

Draft recommendations on the
future electoral arrangements for
Tonbridge & Malling in Kent

October 2000

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 statutorily required to review periodically the electoral arrangements – such as the number of councillors representing electors in each area and the number and boundaries of wards and electoral divisions – of every principal local authority in England. In broad terms our objective 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, and the number of councillors and ward names. We can also make recommendations for change to the electoral arrangements of parish and town councils in the borough.

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A large map illustrating the existing and proposed ward boundaries for the Tonbridge area is inserted inside the back cover of the report.

SUMMARY

The Commission began a review of the electoral arrangements for Tonbridge & Malling on 9 May 2000.

- **This report summarises the representations we received during the first stage of the review, and makes draft recommendations for change.**

We found that the existing electoral arrangements provide unequal representation of electors in Tonbridge & Malling:

- **in 10 of the 27 wards the number of electors represented by each councillor varies by more than 10 per cent from the average for the borough and four wards vary by more than 20 per cent from the average;**
- **by 2005 this unequal representation is not expected to improve, with the number of electors per councillor forecast to vary by more than 10 per cent from the average in 13 wards and by more than 20 per cent in six wards.**

Our main draft recommendations for future electoral arrangements (Figures 1 and 2 and paragraphs 113–114) are that:

- **Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council should have 53 councillors, two fewer than at present;**
- **there should be 27 wards, the same as at present;**
- **the boundaries of 17 of the existing wards should be modified, and 10 wards should retain their existing boundaries;**
- **elections should continue to take place every four years.**

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

- **In 11 of the proposed 27 wards the number of electors per councillor would vary by no more than 10 per cent from the borough average.**
- **This level of electoral equality is expected to improve further with the number of electors per councillor in 25 wards expected to vary by no more than 10 per cent from the average for the borough in 2005.**

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

- **revised warding arrangements and the redistribution of councillors for the parish of Snodland;**
- **new warding arrangements and the redistribution of councillors for the parish of Mereworth;**
- **the redistribution of councillors for the parish of Aylesford; and**
- **minor modifications to parish ward boundaries in Hadlow parish.**

This report sets out our draft recommendations on which comments are invited.

- **We will consult on our draft recommendations for eight weeks from 17 October 2000. Because we take this consultation very seriously, we may move away from our draft recommendations in the light of Stage Three responses. It is therefore important that all interested parties let us have their views and evidence, *whether or not* they agree with our draft recommendations.**
- **After considering local views, we will decide whether to modify our draft recommendations and then make our final recommendations to the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions.**
- **It will then be for the Secretary of State to accept, modify or reject our final recommendations. He will also determine when any changes come into effect.**

You should express your views by writing directly to the Commission at the address below by 11 December 2000:

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Website: www.lgce.gov.uk**

Figure 1: The Commission's Draft Recommendations: Summary

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Constituent areas	Map reference
1	Aylesford	2	<i>Unchanged</i> (North and South wards of Aylesford parish)	Map 2
2	Addington, Mereworth & Offham	1	Long Mill ward (part – Offham parish); Oast ward (part - Addington parish); West Malling, West Peckham & Mereworth ward (part – Mereworth Village ward of Mereworth parish as proposed)	Maps 2 and A3
3	Birling, Ryarsh & Trottscliffe	1	Birling, Leybourne and Ryarsh ward (part – Birling and Ryarsh parishes); Oast ward (part – Trottscliffe parish)	Map 2
4	Blue Bell Hill & Walderslade	2	<i>Unchanged</i> (Blue Bell Hill and Walderslade wards of Aylesford parish)	Map 2
5	Borough Green, Platt & Plaxtol	3	Borough Green ward (Borough Green parish as amended); Long Mill ward (part – Platt parish as amended and Plaxtol parish)	Map 2
6	Burham, Eccles & Wouldham	2	<i>Unchanged</i> (Burham and Wouldham parishes and Eccles ward of Aylesford parish)	Map 2
7	Cage Green (in Tonbridge)	2	Cage Green ward (part); Trench ward (part); Castle ward (part)	Large map
8	Castle (in Tonbridge)	2	Castle ward (part); Cage Green ward (part); Judd ward (part); Trench ward (part)	Large map
9	Ditton	2	<i>Unchanged</i> (Ditton parish as amended)	Map 2
10	East Malling	2	<i>Unchanged</i> (East Malling ward of East Malling & Larkfield parish)	Map 2
11	East Peckham & Golden Green	2	East Peckham ward (East Peckham parish as amended); Hadlow ward (part – Golden Green ward of Hadlow parish as amended)	Maps 2 and A2
12	Hadlow, Shipbourne & West Peckham	2	Hadlow ward (part – Hadlow ward of Hadlow parish as amended); Long Mill ward (part – Shipbourne parish as amended); West Malling, West Peckham & Mereworth ward (part – West Peckham parish)	Maps 2 and A2
13	Higham (in Tonbridge)	3	Higham ward (part); Medway ward (part); Cage Green ward (part)	Large map
14	Hildenborough	2	<i>Unchanged</i> (Hildenborough parish as amended)	Map 2
15	Ightham	1	<i>Unchanged</i> (Ightham parish as amended)	Map 2
16	Judd (in Tonbridge)	2	Judd ward (part)	Large map

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Constituent areas	Map reference
17	Kings Hill	2	West Malling, West Peckham & Mereworth ward (part – Kings Hill parish and Airfield ward of Mereworth parish as proposed)	Maps 2 and A3
18	Larkfield North	2	<i>Unchanged</i> (Larkfield North ward of East Malling & Larkfield parish as amended)	Map 2
19	Larkfield South	2	<i>Unchanged</i> (Larkfield South ward of East Malling & Larkfield parish)	Map 2
20	Medway (in Tonbridge)	2	Higham ward (part); Medway ward (part); Vauxhall ward (part)	Large map
21	Snodland East	2	Snodland East ward (part – Snodland parish (part))	Maps 2 and A4
22	Snodland West	3	Snodland East ward (part – Snodland parish (part)); Snodland West ward (Snodland parish (part))	Maps 2 and A4
23	Trench (in Tonbridge)	2	Trench ward (part)	Large map
24	Vauxhall (in Tonbridge)	2	Vauxhall ward (part); Judd ward (part)	Large map
25	Wateringbury	1	<i>Unchanged</i> (Wateringbury parish)	Map 2
26	West Malling & Leybourne	3	West Malling, West Peckham & Mereworth ward (part – West Malling parish); Birling, Leybourne and Ryarsh ward (part – Leybourne parish)	Map 2
27	Wrotham & Stansted	1	Oast ward (part – Stansted parish); Wrotham ward (Wrotham parish as amended)	Map 2

Notes: 1 Tonbridge is the only unparished part of the borough and comprises the seven wards indicated above.

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

3 All proposed ward boundaries are based upon the revised parish boundaries which come into effect in April 2002.

Figure 2: The Commission's Draft Recommendations for Tonbridge & Malling

	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	Aylesford	2	3,496	1,748	14	3,496	1,748	8
2	Addington, Mereworth & Offham	1	1,709	1,709	12	1,709	1,709	6
3	Birling, Ryarsh & Trottiscliffe	1	1,265	1,265	-17	1,505	1,505	-7
4	Blue Bell Hill & Walderslade	2	3,189	1,595	4	3,199	1,600	-1
5	Borough Green, Platt & Plaxtol	3	4,696	1,565	2	4,737	1,579	-2
6	Burham, Eccles & Wouldham	2	2,861	1,431	-6	3,455	1,728	7
7	Cage Green (in Tonbridge)	2	3,279	1,640	7	3,279	1,640	1
8	Castle (in Tonbridge)	2	3,396	1,698	11	3,396	1,698	5
9	Ditton	2	3,640	1,820	19	3,640	1,820	13
10	East Malling	2	3,195	1,598	5	3,383	1,692	5
11	East Peckham & Golden Green	2	2,959	1,480	-3	3,007	1,504	-7
12	Hadlow, Shipbourne & West Peckham	2	3,042	1,521	0	3,042	1,521	-6
13	Higham (in Tonbridge)	3	4,662	1,554	2	4,662	1,554	-4
14	Hildenborough	2	3,597	1,799	18	3,605	1,803	12
15	Ightham	1	1,549	1,549	1	1,549	1,549	-4
16	Judd (in Tonbridge)	2	3,318	1,659	9	3,363	1,682	4
17	Kings Hill	2	1,755	878	-43	2,922	1,461	-10
18	Larkfield North	2	2,591	1,296	-15	3,171	1,586	-2
19	Larkfield South	2	3,163	1,582	3	3,163	1,582	-2
20	Medway (in Tonbridge)	2	2,872	1,436	-6	3,382	1,691	5

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 (%)
21 Snodland East	2	2,932	1,466	-4	2,932	1,466	-9
22 Snodland West	3	3,810	1,270	-17	4,409	1,470	-9
23 Trench (in Tonbridge)	2	3,092	1,546	1	3,092	1,546	-4
24 Vauxhall (in Tonbridge)	2	3,406	1,703	11	3,406	1,703	5
25 Wateringbury	1	1,535	1,535	0	1,535	1,535	-5
26 West Malling & Leybourne	3	4,225	1,408	-8	4,834	1,611	0
27 Wrotham & Stansted	1	1,777	1,777	16	1,777	1,777	10
Totals	53	81,011	-	-	85,650	-	-
Averages	-	-	1,529	-	-	1,616	-

Source: Electorate figures are based on Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council's submission.

Note: 1 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.

2 All proposed ward boundaries are based upon the revised parish boundaries which come into effect in April 2002.

1 INTRODUCTION

1 This report contains our draft recommendations on the electoral arrangements for the borough of Tonbridge & Malling in Kent on which we are now consulting. We are reviewing the 12 two-tier districts in Kent as part of our programme of periodic electoral reviews (PERs) of all 386 principal local authority areas in England. Our programme started in 1996 and is currently expected to be completed by 2005.

2 This is our first review of the electoral arrangements of Tonbridge & Malling. The last such review was undertaken by our predecessor, the Local Government Boundary Commission (LGBC), which reported to the Secretary of State in September 1988 (Report No. 560). The electoral arrangements of Kent County Council were last reviewed in November 1980 (Report No. 402). We completed a directed electoral review of Medway in 1996. We expect to commence a periodic electoral review of Medway later this year, and of the County Council's electoral arrangements in 2002.

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

- the statutory criteria in section 13(5) of the Local Government Act 1992, ie the need to:
 - (a) reflect the identities and interests of local communities; and
 - (b) secure effective and convenient local government;
- the *Rules to be Observed in Considering Electoral Arrangements* in Schedule 11 to the Local Government Act 1972 (see Appendix C).

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

5 We also have regard to our *Guidance and Procedural Advice for Local Authorities and Other Interested Parties* (third edition published in October 1999). This sets out our approach to the reviews.

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

7 The broad objective of PERs is to achieve, as far as possible, equality of representation across the borough as a whole. Having regard to the statutory criteria, our aim is to achieve as low a level of electoral imbalance as is practicable. We will require particular justification for schemes which would result in, or retain, an electoral imbalance of over 10 per cent in any ward. Any

imbalances of 20 per cent or more should only arise in the most exceptional circumstances, and will require the strongest justification.

