

Final recommendations on the
future electoral arrangements
for Rother in East Sussex

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

August 2001

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CONTENTS

page

WHAT IS THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT COMMISSION FOR ENGLAND? *v*

SUMMARY *vii*

1 INTRODUCTION *1*

2 CURRENT ELECTORAL ARRANGEMENTS *3*

3 DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS *7*

4 RESPONSES TO CONSULTATION *9*

5 ANALYSIS AND FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS *11*

6 WHAT HAPPENS NEXT *29*

APPENDIX

A Final Recommendations for Rother:
Detailed Mapping *31*

A large map illustrating the proposed ward boundaries for
Battle and Bexhill-on-Sea is inserted inside the back cover of this report.

WHAT IS THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT COMMISSION FOR ENGLAND?

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

Members of the Commission are:

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

Barbara Stephens (Chief Executive)

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

This report sets out the Commission's final recommendations on the electoral arrangements for the district of Rother in East Sussex.

SUMMARY

We began a review of Rother's electoral arrangements on 25 July 2000. We published our draft recommendations for electoral arrangements on 20 February 2001, after which we undertook a nine-week period of consultation.

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

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

- **in 18 of the 26 wards the number of electors represented by each councillor varies by more than 10 per cent from the average for the district and seven wards vary by more than 20 per cent;**
- **by 2005 this situation is expected to worsen, with the number of electors per councillor forecast to vary by more than 10 per cent from the average in 18 wards and by more than 20 per cent in nine wards.**

Our main final recommendations for future electoral arrangements (see Tables 1 and 2 and paragraphs 105-106) are that:

- **Rother District Council should have 38 councillors, seven fewer than at present;**
- **there should be 20 wards, instead of 26 as at present;**
- **the boundaries of 25 of the existing wards should be modified, resulting in a net reduction of five, and one ward should retain its existing boundaries;**
- **elections should continue to take place every four years.**

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

- **In one of the proposed 20 wards the number of electors per councillor would vary by more than 10 per cent from the district average.**
- **An improved level of electoral equality is forecast to continue with the number of electors per councillor in 19 wards expected to vary by no 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 Battle parish.**

All further correspondence on these final recommendations and the matters discussed in this report should be addressed to the Secretary of State for the Transport, Local Government and the Regions, who will not make an Order implementing them before 17 September 2001.

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

Table 1: Final Recommendations: Summary

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Constituent areas	Map reference
1	Battle Town	2	the proposed Marley and Watch Oak parish wards of Battle parish	Map 2 and large map
2	Brede Valley	2	the parishes of Brede, Udimore and Westfield	Map 2
3	Central	2	part of Central ward	Map 2 and large map
4	Collington	2	part of Collington ward	Map 2 and large map
5	Crowhurst	1	the parishes of Ashburnham, Catsfield, Crowhurst and Penhurst and the proposed Telham parish ward of Battle parish	Map 2 and large map
6	Darwell	2	the parishes of Brightling, Burwash, Dallington, Mountfield and Whatlington and Netherfield parish ward of Battle parish	Map 2 and large map
7	Eastern Rother	2	the parishes of Camber, East Guldeford, Icklesham, Iden and Playden	Map 2
8	Ewhurst & Sedlescombe	1	Ewhurst and Sedlescombe parishes	Map 2
9	Kewhurst	2	part of Collington ward; part of St Marks ward; part of St Stephens ward	Map 2 and large map
10	Marsham	2	Fairlight, Guestling and Pett parishes	Map 2
11	Old Town	2	part of Old Town ward; part of St Michaels ward; part of Sidley ward	Map 2 and large map
12	Rother Levels	2	Beckley, Northiam, Peasmarsch and Rye Foreign parishes	Map 2
13	Rye	2	<i>unchanged</i> - Rye parish	Map 2
14	Sackville	2	part of Sackville ward; part of Central ward; part of St Michaels ward	Map 2 and large map
15	St Marks	2	part of St Marks ward; part of Collington ward; part of St Stephens ward	Map 2 and large map
16	St Michaels	2	part of St Michaels ward; part of Old Town ward	Map 2 and large map
17	St Stephens	2	part of St Stephens ward; part of Old Town ward; part of St Marks ward	Map 2 and large map
18	Salehurst	2	the parishes of Bodiam, Hurst Green and Salehurst & Robertsbridge	Map 2

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Constituent areas	Map reference
19	Sidley	2	part of Sidley ward; part of Old Town ward	Map 2 and large map
20	Ticehurst & Etchingham	2	Etchingham and Ticehurst parishes	Map 2

Notes: 1 Bexhill-on-Sea is unparished.

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

Table 2: Final Recommendations for Rother

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 Battle Town	2	3,665	1,833	3	3,875	1,938	6
2 Brede Valley	2	3,704	1,852	4	3,758	1,879	2
3 Central	2	3,756	1,878	6	3,839	1,920	5
4 Collington	2	3,607	1,804	2	3,701	1,851	1
5 Crowhurst	1	1,938	1,938	9	1,952	1,952	6
6 Darwell	2	3,708	1,854	5	3,795	1,898	3
7 Eastern Rother	2	3,590	1,795	1	3,820	1,910	4
8 Ewhurst & Sedlescombe	1	1,847	1,847	4	1,916	1,916	4
9 Kewhurst	2	3,840	1,920	8	3,833	1,917	4
10 Marsham	2	3,240	1,620	-9	3,283	1,642	-11
11 Old Town	2	3,061	1,531	-14	3,608	1,804	-2
12 Rother Levels	2	3,605	1,803	2	3,753	1,877	2
13 Rye	2	3,225	1,613	-9	3,290	1,645	-10
14 Sackville	2	3,611	1,806	2	3,662	1,831	0
15 St Marks	2	3,713	1,857	5	3,696	1,848	1
16 St Michaels	2	3,704	1,852	4	3,875	1,938	6
17 St Stephens	2	3,261	1,631	-8	3,526	1,763	-4
18 Salehurst	2	3,229	1,615	-9	3,337	1,669	-9
19 Sidley	2	3,908	1,954	10	3,952	1,976	8
20 Ticehurst & Etchingham	2	3,200	1,600	-10	3,313	1,657	-10
Totals	38	67,412	-	-	69,784	-	-
Averages	-	-	1,774	-	-	1,836	-

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

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

1 INTRODUCTION

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

2 This was our first review of the electoral arrangements of Rother. Rother's last review was undertaken by our predecessor, the Local Government Boundary Commission (LGBC), which reported to the Secretary of State in September 1979 (Report no. 362). The electoral arrangements of East Sussex County Council were last reviewed in August 1981 (Report no. 417). 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, i.e. the need to:
 - (a) reflect the identities and interests of local communities; and
 - (b) secure effective and convenient local government;
- the *Rules to be Observed in Considering Electoral Arrangements* contained in Schedule 11 to the Local Government Act 1972.

4 Full details of the legislation under which we work are set out in a document entitled *Guidance and Procedural Advice for Local Authorities and Other Interested Parties* (fourth edition published in December 2000). This *Guidance* sets out our approach to the reviews.

