
(This address should only be used for this purpose)**

Table 1: Final recommendations: Summary

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Constituent areas	Map reference
1	Acklam	2	Acklam ward; part of Kirby ward	Map 2 and large map
2	Ayresome	2	Ayresome ward; part of St Hilda's ward; part of Kader ward	Map 2 and large map
3	Beckfield	2	Beckfield ward (unchanged)	Map 2 and large map
4	Beechwood	2	Part of Beechwood ward; part of Grove Hill ward; part of Easterside ward	Map 2 and large map
5	Brookfield	2	Brookfield ward; part of Hemlington ward	Map 2 and large map
6	Clairville	2	Part of Grove Hill ward; part of Beechwood ward; part of Kirby ward	Map 2 and large map
7	Coulby Newham	3	Part of Newham ward	Map 2 and large map
8	Gresham	3	Part of Gresham ward; part of St Hilda's ward; part of Southfield ward	Map 2 and large map
9	Hemlington	2	Part of Hemlington ward; part of Stainton & Thornton ward	Map 2 and large map
10	Kader	2	Part of Kader ward; part of Easterside ward; part of Hemlington ward; part of Newham ward	Map 2 and large map
11	Ladgate	2	Part of Easterside ward; part of Newham ward	Map 2 and large map
12	Linthorpe	3	Part of Linthorpe ward; part of Kirby ward; part of Park ward	Map 2 and large map
13	Longlands	2	Part of North Ormesby ward; part of Thorntree ward	Map 2 and large map
14	Marton	2	Marton ward; part of Newham ward; part of Easterside ward	Map 2 and large map
15	Marton West	2	Part of Newham ward	Map 2 and large map
16	Middlehaven	2	Part of St Hilda's ward; part of North Ormesby ward; part of Westbourne ward; part of Southfield ward	Map 2 and large map
17	Nunthorpe	2	Parish of Nunthorpe (unchanged)	Map 2 and large map
18	Pallister	2	Part of Pallister ward; part of Berwick Hills ward	Map 2 and large map
19	Park	2	Part of Park ward; part of Linthorpe ward; part of Grove Hill ward; part of Kirby ward	Map 2 and large map
20	Park End	2	Park End ward; part of Berwick Hills ward	Map 2 and large map
21	Stainton & Thornton	1	Parish of Stainton & Thornton; part of Hemlington ward	Map 2 and large map

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Constituent areas	Map reference
22	Thorntree	2	Part of Thorntree ward; part of Pallister ward	Map 2 and large map
23	University	2	Part of Westbourne ward; part of Southfield ward; part of Gresham ward	Map 2 and large map

Notes: 1 Stainton & Thornton and Nunthorpe are the only parished areas in the borough, and comprise the two wards indicated above.

2 The wards in the above table are illustrated on Map 2.

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

Table 2: Final recommendations for Middlesbrough

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2001)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2006)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
1	Acklam	2	4,636	2,318	7	4,593	2,297	5
2	Ayresome	2	4,872	2,436	13	4,547	2,274	4
3	Beckfield	2	4,025	2,013	-7	4,028	2,014	-8
4	Beechwood	2	4,016	2,008	-7	4,096	2,048	-6
5	Brookfield	2	4,976	2,488	15	4,931	2,466	13
6	Clairville	2	4,186	2,093	-3	4,317	2,159	-1
7	Coulby Newham	3	6,536	2,179	1	6,758	2,253	3
8	Gresham	3	6,336	2,112	-2	6,307	2,102	-4
9	Hemlington	2	4,663	2,332	8	4,624	2,312	6
10	Kader	2	4,179	2,090	-3	4,171	2,086	-4
11	Ladgate	2	4,564	2,282	6	4,522	2,261	4
12	Linthorpe	3	6,329	2,110	-2	6,623	2,208	1
13	Longlands	2	4,919	2,460	14	4,545	2,273	4
14	Marton	2	3,908	1,954	-9	3,982	1,991	-9
15	Marton West	2	4,155	2,078	-4	4,401	2,201	1
16	Middlehaven	2	3,311	1,656	-23	4,140	2,070	-5
17	Nunthorpe	2	3,870	1,935	-10	4,004	2,002	-8
18	Pallister	2	4,439	2,220	3	4,395	2,198	1
19	Park	2	4,257	2,129	-1	4,218	2,109	-3
20	Park End	2	4,629	2,315	7	4,587	2,294	5
21	Stainton & Thornton	1	2,345	2,345	9	2,337	2,337	7
22	Thorn tree	2	4,323	2,162	0	4,336	2,168	-1
23	University	2	4,116	2,058	-5	4,206	2,103	-4
	Totals	48	103,590	-	-	104,668	-	-
	Averages	-	-	2,158	-	-	2,181	-

Source: Electorate figures are based on information provided by Middlesbrough Borough Council.

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

1 INTRODUCTION

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

2 Middlesbrough's last review was carried out by the Local Government Boundary Commission for England, which reported to the Secretary of State in 1975 (Report No 87). Middlesbrough became a unitary authority on 1 April 1996.

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

- the statutory criteria contained in section 13(5) of the Local Government Act 1992 (as amended by SI 2001 No 3692), i.e. the need to:
 - (a) reflect the identities and interests of local communities;
 - (b) secure effective and convenient local government; and
 - (c) achieve equality of representation.
- Schedule 11 to the Local Government 1972.

4 Details of the legislation under which the review of Middlesbrough was conducted are set out in a document entitled *Guidance and Procedural Advice for Local Authorities and Other Interested Parties* (LGCE, fourth edition published in October 2001). This *Guidance* sets out the approach to the review.

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

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

7 We are not prescriptive on council size. Insofar as Middlesbrough is concerned, we started from the assumption that the size of an existing council already secures effective and convenient local government, but were 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 any proposal for an increase in council size would need to be fully justified. In particular, we do not accept that an increase in electorate should automatically result in an increase in the number of councillors, nor that changes should be made to the size of a council simply to make it more consistent with the size of other similar councils.

8 Stage One began on 16 October 2001, when the LGCE wrote to Middlesbrough Borough Council inviting proposals for future electoral arrangements. It also notified Cleveland Police Authority, the Local Government Association, Cleveland Local Councils Association, parish councils in the borough, the Members of Parliament with constituency interests in the borough, the Members of the European Parliament for the North East Region, and the headquarters of the main political parties. The LGCE placed a notice in the local press, issued a press release and invited Middlesbrough Borough Council to publicise the review further. The closing date for

receipt of representations, the end of Stage One, was 7 January 2002. At Stage Two we considered all the representations received during Stage One and prepared our draft recommendations.

9 Stage Three began on 14 May 2002 with the publication of the report, *Draft recommendations on the future electoral arrangements for Middlesbrough*, and ended on 8 July 2002. During this period comments were sought from the public and any other interested parties on the preliminary conclusions. Finally, during Stage Four the draft recommendations were reconsidered in the light of the Stage Three consultation, and we now publish our final recommendations.