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

9 The review is in four stages (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Stages of the Review

Stage	Description
One	Submission of proposals to the Commission
Two	The Commission’s analysis and deliberation
Three	Publication of draft recommendations and consultation on them
Four	Final deliberation and report to the Secretary of State

10 In July 1998 the Government published a White Paper, *Modern Local Government – In Touch with the People*, which set out legislative proposals for local authority electoral arrangements. In two-tier areas, it proposed introducing a pattern in which both the borough and county councils would hold elections every two years, ie in year one half of the borough 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.

11 Following publication of the White Paper, we advised all authorities in our 2000/2001 PER programme, including the Kent districts, that the Commission would continue to maintain its current approach to PERs as set out in the October 1999 *Guidance*. Nevertheless, we considered that local authorities and other interested parties might wish to have regard to the Secretary of State’s intentions and legislative proposals in formulating electoral schemes as part of PERs of their areas. The proposals have been taken forward in the Local Government Act 2000 which, among other matters, provides that the Secretary of State may make Orders to change authorities’ electoral cycles. However, until such time as the Secretary of State makes any Order 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 two-tier areas, and our present *Guidance*.

12 Stage One began on 9 May 2000, when we wrote to Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council inviting proposals for future electoral arrangements. We also notified Kent County Council, Kent Police Authority, the local authority associations, Kent Local Councils' Association, parish and town councils in the borough, the Members of Parliament with constituency interests in the borough and 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 Borough Council to publicise the review further. The closing date for receipt of representations, the end of Stage One, was 31 July 2000.

13 At Stage Two we considered all the representations received during Stage One and prepared our draft recommendations.

14 Stage Three began on 17 October 2000 and will end on 11 December 2000. This stage involves publishing the draft recommendations in this report and public consultation on them. **We take this consultation very seriously and it is therefore important that all those interested in the review should let us have their views and evidence, whether or not they agree with our draft recommendations.**

15 During Stage Four we will reconsider the draft recommendations in the light of the Stage Three consultation, decide whether to move away from them in any areas, and submit final recommendations to the Secretary of State. Interested parties will have a further six weeks to make representations to the Secretary of State. It will then be for him to accept, modify or reject our final recommendations. If the Secretary of State accepts the recommendations, with or without modification, he will make an order. The Secretary of State will determine when any changes come into effect.

2 CURRENT ELECTORAL ARRANGEMENTS

16 The borough of Tonbridge & Malling covers an area of approximately 24,000 hectares and stretches from the ridge of the North Downs to the edge of the Kentish Weald. The borough includes much of the River Medway valley, with the main urban areas being Tonbridge, and the Medway Gap area containing a number of urban settlements. The borough contains 27 parishes, but Tonbridge town itself is unparished and comprises 30 per cent of the borough's total electorate.

17 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'.

18 The electorate of the borough is 81,011 (February 2000). The Council currently has 55 members who are elected from 27 wards. Five of the wards are each represented by three councillors, 18 are each represented by two councillors and four are single-member wards. The whole Council is elected every four years.

19 Since the last electoral review in 1988 there has been an increase of just over 2 per cent in the electorate of Tonbridge & Malling.

20 At present, each councillor represents an average of 1,473 electors, which the Borough Council forecasts will increase to 1,557 by the year 2005 if the present number of councillors is maintained. However, due to demographic and other changes over the past two decades, the number of electors per councillor in 10 of the 27 wards varies by more than 10 per cent from the borough average, four wards by more than 20 per cent and one ward by more than 30 per cent. The worst imbalance is in West Malling, West Peckham & Mereworth ward where the councillor represents 49 per cent more electors than the borough average, due to the development at Kings Hill on the former West Malling Airfield.

Map 1: Existing Wards in Tonbridge & Malling

Figure 4: 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	Aylesford	3	3,496	1,165	-21	3,496	1,165	-25
2	Birling, Leybourne & Ryarsh	2	3,181	1,591	8	4,030	2,015	29
3	Blue Bell Hill	2	3,189	1,595	8	3,199	1,600	3
4	Borough Green	2	2,770	1,385	-6	2,792	1,396	-10
5	Burham, Eccles & Wouldham	2	2,861	1,431	-3	3,455	1,728	11
6	Cage Green (in Tonbridge)	2	3,087	1,544	5	3,087	1,544	-1
7	Castle (in Tonbridge)	2	3,215	1,608	9	3,215	1,608	3
8	Ditton	3	3,640	1,213	-18	3,640	1,213	-22
9	East Malling	2	3,195	1,598	8	3,383	1,692	9
10	East Peckham	2	2,594	1,297	-12	2,642	1,321	-15
11	Hadlow	2	2,781	1,391	-6	2,781	1,391	-11
12	Higham (in Tonbridge)	3	4,105	1,368	-7	4,105	1,368	-12
13	Hildenborough	3	3,606	1,202	-18	3,614	1,205	-23
14	Ightham	1	1,491	1,491	1	1,491	1,491	-4
15	Judd (in Tonbridge)	2	3,661	1,831	24	3,706	1,853	19
16	Larkfield North	2	2,591	1,296	-12	3,171	1,586	2
17	Larkfield South	2	3,163	1,582	7	3,163	1,582	2
18	Long Mill	2	2,903	1,452	-1	2,922	1,461	-6
19	Medway (in Tonbridge)	2	2,675	1,338	-9	3,185	1,593	2
20	Oast	1	1,398	1,398	-5	1,398	1,398	-10
21	Snodland East	2	3,009	1,505	2	3,041	1,521	-2
22	Snodland West	2	3,733	1,867	27	4,300	2,150	38

Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2000)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2005)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
23 Trench (in Tonbridge)	3	3,786	1,262	-14	3,786	1,262	-19
24 Vauxhall (in Tonbridge)	2	3,496	1,748	19	3,496	1,748	12
25 Wateringbury	1	1,535	1,535	4	1,535	1,535	-1
26 West Malling, West Peckham & Mereworth	2	4,388	2,194	49	5,555	2,778	78
27 Wrotham	1	1,462	1,462	-1	1,462	1,462	-6
Totals	55	81,011	-	-	85,650	-	-
Averages	-	-	1,473	-	-	1,557	-

Source: Electorate figures are based on information provided by Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council.

Notes: 1 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 2000, electors in Aylesford ward were relatively over-represented by 21 per cent, while electors in West Malling, West Peckham & Mereworth ward were relatively under-represented by 49 per cent. Figures have been rounded to the nearest whole number.

2 All existing wards are based upon the current parish boundaries, and will not be subject to revision when new parish boundaries come into effect in April 2002.

3 REPRESENTATIONS RECEIVED

21 At the start of the review we invited members of the public and other interested parties to write to us giving their views on the future electoral arrangements for Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council and its constituent parish and town councils.

22 During this initial stage of the review, officers from the Commission visited the area and met officers and members from the Borough Council. We are grateful to all concerned for their co-operation and assistance. We received 31 representations during Stage One, including a borough-wide scheme from the Borough Council, all of which may be inspected at the offices of the Borough Council and the Commission.

Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council

23 The Borough Council proposed a council of 55 members, as at present, serving 28 wards, one more than at present. In formulating its proposals, the Council had regard to the aim of achieving electoral equality across the borough. However, it considered that, “the character and interests of local communities to be of greater significance in a borough like Tonbridge & Malling”.

24 The proposals were largely based on existing warding arrangements with 14 wards retaining their existing boundaries. An extensive public consultation exercise on draft proposals was undertaken involving parish and town councils and local residents and in the light of comments received a modified scheme was prepared. In particular the Council proposed separate wards for Kings Hill, Aylesford, Ditton, East Peckham and Hildenborough and a two-member Addington, Birling, Trottiscliffe, Ryarsh and Stansted ward. The Council’s proposals were agreed unanimously by the Council and gained support from all the political groups on the Council. The Borough Council’s proposals would result in nine of the proposed 28 wards varying by more than 10 per cent from the borough average by 2005. The Council’s proposal is summarised at Appendix B.

Political Groups

25 Tonbridge, Edenbridge and Malling, Chatham and Aylesford Conservative Party (“the Conservatives”) expressed support for the Borough Council’s proposals, stressing that “community identity should have greater support than numeric formulae”. The Conservatives argued that if the Council’s scheme was unacceptable, Addington, Stansted and Trottiscliffe parishes could be combined to form a single-member ward; Birling, Ryarsh and West Malling parishes could be combined to form a two-member ward; and West Peckham, Mereworth and Wateringbury parishes could be combined to form a two-member ward. In relation to Tonbridge, the Conservatives argued that, if the Commission wished to improve electoral equality, it should divide the current Hildenborough ward and combine part of it with Castle ward, increasing its representation to three councillors and thereby increasing council size to 56.

26 Tonbridge & Malling Liberal Democrats supported the Borough Council’s proposals, specifically in relation to the formation of a separate Kings Hill ward and its proposed West

Malling, West Peckham & Mereworth ward. Chatham & Aylesford Liberal Democrats broadly supported the Borough Council's proposals, specifically in relation to the part of the borough within the Chatham & Aylesford parliamentary constituency. In particular, it supported the retention of separate Aylesford and Ditton wards. Kent County Council Liberal Democrat Group supported the Borough Council's proposals.

27 Chatham & Aylesford Constituency Labour Party and Snodland Branch Labour Party expressed strong support for the Borough Council's proposals in relation to Snodland, welcoming an additional councillor for Snodland West. It also supported the retention of Aylesford and Ditton as separate wards. Tonbridge North Branch Labour Party opposed the Council's proposals to divide Trench ward and the proposed boundary change between Judd and Vauxhall wards. They supported the Council's proposed Addington, Birling, Trottiscliffe, Ryarsh & Stansted, East Peckham, Burham, Wouldham & Eccles and Borough Green wards, but proposed the retention of three councillors for Hildenborough ward.

Parish and Town Councils

28 We received representations from 18 parish and town councils. Aylesford, Birling, Borough Green, Ditton, East Peckham, Offham, Platt, Plaxtol, Ryarsh, Snodland, Trottiscliffe, West Peckham and Wrotham parish councils all supported the proposals submitted by the Borough Council.

29 Addington Parish Council argued that it should remain in a rural ward with neighbouring parishes, in particular Trottiscliffe parish. Burham Parish Council expressed concern at the proposal to reduce the number of councillors for its area by one. Stansted Parish Council supported the retention of the existing warding arrangements for its area.

30 Kings Hill Parish Council supported the Borough Council's proposals, and in particular a separate Kings Hill ward. West Malling Parish Council supported the Council's proposed Kings Hill and West Malling, West Peckham & Mereworth wards. However, both parish councils queried the level of growth forecast for the Kings Hill development, arguing that it had been underestimated by the Council.

Other Representations

31 We received a further five representations from local groups and local residents. The Hadlow Society supported the retention of the existing district warding arrangements for Hadlow. The Seekers Trust argued that Addington parish should be combined with Birling, Ryarsh and Trottiscliffe parishes in a new ward. A local resident supported the Borough Council's proposals, while one local resident broadly supported the Borough Council's proposals, but argued that the River Medway should be utilised as a ward boundary in Tonbridge in its entirety. A further resident requested changes to Aylesford Parish Council's electoral arrangements.