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

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

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

8 We are not prescriptive on council size. We start from the assumption that the size of the existing council already secures effective and convenient local government, but we are willing to look carefully at arguments why this might not be so. However, we have found it necessary to safeguard against upward drift in the number of councillors, and we believe that any proposal for an increase in council size will need to be fully justified. In particular, we do not accept that an increase in electorate should

automatically result in an increase in the number of councillors, nor that changes should be made to the size of a council simply to make it more consistent with the size of other similar councils.

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

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

11 Stage Three began on 20 February 2001 with the publication of our report, *Draft recommendations on the future electoral arrangements for Rother in East Sussex*, and ended on 23 April 2001. During this period we sought comments from the public and any other interested parties on our preliminary conclusions. Finally, during Stage Four we reconsidered our draft recommendations in the light of the Stage Three consultation and now publish our final recommendations.

2 CURRENT ELECTORAL ARRANGEMENTS

12 Rother district is situated in the east of East Sussex and is bordered to the west by Wealden district, to the south by the English Channel and Hastings borough and to the east and north by Kent county. The district covers an area of around 51,048 hectares and has a population of 91,530. The principal settlement is Bexhill-on-Sea, while Battle and Rye are also significant local settlements. It is a diverse district, containing a large urban area and an extensive rural hinterland. Agriculture and tourism both occupy important positions within the economy of the district.

13 The district contains 33 parishes, but Bexhill-on-Sea town itself is unparished. Bexhill-on-Sea comprises 48 per cent of the district's total electorate.

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

15 The electorate of the district is 67,412 (February 1999). At present the Council has 45 members who are elected from 26 wards. Eight of the wards are each represented by three councillors, three are each represented by two councillors and 15 are single-member wards. The Council is elected together every four years.

16 Since the last electoral review there has been an increase in the electorate in Rother district, with around 11 per cent more electors than two decades ago as a result of new housing developments.

17 At present, each councillor represents an average of 1,498 electors, which the District Council forecasts will increase to 1,551 by the year 2005 if the current number of councillors is maintained. However, due to demographic and other changes over the past two decades, the number of electors per councillor in 18 of the 26 wards varies by more than 10 per cent from the district average, seven wards by more than 20 per cent and three wards by more than 30 per cent. The worst imbalance is in Winchelsea ward where the councillor represents 38 per cent more electors than the district average.

Map 1: Existing Wards in Rother

Table 3: Existing Electoral Arrangements

Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2000)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2005)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
1 Ashburnham	1	1,175	1,175	-22	1,189	1,189	-23
2 Battle	3	4,578	1,526	2	4,799	1,600	3
3 Beckley & Peasmarsch	1	1,688	1,688	13	1,760	1,760	13
4 Bodiam & Ewhurst	1	1,080	1,080	-28	1,111	1,111	-28
5 Brede & Udimore	1	1,731	1,731	16	1,751	1,751	13
6 Burwash	1	2,046	2,046	37	2,112	2,112	36
7 Camber	1	1,791	1,791	20	2,007	2,007	29
8 Catsfield & Crowhurst	1	1,256	1,256	-16	1,264	1,264	-18
9 Central	3	3,968	1,323	-12	4,054	1,351	-13
10 Collington	3	4,206	1,402	-6	4,226	1,409	-9
11 Etchingam & Hurst Green	1	1,664	1,664	11	1,711	1,711	10
12 Fairlight	1	1,492	1,492	0	1,513	1,513	-2
13 Guestling & Pett	1	1,748	1,748	17	1,770	1,770	14
14 Northiam	1	1,650	1,650	10	1,700	1,700	10
15 Old Town	2	3,281	1,641	10	3,986	1,993	29
16 Rye	3	3,225	1,075	-28	3,290	1,097	-29
17 Sackville	2	3,399	1,700	13	3,447	1,724	11
18 St Marks	3	4,760	1,587	6	4,785	1,595	3
19 St Michaels	3	4,369	1,456	-3	4,521	1,507	-3
20 St Stephens	3	4,570	1,523	2	4,721	1,574	1
21 Salehurst	1	1,913	1,913	28	1,994	1,994	29
22 Sedlescombe & Whatlington	1	1,290	1,290	-14	1,330	1,330	-14
23 Sidley	3	3,908	1,303	-13	3,956	1,319	-15

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 Ticehurst	2	2,585	1,293	-14	2,678	1,339	-14
25 Westfield	1	1,973	1,973	32	2,007	2,007	29
26 Winchelsea	1	2,066	2,066	38	2,106	2,106	36
Totals	45	67,412	–	–	69,788	–	–
Averages	–	–	1,498	–	–	1,551	–

Source: Electorate figures are based on information provided by Rother 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 Bodiam & Ewhurst ward were relatively over-represented by 28 per cent, while electors in Winchelsea ward were relatively under-represented by 38 per cent. Figures have been rounded to the nearest whole number.

3 DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS

18 During Stage One we received 20 representations, including a district-wide scheme from Rother District Council and detailed proposals for the rural area from Councillor Hardy. 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 Rother in East Sussex*.

19 Our draft recommendations were based on the District Council's proposals, which achieved some improvement in electoral equality, and provided a pattern of two-member wards across the district. However, we moved away from the District Council's scheme in the west of the parished area, affecting six wards, utilising our own proposals which included two single-member wards. We proposed that:

- Rother District Council should be served by 38 councillors, compared with the current 45, representing 20 wards, six less than at present;
- the boundaries of 25 of the existing wards should be modified, while one ward should retain its existing boundaries;
- there should be new warding arrangements for Battle parish.

Draft Recommendation

Rother District Council should comprise 38 councillors, serving 20 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 19 of the 20 wards varying by no more than 10 per cent from the district average. This level of electoral equality was forecast to continue, with only one ward varying by more than 10 per cent from the average in 2005.

4 RESPONSES TO CONSULTATION

21 During the consultation on our draft recommendations report, we received 45 representations. A list of all respondents is available from us on request. All representations may be inspected at our offices and those of Rother District Council.

Rother District Council

22 The District Council supported our draft recommendations subject to proposing minor amendments to the boundaries of Battle Town and Crowhurst wards in Battle and to the boundaries of the proposed Bexhill Down, Old Town and Pebsham wards in Bexhill-on-Sea. The Council also proposed changes to four of the proposed ward names in the district.

Bexhill & Battle Liberal Democrat Constituency Party

23 The Liberal Democrat Constituency Party, writing on behalf of its executive officers and the district councillors (hereafter referred to as the Liberal Democrats), stated that they “welcomed the Commission’s recommendation that the centre of Battle town be recognised as a unit” but considered that the ward should include the Netherfield Hill and Hastings Road areas. The Liberal Democrats opposed the proposed Darwell ward and the proposal to divide the villages of Bodiam and Ewhurst between different district wards, as they considered that this would not reflect local community identities and interests. They also opposed the new ward names proposed in the draft recommendations.

East Sussex County Council

24 The County Council opposed the draft recommendations for Rother in the rural area as it considered that villages sharing common community identities would no longer be contained in the same ward.

Parish and Town Councils

25 Ashburnham & Penhurst, Bodiam, Brightling, Burwash, Catsfield, Crowhurst, Dallington, Etchingham, Ewhurst, Hurst Green, Mountfield, Pett, Playden, Salehurst & Robertsbridge and Whatlington parish councils opposed the draft recommendations in their areas, instead generally preferring the retention of the status quo. Councillor Camble, writing on his own behalf and on behalf of Iden Parish Council, opposed the draft recommendations for Iden parish, instead proposing an alternative arrangement which would combine it with the parishes of Peasmarsch, Beckley and Northiam. Rye Town Council opposed the draft recommendation reducing the number of district councillors representing the town from three to two. Fairlight Parish Council opposed the name of the proposed Godwin ward, instead preferring the name Marsham. Westfield Parish Council considered that the proposed name of Brede Valley ward would not reflect the area covered by the ward in question.