2 CURRENT ELECTORAL ARRANGEMENTS

10 The borough of Middlesbrough is the sub-regional centre of the Tees Valley. The borough is situated on the River Tees and on the edge of the North Yorkshire Moors National Park. It developed during the industrial revolution and was sustained by the iron, steel and petro-chemical industries. However, Middlesbrough's economy is now dominated by the service sector. It comprises an area of approximately 5,394 hectares and has a population of some 146,000. The borough contains two parishes. Middlesbrough has experienced a decline in population (6% since 1976) and a migration to the south of the borough. Middlesbrough Borough Council became a unitary authority in 1996.

11 The electorate of the borough is 103,590 (February 2001). The Council presently has 53 members who are elected from 25 wards. Twenty-two of the wards are each represented by two councillors and three are each represented by three councillors. The Council is elected as a whole every four years.

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

13 At present, each councillor represents an average of 1,955 electors, which the Borough Council forecasts will increase to 1,975 by the year 2006 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 13 of the 25 wards varies by more than 10% from the borough average, in six wards by more than 20% and in one ward by more than 30%. The worst imbalance is in Newham ward where each of the three councillors represents 120% more electors than the borough average.

Map 1: Existing wards in Middlesbrough

Table 3: Existing electoral arrangements

Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2001)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2006)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
1 Acklam	2	3,947	1,974	1	3,911	1,956	-1
2 Ayresome	3	4,269	1,423	-27	3,951	1,317	-33
3 Beckfield	2	4,025	2,013	3	4,028	2,014	2
4 Beechwood	2	3,221	1,611	-18	3,191	1,596	-19
5 Berwick Hills	2	3,257	1,629	-17	3,227	1,614	-18
6 Brookfield	2	4,910	2,455	26	4,865	2,433	23
7 Easterside	2	3,183	1,592	-19	3,154	1,577	-20
8 Gresham	2	3,361	1,681	-14	3,330	1,665	-16
9 Grove Hill	2	3,890	1,945	0	4,113	2,057	4
10 Hemlington	2	3,774	1,887	-3	3,771	1,886	-5
11 Kader	2	4,712	2,356	21	4,669	2,335	18
12 Kirby	2	4,146	2,073	6	4,108	2,054	4
13 Linthorpe	2	3,957	1,979	1	4,299	2,150	9
14 Marton	2	3,797	1,899	-3	3,766	1,883	-5
15 Newham	3	12,874	4,291	120	13,425	4,475	127
16 North Ormesby	2	3,423	1,712	-12	3,463	1,732	-12
17 Nunthorpe	2	3,870	1,935	-1	4,004	2,002	1
18 Pallister	2	2,988	1,494	-24	2,961	1,481	-25
19 Park	2	3,602	1,801	-8	3,569	1,785	-10
20 Park End	2	3,808	1,904	-3	3,773	1,887	-4
21 Southfield	2	3,202	1,601	-18	3,436	1,718	-13
22 St Hilda's	2	3,005	1,503	-23	3,202	1,601	-19

Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2001)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2006)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
23 Stainton & Thornton	2	3,340	1,670	-15	3,327	1,664	-16
24 Thorntree	3	5,287	1,762	-10	5,290	1,763	-11
25 Westbourne	2	3,742	1,871	-4	3,835	1,918	-3
Totals	53	103,590	-	-	104,668	-	-
Averages	-	-	1,955	-	-	1,975	-

Source: Electorate figures are based on information provided by Middlesbrough Borough Council.

Note: The 'variance from average' column shows by how far, in percentage terms, the number of electors per councillor varies from the average for the borough. The minus symbol (-) denotes a lower than average number of electors. For example, in 2001, electors in St Hilda's ward were relatively over-represented by 23%, while electors in Newham ward were significantly under-represented by 120%. Figures have been rounded to the nearest whole number.

3 DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS

14 During Stage One five representations were received, from a parish council, a local community council, a borough councillor, a local resident, and a borough-wide scheme from Middlesbrough Borough Council. 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 Middlesbrough*.

15 Our draft recommendations were based on the Borough Council's proposals, which achieved some improvement in electoral equality, and provided a pattern of largely two-member wards, with one single-member ward and three three-member wards. However, we moved away from the Borough Council's scheme in a number of areas, affecting nine wards, and put forward our own proposals. We proposed that:

- Middlesbrough Borough Council should be served by 48 councillors, compared with the current 53, representing 23 wards, two less than at present;
- the boundaries of 23 of the existing wards should be modified, while two wards should retain their existing boundaries.

Draft recommendation

Middlesbrough Borough Council should comprise 48 councillors, serving 23 wards.

16 Our proposals would have resulted in significant improvements in electoral equality, with the number of electors per councillor in 19 of the 23 wards varying by no more than 10 per cent from the borough average. This level of electoral equality was forecast to improve further, with no ward varying by more than 10 per cent from the borough average by 2006.

4 RESPONSES TO CONSULTATION

17 During the consultation on the draft recommendations report, we received representations from 246 respondents. A list of all respondents is available from us on request. All representations may be inspected at our offices and those of Middlesbrough Borough Council.

Middlesbrough Borough Council

18 The Borough Council supported the draft recommendations where they reflected the Council's Stage One submission. It also supported 'a number of the changes that the Committee have made to that submission'. The Borough Council proposed 'firmer names for the wards' and four boundary amendments affecting six wards: Riverside, University, Grove Hill, Linthorpe, Berwick Hills & Pallister and Thorntree.

Member of Parliament

19 Stuart Bell MP (Middlesbrough) illustrated 'those parts of (the) recommendations which traverse existing parliamentary constituency boundaries', suggesting that 'this may or may not create administrative difficulties'. He also supported the Borough Council in its opposition to the proposal for part of the existing Kirby ward to form part of the proposed Grove Hill ward.

Parish council

20 Stainton & Thornton Parish Council supported the proposed Stainton & Thornton ward.

Other representations

21 A further 243 representations were received in response to our draft recommendations from local organisations, councillors and residents.

22 Councillor Michna (Park ward) and Park Ward Community Council opposed our proposals for Park ward. Councillor Michna proposed an alternative warding arrangement for this area. He also enclosed a list of 107 individuals who had responded to a survey he had jointly conducted with Councillor McIntyre (Park ward). Councillor Hall (Brookfield ward) proposed that the proposed Brookfield ward be renamed Thornhill ward. Both Acklam and Marton West Community Councils supported the draft recommendations for their respective areas. The University of Teeside proposed that the whole of its site be contained in the proposed University ward.

23 Brookfield Community Council, two of its members and 21 local residents, one of whom enclosed a petition signed by 50 local residents, objected to our proposals for Brookfield ward. The two members of the Community Council proposed an alternative warding arrangement for this area, which was supported by six local residents and a further 89 local residents who submitted a standard letter. Three local residents argued that an alternative area in the north-east of the existing Brookfield ward should be transferred to Kader ward, while five local residents submitted warding arrangements which identified the area to be transferred. The alternative warding arrangement submitted by the two members of Brookfield Community Council was opposed by two local residents along with a further 122 local residents who submitted a standard letter. Three local residents proposed alternative warding arrangements to create a single- and three-member ward pattern comprising the existing wards of Brookfield and Kader.