4 ANALYSIS AND DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS

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

33 In relation to Schedule 11, our recommendations are not intended to be based solely on existing electorate figures, but also on assumptions as to changes in the number and distribution of local government electors likely to take place within the 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 provides for exactly the same number of electors per councillor in every ward of an authority. There must be a degree of flexibility. However, our approach, in the context of the statutory criteria, is that such flexibility must be kept to a minimum.

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 kept to the minimum, the objective 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 start from the standpoint of electoral equality, and then make adjustments to reflect relevant factors, such as community identity and interests. Regard must also be had to five-year forecasts of changes in electorates.

Electorate Forecasts

36 The Borough Council submitted electorate forecasts for the year 2005, projecting an increase in the electorate of approximately 6 per cent from 81,011 to 85,04 over the five-year period from 2000 to 2005. It expects most of the growth to be in the Kings Hill area, although a significant amount is also expected at the former Leybourne Hospital site in Birling, Leybourne & Ryarsh 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 Borough Council on the likely effect on electorates of changes to ward boundaries has been obtained.

37 In their submission, Borough Green Parish Council argued that consideration had not been given by the Borough Council to the 47 homes under construction or becoming occupied in its electoral forecasts. Similarly, West Malling Parish Council argued that the Borough Council had under-estimated the level of growth in electorate of the Kings Hill development. They stated that currently there are some 2 electors per household, while the Council has assumed that there will be 1.76 per household. In addition, they argued that new houses were being completed at a faster

rate than the Council had assumed, and that in the current housing market this rate was likely to accelerate.

38 In the light of these arguments we sought further clarification from the Borough Council regarding its forecasts for the Borough Green and Kings Hill areas. In relation to Borough Green the Council argued that it had included all relevant planning applications and could not take into account any applications that had been made after the commencement of the review. In relation to Kings Hill, the Council stated that it considered that, having examined previous records, the projected housing completions, while subject to fluctuation, would not exceed those currently predicted. The Council conceded, however, that the Parish Council were correct in stating that amongst occupied dwellings on the Kings Hill development there is a higher number of electors per household than the average for the borough as a whole. However, due to the high level of unoccupied properties, some 20 per cent of the total number, the number of electors per household is currently lower than average. The Council recognised that it could be argued that over time the percentage of unoccupied properties would decline to a rate closer to the borough's average of 8 per cent and that, on this basis, it would be appropriate to apportion a higher electorate to the Kings Hill development and therefore to the borough as a whole. It stated that, having reconsidered its forecasts, the electorate of the Kings Hill development would have 2,677 electors by 2005 rather than 2,531 as previously forecast. Similarly, it predicted that the borough-wide electorate would increase to 85,650 rather than 85,504, as previously forecast.

39 We accept that forecasting electorates is an inexact science and, having given consideration to the Borough Council's revised figures, are content that they represent the best estimates that can reasonably be made at this time. We welcome further evidence on electorate forecasts during Stage Three.

Council Size

40 Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council currently has 55 members. At Stage One, the Borough Council consulted on a small reduction in council size to 53. However, in the light of comments received, it proposed significant modifications to its draft scheme. Its resulting proposals would retain the current council size of 55. It considered that its proposals would best meet the interests of local communities and provide for effective and convenient local government.

41 We received one further representation concerning council size. The Conservatives stated that under the Borough Council's submission, Tonbridge would be under-represented. It argued that if the Commission wished to improve electoral equality in this area, it could increase the number of councillors for the area by one, increasing council size to 56.

42 As already explained, the Commission's starting point is to assume that the current council size facilitates effective and convenient local government, although we are willing to look carefully at arguments why this might not be the case. However, we advise all respondents to examine whether a small change to council size may facilitate a better balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria.

43 Under the Borough Council's proposals, its proposed allocation of councillors would not provide a fair balance of representation between the three primary areas of the district: the Medway Gap, Tonbridge and the remaining rural area. (The communities that make up these areas are outlined below. For the purposes of analysis, we have considered the Malling Rural and Tonbridge Rural areas together.) Under the Council's proposals for a council size of 55, by 2005 the rural area would be entitled to 19.4 councillors, the Medway Gap would be entitled to 19.8 councillors and Tonbridge would be entitled to 15.8 councillors. However, the Council proposed that the rural area should be over-represented with 21 councillors, and that the Medway Gap and Tonbridge areas should be under-represented with 19 and 15 councillors respectively. Similarly, the Conservatives' alternative proposals, while improving electoral equality on the Tonbridge urban area, would result in over-representation of the rural area and under-representation of the Medway Gap area.

44 In view of this imbalance of representation in the borough, we have given further consideration to both the proposed warding arrangements and council size. In relation to the rural area we considered that the Council's proposals would lead to significant levels of over-representation and that these should be addressed as part of this periodic electoral review. Upon examination, we also considered that the Borough Council's proposals for the Medway Gap and Tonbridge areas reflected community identities and interests relatively well. In addition, we found that by making a small reduction in council size, the level of electoral equality would improve significantly both overall and in the majority of the Council's proposed wards in the urban area. An alternative approach would be to increase council size in the two urban areas, but retain the same number of councillors for the rural area. We considered that such an approach would cause significant disruption to the existing wards and would not best reflect community ties. We therefore concluded that the best balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria would be achieved by reducing the level of representation in the rural area rather than increasing the number of councillors for the urban areas and therefore propose a council size of 53 (two fewer than at present).

45 Under a 53-member scheme, by 2005 the rural areas would be entitled to 18.7 councillors, the Medway Gap would be entitled to 19.1 councillors and the Tonbridge area would be entitled to 15.2 councillors. Our proposals would provide the rural area and the Medway Gap area with 19 councillors each and Tonbridge with 15 councillors. In this way, each area of the borough would achieve a fair level of representation on the Borough Council.

46 Having considered the size and distribution of the electorate, the geography and other characteristics of the area, together with the representations received, we have concluded that the achievement of electoral equality and the statutory criteria would best be met by a council of 53 members.

Electoral Arrangements

47 We have carefully considered all the representations received at Stage One, including the borough-wide scheme from the Borough Council. From these representations, some considerations have emerged which have assisted us in preparing our draft recommendations.

48 The Borough Council's proposals were largely based on existing warding arrangements, with 14 wards retaining their existing boundaries. Under the proposals, the number of wards would increase by one to 28, and the number of councillors would remain unchanged at 55. The proposals have been subject to extensive public consultation and appear to have a significant degree of local support. The Council argued that the current wards, particularly in the rural areas "reflects the character and interests of parishes and communities very well". In preparing its proposals, the Council stated that it had tried to group communities with similar interests and reflect the views of smaller parishes opposed to being combined with larger parishes.

49 The Council argued that the borough is diverse, combining rural and urban areas and with population centres in the north and south. While it recognised that one of the Commission's objectives is to achieve as close to electoral equality as possible, it considered that there is a need to reflect the borough's diversity. However, the resulting scheme fails to achieve a good level of electoral equality. In 2005, nine of the proposed 28 wards are projected to have variances in excess of 10 per cent from the borough average, resulting in councillors in the borough representing between 1,238 electors and 1,820 electors (while the average is 1,557).

50 We recognise that Tonbridge & Malling is a diverse borough. It combines a significant rural area with larger settlements to the south-west and north-east. Although reviewed relatively recently, the borough has been subject to significant changes in the size and distribution of its electorate. In particular, there has been significant growth in Kings Hill and in Snodland. We recognise that the Borough Council has in its proposals attempted to accommodate these changes while making only minimal changes to ward boundaries.

51 We consider that such an approach is appropriate in some parts of the borough. In particular, we have largely concurred with the Council's proposals for the Tonbridge area and north-east of the borough which, on the basis of a 53 member council, we consider represent a reasonable balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria. However, we consider that such an approach does have limitations. We consider that in order to reflect community identities and the preferences of respondents, the Council has failed to adequately address the requirement to achieve a reasonable level of electoral equality in the rural part of the borough. In particular, we consider that the level of over-representation proposed for the East Peckham, Kings Hill and rural northern areas should be addressed.

52 As a result, we have departed from the Borough Council's proposals in a number of areas in order to achieve a better balance between the need for electoral equality and the statutory criteria. For borough warding purposes, the following areas, based on existing wards, are considered in turn:

Medway Gap

- (a) Aylesford, Blue Bell Hill, Burham, Eccles & Wouldham and Ditton wards;
- (b) East Malling, Larkfield North and Larkfield South wards;
- (c) Snodland East and Snodland West wards;

Malling Rural

- (d) Birling, Leybourne & Ryarsh and Oast wards;
- (e) Ightham and Wrotham wards;
- (f) West Malling, West Peckham & Mereworth and Wateringbury wards;
- (g) Borough Green and Long Mill wards;

Tonbridge Rural

- (h) East Peckham, Hadlow and Hildenborough wards

Tonbridge Urban

- (i) Cage Green, Higham and Trench wards;
- (j) Castle, Judd, Medway and Vauxhall wards.

53 Details of our draft recommendations are set out in Figures 1 and 2, and illustrated on Map 2, at Appendix A and on the large map inserted in the back cover of this report.

Medway Gap

Aylesford, Blue Bell Hill, Burham, Eccles & Wouldham and Ditton wards

54 The existing wards of Aylesford, Blue Bell Hill, Burham, Eccles & Wouldham and Ditton are situated in the north-eastern corner of the borough. Aylesford ward contains North and South wards of Aylesford parish and is currently represented by three councillors. Blue Bell Hill ward contains Blue Bell Hill and Walderslade wards of Aylesford parish and is currently represented by two councillors. Burham, Eccles & Wouldham ward contains Eccles ward of Aylesford parish together with the parishes of Burham and Wouldham and is currently represented by two councillors. Ditton ward is coterminous with Ditton parish and is currently represented by three councillors. Under existing arrangements, Aylesford, Burham, Eccles & Wouldham and Ditton wards would contain 21 per cent, 3 per cent and 18 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the borough average respectively (25 per cent fewer, 11 per cent more and 22 per cent fewer by 2005), while Blue Bell Hill ward contains 8 per cent more electors per councillor than the average (3 per cent more by 2005).

55 The Borough Council proposed no boundary changes in this area, but recommended a reduction in the number of councillors representing the two wards of Aylesford and Ditton from three each to two each. The Council consulted locally on a proposal which would combine the

Holtwood area with Ditton parish, and the northern part of Ditton parish with the remainder of Aylesford village. However, in the light of local consultation it reconsidered its proposals. The Council stated that it “does not believe a practical solution is achievable so as to obtain closer electoral equality in these wards”, arguing that it was difficult to obtain a clear and identifiable alternative boundary. It argued that to improve electoral equality would result in arbitrary district and parish warding and would lead to “disruption and confusion”. Under the Council’s proposed council size of 55, Aylesford, Blue Bell Hill and Ditton wards would have 19 per cent, 8 per cent and 24 per cent more electors respectively than the borough average at present, improving to 12 per cent, 3 per cent and 17 per cent more than the average by 2005, while Burham, Eccles & Wouldham would have 3 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the borough average, and 11 per cent more than the average by 2005.