26 Battle Town Council stated that it preferred the draft recommendations for Battle to the District Council’s Stage One proposal. However, it proposed that, if possible, the existing arrangements should be retained for Battle. Sedlescombe Parish Council stated that it did not oppose the draft recommendations for Ewhurst & Sedlescombe ward, although it proposed that the ward should be renamed Sedlescombe & Ewhurst.

Other Representations

27 A further 16 representations were received in response to our draft recommendations from councillors and residents. Councillor Hardy objected to the draft recommendations for a council size of 38 as he considered that it would not allow for the provision of a satisfactory solution in the rural area. He stated that, if change is necessary, his first preference would be to modify the existing electoral arrangements in only one area by reducing the number of councillors representing Rye ward from three to two. As a second preference he put forward proposals for the rural area alone, based on a council size of 38 for the district as a whole, which utilised a mix of single-, two- and three-member wards in the area concerned.

28 Councillor Vereker opposed the draft recommendations for a two-member Darwell ward, instead preferring that it should comprise two single-member wards so that Burwash parish could comprise a ward on its own. While he noted that under this proposal Burwash ward would vary by 15 per cent from the district average, he considered that this was justified as it would permit a better reflection of local community identities and interests. Councillor LeBesque supported Councillor Vereker's proposals.

29 Councillor Maynard generally supported the draft recommendations, subject to endorsing the District Council's view that Ticehurst parish should be joined with Hurst Green parish. Councillor Maynard expressed concern that the draft recommendations had not provided a uniform pattern of two-member wards across the district. Councillor Parren generally supported the draft recommendations for Rother Levels ward although he proposed that Rye Foreign parish should form part of Eastern Rother ward.

30 A resident of Battle put forward alternative proposals for the rural area based on 22 councillors for the area.

31 Councillor Kemp and Councillor Prochak generally opposed the draft recommendations. Councillor Russell, Councillor Williams and five local residents opposed the draft recommendations for the Battle area. Councillor Glazier opposed the proposed Eastern Rother ward as he considered that it would not reflect local community identities. A further five residents generally opposed the draft recommendations, on the grounds that they would not provide a good reflection of community identities and interests. Councillor Fleming proposed a small number of boundary amendments to Sidley ward to provide improved electoral equality in the ward. A local resident opposed the draft recommendations for Central and Sidley wards. One resident supported the draft recommendations for Crowhurst ward, while a resident of Playden generally supported the draft recommendations except in his own area.

5 ANALYSIS AND FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS

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

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

34 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.

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

Electorate Forecasts

36 The District Council submitted electorate forecasts for the year 2005, projecting an increase in the electorate of some 4 per cent from 67,412 to 69,788 over the five-year period from 2000 to 2005. It expected the greatest growth to be in Old Town ward. The Council has 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 has been obtained. In arriving at 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 at the time.

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

Council Size

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

39 Rother District Council presently has 45 members. At Stage One the District Council proposed a council size of 38, a reduction of seven, while Councillor Hardy and the Labour Group each supported a council size of 42, a reduction of three. The District Council considered that its amended council size was justified as it would facilitate substantial improvements to electoral equality while permitting a good reflection of local community identities and interests. It also considered that its proposed amendments would facilitate possible future changes under the Government's modernisation agenda. In particular it considered that "an executive style of political management coupled with an enhanced scrutiny role for councillors would better be served by a reduced council size".

40 As discussed below, in examining the two schemes for council sizes of 42 and 38 and arriving at our draft recommendations, we considered that a council size of 38 would facilitate a scheme providing the best balance between the need to improve electoral equality and the statutory criteria. 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 a council of 38 members.

41 During Stage Three we received a number of further alternative proposals from respondents with regard to council size. Among these, Councillor Kemp supported the proposal for a 42-member council which had been proposed during Stage One. Councillor Hardy proposed that, as a first preference, there should only be a small reduction in council size, and proposed that the status quo be retained, subject to reducing the number of councillors representing Rye ward from three to two. As a second preference he put forward proposals for the rural area based on a council size of 38 for the district as a whole. A local resident considered that the correct council size for the district was 42 although he did not include detailed proposals based on such a council size for the whole district.

42 We have given careful consideration to the alternative proposals which we have received with regard to council size during Stage Three. While we note that we have received a number of proposals supporting a smaller reduction in council size than that which we put forward in our draft recommendations, we do not consider that these proposals present adequate argumentation in their support. Consequently we are confirming our draft recommendations for a council size of 38 as final, as we continue to consider that this would best facilitate the achievement of electoral equality and the statutory criteria.

Electoral Arrangements

43 In arriving at our draft recommendations we gave careful consideration to the views which we received during Stage One and, in particular, to the District Council's district-wide scheme and to the detailed proposals for the rural area which we received from Councillor Hardy. As outlined above, while we noted that there was evidence of some support for a reduction in council size, we noted that there was no agreement as to the precise size of such a reduction. Furthermore, we noted that under both the District Council's and Councillor Hardy's proposed schemes, substantial improvements would be secured to electoral equality across the district. However, in considering the relative merits of the two schemes which we received we considered that, in general, the District Council's scheme provided the better balance between the need to seek improvements to electoral equality and the statutory criteria, for the district as a whole. Consequently we adopted the District Council's proposals as the basis for our draft recommendations, subject to some amendments where we judged that improvements could be made.

44 We have reviewed our draft recommendations in the light of further evidence and the representations received during Stage Three. In particular, we note that a number of respondents have expressed concern that our draft recommendations amended the District Council's scheme for a uniform pattern of two-member wards to include two single-member wards. It should be noted that in conducting this review we are able to propose single-, two- and three-member wards and we are not constrained by the need to put forward a uniform warding arrangement. For district warding purposes, the following areas, based on existing wards, are considered in turn:

- (a) Central, Collington, Sackville, St Marks and St Michaels wards;
- (b) Old Town, St Stephens and Sidley wards;
- (c) Ashburnham, Battle, Catsfield & Crowhurst and Sedlescombe & Whatlington wards;
- (d) Bodiam & Ewhurst, Burwash, Etchingham & Hurst Green, Salehurst and Ticehurst wards;
- (e) Beckley & Peasmarsh and Northiam wards;
- (f) Brede & Udimore, Camber, Fairlight, Guestling & Pett, Rye, Westfield and Winchelsea wards.

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

Central, Collington, Sackville, St Marks and St Michaels wards

46 These five wards together comprise the coastal area of Bexhill-on-Sea. Sackville ward is represented by two councillors while each of the remaining wards is represented by three councillors; each ward is entirely unparished. The number of electors per councillor is 12 per cent below the district average in Central ward (13 per cent below in 2005), 6 per cent below in Collington ward (9 per cent below in 2005), 13 per cent above in Sackville ward (11 per cent above in 2005), 6 per cent above in St Marks ward (3 per cent above in 2005) and 3 per cent below in St Michaels ward both now and in 2005.