5 ANALYSIS AND FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS

24 As described earlier, our prime objective in considering the most appropriate electoral arrangements for Middlesbrough is to achieve electoral equality. In doing so we have regard to section 13(5) of the Local Government Act 1992 (as amended) – the need to secure effective and convenient local government; reflect the identities and interests of local communities; and secure the matters referred to in paragraph 3(2)(a) of Schedule 11 to the Local Government Act 1972 (equality of representation). Schedule 11 to the Local Government Act 1972 refers to the number of electors per councillor being ‘as nearly as may be, the same in every ward of the borough or district’.

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

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

27 We accept that the achievement of absolute electoral equality for an authority as a whole is likely to be unattainable. However, we consider that, if electoral imbalances are to be minimised, the aim of electoral equality should be the starting point in any review. We therefore strongly recommend that, in formulating electoral schemes, local authorities and other interested parties should make electoral equality their starting point, and then make adjustments to reflect relevant factors such as community identities and interests. Five-year forecasts of changes in electorate must also be considered, and we would aim to recommend a scheme which provides improved electoral equality over this five-year period.

Electorate forecasts

28 The Borough Council submitted electorate forecasts for the year 2006, projecting an increase in the electorate of 1% from 103,590 to 104,668 over the five-year period from 2001 to 2006. It expects most of the growth to be in the Middlehaven complex within the current St Hilda's ward, although a significant amount is also expected in Newham ward. In order to prepare these forecasts, the Council estimated rates and locations of housing development with regard to structure and local plans, the expected rate of building over the five-year period and assumed occupancy rates. Advice from the Borough Council on the likely effect on electorates of changes to ward boundaries has been obtained. Having accepted that this is an inexact science, and having considered the forecast electorates, we stated in our draft recommendations report that we were satisfied that they represented the best estimates that could reasonably be made at the time.

29 During Stage Three Park Ward Community Council questioned whether ‘three potential building areas’ had been accounted for in producing the electoral forecasts. The Community Council suggested that there is planned development of ‘53 dwellings on Dormans Sports Ground and the possible development of 200 plus dwellings on the site of the Dairy’ and ‘530 dwellings’ on the site of the ‘Hospital’. It suggested that ‘these proposed developments extend beyond the one electoral cycle that the review seems to have based its figures on’.

30 In light of the comments from Park Ward Community Council, we sought further clarification from the Borough Council as to the electorate forecasts for this area. It stated that ‘there is no prospect of the Dormans Sports Ground being developed for residential use before 2006’ and that ‘it is very unlikely after that date’ as the area is ‘allocated in the Local Plan as

primary open space'. It noted that 'no planning application has been submitted for development of the site on the former dairy'. It also noted that there are two hospital sites in Linthorpe and Park. The Borough Council stated with regard to the West Lane Hospital that 'there is no clear prospect of it becoming available' as a site for development and it therefore had not been taken into account in the projections. However, it explained that development on the Middlesbrough General Hospital site has been included in the projections. The Borough Council also explained that planned development on the Oxford Road and Park Road had been included in the projections.

31 Having considered the evidence received at Stage Three and the further comments from the Borough Council we have concluded that the Borough Council's electoral forecasts remain the best estimates that can be reasonably made at this time.

Council size

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

33 Middlesbrough Borough Council presently has 53 members. At Stage One the Borough Council proposed a council of 48 members. The Council has embraced the Government's modernisation agenda and has already introduced a mayor and cabinet model of political management, with the mayoral election held in May. The Borough Council stated that the reduction 'will enhance members' representational role, and it is envisaged that all members of the council will potentially have a role on either the Cabinet, the Scrutiny Process or one of the regulatory committees'. The Council argued that under its new constitution 'no backbench member will be expected to sit in more than two of the scrutiny Panels, Board, or the other Committees'. The Council concluded that a council of 48 members would ensure the most equitable distribution of responsibilities between councillors and therefore ensure that the Council discharges its functions effectively.

34 In formulating the draft recommendations we considered the evidence received and were of the opinion that the Council has given the necessary consideration to internal political management, the role of councillors and the implications both for the Council and for residents of the proposed new structure. We agreed with the Council that the new structure will enhance members' representational role and noted the substantial amount of public consultation undertaken by the Borough Council in respect of its proposed restructuring. In the light of this we concluded that a council of 48 members would best meet the achievement of the statutory criteria.

35 During Stage Three the Borough Council supported the proposed reduction in council size. We received no other comments regarding the proposed council size and therefore we confirm our draft recommendation for a council size of 48 as final.

Electoral arrangements

36 We considered all the submissions received during Stage One. In the light of the consultation the Borough Council undertook and the cross-party support its scheme received, we proposed basing our draft recommendations on the Council's scheme. We considered that this scheme would provide a better balance between the statutory criteria than the current arrangements. We also proposed to use the working ward names as part of our draft recommendations.

37 We noted Acklam Community Council's support for the proposed Acklam ward and that the Borough Council's proposed Stainton & Thornton ward reflected Stainton & Thornton Parish

Council's submission. We were not persuaded by Councillor Smith's proposal that the current Brookfield ward should be retained, due to the high levels of electoral inequality which would result.

38 However, to further improve electoral equality and bearing in mind local community identities and interests, we proposed amendments to the Council's scheme in three areas: the proposed Linthorpe and Grove Hill wards; the proposed Berwick Hills & Pallister and Thorntree wards; and the proposed Acklam ward. We also proposed minor boundary amendments in a further six areas to improve electoral equality, while reflecting community identities and the need to secure convenient and effective local government.

39 In response to our draft recommendations report, a number of respondents expressed the view that our proposals would not reflect community identities and interests in their respective areas, in particular with regard to the proposed wards of Park and Brookfield. Two respondents proposed an alternative warding arrangement in the Brookfield area. However, a number of respondents expressed the view that this locally proposed alternative arrangement would not reflect community identities and interests. The University of Teeside proposed that the whole of its site be contained in the proposed University ward.

40 At Stage Three the Borough Council broadly supported the draft recommendations and proposed amendments to the boundaries between the proposed wards of Berwick Hills & Pallister and Thorntree, Riverside and University, and Grove Hill and Linthorpe. It also proposed seven ward name changes to better reflect their constituent areas.

41 During Stage Four it was noted that there were inaccuracies in the figures detailing the proposed Beckfield, Berwick Hills & Pallister, Park End and Thorntree wards' electorates. This had the consequence that the figures detailed in our draft recommendations report were not a true reflection of the proposed Beckfield, Berwick Hills & Pallister, Park End and Thorntree wards' electoral variances. However, in consultation with Council officers, we were able to rectify these inaccuracies and therefore correctly reflect the electoral variances for those wards. We noted that, after taking into account the discrepancies between the figures, our draft recommendations would still provide an improved level of electoral equality in the area. Therefore we remained of the view that the draft recommendations provided the best balance between the statutory criteria.