56 Chatham & Aylesford Liberal Democrats supported the Borough Council’s proposals to retain the existing boundaries for the area, particularly in Aylesford and Ditton wards, arguing that “it has no knock on effect on any other wards and respects local opinion”. They accepted the reduction in councillors for Aylesford and Ditton wards due to changing population distribution in the borough. Kent County Council Liberal Democrat Group generally supported the Borough Council’s proposals. The Conservatives also supported the Borough Council’s proposals, arguing that in Aylesford and Ditton wards any change to the existing ward boundaries “would be met by public incredulity”. The Chatham & Aylesford Constituency Labour Party and the Snodland Branch Labour Party stated their opposition to any proposal which would divide Aylesford and Ditton wards, arguing that they are separate and distinct communities. Tonbridge North Branch Labour Party also supported the Borough Council’s proposed Aylesford and Ditton wards.

57 Aylesford Parish Council expressed support for the Borough Council’s proposals for this area, but proposed renaming Blue Bell Hill ward as Blue Bell Hill and Walderslade ward. It opposed the alternative proposal, which would divide the current Aylesford and Ditton wards, would not take into account the identities and interests of local communities and would lead to only a marginal improvement in electoral equality. Ditton Parish Council supported the proposals, while Burham Parish Council was concerned that representation was not increasing with the area’s population. Finally, we received a submission from a local resident strongly supporting the reduction of councillors in Aylesford and Ditton wards, as proposed by the Council.

58 We consider that under the Council’s proposed 55 member scheme the level of electoral inequality in this area would be unacceptably high. However, we recognise that the existing wards reflect community ties well and note that by reducing council size to 53, electoral equality would be significantly improved. In the light of the strong consensus and distinct community identities in the area, we are content to put forward the Borough Council’s proposals for Aylesford, Blue Bell Hill, Burham, Eccles & Wouldham and Ditton wards as part of our draft recommendations, subject to one minor name change as proposed by Aylesford Parish Council. We consider Walderslade to be a significant part of Blue Bell Hill ward and propose renaming Blue Bell Hill ward as Blue Bell Hill & Walderslade ward. Under our proposals, based on a council size of 53, Aylesford, Blue Bell Hill and Ditton wards would have 14 per cent, 4 per cent and 19 per cent more electors per councillor than the borough average respectively (8 per cent more, 1 per cent fewer and 13 per cent more than the average by 2005) whilst Burham, Eccles and Wouldham

would have 6 per cent fewer (7 per cent more than the average by 2005). Our proposals for this area are illustrated on Map 2.

East Malling, Larkfield North and Larkfield South wards

59 The existing wards of East Malling, Larkfield North and Larkfield South are situated in the north-east of the borough. All three wards are coterminous with the parish wards of East Malling & Larkfield parish of the same name, and are currently each represented by two councillors. Under existing arrangements, East Malling and Larkfield South wards contain 8 per cent and 7 per cent more electors per councillor than the borough average respectively, while Larkfield North ward contains 12 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the average. This level of electoral equality is projected to improve over the next five years in the two Larkfield wards so that Larkfield North and Larkfield South wards would each contain 2 per cent more electors per councillor than the borough average by 2005, while East Malling ward would contain 9 per cent more than average by 2005.

60 The Borough Council proposed no change to the existing East Malling, Larkfield North and Larkfield South wards, except to realign the boundary between Larkfield North and Ditton wards to reflect the minor parish boundary change which will come into effect in 2002. Under a council size of 55, East Malling, Larkfield North and Larkfield South wards would have 8 per cent more, 12 per cent fewer and 7 per cent more electors per councillor than the borough average respectively (9 per cent, 2 per cent and 2 per cent more than the average by 2005).

61 We received three further submissions for this area. Chatham & Aylesford Liberal Democrats, Kent County Council Liberal Democrat Group and the Conservatives all supported the Borough Council's proposals.

62 We consider that the existing arrangements reflect community ties well, and based on a council size of 53, would provide for reasonable electoral equality by 2005. We are therefore content to put forward the Council's proposals for East Malling, Larkfield North and Larkfield South wards as part of our draft recommendations. Under our proposals, East Malling and Larkfield South would have 5 per cent and 3 per cent more electors per councillor than the borough average respectively (5 per cent more and 2 per cent fewer than the average by 2005), while Larkfield North would have 15 per cent fewer (2 per cent fewer by 2005). These wards are illustrated on Map 2.

Snodland East and Snodland West wards

63 The existing wards of Snodland East and Snodland West are situated in the north-east of the borough, and together cover the Snodland Town Council area. Each ward is currently represented by two councillors. Snodland East and Snodland West wards have 2 per cent and 27 per cent more electors per councillor than the borough average respectively. Electoral equality is projected to remain relatively constant in Snodland East ward over the next five years, while in Snodland West ward it is projected to deteriorate to 38 per cent more electors per councillor than the borough average by 2005.

64 The Borough Council proposed minimal change in this area, amending the boundary between Snodland East and Snodland West wards to follow the centre of Malling Road rather than run to the rear of the properties, and increasing the number of councillors representing Snodland West ward from two to three. Based on a council size of 55, the Council's proposed Snodland East ward would have equal to the average number of electors per councillor (6 per cent fewer than average by 2005), while Snodland West would have 14 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the borough average (6 per cent fewer by 2005).

65 Chatham & Aylesford Constituency Labour Party and the Snodland Branch Labour Party strongly supported the Council's proposals for Snodland and welcomed the third councillor for Snodland West ward. The Conservatives, Chatham & Aylesford Liberal Democrats and Kent County Council Liberal Democrat Group also supported the Council's proposals for this area. We received one further submission from a local resident, who argued that the substantial population growth in Snodland justified an extra councillor.

66 We note that there is consensus regarding the proposal to increase the number of councillors for Snodland West ward, and also for the Council's proposed minor boundary amendment. We consider that the Council's proposals provide for reasonable electoral equality, whilst reflecting the identities and interests of local communities and are therefore content to put forward the Council's proposals for Snodland East and Snodland West wards as part of our draft recommendations. Under our proposed council size of 53, Snodland East and Snodland West wards would have 4 per cent and 17 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the borough average respectively, both improving to 9 per cent fewer than average by 2005. Our proposals for this area are illustrated in Map A4 at Appendix A.

Malling Rural

Birling, Leybourne & Ryarsh and Oast wards

67 The existing wards of Birling, Leybourne & Ryarsh and Oast are situated in the north of the borough. Birling, Leybourne & Ryarsh ward comprises the three parishes of Birling, Leybourne and Ryarsh and is currently represented by two councillors. Oast ward comprises the parishes of Addington, Stansted and Trottiscliffe and is currently represented by a single councillor. Under existing arrangements, Birling, Leybourne & Ryarsh ward contains 8 per cent more electors per councillor than the borough average, while Oast ward contains 5 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the average. This level of electoral equality is projected to deteriorate in both wards over the next five years, so that Birling, Leybourne & Ryarsh ward would contain 29 per cent more electors per councillor than the borough average and Oast ward would contain 10 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the average by 2005.

68 The Borough Council proposed significant change in this area, combining Birling and Ryarsh parishes with the existing Oast ward to form a new two-member Addington, Birling, Trottiscliffe, Ryarsh & Stansted ward. It also proposed a new two-member Leybourne ward comprising Leybourne parish. The Council argued that while the five rural settlements of Addington, Birling, Trottiscliffe, Ryarsh and Stansted are separately parished they have strong community and

historical links and share many common interests. The Council argued that Leybourne has changed significantly due to housing development since the last review, and justifies its own borough ward due to its distinctly more urban character. It also noted that its proposals for this area were “unanimously supported by all consultees in the area”. Under the Council’s proposed 55-member scheme the two-member Addington, Birling, Trottiscliffe, Ryarsh and Stansted ward would have 24 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the borough average (21 per cent fewer than the average by 2005), while Leybourne ward would have 20 per cent fewer than average (5 per cent fewer by 2005).

69 The Conservatives supported the Borough Council’s proposals for this area. They argued that Addington, Birling, Ryarsh, Stansted and Trottiscliffe are “small village communities with similar attitudes and interests”. They proposed an alternative option should the Commission find their preferred option unacceptable, which would retain the existing single-member Oast ward, whilst combining the parishes of Birling and Ryarsh with West Malling in a two-member ward. Under a council size of 55 the Conservatives’ alternative proposal single-member Addington, Stansted and Trottiscliffe ward and two-member Birling, Ryarsh and West Malling would have 5 per cent and 8 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the borough average respectively (10 per cent and 5 per cent fewer than the average by 2005).

70 Tonbridge & Malling Liberal Democrats supported the Borough Council’s proposals for this area and stated their opposition to proposals in the Borough Council’s draft scheme which would unite Addington parish with the parishes of West Malling and Offham in a two member ward. They argued that this would “cut across local ties”, and that the A20, which runs from West to East across the Malling area, acts as a barrier between Addington to the north of this road and Offham and West Malling to the south. Kent County Council Liberal Democrat Group also supported the Council’s proposals.

71 Birling Parish Council proposed that Birling parish should no longer be warded with Leybourne parish as they are divided by the M20 motorway and Leybourne has become increasingly urbanised. It argued that, considering the rural nature of Birling and the level of population growth in Leybourne, the people of Birling would not be effectively represented if they remained in a ward with Leybourne. Furthermore, it argued, Birling has strong “cultural and emotional” links with the adjoining rural parishes, in particular Ryarsh parish and, as such, should form part of a rural ward consisting of Addington, Birling, Ryarsh, Stansted and Trottiscliffe parishes, as proposed by the Borough Council. Addington Parish Council also proposed that it should be warded with similar rural parishes. In particular, it argued that it should retain shared representation with Trottiscliffe, with which it has strong historical links, and should not be combined with any urban area. Trottiscliffe and Ryarsh parish councils both also proposed a new two-member ward consisting of Addington, Birling, Ryarsh, Stansted and Trottiscliffe parishes, on the grounds that these parishes have strong community and historical links. Stansted Parish Council stated their preference for no change to the current warding arrangements.

72 Tonbridge North Branch Labour Party supported the Council’s Addington, Birling, Ryarsh, Stansted & Trottiscliffe ward. The Seekers Trust supported Addington Parish Council’s opposition to any proposal which would unite Addington with the urban area of West Malling

and emphasised Addington links with the rural parishes of Birling, Ryarsh & Trottiscliffe. Finally, one local resident expressed support for the Council's proposals for this area.

73 We recognise that there is significant local support for the Borough Council's proposed warding arrangements for this area. However, we consider the resulting level of electoral inequality in the proposed Addington, Birling, Stansted, Ryarsh and Trottiscliffe ward to be unacceptable, and we are therefore not prepared to put this option forward as part of our draft recommendations. We do consider, however, that there is merit in Birling and Ryarsh parishes forming part of a rural ward rather than being combined with Leybourne parish, or under the Conservatives' alternative proposal, West Malling parish. We therefore propose creating a single-member Birling, Ryarsh and Trottiscliffe ward, which would unite three rural parishes which share common interests, separate rural Birling from urban Leybourne, and provide for a reasonable level of electoral equality. We note that while such a ward would be over-represented currently, development in Ryarsh parish is projected to significantly improve electoral equality by 2005.