47 At Stage One the District Council proposed a number of modifications to these wards to improve electoral equality, and it also proposed that each of the five new wards should be represented by two members. It proposed that St Michaels ward should be modified so that the area generally to the north and west of Hastings Road would be transferred to a revised Old Town ward (discussed later). It proposed that several properties on Worsham Lane should be transferred to St Michael's ward. The District Council proposed that Sackville ward should be modified to include part of Central ward to the east of Wilton Road. It proposed that Collington ward should be modified to transfer an area generally to the north of the eastern end of Cranston Avenue to a new ward (discussed later). It further proposed that Collington ward should be further modified to include an area around Effingham Drive in the new ward (discussed later). The District Council proposed that a large area of St Marks ward around Birk Dale should also be transferred to the new ward. It considered that its proposals for these wards would provide substantial improvements to electoral equality while having regard to local community identities and interests. It also stated that "although not considered by the Council, the Commission may wish to have regard to the following in the naming of wards". Accordingly it proposed that the modified St Marks ward could be renamed Barnhorne ward and St Michaels ward could be renamed Pebsham ward.

48 In arriving at our draft recommendations, we noted in particular the substantial improvements to electoral equality which would result under the District Council's proposals and considered that the

proposed warding arrangements would provide a good reflection of the statutory criteria. Consequently we adopted the District Council's proposals for these five wards, subject to two minor amendments to the northern boundary of Sackville ward to ensure that it follows recognisable ground detail, which would not affect any electors. We also adopted the District Council's alternative names as part of our draft recommendations.

49 Under our draft recommendations the number of electors per councillor would be 5 per cent above the district average in Barnhorne ward (1 per cent above in 2005), 6 per cent above the district average in Central ward (5 per cent in 2005), 2 per cent above in Collington ward (1 per cent above in 2005), 4 per cent above in Pebsham ward (6 per cent above in 2005) and 2 per cent above in Sackville ward (equal to the average in 2005).

50 At Stage Three Rother District Council proposed that the boundary between Old Town ward and Pebsham ward should be modified to ensure that all the properties on Pebsham Lane are included in Pebsham ward. It also proposed that the names of Barnhorne and Pebsham wards should be amended to retain the existing ward name in each case. Councillor Fleming proposed an amendment to the northern boundary of Barnhorne ward (discussed later). A resident of Bexhill-on-Sea opposed the draft recommendations for Central ward.

51 Having carefully considered the representations received, we have decided to endorse our draft recommendations for the wards in this area as they would achieve reasonable electoral equality and, we judge, would have regard to the statutory criteria. We are, however, adopting the minor amendment to the boundary between Old Town and Pebsham wards put forward by the District Council as we judge that it would provide a more clearly defined boundary. We are also adopting the proposed name changes put forward by the District Council so that Pebsham ward is called St Michaels and Barnhorne ward is called St Marks, thereby retaining the existing ward names in each case. Our final recommendations for these wards are illustrated on the large map at the back of the report.

52 Under our final recommendations the number of electors per councillor would be 5 per cent above the district average in St Marks ward (1 per cent above in 2005), 6 per cent above in Central ward (5 per cent in 2005), 2 per cent above in Collington ward (1 per cent above in 2005), 4 per cent above in St Michaels ward (6 per cent above in 2005) and 2 per cent above in Sackville ward (equal to the average in 2005).

Old Town, St Stephens and Sidley wards

53 The wards of Old Town, St Stephens and Sidley are situated in the north of Bexhill-on-Sea, and each ward is unparished. Old Town ward is represented by two councillors while St Stephens and Sidley wards are each represented by three councillors. The number of electors per councillor is 10 per cent above the district average in Old Town ward (29 per cent above in 2005), 2 per cent above in St Stephens ward (1 per cent above in 2005) and 13 per cent below in Sidley ward (15 per cent below in 2005).

54 As described above, at Stage One the District Council proposed a new two-member ward in the west of Bexhill-on-Sea, comprising parts of Collington and St Marks wards together with an area of the existing St Stephens ward generally to the south of Broad Oak Lane, to the west of West Down Road and to the south of the eastern part of Little Common Road. The District Council considered that its proposals would "create a new ward comprising similar status residential areas" while providing good levels of electoral equality. In addition to the modifications to Old Town ward, described earlier,

the District Council proposed that St Stephens ward should be expanded to the west to include an area of the existing Old Town ward generally to the west of Chantry Lane and Bexhill Hospital and to the south of Springfield Road and St George's Road. It proposed that Sidley ward should be retained on its existing boundaries. The District Council considered that its proposals would generally secure improvements to electoral equality while having regard to local community identities and interests. While it noted that Sidley ward would have the greatest electoral imbalance in 2005 of all the wards in Bexhill-on-Sea, it considered that the strength of community identity and the strong boundaries of the ward justified such a variance from the district average. The District Council proposed that each of these wards should be represented by two members. It also stated that "although not considered by the District Council, the Commission may wish to have regard to the following in the naming of wards". Accordingly it proposed that the New ward could be named Kewhurst, while the modified St Stephens ward could be renamed Bexhill Down.

55 In arriving at our draft recommendations we noted in particular the substantial improvements to electoral equality which would generally result under the District Council's proposals and considered that the proposed warding arrangements would offer a good reflection of the statutory criteria. While we noted that under these proposals Sidley ward would vary by 8 per cent from the district average by 2005, we considered that seeking further improvements to electoral equality in this area would have an adverse effect on community identities and could not be achieved without moving away from the clearly identifiable boundaries which currently exist. Consequently we adopted the District Council's proposals for these four wards, subject to a number of minor amendments to the southern boundary of Sidley ward to ensure that it followed recognisable ground detail; these amendments would not affect any electors. We also adopted the District Council's alternative names as part of our draft recommendations.

56 Under our draft recommendations the number of electors per councillor would be 8 per cent below the district average in Bexhill Down ward (4 per cent below in 2005), 8 per cent above the district average in Kewhurst ward (4 per cent above in 2005), 14 per cent below in Old Town ward (2 per cent below in 2005) and 10 per cent above in Sidley ward (8 per cent above in 2005).

57 In response to our draft recommendations the District Council proposed a minor modification to the boundary between Bexhill Down and Old Town wards to ensure that all of Crowmere Avenue is contained in Bexhill Down ward. It also proposed that the name of Bexhill Down ward should be changed to St Stephens, the existing ward name.

58 Councillor Fleming proposed two modifications to the boundaries of Sidley ward. First he proposed that the boundary between Sidley ward and Bexhill Down ward should be modified to include an area around Clinch Green Avenue in Bexhill Down ward. Second he proposed that the boundary between Barnhorne ward and Sidley ward should be modified so that "Barnhorne extends east to the north of the ward to the point of St Mary's Lane". Councillor Fleming considered that this proposal would provide improved electoral equality in the area concerned and would better reflect local community identities and interests. A resident of Bexhill-on-Sea opposed the draft recommendations for Sidley ward.

59 We have given careful consideration to the evidence and representations which we have received in this area. With regard to Councillor Fleming's proposals, we note that they would provide a small improvement to electoral equality by 2005. However, we also note that we have not received evidence of wider support for these proposals and we do not consider that they would utilise as strong boundaries as are utilised in our draft recommendations in this area. Consequently we are not adopting Councillor Fleming's proposed amendments as part of our final recommendations. We are therefore confirming

our draft recommendations for the wards in this area, subject to adopting the District Council's proposed minor modification to the boundary between Bexhill Down and Old Town wards and to retaining the name of St Stephens ward. Our final recommendations are illustrated on the large map at the back of this report.