42 At Stage Three the Borough Council opposed our proposed boundary between the proposed Thorntree and Berwick Hills & Pallister wards. Our decision to modify or confirm our draft recommendations for the proposed Berwick Hills & Pallister and Thorntree wards at Stage Four in light of this opposition was considered with regard to the statutory criteria and the argumentation and evidence that had been provided.

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

- (a) Nunthorpe, Marton, Easterside and Newham wards;
- (b) Stainton & Thornton, Hemlington, Brookfield, Kader and Ayresome wards;
- (c) Acklam, Beechwood, Linthorpe, Park, Grove Hill and Kirby wards;
- (d) Gresham, Southfield, Westbourne and St Hilda's wards;
- (e) Park End, Beckfield, Thorntree, Berwick Hills, Pallister and North Ormesby wards.

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

Nunthorpe, Marton, Easterside and Newham wards

45 These four wards are situated in the south of the borough. Nunthorpe ward comprises the parish of Nunthorpe. Nunthorpe, Marton and Easterside are each represented by two members, while Newham is represented by three members. The number of electors per councillor is 1% below the borough average in Nunthorpe ward (1% above by 2006), 3% below the average in Marton ward (5% below by 2006), 19% below the average in Easterside ward (20% below by 2006) and 120% above the average in Newham ward (127% above by 2006).

46 At Stage One the Borough Council proposed a two-member ward comprising the parish of Nunthorpe, suggesting a working ward name of Nunthorpe. It proposed a two-member ward, suggesting a working ward name of Marton, comprising the existing Marton ward, the area to the west of Stokesley Road, and the areas of Stewart Park and the Prissick Sports Centre and School Base. The Borough Council stated that the proposed Marton ward would contain a defined community and areas of similar socio-economic composition. It proposed a two-member ward, suggesting a working ward name of Easterside & Marton Manor, comprising part of the existing Easterside ward by uniting the Easterside estate together with those parts of Newham ward north of the A174 and east of the Marton West Beck.

47 The Borough Council proposed a two-member ward, suggesting a working ward name of Marton West, comprising those parts of the existing Newham ward south of the A174 and east of the Marton West Beck. It proposed a three-member ward, suggesting a working ward name of Coulby Newham, comprising the part of the existing Newham ward south of the A174 and west of the Marton West Beck. The Borough Council stated that the proposed Marton West ward and Coulby Newham ward would each comprise a 'relatively homogeneous community'.

48 After careful consideration of the representations received we decided to adopt the Borough Council's scheme for this area in its entirety as part of our draft recommendations. We noted that the Borough Council's proposed wards would provide a good balance between the statutory criteria, and considered that they were based on strong boundaries that reflected community identities. We noted the relatively high electoral variances secured by the proposed wards of Nunthorpe and Marton. However, after officers from the Committee had visited the area we considered that an alternative warding arrangement would not provide an equally good balance between the statutory criteria.

49 At Stage Three the Borough Council supported our draft recommendations for this area. However, it proposed that the proposed Easterside & Marton Manor ward be renamed Ladgate ward. It argued that this ward 'combines two distinct communities' and noted that 'Ladgate Lane is the road that joins the two communities and runs through the middle of the ward'. Marton West Community Council supported our proposed Easterside & Marton Manor ward.

50 Having carefully considered the representations received, we have decided to endorse the proposed ward name change for the proposed ward of Easterside & Marton Manor to reflect a prominent feature within the proposed ward. Subject to this amendment we propose to endorse the draft recommendations for the wards of Nunthorpe, Ladgate, Marton West and Coulby Newham as final.

51 Under our final recommendations the proposed Nunthorpe, Marton, Ladgate, Marton West and Coulby Newham wards would have 10% fewer, 9% fewer, 6% more, 4% fewer and 1% more electors per councillor than the borough average respectively (8% fewer, 9% fewer, 4% more, 1% more and 3% more in 2006). Our final recommendations are illustrated on Map 2 and the large map inserted in the back of the report.

Stainton & Thornton, Hemlington, Brookfield, Kader and Ayresome wards

52 These five wards are situated in the south and west of the borough. Stainton & Thornton ward comprises the parish of Stainton & Thornton and part of the Hemlington estate and is represented by two councillors. Hemlington, Brookfield and Kader wards are each represented by two councillors, while Ayresome ward is represented by three councillors. Stainton & Thornton, Hemlington, Brookfield, Kader and Ayresome wards currently have 15% fewer, 3% fewer, 26% more, 21% more and 27% fewer electors per councillor than the borough average respectively (16% fewer, 5% fewer, 23% more, 18% more and 33% fewer by 2006).

53 At Stage One the Borough Council proposed to modify the current arrangements for Stainton & Thornton ward and Hemlington ward. It proposed a single-member ward, suggesting a working ward name of Stainton & Thornton, comprising the parish of Stainton & Thornton and an area in Hemlington adjacent to the village of Stainton and east of Stainton Way. The Council noted that this would unite an area of the Hemlington estate and the parish of Stainton & Thornton, which it argued are similar in socio-economic composition. It further argued that this part of the Hemlington estate 'looks to Stainton Village for most of its services'. It proposed a two-member ward, suggesting a working ward name of Hemlington, to include part of the existing Hemlington ward and part of the estate that is currently in Stainton & Thornton ward.

54 The Borough Council proposed a two-member ward, suggesting a working ward name of Brookfield, comprising the existing Brookfield ward but excluding the area which is broadly south of Ledbury Drive, east of the Oval and Lincombe Drive to the Blue Bell Beck (transferring some 370 electors). The Borough Council noted that to retain the existing Brookfield ward under the proposed council scheme would result in high levels of electoral inequality. The Borough Council proposed to transfer the excluded area from the proposed Brookfield ward into a proposed two-member ward, suggesting a working ward name of Kader. The area was selected for its access and proximity to Low Lane, which links the two proposed wards. The proposed Kader ward would comprise part of the existing Brookfield ward, part of the existing Kader ward, without the area north of Mandale road, but including the areas north of the A174 within the existing wards of Hemlington and Newham and the area bounded by Newham Beck and Marton West Beck. The Council argued that the Municipal Golf Course and the Police Headquarters should be included in the proposed Kader ward as the area looks to Acklam Road for its community services. The Borough Council proposed a two-member ward, suggesting a working ward name of Ayresome, comprising the existing Ayresome ward and the area north of Mandale Road in the existing Kader ward.

55 Councillor Smith (Brookfield ward) opposed the proposed Brookfield ward for its division of Brookfield's community and proposed retaining the existing Brookfield ward.

56 We carefully considered all the representations received for this area and noted that the Borough Council's proposed Stainton & Thornton ward reflected Stainton & Thornton Parish Council's proposed borough ward. We noted the local resident's proposed boundary amendment for the existing Brookfield ward and recognised that the Borough Council's proposals utilise the A174 as a boundary, transferring the area south of Low Lane from the existing Hemlington ward.