74 We also recognise the concerns of Addington Parish Council about being combined with the urban area of West Malling. While we recognise the Parish Council's preference for being combined with the rural area to its north, we have been unable to find a warding arrangement that could achieve this and also provide reasonable electoral equality. We therefore propose combining it with the rural parishes of Offham and Mereworth to its south. We are not convinced by the Tonbridge & Malling Liberal Democrats' argument that the A20 acts a barrier between Addington and Offham, and note that Church Road provides good access between the two villages; we consider the A20 to be no more of a barrier to the south of Addington than the M20 to the north. We also note that prior to the last electoral review, Offham and Addington parishes formed part of the same ward. Stansted Parish Council's proposals to retain the existing Oast ward would result in an unacceptable level of electoral inequality and would be incompatible with our proposed warding arrangements elsewhere in the area. Similarly, combining Stansted parish with Birling, Ryarsh and Trottiscliffe parishes would also result in an unacceptable level of electoral equality, particularly in the light of the projected growth in Ryarsh parish. In the light of these considerations we consider that combining Stansted parish with the neighbouring parish of Wrotham would provide for the most appropriate balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria.

75 As detailed above, we propose dividing Leybourne ward and creating a single member Birling, Ryarsh and Trottiscliffe ward. We propose combining Leybourne parish with West Malling parish to form a three-member ward, as we consider that the largely residential area of Leybourne looks more to the urban settlement of West Malling than the rural areas to the west, and we note that the two parishes have strong communication links. Under our proposals, Birling, Ryarsh & Trottiscliffe and West Malling & Leybourne wards would have 8 per cent and 17 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the borough average respectively, improving to 7 per cent fewer than and equal to the average by 2005. Wrotham & Stansted ward would have 16 per cent more electors per councillor than average initially, improving to 10 per cent more than the average by 2005. Our proposals for this area are illustrated on Map 2.

Ightham and Wrotham wards

76 The existing wards of Ightham and Wrotham are situated in the north-west of the borough. Ightham ward is coterminous with Ightham parish and Wrotham ward is coterminous with Wrotham parish, and both are currently represented by a single councillor. Under existing arrangements, Wrotham ward contains 1 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the borough average, while Ightham ward contains 1 per cent more electors per councillor than the borough average. This level of electoral equality is projected to deteriorate over the next five years to 6 per cent and 4 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the borough average respectively.

77 The Borough Council proposed no change to the existing electoral arrangements of Ightham and Wrotham other than to reflect the proposed boundary amendment between the parishes of Ightham, Platt and Wrotham which would come into effect in 2002. Under a council size of 55, these wards would have 5 per cent more and 5 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the borough average respectively (1 per cent and 10 per cent fewer than the average by 2005).

78 We received four other submissions in relation to this area. The Conservatives, Tonbridge & Malling Liberal Democrats, Kent County Council Liberal Democrat Group and Wrotham Parish Council all supported the Council's proposals.

79 We are content that the Borough Council's proposals for Ightham ward provide for a reasonable level of electoral equality, whilst reflecting the identities and interests of local communities. We are therefore content to put forward the Council's proposals for Ightham ward as part of our draft recommendations. However, under a Council size of 53, the Council's proposed Wrotham ward would have a high level of electoral inequality, which would deteriorate as further growth occurs throughout the borough. As discussed previously, we are therefore proposing to combine Wrotham parish with the neighbouring parish of Stansted, which would provide for improved electoral equality by 2005. Under a council size of 53, the single-member Ightham ward would have 1 per cent more electors per councillor than the borough average (4 per cent fewer by 2005), while Wrotham & Stansted ward would have 16 per cent more electors per councillor than the average improving to 10 per cent more than the borough average by 2005. Our proposals for this area are illustrated on Map 2.

West Malling, West Peckham & Mereworth and Wateringbury wards

80 The existing wards of West Malling, West Peckham & Mereworth and Wateringbury are situated in the east of the borough. Wateringbury ward is coterminous with Wateringbury parish and is currently represented by a single councillor. West Malling, West Peckham & Mereworth ward comprises the parishes of Mereworth, Kings Hill, West Malling and West Peckham and is currently represented by two councillors. Under existing arrangements Wateringbury and West Malling, West Peckham & Mereworth wards contain 4 per cent and 49 per cent more electors per councillor than the borough average respectively. While the level of electoral equality is projected to improve in Wateringbury ward (to 1 per cent fewer than the average), in West Malling, West Peckham & Mereworth ward it is projected to deteriorate to 78 per cent more electors per councillor than the borough average by 2005, due to extensive development in the Kings Hill area.

81 In order to improve electoral equality, the Borough Council proposed dividing the current West Malling, West Peckham & Mereworth ward by creating a new two-member Kings Hill ward, comprising Kings Hill parish. The remainder of the current ward, Mereworth, West Malling and West Peckham parishes, would form a revised two-member West Malling, West Peckham & Mereworth ward. It also proposed retaining the existing ward boundaries for Wateringbury ward. The Council considered the residential and business development in Kings Hill parish to be unique and relatively self-contained and to “have no common interests or historic links with its neighbouring areas”. It argued that it was important for the new settlement to have adequate representation on the Borough Council, and that if it was “combined with another village the interests of the new development would be likely to swamp any issues in the other smaller village”. Under the Council’s proposed council size of 55, West Malling, West Peckham & Mereworth and Wateringbury wards would have 2 per cent fewer and 4 per cent more electors per councillor than the borough average respectively (8 per cent and 1 per cent fewer than the average by 2005). Kings Hill ward would have 49 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the borough average, improving to 14 per cent fewer than the average by 2005.

82 The Conservatives supported the Borough Council’s proposals for Kings Hill, reiterating the Council’s argument that Kings Hill is a distinct new community with little or no links to neighbouring communities. The Conservatives also supported the Borough Council’s proposals for Wateringbury and West Malling, West Peckham & Mereworth wards, but, as detailed above, also proposed alternative warding arrangements for this area should the Commission find its preferred option unacceptable. They proposed combining West Malling parish with Birling and Ryarsh parishes in a two-member ward, and combining West Peckham, Mereworth and Wateringbury parishes in a two-member ward. Under the Conservatives’ alternative proposals, Birling Ryarsh & West Malling and Mereworth, Wateringbury & West Peckham wards would have 8 per cent more and 14 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the borough average respectively (5 per cent more and 19 per cent fewer by 2005).

83 Tonbridge & Malling Liberal Democrats supported the Borough Council’s proposals for this area, and argued that Kings Hill is a separate urban community which should not be combined with neighbouring parishes merely “to get the figures right”. They noted that in the Council’s draft scheme, it proposed that West Peckham parish be combined with East Peckham parish, and opposed this arrangement on the basis that these settlements have little in common apart from their name. As discussed previously, they also opposed the Council’s consultation proposal to combine Addington and West Malling parishes in a ward. Kent County Council Liberal Democrat Group supported the Council’s proposals, while Tonbridge North Branch Labour Party supported the Council’s proposed Kings Hill ward.

84 West Peckham Parish Council supported the Borough Council’s proposals and stated that, in particular, it is important to recognise the community links between West Peckham and Mereworth. West Malling Parish Council also supported the Borough Council’s proposals, commenting in particular that Kings Hill should be a separate ward due to “its unique character within the borough”. As outlined above, it also questioned the Council’s original electorate forecasts for Kings Hill. Kings Hill Parish Council also expressed support for the Borough Council’s proposals for this area. Finally, a local resident expressed support for the Borough

Council's proposals, arguing that Kings Hill merited extra councillors because of the high levels of population growth in this area.

85 We concur with the Borough Council that Kings Hill is a distinct and self-contained community that has little in common with neighbouring rural settlements, but consider that we should address the high level of electoral inequality under the existing arrangements and the Council's proposals. We therefore propose amending the Council's proposals to include the Airfield Estate in Kings Hill ward, which we consider shares relatively few links with the village of Mereworth itself and neighbours the Kings Hill development which is being constructed on the former West Malling Airfield. We consider that, by warding that part of Mereworth parish which contains the Airfield Estate, we would be able to establish separate representation for the Kings Hill area, would be reflecting local identities and interests, would divide no settlement and would provide for an improved level of electoral equality.

86 As discussed previously, we propose combining West Malling and Leybourne parishes in a three-member ward. We consider both of these areas to be urban in nature and to have strong communication links. We also consider that the option provides reasonable electoral equality, and enables the smaller rural areas currently combined with the two parishes to form part of wards with a rural perspective. Also, as outlined above, we have not been persuaded to combine Birling and Ryarsh parishes with West Malling parish, as proposed by the Conservatives in their alternative option as we consider that these areas share limited links.

87 As a consequence of our proposed West Malling & Leybourne and Kings Hill wards it is therefore necessary to consider alternative warding arrangements for Mereworth and West Peckham. While we recognise that there was some local support for maintaining links between West Peckham and Mereworth parishes, we note that this would result in unacceptably high levels of electoral inequality. In the light of the resulting high levels of electoral inequality, we are also not convinced that the Conservatives' alternative proposals for a Mereworth, Wateringbury and West Peckham ward would provide for the best balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria. As detailed above, we propose, therefore, to combine Mereworth parish, less that part which would form Airfield parish ward and would be combined with Kings Hill, with the similarly rural parishes of Offham and Addington to its north in a single-member ward. While we recognise that Mereworth shares stronger links with areas to its east and west, we note that it is linked to areas to its north by the B2016 and we consider that Addington and Offham are communities of a comparable size and nature. Furthermore, as outlined in more detail below, we propose combining West Peckham parish with Hadlow parish, less Golden Green, and Shipbourne parish in a two-member ward.

88 We are content that the Borough Council's proposals for Wateringbury ward provide for the best balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria and are therefore content to put this proposal forward as part of our draft recommendations. Under our proposed council size of 53, Hadlow, Shipbourne & West Peckham ward would have equal to the average number of electors per councillor than the borough average (6 per cent fewer than the average by 2005), while Addington, Mereworth and Offham would have 12 per cent more than the average (6 per cent more by 2005). Kings Hill ward would have 43 per cent fewer electors per councillor

currently, improving to 10 per cent more than the average by 2005. Our proposals for this area are illustrated in Map 2 and Map A3 at Appendix A.

Borough Green and Long Mill wards

89 The existing wards of Borough Green and Long Mill are situated in the west of the borough. Borough Green ward is coterminous with Borough Green parish, and Long Mill ward comprises the parishes of Offham, Platt, Plaxtol and Shipbourne. Each ward is currently represented by two councillors. Under existing arrangements, Borough Green and Long Mill wards contain 6 per cent and 1 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the borough average respectively. This level of electoral equality is projected to deteriorate to 10 per cent and 6 per cent fewer than the average respectively by 2005.

90 The Borough Council proposed no change to Borough Green and Long Mill wards, other than to reflect the revised parish boundaries between Borough Green and Platt, Platt and Wrotham and Shipbourne and Hildenborough parishes, which come into effect in 2002. The Council argued that Borough Green “is unique in the west of the borough with its predominantly urban character”, and as such should not be combined in a ward with any of its neighbouring rural parishes. It argued that Long Mill ward contains numerous small settlements abutting the A25 and A227 trunk roads. Under the Council’s proposals, Borough Green and Long Mill wards would have 6 per cent and 1 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the borough average respectively (11 per cent and 5 per cent fewer than the average by 2005).