60 Under our final recommendations the number of electors per councillor would be 8 per cent below the district average in St Stephens ward (4 per cent below in 2005), 8 per cent above the district average in Kewhurst ward (4 per cent above in 2005), 14 per cent below in Old Town ward (2 per cent below in 2005) and 10 per cent above in Sidley ward (8 per cent above in 2005).

Ashburnham, Battle, Catsfield & Crowhurst and Sedlescombe & Whatlington wards

61 These four wards are located in the west of the district. Battle ward (comprising the parish of the same name) is represented by three councillors while Ashburnham ward (comprising the parishes of Ashburnham, Brightling, Dallington, Mountfield and Penhurst), Catsfield & Crowhurst ward (comprising the parishes of those names) and Sedlescombe & Whatlington ward (comprising the parishes of those names) are each represented by a single councillor. The number of electors per councillor is 22 per cent below the district average in Ashburnham ward (23 per cent below in 2005), 2 per cent above in Battle ward (3 per cent above in 2005), 16 per cent below in Catsfield & Crowhurst ward (18 per cent below in 2005) and 14 per cent below in Sedlescombe & Whatlington ward both now and in 2005.

62 At Stage One the District Council proposed a substantial re-warding in this area. The District Council did not include proposed names for the wards in the parished part of the district but referred to the wards with numbers. It proposed that a new two-member Rural Ward Three should comprise the parishes of Ashburnham, Catsfield, Crowhurst and Penhurst together with an area of Battle parish generally to the south and east of the High Street. The District Council proposed that a new two-member Rural Ward Two should comprise the parishes of Brightling, Burwash, Dallington and Etchingham together with Netherfield parish ward of Battle parish. It proposed that the remainder of Battle parish should be combined with Sedlescombe and Whatlington ward to form a new two-member Rural Ward Four. In addition the District Council proposed that Mountfield ward should be combined with parishes to the north, as discussed later. The District Council stated that while it had considered alternative warding configurations for patterns of two-member wards in the Battle area "no overall advantages [were] identified in any of these proposals". It therefore considered that its proposals would achieve substantial improvements to electoral equality while having regard to the statutory criteria.

63 Under the District Council's proposals the number of electors per councillor would be 4 per cent above the district average in Rural Ward Two (3 per cent above in 2005), 4 per cent below in Rural Ward Three both now and in 2005 and 2 per cent below in Rural Ward Four both now and in 2005.

64 Councillor Hardy proposed an alternative configuration of wards in this area. In particular, he proposed that a new two-member Battle Town ward should comprise "so much of both Watch Oak and Marley polling districts as would create an acceptable electoral number, but keeping in sympathy with clear geographic or local community boundaries". We received a number of further submissions from local parish and town councils, local political parties and residents.

65 In arriving at our draft recommendations we gave careful consideration to the representations which we had received in this area. While we noted that the District Council examined a number of different

options when arriving at its draft recommendations, and that under a council size of 38 the parish of Battle cannot form a single district ward on its own if reasonable levels of electoral equality are to be achieved, we were not persuaded that dividing the central urban area of Battle parish between different district wards offered the best available reflection of local community identities and interests. Consequently we sought an alternative arrangement in this area which permitted the retention of a single ward to cover the central urban area of Battle parish, while providing satisfactory electoral equality under a council size of 38. We therefore proposed a similar Battle Town ward to that put forward by Councillor Hardy, modified to comprise the whole of the proposed parish wards of Marley and Watch Oak. We proposed that the proposed Telham parish ward should be combined with the parishes of Ashburnham, Catsfield, Crowhurst and Penhurst to form a new single-member Crowhurst ward. We proposed that a new two-member Darwell ward should comprise the parishes of Brightling, Burwash, Dallington, Mountfield and Whatlington, and Netherfield parish ward of Battle parish. We also proposed that a new single-member Ewhurst & Sedlescombe ward should comprise the parishes of Ewhurst and Sedlescombe. We considered that these amendments would secure satisfactory electoral equality while providing a good reflection of local community identities and interests in this area, in particular providing a single ward to cover the central urban area of Battle parish.

66 Under our draft recommendations the number of electors per councillor would be 3 per cent above the district average in Battle Town ward (5 per cent above in 2005), 10 per cent above in Crowhurst ward (7 per cent above in 2005), 5 per cent above in Darwell ward (3 per cent above in 2005) and 4 per cent above in Ewhurst ward both now and in 2005.

67 At Stage Three the District Council proposed a number of minor amendments to ward boundaries in Battle. It proposed that Farthings Farm and Farthings Bungalow should be transferred from the proposed Watch Oak parish ward to Marley parish ward; that Coursebarn Farm should be transferred from Marley parish ward to Watch Oak parish ward; that a number of properties on Hastings Road should be transferred from Telham parish ward to Marley parish ward; and that Branshill Farm should be transferred from Marley parish ward to Telham parish ward. The District Council considered that these amendments would provide a better reflection of local community identities and interests.

68 Battle Town Council noted that it had opposed the District Council's Stage One submission and stated that it "was therefore pleased to note the comments in your report and draft recommendations which go some way to redressing the balance". However, it stated that its preferred solution would be to retain a single ward covering Battle parish to be represented by three councillors. As a second option it considered that there might be a case for excluding part of Netherfield parish ward from the same district ward as the remainder of the parish. Bexhill & Battle Liberal Democrat Constituency Party stated that it "welcomed the Commission's recommendation that the centre of Battle Town be recognised as a unit". However, it went on to note that it considered the natural boundaries of Battle to include Netherfield Hill and Hastings Road.

69 East Sussex County Council opposed the draft recommendations for Battle as they would combine parts of Battle parish with neighbouring parishes which it considered would not reflect local community identities and interests. Councillor Russell, Councillor Williams and a number of local residents opposed the draft recommendations for Battle.

70 Councillor Hardy put forward as his second preference for the district an alternative proposal for the rural area which would utilise 20 councillors in the rural part of the district. Under this proposal the parishes of Battle and Whatlington would comprise a three-member ward, the parishes of Catsfield, Crowhurst, Ashburnham, Penhurst and Dallington would comprise a single-member ward and the

parishes of Burwash, Etchingham and Ticehurst would comprise a three-member ward. The number of electors per councillor in these wards would be 8 per cent below, 1 per cent below and 2 per cent below the district average respectively.

71 A resident of Battle opposed the draft recommendations for the town, arguing that they would create wards which would not reflect local community identities and interests. Instead, based on 22 councillors for the rural part of the district, she proposed that Battle should be served by three councillors representing the whole parish together with “the area south of A21 trunk road and east of A2100 road”. She further proposed that a new two-member Ashburnham ward should comprise Ashburnham, Penhurst, Mountfield, Catsfield, Crowhurst, Dallington, Netherfield and Brightling parishes together with an area of Burwash parish outside the main settlement. A further part of Burwash parish, comprising the town of Burwash, would form a single-member ward.

