

Final recommendations on the
future electoral arrangements
for Herefordshire

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

July 2001

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Two A3 maps showing existing and proposed warding arrangements for Herefordshire can be found at the back of this report.

A large map illustrating the proposed ward boundaries for Hereford City is inserted inside the back cover of the report.

WHAT IS THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT COMMISSION FOR ENGLAND?

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

Members of the Commission are:

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

Barbara Stephens (Chief Executive)

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

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

SUMMARY

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

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

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

- **in 19 of the 44 wards the number of electors represented by each councillor varies by more than 10 per cent from the average for the district, and six wards vary by more than 20 per cent from the average;**
- **by 2005 electoral equality 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 18 wards and by more than 20 per cent in 9 wards.**

Our main final recommendations for future electoral arrangements (Figures 1 and 2 and paragraphs 171 - 172) are that:

- **Herefordshire Council should have 58 councillors, two fewer than at present;**
- **there should be 40 wards, instead of 44 as at present;**
- **the boundaries of 39 of the existing wards should be modified and five wards should retain their existing boundaries;**
- **elections should continue to take place every four years.**

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

- **In 33 of the proposed 40 wards the number of electors per councillor would vary by no more than 10 per cent from the district average.**
- **This improved level of electoral equality is forecast to continue, with the number of electors per councillor in four wards (Ledbury, Pontrilas, Ross-on-Wye East and Ross-on-Wye West) expected to vary by more than 10 per cent from the average for the district in 2005.**

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

- **revised warding arrangements and the redistribution of councillors for the parishes of Hereford, Ledbury, Leominster, Lower Bullingham, Ross-on-Wye, Ross Rural and Withington Group Parish Council.**

All further correspondence on these final recommendations and the matters discussed in this report should be addressed to the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, who will not make an Order implementing them before 11 September 2001:

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

Table 1: Final Recommendations: Summary

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Constituent areas
1	Aylestone	2	part of Hereford parish (the proposed Aylestone parish ward)
2	Backbury	1	the parishes of Dormington, Fownhope, Hampton Bishop, Mordiford, Stoke Edith, Tarrington and Weston Beggard
3	Belmont	3	part of Hereford parish (the proposed Belmont parish ward) and the parish of Belmont Rural
4	Bircher	1	<i>unchanged</i> : the parishes of Croft & Yarpole, Kingsland, Lucton, Orleton and Richards Castle
5	Bringsty	1	the parishes of Bredenbury, Brockhampton, Collington, Edwin Loach & Salt Marshe, Edwyn Ralph, Linton, Norton, Tedstone Delamere, Tedstone Wafer, Thornbury, Upper Sapey, Wacton, Whitbourne and Wolferlow
6	Bromyard	2	the parishes of Avenbury, Bromyard & Winslow, Felton, Little Cowarne, Ocle Pychard, Pencombe with Grendon Warren, Stoke Lacy and Ullingswick
7	Burghill, Holmer & Lyde	1	the parishes of Burghill, Holmer, and Pipe & Lyde
8	Castle	1	the parishes of Almeley, Brilley, Brobury with Monnington on Wye, Eardisley, Huntington, Kinnersley, Letton, Norton Canon, Sarnesfield, Staunton on Wye, Whitney on Wye and Willersley & Winforton,
9	Central	1	part of Hereford parish (the proposed Central parish ward)
10	Credenhill	1	<i>unchanged</i> : the parishes of Breinton, Credenhill, Kenchester and Stretton Sugwas
11	Dinmore Hill	1	the parishes of Bishopstone, Bridge Sollers, Brinsop & Wormsley, Byford, Canon Pyon, Dinmore, King's Pyon, Mansell Gamage, Mansell Lacy, Wellington and Yazor
12	Frome	1	the parishes of Acton Beauchamp, Ashperton, Aylton, Bishop's Frome, Canon Frome, Castle Frome, Eggleton, Evesbatch, Little Marcle, Marcle Ridge, Moreton Jeffries, Much Cowarne, Munsley, Pixley, Putley, Stanford Bishop, Stretton Grandison and Yarkhill & Tarrington
13	Golden Cross with Weobley	1	the parishes of Birley with Upper Hill, Dilwyn, Eardisland, Monkland & Stretford and Weobley
14	Golden Valley North	1	the parishes of Blakemere, Bredwardine, Clifford, Cusop, Dorstone, Moccas & Preston on Wye, Peterchurch, and Tyberton
15	Golden Valley South	1	the parishes of Abbey Dore, Bacton, Craswall, Dulas, Ewyas Harold, Llancillo, Llanveynoe, Longtown, Michaelchurch Escley, Newton, Rowstone, St Margarets, Turnastone, Vowchurch and Walterstone
16	Hagley	1	<i>unchanged</i> : the parishes of Bartestree, Lugwardine, Preston Wynne, Westhide and Withington