91 The Conservatives, Tonbridge & Malling Liberal Democrats and Kent County Council Liberal Democrat Group all expressed support for the Council’s proposals. Tonbridge North Branch Labour Party supported the retention of a separate Borough Green ward.

92 Plaxtol Parish Council supported the Borough Council’s proposals and expressed strong support for maintaining the existing Long Mill ward. It considered that the rural needs of Plaxtol to be quite distinct from those of Borough Green and it opposed, therefore, the Borough Council’s draft consultation proposal to combine Borough Green with Platt and Plaxtol parishes. Similarly, Borough Green Parish Council, cited “a very different ambience to that of our very rural neighbours” in its case for maintaining a separate ward for Borough Green. Offham and Platt parish councils also supported the Borough Council’s proposal to retain the existing Long Mill ward.

93 We recognise that there is a degree of local support for retaining the existing warding arrangements in this area. However, on the basis of our proposed council size of 53, both wards would have electoral variances of 10 per cent or more from the average. In addition, in order to provide reasonable electoral equality in neighbouring areas we have found the retention of the existing Long Mill ward not to be viable. As discussed previously, we propose combining Offham parish with Addington parish and the majority of Mereworth parish in a single-member ward. In addition, as discussed further below, we propose combining Shipbourne parish with West Peckham parish and part of Hadlow parish in a two-member ward. We are therefore proposing to combine Borough Green, Platt and Plaxtol parishes in a three-member ward. We recognise that

such an arrangement was opposed locally during the Council's consultation period. However, we consider that the levels of electoral inequality should be addressed and that, in order to provide the best scheme for the borough as a whole, these areas should form a ward. We note that the three areas have good communication links and consider that the differences between Borough Green and Platt parishes in particular have been over-stated. We consider these proposals to reflect the most appropriate balance currently available between electoral equality and the statutory criteria.

94 Under our proposals, Borough Green, Platt & Plaxtol and Addington, Mereworth & Offham wards would have 2 per cent and 12 per cent more electors per councillor than the borough average respectively (2 per cent fewer and 6 per cent more than average by 2005), while Hadlow, Shipbourne and West Peckham ward would have equal to the average (6 per cent fewer by 2005). Our proposals for this area are illustrated on Map 2.

Tonbridge Rural

East Peckham, Hadlow and Hildenborough wards

95 The existing wards of East Peckham, Hadlow and Hildenborough are situated in the south of the borough. The three wards are each coterminous with the parishes of the same name. East Peckham and Hadlow wards are each represented by two councillors, while Hildenborough ward is represented by three councillors. All three wards are currently over-represented, and the level of electoral equality in each is projected to deteriorate over the next five years. Under existing arrangements, East Peckham, Hadlow and Hildenborough wards contain 12 per cent, 6 per cent and 18 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the borough average respectively (deteriorating to 15 per cent, 11 per cent and 23 per cent fewer than average by 2005).

96 The Borough Council proposed no change to boundaries in this area, other than to reflect the revised parish boundaries between East Peckham and Hadlow parishes and Hildenborough and Shipbourne parishes which come into effect in 2002. However, it did propose a reduction in the number of councillors representing Hildenborough ward from three to two. The Council noted that the majority of the population in Hildenborough ward is situated in the south of the ward and argued that, because of the distance between the village centres of Hildenborough and Shipbourne to the north, the two parishes have very little in common. Furthermore the Council argued that although Hildenborough is within easy reach of Tonbridge, it retains a strong sense of community identity and therefore should not be combined with part of the urban area of Tonbridge. The Council also argued that East Peckham is isolated, both geographically and in terms of community links, from its neighbouring parishes. It argued that its interest in the hop industry are shared only by areas across the borough boundary such as Paddock Wood and Yalding. It concluded therefore that East Peckham, Hadlow and Hildenborough should remain as separate wards. Under the Council's proposed council size of 55, East Peckham, Hadlow and Hildenborough wards would have 14 per cent fewer, 4 per cent fewer and 22 per cent more than the average number of electors per councillor respectively (17 per cent fewer, 9 per cent fewer and 16 per cent more than average by 2005).

97 The Conservatives supported the Borough Council’s proposals. They stated that, in relation to East Peckham, “any change of the boundaries would be resented by the parish and in any area suggested for annexation”. They did, however, state that, as recognised by the Borough Council in its submission, the Tonbridge area would be under-represented under its proposals. They argued that, “if the Commission wishes to have regard for its own elector:councillor ratio”, it could combine part of Hildenborough with the existing Castle ward in Tonbridge and increase its representation to three councillors. Tonbridge North Branch Labour Party, on the other hand, proposed the retention of three councillors for Hildenborough and the retention of the existing East Peckham ward.

98 East Peckham Parish Council, Tonbridge & Malling Liberal Democrats and Kent County Liberal Democrats Group supported the Council’s proposals, while a resident stated she considered that Hildenborough would “be adequately served” by two councillors. Tonbridge & Malling Liberal Democrats also opposed any link between East Peckham and West Peckham parishes as they share little in common. The Hadlow Society proposed that the existing Hadlow ward should be retained, arguing that Hadlow is a distinct community.

99 We have carefully considered the representations received at Stage One in relation to this area. We have considered the Conservatives’ alternative proposals to divide Hildenborough parish and combine part of it with the town of Tonbridge. Upon examination we were unable to find a suitable boundary between the two wards which would not cause significant disruption to the wards throughout the town of Tonbridge. We therefore concluded that this option would not best reflect community ties in the area. Equally, we did not consider that there should be a continuation in the high level of over-representation proposed by Tonbridge North Branch Labour Party or that Hildenborough should be combined with Shipbourne to its east. Furthermore, we note that, by reducing council size to 53, the level of electoral equality for the proposed two-member Hildenborough ward would improve significantly both now and in 2005.

100 While we recognise that there was some local support for retaining the existing East Peckham ward we consider the resulting high level of electoral inequality is unacceptable. We therefore considered alternative options for this area. We noted that this part of the borough is relatively isolated and appears to have few links with areas to its north. We therefore propose transferring Golden Green parish ward from Hadlow district ward and combining it with East Peckham parish to form a new East Peckham and Golden Green ward. We consider that this proposal would unite two neighbouring areas with common interests whilst providing for significantly improved levels of electoral equality. We also propose a minor modification of the boundary of Golden Green parish ward so that the boundary follows geographical features. This amendment would result in a transfer of the two electors on Victoria Road into a revised Hadlow parish ward. As a result of our proposal to combine East Peckham parish with Golden Green parish ward, the remainder of Hadlow parish has too few electors to remain a separate ward. In order to improve electoral equality in this area, we propose combining the remainder of Hadlow parish, the revised Hadlow parish ward, with the neighbouring parishes of West Peckham and Shipbourne.

101 We recognise that our proposals in this area depart from local preferences, but consider that the significant levels of electoral inequality in this area should be addressed as part of this review.

Under our proposals, East Peckham & Golden Green and Hadlow, Shipbourne & West Peckham wards would have 3 per cent fewer and equal to the average number of electors per councillor than the borough average respectively (7 per cent and 6 per cent fewer than the average by 2005). Hildenborough ward would have 18 per cent more electors per councillor currently but would improve to 12 per cent more than average by 2005. Our proposals are outlined in Map 2 and Map A2 at Appendix A.

Tonbridge Urban

Cage Green, Higham and Trench wards

102 The existing wards of Cage Green, Higham and Trench are situated in the south of the borough and together cover part of the unparished, urban area of Tonbridge. Cage Green ward is currently represented by two councillors, while Higham and Trench wards are each represented by three councillors. Under existing arrangements, Cage Green ward contains 5 per cent more electors per councillor than the borough average (1 per cent fewer by 2005) while Higham and Trench wards contain 7 per cent and 14 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the borough average respectively (12 per cent and 19 per cent fewer by 2005).

103 The Borough Council proposed a number of changes to warding arrangements in Cage Green, Higham and Trench wards. In order to improve electoral equality, the Council proposed reducing the number of councillors for Trench ward from three to two. It also proposed transferring properties currently in Trench ward to the north of Hawthorn Close (including properties on Willow Lea, Elmhurst Gardens, Ashden Walk, Fernholt, Springwood Park, Delarue Close and isolated properties to the west of Shipbourne Road), to a revised Cage Green ward. The Council also proposed amending the eastern boundary of Cage Green ward, transferring the properties on Hoptarden Road, Parkway and Nursery Close to a revised Higham ward. Under the Borough Council's proposed council size of 55, Cage Green, Higham and Trench wards would have 14 per cent, 3 per cent and 5 per cent more electors per councillor than the borough average respectively (improving to 8 per cent more, 3 per cent more and 1 per cent fewer by 2005).

104 The Conservatives supported the Borough Council's proposals for this part of Tonbridge. They did however, consider that, if the Commission wanted to improve electoral equality, it could provide an additional councillor for south Tonbridge as discussed below. Tonbridge North Branch Labour Party opposed the Council's proposals to divide the existing Trench ward, arguing that this would have a negative effect on participation in the electoral system and remove natural boundaries. Tonbridge & Malling Liberal Democrats and Kent County Council Liberal Democrat Group supported the Borough Council's proposals. A local resident supported the Council's proposals, arguing that Trench ward would be adequately represented by two councillors.

105 We are content that the Council's proposals provide for a reasonable level of electoral equality whilst having regard to community identities and interests and therefore propose basing our draft recommendations on the Council's proposals, subject to some minor amendments in order to further improve boundaries and electoral equality. Firstly, we propose amending the western boundary of the Council's proposed Higham ward so as to include properties on either

side of Salisbury Road (up to, but not including, Winchester Road) and Salisbury Close from Cage Green ward. Secondly, we propose amending the southern boundary of the Council's proposed Higham ward, transferring all the properties on Hadlow Road to the north of Yardley Park Road and all the properties on Loampits Close and Yardley Close from Medway ward to a revised Higham ward. Thirdly, we propose amending the southern boundary of Trench ward so as to follow Hilden Brook in order to create a more clearly identifiable boundary. Lastly, we propose an amendment to the boundary between Cage Green and Medway wards to unite Cheviot Close in Medway ward. Under our proposed council size of 53, our proposed Cage Green, Higham and Trench wards would have 7 per cent, 2 per cent and 1 per cent more electors per councillor than the borough average respectively (1 per cent more, 4 per cent fewer and 4 per cent fewer by 2005). Our proposals are outlined in the large map at the back of this report.

Castle, Judd, Medway and Vauxhall wards

106 The existing wards of Castle, Judd, Medway and Vauxhall are situated in the south of the borough and together cover the southern part of the unparished, urban area of Tonbridge. All four wards are each currently represented by two councillors. Under existing arrangements, Castle, Judd and Vauxhall wards contain 9 per cent, 24 per cent and 19 per cent more electors per councillor than the borough average respectively (3 per cent, 19 per cent and 12 per cent more by 2005), while Medway ward contains 9 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the average (2 per cent more by 2005).