57 We noted that the Borough Council's proposed wards of Stainton & Thornton and Hemlington were generally based on the existing arrangements, utilised the strong boundaries of the A174 in the north and the B1365 in the east, reflected community identities and Stainton & Thornton Parish Council's proposal. Therefore we were content to adopt the Borough Council's proposed wards for this area, and its suggested ward names, as part of our draft recommendations. We considered that the Borough Council's proposed Brookfield ward provided the best balance between the statutory criteria. While we noted Councillor Smith's opposition, we considered that insufficient evidence was received to justify the high level of

electoral variance secured by his proposal. However, we proposed a minor boundary amendment to run behind the houses of Lincombe Drive and Low Lane (affecting 31 electors) so that the whole of these roads would be contained in the proposed Kader ward. With this amendment we were content to adopt the proposed ward, and its suggested working ward name, as part of our draft recommendations. We considered that the proposed Kader and Ayresome wards utilised strong boundaries and provided the best balance between the statutory criteria, and therefore proposed basing our draft recommendations on the Borough Council's proposals. However, we proposed maintaining the current boundary between the proposed wards of Kader and Acklam where it follows the northern edge of the cemetery and the eastern edge of the crematorium to provide for a more identifiable boundary. We also proposed a minor amendment to the north-eastern boundary of the proposed Ayresome ward to tie it to ground detail. Neither of these boundary amendments would affect any electors.

58 At Stage Three the Borough Council supported our draft recommendations for these wards. However, it proposed that the proposed Brookfield ward be renamed Trimdon ward, as the proposed ward comprises 'only part of the traditional Brookfield area' and 'Trimdon Avenue is the most prominent road through the ward'. Councillor Hall proposed that the proposed Brookfield ward be renamed Thornhill ward, as 'this will reflect the name currently attached to roughly 35% of the ward'. He argued that the proposed name of Trimdon would not reflect the proposed ward's constituent areas. Councillor Hall also noted that the draft recommendations would 'bring together the two parts of different wards that both lay claim to the name Brookfield'.

59 Stainton & Thornton Parish Council supported our proposed Stainton & Thornton ward.

60 Brookfield Community Council made representations on behalf of local residents 'who view (our) proposals as divisive'. It observed that alternative warding arrangements had been proposed and that one proposal for an area broadly east of Earlsdon Avenue to form part of the proposed Kader ward was opposed by residents in the affected area. The Community Council and four local residents, one of whom enclosed a petition signed by 50 local residents, argued that their community does not share its identity and interests with the communities of the existing Kader ward, which are separated from Brookfield by the Blue Bell Beck.

61 Three local residents argued that our proposals would transfer the oldest part of Brookfield ward into a new ward. They argued that the northern areas of Brookfield are the result of more recent development and it would, therefore, be more appropriate to transfer these areas to the proposed Kader ward. Seven local residents proposed an alternative warding arrangement in which an area broadly east of Trimdon Avenue and Earlsdon Avenue would be transferred to the proposed Kader ward, arguing that this would provide a better balance between the statutory criteria. Two local residents proposed a warding arrangement creating a single- and a three-member ward comprising the existing wards of Kader and Brookfield. One local resident proposed a three-member Brookfield ward comprising the existing wards of Brookfield and Kader and transferring a northern part of the proposed Kader ward to the proposed Ayresome ward.

62 Two members of Brookfield Community Council objected to the draft recommendations as the area to be transferred to the proposed Kader ward 'is the oldest part of Brookfield and contains half of an integrated community'. They proposed that an area broadly east of Trimdon Avenue and Earlsdon Avenue be transferred to the proposed Kader ward. They argued that the area has 'a close affinity to Kader ward in that they lie within the catchment area of Kader primary school and are adjacent to Kader Youth and Community Centre'. Six local residents and a further 89 local residents who submitted a standard letter supported this proposal. The six local residents and the standard letter argued that the properties in the area to the east of Earlsdon Avenue are 'a result of a number of more recent separate housing developments' representing a younger population which does not identify with the Brookfield community.

63 Two local residents and a further 122 local residents who submitted a standard letter opposed the alternative warding arrangement proposed by the two members of Brookfield Community Council. One of the residents argued that 'the alteration will put the area to the east of Earlsdon Avenue in a ward from which it is effectively isolated'. He contended that the communities either side of the Blue Bell Beck do not share an identity as the Beck represents a 'natural boundary'.

64 We have noted the opposition to our proposed Brookfield ward. We consider that we have not received sufficient evidence for the comprehensive transformation of the draft recommendations required by the proposals for a single- and three-member warding pattern. We note the alternative warding arrangement proposed by the two members of Brookfield Community Council, but we also note the substantial opposition this proposal has received.

65 We have carefully considered the evidence arguing that 'Brookfield is a long established community, based around the Oval and the older parts of Low Lane'. We are minded to agree that the 'draft recommendations run counter to the sense of community' and consequently would be divisive as 'the Oval at Brookfield is synonymous with the ward'. We concur with the evidence explaining how this area provides a focus and services for the community and 'is in effect the heart of (the) community'. We have also been persuaded that the Blue Bell Beck represents a clear delineation between two communities. We consider that the evidence of the area's community identity and interests demonstrates that our proposals would not provide the best balance between the statutory criteria.

66 We note that to utilise the Beck as the boundary would secure a high level of electoral inequality in the proposed Brookfield ward. However, we propose an enlarged Brookfield ward comprising the existing Brookfield ward and the area east of the Blue Bell Beck and north of the A174 currently within the existing Hemlington ward. We judge that this would provide the best balance between the statutory criteria and consider that the high level of electoral imbalance has been fully justified by the evidence we have received regarding community identity in the Brookfield area.

67 We note Stainton & Thornton Parish Council's support for the proposed Stainton & Thornton ward and that we have not received comments regarding the proposed Hemlington and Ayresome wards. We are therefore confirming our proposed Stainton & Thornton, Ayresome and Hemlington wards as final.

68 Under our final recommendations our proposed Ayresome, Brookfield, Hemlington and Stainton & Thornton wards would have 13% more, 15% more, 8% more and 9% more electors per councillor than the borough average currently (4% more, 13% more, 6% more and 7% more by 2006). Our final recommendations are illustrated on Map 2 and the large map inserted in the back of the report.

Acklam, Beechwood, Linthorpe, Park, Grove Hill and Kirby wards

69 These six wards comprise the west central part of the borough. The wards of Acklam, Beechwood, Linthorpe, Park, Grove Hill and Kirby are each represented by two councillors and have 1% more, 18% fewer, 1% more, 8% fewer, equal to, and 6% more electors per councillor than the borough average respectively (1% fewer, 19% fewer, 9% more, 10% fewer, 4% more and 4% more by 2006).