72 Bexhill & Battle Constituency Liberal Democrat Party and Ashburnham & Penhurst, Brightling, Burwash, Dallington and Whatlington parish councils, Councillor Vereker and Councillor LeBesque and two local residents generally opposed the creation of a two-member Darwell ward as they considered that it would not provide a satisfactory reflection of the statutory criteria. Councillor Vereker, Councillor LeBesque and Burwash Parish Council proposed that the two-member Darwell ward should be divided into two single-member wards, one comprising Burwash parish and the other comprising the remainder of the proposed ward. Under this proposal the number of electors per councillor would vary by 15 per cent from the district average in Burwash ward by 2005. Mountfield Parish Council proposed that a two-member Ashburnham Parish Council should be created comprising the parishes of Ashburnham, Brightling, Catsfield, Crowhurst, Dallington, Mountfield and Penhurst, a proposal which it considered would better reflect local community identities and interests. Brightling Parish Council supported the name Darwell for the ward in which it was contained. Catsfield Parish Council and Crowhurst Parish Council each opposed the proposals for Crowhurst ward. Sedlescombe Parish Council stated that it did not object to the proposed Ewhurst & Sedlescombe ward but felt that it should be renamed Sedlescombe & Ewhurst ward. Whatlington Parish Council opposed the draft recommendations in its area and stated that its preferred option would be to retain the existing arrangement. If this was not possible, the Parish Council considered that it should be combined with Sedlescombe and Mountfield parishes alone. Two local residents considered that Whatlington parish should be combined with Sedlescombe and Ewhurst parishes in a single ward.

73 We have carefully considered the representations received in response to our draft recommendations. While we note that we have received a certain amount of qualified support for our proposals for Battle, we also note that our proposals for this area as a whole have been the subject of local opposition. We have therefore revisited our draft recommendations in this area. With regard to Battle, we continue to consider that retaining a single three-member ward comprising Battle parish would fail to provide acceptable electoral equality and as a consequence we are not adopting such a proposal as part of our final recommendations. We also do not consider that we have received evidence of substantial support for the alternative proposals put forward by Councillor Hardy or the resident of Battle and consequently we are not including their proposals as part of our final recommendations. In the absence of further proposals for Battle which would provide a satisfactory balance of the need to achieve improvements to electoral equality while having regard to the statutory criteria, we are confirming our draft recommendations for Battle Town ward as final, subject to adopting the small number of minor amendments put forward by the District Council.

74 With regard to the remaining area outside Battle town, we note that we have received a proposal from Councillor Vereker that the two-member Darwell ward should be divided into two single-member

wards, thereby retaining a single-member ward comprising Burwash parish alone. However, we are concerned that such an arrangement would produce an electoral variance of 15 per cent in Burwash ward. We do not consider that we have received sufficient evidence in terms of the statutory criteria to justify such electoral inequality and consequently, in the absence of further proposals which would meet the aims of the review across the wider district, we are not proposing to modify our draft recommendations in this area. We are not proposing to modify the name of Ewhurst & Sedlescombe ward as we continue to consider that our proposed name adequately reflects the nature of the area concerned. We are therefore confirming our draft recommendations for the wards of Crowhurst, Darwell and Ewhurst & Sedlescombe as final. Our final recommendations for these wards are illustrated on Map 2 and on the large map at the back of the report.

75 Under our final recommendations the number of electors per councillor would be 3 per cent above the district average in Battle Town ward (6 per cent above in 2005), 9 per cent above in Crowhurst ward (6 per cent above in 2005), 5 per cent above in Darwell ward (3 per cent above in 2005) and 4 per cent above in Ewhurst ward both now and in 2005.

Bodiam & Ewhurst, Burwash, Etchingham & Hurst Green, Salehurst and Ticehurst wards

76 These five wards together cover much of the north-west of the district. Bodiam & Ewhurst, Burwash, Etchingham & Hurst Green and Salehurst wards are each represented by a single councillor while Ticehurst ward is represented by two councillors. The five wards are entirely parished: Bodiam & Ewhurst, Burwash, Etchingham & Hurst Green and Ticehurst wards each comprise the parishes of those names, while Salehurst ward comprises Salehurst & Robertsbridge parish. The number of electors per councillor is 28 per cent below the district average in Bodiam & Ewhurst ward both now and in 2005, 37 per cent above in Burwash ward (36 per cent above in 2005), 11 per cent above in Etchingham & Hurst Green ward (10 per cent above in 2005), 28 per cent above in Salehurst ward (29 per cent above in 2005) and 14 per cent below in Ticehurst ward both now and in 2005.

77 At Stage One the District Council proposed a reconfiguration of wards in this area and, as noted earlier, it did not include proposed names for the wards in the parished part of the district but referred to the wards with numbers. As detailed earlier, the District Council proposed that Rural Ward Two should comprise the parishes of Brightling, Burwash, Dallington and Etchingham together with Netherfield parish ward of Battle parish. It proposed that a new two-member Rural Ward One should comprise the parishes of Hurst Green and Ticehurst. The District Council further proposed that a new Rural Ward Five should comprise the parishes of Bodiam, Ewhurst, Mountfield and Salehurst & Robertsbridge. The District Council considered that its proposals for these wards would provide improvements to electoral equality while having regard to the statutory criteria.

78 Under the District Council's proposals the number of electors per councillor would be 2 per cent above the district average in Rural Ward One both now and in 2005 and 5 per cent below in Rural Ward Five both now and in 2005.

79 We also received proposals for an alternative warding configuration in this area from Councillor Hardy and further submissions from Bodiam and Etchingham parish councils.

80 In arriving at our draft recommendations we gave careful consideration to the alternative proposals which we had received in this area. We proposed that a modified two-member Ticehurst & Etchingham ward should comprise the parishes of Etchingham and Ticehurst, while a modified two-member

Salehurst ward should comprise the parishes of Bodiam, Hurst Green and Salehurst & Robertsbridge. We judged that these proposals would provide a reasonable reflection of the statutory criteria, and while we noted that by 2005 these wards would vary by 9 per cent and 10 per cent from the district average respectively, we considered that such levels of electoral equality were justified as they facilitated the formation of a good district-wide scheme.

81 Under our draft recommendations the number of electors per councillor would be 9 per cent below the district average in Salehurst ward and 10 per cent below in Ticehurst & Etchingham ward, both now and in 2005.

82 At Stage Three Hurst Green Parish Council opposed the proposal to place it in a different district ward to Etchingham parish, with which it considered it shared community identity and interest. The Parish Council proposed instead that a single-member Hurst Green & Etchingham ward could be retained and a three-member Ticehurst & Burwash ward (comprising the parishes of those names) could be created. It also proposed that Salehurst ward could be renamed Hurst Green Salehurst ward. Bodiam, Etchingham and Salehurst & Robertsbridge parish councils opposed the draft recommendations in their areas as they considered that they would not reflect local community identities and interests. Councillor Prochak opposed the draft recommendations and argued that the existing arrangements were preferable to our draft recommendations. Councillor Maynard stated that he endorsed the District Council's Stage One proposal, although he stated that he did not feel there were "overwhelming arguments" for either the District Council's proposals or the draft recommendations so far as Ticehurst was concerned. The Liberal Democrats opposed the proposal to place Bodiam and Ewhurst parishes in separate wards on the grounds that this would not reflect local community identities and interests.