107 The Borough Council proposed a number of changes to Castle, Judd, Medway and Vauxhall wards. It proposed amending the south-eastern boundary of Castle ward so that the properties to the south of the Big Bridge bounded by the River Medway, High Street and Barden Road, would be transferred from Judd ward to a revised Castle ward. It proposed amending the eastern boundary of Judd ward to run to the rear of properties on Quarry Hill Road and Fosse Bank and transferring them to Vauxhall ward. It also proposed amending the western boundary of Medway ward, to incorporate properties to the east of the railway line from Vauxhall ward. Under a council size of 55, the Borough Council's proposed Castle, Judd and Vauxhall wards would have 15 per cent, 13 per cent and 17 per cent more electors per councillor than the borough average respectively (9 per cent, 8 per cent and 11 per cent more than average by 2005), while Medway ward would have 2 per cent fewer than average (9 per cent more by 2005).

108 The Conservatives supported the Borough Council's proposals. However they considered that, if the Commission wanted to improve electoral equality, it could combine part of Hildenborough ward with the existing Castle ward and increase its representation from two to three councillors. They argued that under the Council's proposals Tonbridge would be under-represented with 15 councillors instead of 16. Tonbridge North Branch Labour Party opposed the Council's proposals to divide the existing Castle and Judd wards, arguing that this would have a negative effect on participation in the electoral system and remove natural boundaries. Finally, a local resident argued that Tonbridge should be warded so that boundaries of wards follow the River Medway rather than straddling it.

109 We are content that the Council's proposals reflect community identities and interests well in this area. Under our proposed council size of 53, we note that its proposals would also achieve

a reasonable level of electoral equality and therefore propose basing our draft recommendations on the Council's proposals, subject to some minor amendments in order to improve electoral equality. As outlined above, we have considered the Conservatives' proposals to create a three-member Castle ward incorporating part of Hildenborough. We have not, however, been persuaded that such an option would provide the best balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria. With regards to the residents' views, we recognise that the River Medway is a significant boundary in the town of Tonbridge but are persuaded that realigning ward boundaries to follow the river would fail to achieve reasonable electoral equality and would cause significant disruption to existing ward boundaries.

110 We do, however, propose some minor boundary amendments in order to improve electoral equality and provide stronger ward boundaries. Firstly, we propose amending the southern boundary of the Council's proposed Medway ward, transferring all the properties to the east of the railway line currently in Vauxhall ward, including all properties on Vauxhall Gardens, to a revised Medway ward. Secondly, as detailed above, we propose transferring a number of properties on Hadlow Road, Loampits Close and Yardley Close from Medway ward to a revised Higham ward. In addition, we propose incorporating all properties on Cheviot Close and the area to the south of Hilden Brook in Castle ward, and transferring properties on Town Acres to Cage Green ward.

111 Under our proposals, Castle, Judd and Vauxhall wards would have 11 per cent, 9 per cent and 11 per cent more electors per councillors than the borough average respectively, improving to 5 per cent, 4 per cent and 5 per cent more than average by 2005. Medway ward would have 6 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the borough average, and 5 per cent more than average by 2005. Our proposals for this area are outlined in the large map at the back of this report.

Electoral Cycle

112 We received only one representation regarding the Borough Council's electoral cycle. Offham Parish Council stated that it supported retaining elections of the whole council every four years. In the absence of any other representations, we therefore propose no change to the current electoral cycle of whole-council elections for the Borough Council.

Conclusions

113 Having considered all the evidence and representations received during the initial stage of the review, we propose that:

- there should be a reduction in council size from 55 to 53;
- there should be 27 wards;
- the boundaries of 17 of the existing wards should be modified;
- elections should continue to be held for the whole council every four years.

114 Our draft recommendations would involve modifications to all but 10 of the existing wards in Tonbridge & Malling Borough, as summarised below:

- in Tonbridge we propose adopting the Borough Council’s proposals subject to some minor boundary amendments;
- in the Malling rural area, we propose new Addington, Mereworth & Offham, Birling, Ryarsh & Trottiscliffe, Borough Green, Platt & Plaxtol and Wrotham & Stansted wards;
- we propose a new Kings Hill ward based on the parish area together with an adjoining part of Mereworth parish;
- in the Tonbridge rural area of the borough we propose new East Peckham & Golden Green and Hadlow, Shipbourne & West Peckham wards;
- we propose adopting the Borough Council’s proposals for Aylesford, Blue Bell Hill, Burham, Eccles & Wouldham, Ditton, East Malling, Hildenborough, Ightham, Larkfield North, Larkfield South and Wateringbury wards;
- we propose renaming Blue Bell Hill ward as Blue Bell Hill & Walderslade ward.

115 Figure 5 shows the impact of our draft recommendations on electoral equality, comparing them with the current arrangements, based on 2000 electorate figures and with forecast electorates for the year 2005.

Figure 5: Comparison of Current and Recommended Electoral Arrangements

	2000 electorate		2005 forecast electorate	
	Current arrangements	Draft recommendations	Current arrangements	Draft recommendations
Number of councillors	55	53	55	53
Number of wards	27	27	27	27
Average number of electors per councillor	1,473	1,529	1,557	1,616
Number of wards with a variance more than 10 per cent from the average	10	11	13	2
Number of wards with a variance more than 20 per cent from the average	4	1	6	0

116 As shown in Figure 5, our draft recommendations for Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council would initially result in an increase in the number of wards varying by more than 10 per cent from the borough average from 10 to 11. However, by 2005, only two wards are forecast to vary by more than 10 per cent from the average for the borough, compared with 13 wards under the existing arrangements.

Draft Recommendation
Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council should comprise 53 councillors serving 27 wards, as detailed and named in Figures 1 and 2, and illustrated on Map 2 and in Appendix A, including the large map inside the back cover. Elections should continue to be held for the whole council every four years.

Parish and Town Council Electoral Arrangements

117 In undertaking reviews of electoral arrangements, we are required to comply as far as possible with the provisions set out in Schedule 11 to the 1972 Act. The Schedule provides that if a parish is to be divided between different borough wards it must also be divided into parish wards, so that each parish ward lies wholly within a single ward of the borough. Accordingly, we propose consequential warding arrangements for the parishes of Mereworth and Snodland to reflect the proposed borough wards. At the request of Aylesford Parish Council and a local resident, we also propose changes to Aylesford Parish Council’s electoral arrangements.

118 The parish of Mereworth is currently served by seven councillors and is not warded. In our draft recommendations we proposed that the parish should be divided between the two borough wards of Addington, Mereworth & Offham and Kings Hill. As a consequence of our draft recommendations we propose that Mereworth parish should also be divided into two parish wards, Mereworth Village parish ward and Airfield parish ward, reflecting the proposed borough ward boundary. As a result, we also propose that each ward should have separate representation on the parish council.

Draft Recommendation
Mereworth Parish Council should comprise seven councillors, as at present, representing two wards: Mereworth Village parish ward (returning five councillors) and Airfield parish ward (returning two councillors). The parish ward boundaries should reflect the proposed borough ward boundaries in the area, as illustrated and named on Map A3 in Appendix A.

119 The town of Snodland is currently served by 15 councillors and is not warded despite being divided between two borough wards. As outlined above, if a parish is divided between separate borough wards, it should also be divided between parish wards. In our draft recommendations we proposed that the town should continue to be divided between the two borough wards of

Snodland East and Snodland West, albeit on slightly modified boundaries, as proposed by the Borough Council. At Stage One, the Borough Council and Chatham & Aylesford Liberal Democrats also proposed that Snodland parish be divided between two wards in order to reflect the proposed borough wards. As a consequence of our draft recommendations we propose that Snodland Town should be divided into two town wards, Snodland East ward and Snodland West, reflecting the proposed borough wards. As a result, we also propose that each ward should have separate representation on the town council.

Draft Recommendation
Snodland Town Council should comprise 15 councillors, as at present, representing two wards: Snodland East town ward (returning seven parish councillors) and Snodland West town ward (returning eight parish councillors). The boundary between the two town wards should reflect the proposed borough ward boundary, as illustrated and named on Map A4 in Appendix A.

120 The parish of Hadlow is currently served by 13 councillors representing two wards: In order to provide clear, identifiable boundaries for our proposed borough wards, we propose amending the boundary between Golden Green parish ward and Hadlow parish ward so that the boundary between the two wards follows field boundaries. As a result of this change, one property, Victoria House, Victoria Road would be transferred from Golden Green parish ward to Hadlow parish ward. We do not propose to make changes to the number of councillors representing each parish ward.

Draft Recommendation
Hadlow Parish Council should comprise 13 councillors, as at present representing two wards: Hadlow parish ward (returning 11 councillors) and Golden Green parish ward (returning two councillors). The boundary between the two parish wards should reflect the proposed borough ward boundary, as illustrated on Map A2 in Appendix A.

121 At Stage One, we received submissions from Aylesford Parish Council and a local resident requesting modifications to the electoral arrangements of Aylesford parish. Aylesford Parish Council requested an additional councillor for Walderslade parish ward. A local resident argued that, in order to provide equality of representation between the different parts of the parish, Eccles parish ward should have one fewer parish councillor and Walderslade parish ward should have one more parish councillor. He noted that Eccles and Blue Bell Hill parish wards are of a similar size yet currently have differing levels of representation on the parish council.

122 We concur with the assessment of Aylesford Parish Council and a local resident that Walderslade parish ward should have an increase in its representation. We also concur with the view of the local resident that Eccles parish ward should have one fewer parish councillor in order to provide fair representation for each of the areas on the parish council.

Draft Recommendation

Aylesford Parish Council should comprise 20 councillors, as at present, representing five wards: Aylesford North parish ward (returning two councillors), Aylesford South parish ward (returning seven councillors), Blue Bell Hill parish ward (returning three councillors), Eccles parish ward (returning three councillors) and Walderslade parish ward (returning five councillors). The boundaries between these parish wards would remain unchanged.

123 We are not proposing any change to the electoral cycle of parish and town councils in the borough.

Draft Recommendation

For parish and town councils, whole-council elections should continue to take place every four years, on the same cycle as that of the Borough Council.

124 We have not finalised our conclusions on the electoral arrangements for Tonbridge & Malling and welcome comments from the Borough Council and others relating to the proposed ward boundaries, number of councillors, electoral cycle, ward names and parish and town council electoral arrangements. We will consider all the evidence submitted to us during the consultation period before preparing our final recommendations.

Map 2: The Commission’s Draft Recommendations for Tonbridge & Malling

5 NEXT STEPS

125 We are putting forward draft recommendations on future electoral arrangements for consultation. We will take fully into account all representations received by 11 December 2000. Representations received after this date may not be taken into account. All representations will be available for public inspection by appointment at the offices of the Commission and the Borough Council, and a list of respondents will be available on request from the Commission after the end of the consultation period.

126 Views may be expressed by writing directly to us:

Review Manager
Tonbridge & Malling Review
Local Government Commission for England
Dolphyn Court
10/11 Great Turnstile
London WC1V 7JU

Fax: 020 7404 6142
E-mail: reviews@lgce.gov.uk
www.lgce.gov.uk

127 In the light of representations received, we will review our draft recommendations to consider whether they should be altered. As indicated earlier, it is therefore important that all interested parties let us have their views and evidence, whether or not they agree with our draft recommendations. We will then submit our final recommendations to the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions. After the publication of our final recommendations, all further correspondence should be sent to the Secretary of State, who cannot make an order giving effect to our recommendations until six weeks after he receives them.