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Constituent areas
17	Hampton Court	1	the parishes of Bodenham, Docklow & Hampton Wafer, Ford & Stoke Prior, Grendon Bishop, Hampton Charles, Hatfield & Newhampton, Hope under Dinmore, Humber, Newton, and Pudleston
18	Hollington	1	part of Lower Bullingham parish (the proposed Lower Bullingham parish ward) and the parishes of Ballingham, Bolstone, Callow, Dewsall, Dinedor, Grafton, Haywood, Holme Lacy and Little Dewchurch
19	Hope End	2	<i>unchanged</i> : the parishes of Bosbury, Coddington, Colwall, Cradley, Mathon and Wellington Heath
20	Kerne Bridge	1	the parishes of Ganarew, Goodrich, Walford, Welsh Bicknor and Whitchurch
21	Kington Town	1	the parishes of Kington, Kington Rural and Lower Harpton
22	Ledbury	3	the parishes of Eastnor, Donnington and Ledbury
23	Leominster North	2	part of Leominster parish (the proposed Leominster North parish ward)
24	Leominster South	2	part of Leominster parish (the proposed Leominster South parish ward)
25	Llangarron	1	the parishes of Bridstow, Llangarron, Llanrothal, Marstow, Peterstow, Sellack and Welsh Newton
26	Mortimer	1	the parishes of Adforton, Aymestry, Brampton Bryan, Buckton & Coxhall, Burrington, Byton, Combe, Downton, Elton, Kinsham, Leinthall Starkes, Leintwardine, Lingen, Pipe Aston, Stapleton, Walford Letton & Newton, Wigmore and Willey
27	Old Gore	1	the parishes of Brampton Abbots, Brockhampton, Foy, How Caple, Kings Caple, Much Marcle, Sollershope, Upton Bishop, Woolhope and Yatton
28	Pembridge & Lyonshall with Titley	1	the parishes of Knill, Lyonshall, Nash & Little Brampton, Pembridge, Rodd, Shobdon, Staunton on Arrow and Titley
29	Penyard	1	the parishes of Aston Ingham, Hope Mansell, Lea, Linton and Weston under Penyard
30	Pontrilas	1	the parishes of Aconbury, Garway, Harewood, Hentland, Little Birch, Llandinabo, Llanwarne, Much Birch, Orcop, Pencoyd, St Weonards, and Tretire with Michaelchurch
31	Ross-on-Wye East	2	part of Ross-on-Wye parish (the proposed Ross-on-Wye East parish ward); part of Ross Rural parish (the proposed Ross Rural East parish ward)
32	Ross-on-Wye West	2	part of Ross-on-Wye parish (the proposed Ross-on-Wye West parish ward); part of Ross Rural Parish (the proposed Ross Rural West parish ward)
33	St Martins & Hinton	3	part of Hereford parish (the proposed St Martins & Hinton parish ward); part of Lower Bullingham parish (the proposed Withy Brook parish ward)
34	St Nicholas	2	part of Hereford parish (the proposed St Nicholas parish ward)
35	Stoney Street	1	the parishes of Eaton Bishop, Clehonger and Madley,

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Constituent areas
36	Sutton Walls	1	the parishes of Marden, Moreton on Lugg and Sutton
37	Three Elms	3	part of Hereford parish (the proposed Three Elms parish ward)
38	Tupsley	3	part of Hereford parish (the proposed Tupsley parish ward)
39	Upton	1	<i>unchanged:</i> the parishes of Brimfield, Eye, Eyton, Kimbolton, Leysters, Little Hereford, Luston, Middleton on the Hill and Moreton & Ashton,
40	Valletts	1	the parishes of Allensmore, Kenderchurch, Kentchurch, Kilpeck, Kingstone, Much Dewchurch, St Devreux, Thruxton, Treville and Wormbridge

Notes: 1 Map 2 and Appendix A, including the large maps in the back of the report, illustrate the proposed wards outlined above.