83 As described earlier, Councillor Hardy included proposals, based on a council size of 38, for a revised pattern of wards in the rural area of the district. He proposed that a new two-member ward should comprise the parishes of Brightling, Hurst Green, Mountfield and Salehurst & Robertsbridge, and that another two-member ward should comprise the parishes of Bodiam, Ewhurst, Northiam and Sedlescombe. Under these proposals, which only included 2005 electorate figures, the number of electors per councillor would be 1 per cent above and 6 per cent above the district average respectively.

84 A resident of Battle put forward alternative proposals in this area, based on 22 members for the rural area. She proposed that a revised three-member Etchingham ward should comprise the parishes of Etchingham, Hurst Green and Ticehurst, together with an eastern part of Burwash parish and a northern part of Salehurst & Robertsbridge parish. A single-member Robertsbridge ward would comprise the remainder of Salehurst & Robertsbridge parish, and a three-member Bodiam ward would comprise Bodiam, Ewhurst, Northiam, Brede, Sedlescombe & Whatlington.

85 We have carefully considered the views which we have received in response to our draft recommendations for this area. While we note that we have received some local opposition to our proposals in this area, we also note that no consensus has emerged which would provide a warding arrangement meeting the aims of this review while being compatible with our proposals for the district as a whole. We continue to judge that our proposals for this area would provide the best balance of the need to seek improvements to electoral equality while having regard to the statutory criteria, and consequently we are proposing to confirm our draft recommendations for the wards of Salehurst and Ticehurst & Etchingham as final. Our final recommendations for these wards are illustrated on Map 2. The number of electors per councillor in each ward will be the same as under our draft recommendations.

Beckley & Peasmarsh and Northiam wards

86 These two single-member wards are situated in the north of the district and each comprises the parishes indicated in the ward names. The number of electors per councillor is 13 per cent above the district average in Beckley & Peasmarsh ward both now and in 2005, and 10 per cent above the district average in Northiam ward both now and in 2005.

87 At Stage One the District Council proposed that these two wards should be combined with Rye Foreign parish (in the existing Camber ward) to form a new two-member Rural Ward Seven, comprising the parishes of Beckley, Northiam, Peasmarsh and Rye Foreign. The District Council considered that “these rural parishes have a common agricultural background forming the northern boundary of the Rother district”. The District Council also observed that Rye Foreign parish has good road links with Peasmarsh parish. Under the District Council’s proposals the number of electors per councillor would be 2 per cent above the district average in Rural Ward Seven both now and in 2005. Councillor Hardy proposed an alternative warding configuration in this area.

88 In arriving at our draft recommendations we gave careful consideration to the views which we received in this area. We considered that under a council size of 38 the District Council’s proposals would provide a good reflection of the need to seek improvements to electoral equality while having regard to the statutory criteria. Consequently we adopted the District Council’s proposals as part of our draft recommendations, but proposed that Rural Ward Seven should be named Rother Levels.

89 At Stage Three Councillor Parren stated that the draft recommendation for a Rother Levels ward comprising the parishes of Beckley, Northiam and Peasmarsh enjoyed local support. However, he expressed opposition to the inclusion of Rye Foreign parish in this ward, in particular noting that this parish forms part of a separate parliamentary constituency to the remaining parishes and would be better placed in Eastern Rother ward. The Liberal Democrats considered that the proposed name of Rother Levels ward did not reflect the area which the ward would cover.

90 As part of his second preference Councillor Hardy included proposals for an alternative warding configuration in this area, which would retain the existing Beckley & Peasmarsh ward on its existing boundaries. Under this proposal the number of electors per councillor in the ward would vary by 4 per cent from the district average in 2005.

91 A resident of Battle proposed that a single-member Peasmarsh ward should comprise all of Beckley & Peasmarsh ward except the southern part of Peasmarsh parish and “extending west into Iden and Rye Foreign”.

92 We have given careful consideration to the views which we have received in response to our draft recommendations for this area. While we note that we have received alternative proposals for warding configurations in this area from Councillor Hardy and from a resident of Battle, we note that these proposals are not compatible with our proposals for neighbouring wards. We are unable to have regard to any single area in isolation but must consider the impact which any modification has upon the scheme for the wider area and consequently we are not adopting either set of proposals as part of our final recommendations. With regard to the remaining submissions which we have received we note in particular that Councillor Parren has expressed concern at our proposal to transfer Rye Foreign parish to the proposed Rother Levels ward, which would mean that this ward would contain parts of two parliamentary constituencies. However, it should be noted that, in conducting these reviews, we do not have regard for parliamentary constituency boundaries. Instead our new wards will form the building

blocks for new parliamentary constituencies when these are reviewed by the Parliamentary Boundary Commission in its forthcoming review. Consequently, we are confirming our draft recommendations for Rother Levels ward as final, as we consider that they provide the best balance of the need to seek improvements to electoral equality while having regard to the statutory criteria. We continue to consider that the name of this ward adequately reflects the nature of the area in question and are therefore not proposing to modify it. Our final recommendations for this ward are illustrated on Map 2. The number of electors per councillor in the ward will be the same as under our draft recommendations.

Brede & Udimore, Camber, Fairlight, Guestling & Pett, Rye, Westfield and Winchelsea wards

93 These seven wards together cover much of the east of the district. Rye ward is represented by three councillors and the remaining wards are each represented by a single councillor. Camber ward comprises the parishes of Camber, East Guldeford, Iden, Playden and Rye Foreign, while Winchelsea ward comprises Icklesham parish; the remaining wards of Brede & Udimore, Fairlight, Guestling & Pett, Rye and Westfield each comprise the parishes of those names. The number of electors per councillor is 16 per cent above the district average in Brede & Udimore ward (13 per cent above in 2005), 20 per cent above in Camber ward (29 per cent above in 2005), equal to the average in Fairlight ward (2 per cent below in 2005), 17 per cent above in Guestling & Pett ward (14 per cent above in 2005), 28 per cent below in Rye ward (29 per cent below in 2005), 32 per cent above in Westfield ward (29 per cent above in 2005) and 38 per cent above in Winchelsea ward (36 per cent above in 2005).

94 At Stage One the District Council proposed a revised pattern of four two-member wards to cover most of this area. It proposed that Rural Ward 10 should comprise the existing Rye ward and be represented by two councillors, its correct allocation under a council size of 38. The District Council proposed that Rural Ward Six should comprise the existing wards of Brede & Udimore and Westfield, while Rural Ward Eight should comprise the existing wards of Fairlight and Guestling & Pett. It proposed that Rural Ward Nine should cover the remaining area, comprising Winchelsea ward and the parishes of Camber, East Guldeford, Iden and Playden. The District Council considered that its proposals for this area would generally provide the best available balance of the need to seek improvements to electoral equality while having regard to the statutory criteria.

95 Councillor Hardy proposed four two-member wards to cover this area. Rye Town Council opposed the proposed reduction in representation for the town, arguing that the fluctuating population of the town due to the tourist season warranted additional representation. Guestling Parish Council supported the District Council's proposals.