APPENDIX A

Draft Recommendations for Tonbridge & Malling: Detailed Mapping

The following maps illustrate the Commission's proposed ward boundaries for the Tonbridge & Malling area.

Map A1 illustrates, in outline form, the proposed ward boundaries within the borough and indicates the areas which are shown in more detail in Maps A2, A3, A4 and the large map at the back of the report.

Map A2 illustrates the proposed amended Golden Green ward of Hadlow parish (and the proposed ward boundaries of East Peckham & Golden Green ward).

Map A3 illustrates the proposed warding of Mereworth parish (and the proposed ward boundaries of Kings Hill ward).

Map A4 illustrates the proposed Snodland East and Snodland West borough and town wards.

The **large map** inserted in the back of the report illustrates the existing and proposed warding arrangements for the Tonbridge area.

Map A1: Draft Recommendations for Tonbridge & Malling: Key Map

Map A2: Proposed Boundary between Golden Green and Hadlow Wards of Hadlow Parish

Map A3: Proposed Warding of Mereworth Parish

Map A4: Proposed Warding of Snodland Town

APPENDIX B

Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council's Proposed Electoral Arrangements

Our draft recommendations detailed in Figures 1 and 2 differ from those put forward by the Borough Council. The following tables outline the Council's proposals:

Figure B1: Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council's Proposal: Constituent Areas

Ward name	Constituent areas
Addington, Birling, Trottiscliffe, Ryarsh and Stansted	Birling, Leybourne and Ryarsh ward (part - Birling and Ryarsh parishes); Oast ward (Addington, Stansted and Trottiscliffe parishes)
Aylesford	<i>Unchanged</i> (North and South wards of Aylesford parish)
Blue Bell Hill	<i>Unchanged</i> (Blue Bell Hill and Walderslade wards of Aylesford parish)
Borough Green	<i>Unchanged</i> (Borough Green parish as amended)
Burham, Eccles & Wouldham	<i>Unchanged</i> (Burham and Wouldham parishes and Eccles ward of Aylesford parish)
Cage Green (in Tonbridge)	Cage Green ward (part); Castle ward (part); Trench ward (part)
Castle (in Tonbridge)	Castle ward (part); Judd ward (part)
Ditton	<i>Unchanged</i> (Ditton parish as amended)
East Malling	<i>Unchanged</i> (East Malling ward of East Malling & Larkfield parish)
East Peckham	<i>Unchanged</i> (East Peckham parish as amended)
Hadlow	<i>Unchanged</i> (Hadlow parish as amended)
Higham (in Tonbridge)	Higham ward; Cage Green ward (part)
Hildenborough	<i>Unchanged</i> (Hildenborough parish as amended)
Ightham	<i>Unchanged</i> (Ightham parish as amended)
Judd (in Tonbridge)	Judd ward (part)
Kings Hill	West Malling, West Peckham & Mereworth ward (part – Kings Hill parish)
Larkfield North	<i>Unchanged</i> (Larkfield North ward of East Malling & Larkfield parish as amended)
Larkfield South	<i>Unchanged</i> (Larkfield South ward of East Malling & Larkfield parish)
Leybourne	Birling, Leybourne and Ryarsh ward (part - Leybourne parish)

Ward name	Constituent areas
Medway (in Tonbridge)	Medway ward; Vauxhall ward (part)
Snodland East	Snodland East ward (part – Snodland parish (part))
Snodland West	Snodland East ward (part – Snodland parish (part)); Snodland West ward (part – Snodland parish (part))
Trench (in Tonbridge)	Trench ward (part)
Vauxhall (in Tonbridge)	Vauxhall ward (part); Judd ward (part)
Wateringbury	<i>Unchanged</i> (Wateringbury parish)
West Malling, West Peckham & Mereworth	West Malling, West Peckham & Mereworth ward (part – Mereworth, West Malling and West Peckham parishes)
Wrotham	<i>Unchanged</i> (Wrotham parish as amended)

Notes: 1 Tonbridge is the only unparished part of the borough and comprises the seven wards indicated above.

2 All proposed ward boundaries are based upon the revised parish boundaries which come into effect in April 2002.

Figure B2: Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council's Proposals: Number of Councillors and Electors by Ward

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2000)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average (%)	Electorate (2005)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average (%)
1	Addington, Birling, Trottscliffe, Ryarsh & Stansted	2	2,235	1,118	-24	2,475	1,238	-21
2	Aylesford	2	3,496	1,748	19	3,496	1,748	12
3	Blue Bell Hill	2	3,189	1,595	8	3,199	1,600	3
4	Borough Green	2	2,760	1,380	-6	2,782	1,391	-11
5	Burham, Wouldham & Eccles	2	2,861	1,431	-3	3,455	1,728	11
6	Cage Green (in Tonbridge)	2	3,349	1,675	14	3,349	1,675	8
7	Castle (in Tonbridge)	2	3,396	1,698	15	3,396	1,698	9
8	Ditton	2	3,640	1,820	24	3,640	1,820	17
9	East Malling	2	3,195	1,598	8	3,383	1,692	9
10	East Peckham	2	2,546	1,273	-14	2,594	1,297	-17
11	Hadlow	2	2,829	1,415	-4	2,829	1,415	-9
12	Higham (in Tonbridge)	3	4,537	1,512	3	4,537	1,512	-3
13	Hildenborough	2	3,597	1,799	22	3,605	1,803	16
14	Ightham	1	1,549	1,549	5	1,549	1,549	-1
15	Judd (in Tonbridge)	2	3,318	1,659	13	3,363	1,682	8
16	Kings Hill	2	1,510	755	-49	2,677	1,339	-14
17	Larkfield North	2	2,591	1,296	-12	3,171	1,586	2
18	Larkfield South	2	3,163	1,582	7	3,163	1,582	2
19	Leybourne	2	2,344	1,172	-20	2,953	1,477	-5
20	Long Mill	2	2,929	1,465	-1	2,948	1,474	-5

	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 (%)
21	Medway (in Tonbridge)	2	2,877	1,439	-2	3,387	1,694	9
22	Snodland East	2	2,932	1,466	0	2,932	1,466	-6
23	Snodland West	3	3,810	1,270	-14	4,409	1,470	-6
24	Trench (in Tonbridge)	2	3,092	1,546	5	3,092	1,546	-1
25	Vauxhall (in Tonbridge)	2	3,456	1,728	17	3,456	1,728	11
26	Wateringbury	1	1,535	1,535	4	1,535	1,535	-1
27	West Malling, West Peckham & Mereworth	2	2,876	1,438	-2	2,876	1,438	-8
28	Wrotham	1	1,399	1,399	-5	1,399	1,399	-10
	Totals	55	81,011	-	-	85,650	-	-
	Averages	-	-	1,473	-	-	1,557	-

Source: Electorate figures are based on Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council's submission.

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

APPENDIX C

The Statutory Provisions

Local Government Act 1992: the Commission's Role

1 Section 13(2) of the Local Government Act 1992 places a duty on the Commission to undertake periodic electoral reviews of each principal local authority area in England, and to make recommendations to the Secretary of State. Section 13(3) provides that, so far as reasonably practicable, the first such review of any area should be undertaken not less than 10 years, and not more than 15 years, after this Commission's predecessor, the Local Government Boundary Commission (LGBC), submitted an initial electoral review report on the county within which that area, or the larger part of the area, was located. This timetable applies to boroughs within shire and metropolitan counties, although not to South Yorkshire and Tyne and Wear¹. Nor does the timetable apply to London boroughs; the 1992 Act is silent on the timing of periodic electoral reviews in Greater London. Nevertheless, these areas will be included in the Commission's review programme. The Commission has no power to review the electoral arrangements of the City of London.

2 Under section 13(5) of the 1992 Act, the Commission is required to make recommendations to the Secretary of State for any changes to the electoral arrangements within the areas of English principal authorities as appear desirable to it, having regard to the need to:

- (a) reflect the identities and interests of local communities; and
- (b) secure effective and convenient local government.

3 In reporting to the Secretary of State, the Commission may make recommendations for such changes to electoral arrangements as are specified in section 14(4) of the 1992 Act. In relation to principal authorities, these are:

- the total number of councillors to be elected to the council;
- the number and boundaries of electoral areas (wards or divisions);
- the number of councillors to be elected for each electoral area, and the years in which they are to be elected; and
- the name of any electoral area.

4 Unlike the LGBC, the Commission may also make recommendations for changes in respect of electoral arrangements within parish and town council areas. Accordingly, in relation to parish

¹ The Local Government Boundary Commission did not submit reports on the counties of South Yorkshire and Tyne and Wear.

or town councils within a principal authority's area, the Commission may make recommendations relating to:

- the number of councillors;
- the need for parish wards;
- the number and boundaries of any such wards;
- the number of councillors to be elected for any such ward or, in the case of a common parish, for each parish; and
- the name of any such ward.

5 In conducting the review, section 27 of the 1992 Act requires the Commission to comply, so far as is practicable, with the rules given in Schedule 11 to the Local Government Act 1972 for the conduct of electoral reviews.

Local Government Act 1972: Rules to be Observed in Considering Electoral Arrangements

6 By virtue of section 27 of the Local Government Act 1992, in undertaking a review of electoral arrangements the Commission is required to comply so far as is reasonably practicable with the rules set out in Schedule 11 to the 1972 Act. For ease of reference, those provisions of Schedule 11 which are relevant to this review are set out below.

7 In relation to shire boroughs:

Having regard to any changes in the number or distribution of the local government electors of the borough likely to take place within the period of five years immediately following the consideration (by the Secretary of State or the Commission):

- (a) the ratio of the number of local government electors to the number of councillors to be elected shall be, as nearly as may be, the same in every ward in the borough;
- (b) in a borough every ward of a parish council shall lie wholly within a single ward of the borough;
- (c) in a borough every parish which is not divided into parish wards shall lie wholly within a single ward of the borough.

8 The Schedule also provides that, subject to (a)–(c) above, regard should be had to:

- (d) the desirability of fixing ward boundaries which are and will remain easily identifiable; and
- (e) any local ties which would be broken by the fixing of any particular ward boundary.

9 The Schedule provides that, in considering whether a parish should be divided into wards, regard shall be had to whether:

- (f) the number or distribution of electors in the parish is such as to make a single election of parish councillors impracticable or inconvenient; and
- (g) it is desirable that any area or areas of the parish should be separately represented on the parish council.

10 Where it is decided to divide any such parish into parish wards, in considering the size and boundaries of the wards and fixing the number of parish councillors to be elected for each ward, regard shall be had to:

- (h) any change in the number or distribution of electors of the parish which is likely to take place within the period of five years immediately following the consideration;
- (i) the desirability of fixing boundaries which are and will remain easily identifiable; and
- (j) any local ties which will be broken by the fixing of any particular boundaries.

11 Where it is decided not to divide the parish into parish wards, in fixing the number of councillors to be elected for each parish regard shall be had to the number and distribution of electors of the parish and any change which is likely to take place within the period of five years immediately following the fixing of the number of parish councillors.