70 At Stage One the Borough Council proposed broadly retaining the existing Acklam ward with an amendment to its northern boundary to include the area south of Green Lane. It suggested a working ward name of Acklam ward. The Council stated that the proposed ward would contain a 'community with a strong identity'. The Council proposed a two-member ward, suggesting a working ward name of Park ward, to comprise part of the existing Park ward and to include the area east of Ayresome Park Road, south of Devonshire Road, north of Orchard

Road and west of The Avenue. It proposed a three-member ward, suggesting a working ward name of Linthorpe ward, to comprise part of the existing Linthorpe ward and to include the area west of Ayresome Park Road and north of Devonshire Road, and the area north of Green Lane and Emerson Road and south of Orchard Road and Eastbourne Road that is currently in Kirby ward. The Council proposed to use Aspen Drive, Sycamore Road, Hebron Road, Beech Grove Road and the Marton West Beck as the eastern boundary of the proposed Linthorpe ward. The Borough Council argued that the proposed wards are 'bounded by major roads, becks or other natural boundaries' and 'preserve as far as possible a sense of Linthorpe Village'.

71 The Borough Council proposed two two-member wards based broadly on the existing wards of Grove Hill and Beechwood. It suggested a working ward name of Grove Hill for one area and proposed that this ward comprise part of the existing Grove Hill ward. It suggested a working name of Beechwood for the other area and proposed that this ward comprise part of the existing Beechwood ward, including the area west of the railway line containing St Luke's Hospital and South Cleveland Hospital and the area of Beechwood estate within the existing Easterside ward. The Council proposed to divide the two proposed wards along Keith Road, Lambton Road, Coppice Road and Farndale Road and behind Belle View Grove.

72 We carefully considered the Borough Council's scheme for this area. We noted the high levels of electoral inequality secured by the proposed wards of Grove Hill, Beechwood and Acklam, considering that they did not secure the levels of electoral equality normally expected in an urban area. Therefore we examined options to improve electoral equality in the proposed wards of Acklam and Beechwood. However, after officers from the Committee had visited the area we judged that, in this area, the Marton West Beck represents a divide between the constituent communities of two urban areas. Therefore we were not minded to transfer electors between the proposed wards of Acklam and Beechwood. However, we noted that the northern boundary of the proposed Acklam ward runs along the centre of Green Lane, placing residents on either side of the road, who are currently within the existing Kirby ward, in two different wards. To address this we proposed to run the boundary behind the back of the houses on the south side (affecting some 190 electors). We also noted that the proposed Beechwood ward boundary would place cul-de-sacs and crescents in a separate ward from their access roads. Therefore we proposed to amend the proposed boundary to follow behind Howard Court, Barnard Court, Moray Close, Farndale Court and Farndale Crescent (affecting some 140 electors). We also considered options to improve the electoral equality in the proposed Grove Hill ward. We proposed to modify the boundary between the proposed wards of Grove Hill and Linthorpe to transfer the areas south of Eastbourne Road, east of The Avenue and north of Beech Grove Road (affecting some 450 electors) from Linthorpe ward into Grove Hill ward. After officers from the Committee had visited the area we considered that the communication links and proximity of the houses indicate that the Marton West Beck, in this area, does not provide a clear division between the communities either side of it. We considered that this amendment would provide improved levels of electoral equality and would offer the best balance between the statutory criteria.

73 At Stage Three the Borough Council supported the proposed wards of Acklam, Beechwood and Park, and the proposed boundary amendment between the proposed wards of Linthorpe and Acklam. However, it objected to the proposal to transfer electors from the proposed Linthorpe ward to the proposed Grove Hill ward. It stated 'that the boundary which (the Borough Council) proposed between Linthorpe and (Grove Hill) is still a much preferable solution', arguing that 'the Marton West Beck provides a visible divide between the two distinct communities'. The Borough Council contended that the community on the western side 'associates with the Linthorpe community' while the eastern side 'looks to the Grove Hill, Easterside and Marton Manor for its services'. Mr Bell MP supported the Borough Council in its opposition to our proposals for this area.

74 The Borough Council proposed a consequential boundary amendment which would mean that an area broadly south of Egmont Road currently in the existing Westbourne ward would be transferred to the proposed Grove Hill ward to secure a good level of electoral equality. It also proposed that the proposed ward of Grove Hill be renamed Clairville ward, arguing that the name Grove Hill 'applies to one part of the area only' and that the name Clairville 'is known and respected in Middlesbrough'.

75 Councillor Michna (Park ward) and Park Ward Community Council opposed the proposal for part of the proposed Park ward to comprise part of the proposed Linthorpe ward. The Community Council argued that the area would be 'alienated and isolated from Linthorpe as it is so far removed from the Linthorpe community' and that 'the natural boundary is that of Roman Road/Ayresome Green Lane and not Ayresome Park Road/Devonshire Road'. Councillor Michna forwarded a list of 107 local residents who had responded to a survey he had jointly conducted with Councillor McIntyre (Park ward). The survey was circulated within the area of Park ward proposed to comprise part of the proposed Linthorpe ward. The local residents submitted standard responses to Councillors Michna and McIntyre stating their wish to remain part of Park ward.

76 Councillor Michna proposed that the area south of St Barnabas' Road, proposed to comprise part of the proposed Linthorpe ward, remain within Park ward and that the existing southern boundary between the existing wards of Kirby and Park be retained. He argued that this would secure a good level of electoral equality and retain as much of the natural boundary of Roman Road as possible.

77 Acklam Community Council submitted that it 'is in full agreement to the proposed recommendations'.

78 The representations received during the consultation period have been carefully considered. We note the Borough Council's opposition to the proposed boundary between the proposed Grove Hill and Linthorpe wards. We have considered the Borough Council's proposed consequential boundary amendment between the proposed University and Grove Hill wards. We consider that the Borough Council has provided significant evidence regarding the communities either side of the Marton West Beck within the proposed Grove Hill and Linthorpe wards. However, we consider that we have not received sufficient argumentation and evidence to convince us that the Council's alternative boundary amendment in the north of Grove Hill would provide a better balance between the statutory criteria than the boundary we proposed between Grove Hill and Linthorpe wards. Without the Council's amendment to the boundary between the proposed Grove Hill and University wards, the proposed Grove Hill ward would secure a variance of 12% by 2006. We also note that the Borough Council's proposed Linthorpe ward would secure a variance of 9% by 2006. We judge that we have not received sufficient evidence to accept this level of electoral inequality in an urban area. We are, however, content to endorse the proposal to rename Grove Hill ward Clairville ward.

79 We have considered Councillor Michna's alternative warding arrangement for Park ward. We note that the proposal would secure a good level of electoral equality, but we have not been persuaded that Councillor Michna's proposals would provide the best balance between the statutory criteria. It is difficult to gauge the strength of local opinion regarding the proposed arrangement as numbers of signatures are not necessarily a true guide. We consider that insufficient argumentation and evidence has been provided to contend that our draft recommendations will provide a worse balance between the statutory criteria than the alternative arrangement proposed by Councillor Michna.