96 In arriving at our draft recommendations we gave careful consideration to the views which we received in this area. With regard to the existing Rye ward, while we noted the views of Rye Town Council regarding variations in the population of the town during the year, in conducting this review we noted that we were only able to have regard to the existing electorate and the electorate forecast for 2005 as they would appear on the electoral roll. Consequently in view of the general support for retaining the existing boundaries of Rye ward, we adopted a two-member Rye ward as part of our draft recommendations. In the remaining area we adopted the District Council's proposals as part of our draft recommendations, as we judged that they would provide the best balance of the need to improve electoral equality while having regard to the statutory criteria. While we noted that under our draft recommendations Rural Ward Eight would vary by slightly more than 10 per cent from the district average in 2005, we judged that seeking further improvements to electoral equality would necessitate additional parish warding in this area, which would not reflect community identities and interests in the

area concerned. We proposed that Rural Ward Six should be renamed Brede Valley, that Rural Ward Eight should be renamed Godwin, that Rural Ward Nine should be renamed Eastern Rother and that Rural Ward 10 should be renamed Rye.

97 Under our draft recommendations the number of electors per councillor would be 4 per cent above the district average in Brede Valley ward (2 per cent above in 2005), 9 per cent below in Godwin ward (11 per cent below in 2005), 1 per cent above in Eastern Rother ward (4 per cent above in 2005) and 9 per cent below in Rye ward (10 per cent below in 2005).

98 At Stage Three Councillor Glazier opposed the creation of a two-member Eastern Rother ward, instead proposing the creation of two single-member Camber and Winchelsea wards. Playden Parish Council opposed the draft recommendations in its area, in particular as they would place Playden parish in a different parish to Rye Foreign parish. Councillor Camble, vice chair of Iden Parish Council, stated that he was writing on behalf of Iden Parish Council and opposed the proposed Eastern Rother ward, instead stating that Iden parish shared links with the parishes to the west. A local resident opposed the proposed Eastern Rother ward. Rye Town Council reiterated its proposal that it should be represented by three district councillors as it is “a busy market and tourist town”.

99 Rother District Council and Fairlight Parish Council each proposed that Godwin ward should be renamed Marsham. Pett Parish Council opposed the draft recommendations in its area. Westfield Parish Council opposed the name of the proposed Brede Valley ward.

100 Councillor Hardy proposed as his first preference that the only change which should take place should be to reduce the number of councillors representing Rye from three to two. As a second preference he made alternative proposals that a single-member ward should comprise Winchelsea parish except for Rye Harbour, while a two-member ward should comprise the remainder of Winchelsea parish together with Rye parish. He proposed that Camber ward should be retained on its existing boundaries. Under these proposals, which only included electorate totals for 2005, the number of electors per councillor would be equal to the district average, 3 per cent below and 9 per cent above the district average respectively.

101 A resident of Battle proposed that a single-member Camber ward should comprise the parishes of Camber, East Guldeford and Playden. She also proposed that a three-member Guestling ward should comprise the parishes of Fairlight, Guestling, Pett and Westfield, while a two-member Winchelsea ward should comprise the current Icklesham ward together with Udimore parish and the southern part of Peasmarsh parish. She proposed that a two-member Rye ward should comprise Rye parish, although she queried whether the “outlying areas of Rye [should] be transferred to neighbouring rural wards to achieve electoral equality, leaving Rye town with one councillor”.

102 We have given careful consideration to the views which we have received during Stage Three. While we note that we have received some opposition to our draft recommendations we also note that we have not received alternative proposals which, under a council size of 38, would provide a better balance between the need to seek electoral equality and the statutory criteria while also permitting the achievement of a scheme which we judge provides a satisfactory warding arrangement for the wider area. We are therefore confirming our draft recommendations for the wards in this area as final. With regard to ward names we note that we have received opposition to the proposed names of Brede Valley and Godwin wards. We note that, in the case of the proposed Godwin ward, there is some agreement in favour of the name Marsham and we are therefore including it as part of our final recommendations. In the case of Brede Valley ward we note that we have not received a specific alternative proposal for

a ward name in this area and we are therefore not modifying our draft recommendation for this ward. Our final recommendations for these wards are illustrated on Map 2. The number of electors per councillor in each ward will be the same as under our draft recommendations.

Electoral Cycle

103 At Stage One we received no evidence of widespread support for change 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.

104 At Stage Three no further evidence of widespread support for such a change was received, and we confirm our draft recommendation as final.

Conclusions

105 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 making a small number of minor amendments to ward boundaries in the district, affecting the proposed Battle Town and Crowhurst wards in Battle and the proposed wards of Bexhill Down, Old Town and Pebsham in Bexhill-on-Sea. We have also proposed changes to the names of four wards in the district.

106 We conclude that, in Rother:

- there should be a reduction in council size from 45 to 38;
- there should be 20 wards, five fewer than at present;
- the boundaries of 25 of the existing wards should be modified;
- the Council should continue to hold whole-council elections every four years.

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

Table 4: Comparison of Current and Recommended Electoral Arrangements

	2000 electorate		2005 forecast electorate	
	Current arrangements	Final recommendations	Current arrangements	Final recommendations
Number of councillors	45	38	45	38
Number of wards	26	20	26	20
Average number of electors per councillor	1,498	1,774	1,551	1,836
Number of wards with a variance more than 10 per cent from the average	18	1	18	1
Number of wards with a variance more than 20 per cent from the average	7	0	9	0

108 As Table 4 shows, our recommendations would result in a reduction in the number of wards with an electoral variance of more than 10 per cent from 18 to one, with no wards varying by more than 20 per cent from the district average. By 2005 only one ward is forecast to vary by more than 10 per cent from the average for the district. We conclude that our recommendations would best meet the need for electoral equality, having regard to the statutory criteria.

Final Recommendation

Rother District Council should comprise 38 councillors serving 20 wards, as detailed and named in Tables 1 and 2, and illustrated on Map 2 and the large map inside the back cover. The Council should continue to hold whole-council elections every four years.

Parish and Town Council Electoral Arrangements

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

110 The parish of Battle is currently served by 17 councillors representing two wards: Battle and Netherfield, represented by 15 and two councillors respectively. In the light of our draft recommendations for district warding we adopted the District Council's proposals for parish warding in Battle parish. We therefore proposed that Battle parish should comprise four parish wards: Marley, Netherfield, Telham and Watch Oak, to be represented by five, two, two and eight councillors

respectively. Having considered all the evidence received, and in the light of the confirmation of our proposed district wards in the area, we confirm our draft recommendation for warding Battle parish as final, subject to adopting the minor modifications to the parish ward boundaries outlined in paragraph 67.

Final Recommendation

Battle Parish Council should comprise 17 councillors, as at present, representing four wards: Marley (returning five councillors), Netherfield (two), Telham (two) and Watch Oak (eight). The parish ward boundaries should reflect the proposed district ward boundaries in the area, as illustrated and named on the large map at the back of the report.

111 In our draft recommendations report we proposed that there should be no change to the electoral cycle of parish 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, at the same time as elections for the district ward of which they are part.

Map 2: Final Recommendations for Rother

6 WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

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

113 It is now up to the Secretary of State to decide whether to endorse our recommendations, with or without modification, and to implement them by means of an Order. Such an Order will not be made before 17 September 2001.

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

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

APPENDIX A

Final Recommendations for Rother: Detailed Mapping

The following maps illustrate our proposed ward boundaries for the Rother area.

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

The **large map** inserted at the back of this report illustrates the proposed warding arrangements for Battle and for Bexhill-on-Sea.

Map A1: Final Recommendations for Rother: Key Map