80 We note Acklam Community Council's support for the proposed Acklam ward and that we did not receive comments regarding the proposed Beechwood ward. Subject to the proposed ward name change we are therefore confirming our proposed Linthorpe, Park, Clairville, Acklam and Beechwood wards as final.

81 Under our final recommendations our proposed Acklam, Beechwood, Clairville, Linthorpe and Park wards would have 7% more, 7% fewer, 3% fewer, 2% fewer and 1% fewer electors per councillor than the borough average respectively (5% more, 6% fewer, 1% fewer, 1% more and 3% fewer by 2006). Our final recommendations are illustrated on Map 2 and the large map inserted in the back of the report.

Gresham, Southfield, Westbourne and St Hilda's wards

82 These four wards lie in the north and west of the borough and are all represented by two councillors. The wards of Gresham, Southfield, Westbourne and St Hilda's currently contain 14% fewer, 18% fewer, 4% fewer and 23% fewer electors per councillor than the borough average respectively (16% fewer, 13% fewer, 3% fewer and 19% fewer by 2006).

83 At Stage One the Borough Council proposed a reconfiguration of these four wards resulting in a reduction of one ward. It proposed two two-member wards, suggesting working ward names of Riverside and University, and a three-member ward, suggesting a working ward name of Gresham & Newport. The proposed University ward would comprise the existing Westbourne ward, except for the area east of Abingdon Road and west of Marton Road and including the areas south of Southfield Road and east of Linthorpe Road currently within the existing Southfield and Gresham wards. The proposed Gresham & Newport ward would comprise part of the existing Gresham ward including the areas to the south of the A66 and railway, west of Hartington Road and Diamond Road, south of Princess Street and the areas south of Borough Road and west of Linthorpe Road currently within the existing Southfield ward. The Borough Council stated that the proposed ward would contain 'the traditional Gresham and Newport communities'. The proposed Riverside ward would comprise the remaining part of the existing St Hilda's ward, the part of the existing Southfield ward and Westbourne ward north of Southfield Road and the area north of the A66 that currently lies in the existing North Ormesby ward. The proposed Riverside ward would constitute the 'main commercial and retail centre of Middlesbrough'.

84 We carefully considered the Borough Council's proposals for this area. We were initially concerned at the high level of electoral variance within the proposed Riverside ward. However, as the adjoining wards are also over-represented any boundary amendments would have a detrimental effect on their levels of electoral equality. We noted the Borough Council's argument that 'the area bordering the river is a major regeneration site' which will improve the level of electoral equality in the proposed Riverside ward over the next five years. Therefore we were content to endorse the proposed Riverside ward as part of our draft recommendations. We considered that the proposed wards of University and Gresham & Newport would facilitate a good balance between the statutory criteria. However, we proposed a minor boundary amendment to the proposed Gresham & Newport ward, which would not affect any electors, to provide for a more identifiable boundary. We proposed that the boundary remain on the southern edge of the A66 rather than adopting the Council's proposal to use the railway as part of the ward boundary. With this boundary amendment, we proposed to adopt the Borough Council's proposals for these two wards as part of our draft recommendations.

85 In response to the draft recommendations the Borough Council supported the proposed ward of Gresham & Newport, but proposed to rename it Gresham ward. It proposed an amendment to the boundary between the proposed wards of Grove Hill and University, as detailed earlier. Both the Borough Council and the University of Teeside proposed a boundary amendment for the university to be contained wholly in a single ward to secure effective and convenient local government. They proposed that an area bounded by Woodlands Road, Borough Road and Linthorpe Road be transferred from the proposed Riverside ward to the proposed University ward. The Borough Council noted that with this amendment the proposed Riverside ward would secure an electoral variance of 9% by 2006. It argued that planned development within the proposed Riverside ward after 2006 would improve the ward's electoral

equality and should therefore be taken into account. The Borough Council also proposed that the proposed Riverside ward be renamed Middlehaven ward to better reflect its constituent area.

86 The representations received during the consultation period have been carefully considered. We note the support for the proposed Gresham & Newport ward, and subject to the proposed ward name change we are content to confirm our draft recommendations for Gresham ward as final. We have considered the boundary amendment proposed by both the University of Teeside and the Borough Council, but we have not been convinced that this amendment would secure more convenient and effective local government or a better reflection of community identity. In particular, we did not consider that sufficient evidence of community identity had been provided to justify what would be a relatively high electoral variance in an urban area. We note the Borough Council's request that planned development after 2006 should be taken into account. However, we only have regard to five-year forecasts and are unable to account for planned development after 2006. Therefore we do not consider that we can recommend the amendment to the boundary between the proposed University and Riverside wards. However, we are content to endorse the proposal that Riverside ward be renamed Middlehaven ward. Subject to this amendment we are confirming our draft recommendations for Gresham ward, Middlehaven ward and University ward as final.

87 Under our final recommendations our proposed Middlehaven, Gresham and University wards would have 23% fewer, 2% fewer and 5% fewer electors per councillor than the borough average respectively (5% fewer, 4% fewer and 4% fewer by 2006). Our final recommendations are illustrated on Map 2 and the large map inserted in the back of the report.

Park End, Beckfield, Thorntree, Berwick Hills, Pallister and North Ormesby wards

88 These six wards are situated in the east of the borough. The wards of Park End, Beckfield, Berwick Hills, Pallister and North Ormesby are each represented by two councillors, while Thorntree is represented by three councillors. Park End, Beckfield, Thorntree, Berwick Hills, Pallister and North Ormesby currently have 3% fewer, 3% more, 10% fewer, 17% fewer, 24% fewer and 12% fewer electors per councillor than the borough average respectively (4% fewer, 2% more, 11% fewer, 18% fewer, 25% fewer and 12% fewer by 2006).

89 At Stage One the Borough Council proposed a reconfiguration of warding arrangements in East Middlesbrough resulting in the reduction of one ward. It proposed a two-member ward, suggesting a working ward name of North Ormesby & Brambles Farm, to comprise part of the existing North Ormesby ward south of the A66 and South Bank Road and to include the area north of College Road from the existing Thorntree ward, known as the Brambles Farm Estate. This ward would contain the 'traditional community of North Ormesby, the Boyds Estate and the Brambles Farm area'. The Council noted that these communities are self-contained, but argued that there are strong links between the communities of North Ormesby and the Boyds Estate, that all three areas are in close proximity and that they share 'many of the same shopping and social facilities'. It proposed a two-member ward and suggested a working ward name of Thorntree, to comprise the remaining part of the existing Thorntree ward and to also include the area west of the Middle Beck currently within the existing Pallister ward. It proposed a two-member ward, suggesting a working ward name of Berwick Hills & Pallister, to comprise the remaining part of the existing Pallister ward and to include part of the existing Berwick Hills ward north of Coledale Road, Roundton Green, Ampleforth Road and Brigham Road. The Council proposed a two-member ward, suggesting a working ward name of Park End, to comprise the existing Park End ward and include the area excluded from the proposed Berwick Hills & Pallister ward, as described above. It proposed a two-member ward, suggesting a working ward name of Beckfield, to comprise the existing Beckfield ward.

90 We carefully considered the Borough Council's proposals for this area. We noted that the scheme would not secure the levels of electoral equality normally expected in an urban area. While we note the high electoral variance of the proposed North Ormesby & Brambles Farm ward, we also note that the planned depopulation of the area will have a positive effect on its electoral equality over the next five years. After officers from the Committee had visited the area we noted that College Road provides a strong boundary and agreed with the Borough Council that it would represent the 'dividing line between the Brambles Farm and Thorntree neighbourhoods'. Therefore we were content to adopt the proposed ward as part of our draft recommendations. We noted the high levels of electoral variance in the proposed wards of Thorntree and Berwick Hills & Pallister and considered alternative options to improve electoral equality. We proposed a boundary modification to the proposed Thorntree and Berwick Hills & Pallister wards in order to secure better electoral equality. We proposed to amend the boundary to follow Homerton Road from the Middle Beck, the eastern boundary of Pallister Park Primary School, to the rear of properties of Fransham Road and to follow Kimberly Drive and Premier Road (affecting 250 electors). After officers from the Committee had visited the area we noted that the Middle Beck does not represent a substantial divide between the communities. We considered that the open space is a communal area due to its provision of social facilities and the close proximity of the properties, while Homerton Road and Premier Road provide good links between these two areas. We considered that this amendment would improve electoral equality and have regard for community identities, thereby providing the best balance between the statutory criteria. Subject to this amendment we were content to endorse the Borough Council's proposed Thorntree and Berwick Hills & Pallister wards as part of our draft recommendations.

91 We were concerned that the proposed boundary between the Council's proposed wards of Berwick Hills & Pallister and Park End would divide a road and a cul-de-sac between borough wards. Therefore we proposed a minor boundary modification to include the whole of Brigham Road in the proposed Berwick Hills & Pallister ward (affecting five electors) and to include Roundton Green in the proposed Park End ward (affecting 31 electors). We also proposed that the boundary follow Ormesby Beck to provide for a more identifiable boundary. With this minor boundary amendment we proposed to adopt the Council's proposed Park End ward as part of our draft recommendations. We also considered that the proposed Beckfield ward provided the best balance between the statutory criteria and proposed to adopt it as part of our draft recommendations.

92 In response to the draft recommendations the Borough Council supported our proposed Park End, Beckfield and North Ormesby & Brambles Farm wards. It proposed two ward name changes: for North Ormesby & Brambles Farm ward to be renamed Longlands ward as this would reflect the road that joins the two constituent communities, which 'runs through the middle of the ward'; and for Berwick Hills & Pallister ward to be renamed Pallister ward as this would reflect Pallister Park, a prominent feature within the ward.

93 The Borough Council opposed our proposed amendment to the boundary between the proposed Berwick Hills & Pallister and Thorntree wards. It proposed that the boundary 'should revert to the Middle Beck' as 'it is clear that the Beck is a substantial physical divide'.

94 The representations received during the consultation period have been carefully considered. We are content to endorse the Borough Council's proposal to rename the proposed North Ormesby & Brambles Farm and Berwick Hills & Pallister wards to better reflect their constituent areas. However, the evidence that we have received that the Middle Beck represents a substantial divide between urban communities has not persuaded us to move away from our draft recommendations. Nor have we have been convinced that using the Beck as the boundary between the proposed Berwick Hills & Pallister and Thorntree wards would provide the best balance between the statutory criteria.

95 As discussed earlier, during Stage Four it was noted that there were inaccuracies in the figures describing the proposed Beckfield, Berwick Hills & Pallister, Park End and Thorntree wards. We note the discrepancy between the two sets of figures, but in light of the amended figures we judge that the draft recommendations for these four wards would still provide the best balance between the statutory criteria. We have not been persuaded by the argumentation and evidence provided that modifying the draft recommendations would provide a better balance between the statutory criteria. Therefore, with the exception of renaming the proposed Brambles Farm & North Ormesby and Berwick Hills & Pallister wards discussed earlier, we are confirming our draft recommendations for Beckfield, Longlands, Pallister, Park End and Thorntree wards as final.

96 Under our final recommendations Longlands, Thorntree, Pallister, Park End and Beckfield wards would have 14% more, equal to, 3% more, 7% more and 7% fewer electors per councillor than the borough average respectively (4% more, 1% fewer, 1% more, 5% more and 8% fewer by 2006). Our final recommendations are illustrated on Map 2 and the large map inserted in the back of the report.

Electoral cycle

97 By virtue of the amendments made to the Local Government Act 1992 by the Local Government Commission for England (Transfer of Functions) Order 2001, we have no powers to make recommendations concerning electoral cycle.

Conclusions

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

- an enlarged Brookfield ward comprising the existing Brookfield ward and an area currently within Hemlington ward;
- six ward name changes to better reflect their constituent areas.

99 We conclude that, in Middlesbrough:

- there should be a reduction in council size from 53 to 48;
- there should be 23 wards, two fewer than at present;
- the boundaries of 23 of the existing wards should be modified.

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

Table 4: Comparison of current and recommended electoral arrangements

	2001 electorate		2006 forecast electorate	
	Current arrangements	Final recommendations	Current arrangements	Final recommendations
Number of councillors	53	48	53	48
Number of wards	25	23	25	23
Average number of electors per councillor	1,955	2,158	1,975	2,181
Number of wards with a variance of more than 10 per cent from the average	13	4	14	1
Number of wards with a variance of more than 20 per cent from the average	6	1	4	0

101 As Table 4 shows, our recommendations would result in a reduction in the number of wards with an electoral variance of more than 10% from 13 to four, with one ward varying by more than 20% from the borough average. This level of electoral equality would improve further in 2006, with only one ward, Brookfield, varying by more than 10% from the average, at 13%. We conclude that our recommendations would best meet the statutory criteria.

Final recommendation

Middlesbrough Borough Council should comprise 48 councillors serving 23 wards, as detailed and named in Tables 1 and 2, and illustrated on Map 2 and the large map inserted in the back of the report.

Parish council electoral arrangements

102 When reviewing parish 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 states that if a parish is to be divided between different borough wards it should also be divided into parish wards, so that each parish ward lies wholly within a single ward of the borough.

103 Our proposed borough warding arrangements would retain the parishes of Nunthorpe and Stainton & Thornton wholly in the proposed wards of Nunthorpe and Stainton & Thornton respectively. Therefore we are not proposing any consequential changes to the parish councils' electoral arrangements. However, we note the anomalies in Nunthorpe Parish Council's boundary and encourage Middlesbrough Borough Council to conduct a parish review in order to fix a more identifiable boundary.

Map 2: Final recommendations for Middlesbrough

6 WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

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

105 It is now up to The Electoral Commission to decide whether to endorse our recommendations, with or without modification, and to implement them by means of an Order. Such an Order will not be made before 26 November 2002.

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

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