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

Table 2: Final Recommendations for Herefordshire

	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	Aylestone	2	5,012	2,506	9	5,156	2,578	4
2	Backbury	1	2,366	2,366	3	2,476	2,476	-1
3	Belmont	3	6,510	2,170	-6	7,364	2,455	-1
4	Bircher	1	2,252	2,252	-2	2,363	2,363	-5
5	Bringsty	1	2,211	2,211	-4	2,305	2,305	-7
6	Bromyard	2	4,356	2,178	-5	4,542	2,271	-9
7	Burghill, Holmer & Lyde	1	2,403	2,403	4	2,625	2,625	5
8	Castle	1	2,359	2,359	2	2,548	2,548	2
9	Central	1	2,213	2,213	-4	2,509	2,509	1
10	Credenhill	1	2,331	2,331	1	2,629	2,629	6
11	Dinmore Hill	1	2,054	2,054	-11	2,364	2,364	-5
12	Frome	1	2,457	2,457	7	2,601	2,601	4
13	Golden Cross with Weobley	1	2,412	2,412	5	2,564	2,564	3
14	Golden Valley North	1	2,290	2,290	-1	2,474	2,474	-1
15	Golden Valley South	1	2,316	2,316	1	2,562	2,562	3
16	Hagley	1	2,581	2,581	12	2,720	2,720	9
17	Hampton Court	1	2,105	2,105	-9	2,345	2,345	-6
18	Hollington	1	1,988	1,988	-14	2,490	2,490	0
19	Hope End	2	4,453	2,227	-3	4,724	2,362	-5
20	Kerne Bridge	1	2,433	2,433	6	2,534	2,534	2
21	Kington Town	1	2,389	2,389	4	2,742	2,742	10
22	Ledbury	3	6,547	2,182	-5	8,275	2,758	11
23	Leominster North	2	4,203	2,102	-9	4,546	2,273	-9
24	Leominster South	2	4,412	2,206	-4	4,756	2,378	-4
25	Llangarron	1	2,474	2,474	7	2,648	2,648	6
26	Mortimer	1	2,322	2,322	1	2,579	2,579	4
27	Old Gore	1	2,378	2,378	3	2,531	2,531	2
28	Pembridge & Lyonshall with Titley	1	2,273	2,273	-1	2,368	2,368	-5
29	Penyard	1	2,501	2,501	9	2,643	2,643	6

Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2000)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average (%)	Electorate (2005)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average (%)
30 Pontrilas	1	2,670	2,670	16	2,849	2,849	14
31 Ross-on-Wye East	2	4,104	2,052	-11	4,399	2,200	-12
32 Ross-on-Wye West	2	3,868	1,934	-16	4,162	2,081	-16
33 St Martins & Hinton	3	7,110	2,370	3	7,602	2,534	2
34 St Nicholas	2	4,839	2,420	5	4,989	2,495	0
35 Stoney Street	1	2,160	2,160	-6	2,260	2,260	-9
36 Sutton Walls	1	2,425	2,425	5%	2,640	2,640	6
37 Three Elms	3	7,939	2,646	15	8,176	2,725	9
38 Tupsley	3	7,062	2,354	2	7,272	2,424	-3
39 Upton	1	2,314	2,314	0	2,428	2,428	-2
40 Vallets	1	2,481	2,481	8	2,625	2,625	5
Totals	58	133,573	-	-	144,385	-	-
Averages	-	-	2,303	-	-	2,489	-

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

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

1 INTRODUCTION

1 This report contains our final recommendations on the electoral arrangements for the unitary authority of Herefordshire on which we are now consulting. We are reviewing Herefordshire as part of our programme of periodic electoral reviews (PERs) of all 386 principal local authority areas in England. Our programme started in 1996 and is currently expected to be completed by 2004.

2 This is our first review of the electoral arrangements of Herefordshire. The last such review of the former City of Hereford was undertaken by our predecessor, the Local Government Boundary Commission (LGBC), which reported to the Secretary of State in October 1976 (Report No. 168). Since undertaking that review, Herefordshire District has become a unitary authority on revised boundaries (April 1998). The new unitary authority area comprises the previous Hereford City and South Herefordshire areas and parts of the former districts of Leominster and Malvern Hills. Electoral arrangements were also considered as part of the Commission's reviews of local government structure, although given the constraints on the timetable for those reviews and the need to afford priority to structural concerns, a detailed review of electoral arrangements was not possible. The electoral arrangements of the new unitary authority were put in place as part of the Structural and Boundary Change Order which abolished Hereford & Worcester County Council electoral divisions covering the area of the new authority.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

10 This review was in four stages. Stage One began on 27 June 2000, when we wrote to Herefordshire Council inviting proposals for future electoral arrangements. We also notified West Mercia Police Authority, the local authority associations, Herefordshire Association of Local Councils, parish and town councils in the district, the Members of Parliament with constituency interests in the district, the Members of the European Parliament for the West Midlands Region, and the headquarters of the main political parties. We placed a notice in the local press, issued a press release and invited the Council to publicise the review further. The closing date for receipt of representations, the end of Stage One, was 3 October 2000. At Stage Two we considered all the representations received during Stage One and prepared our draft recommendations.

11 Stage Three began on 9 January 2001 with the publication of our report, *Draft Recommendations on the Future Electoral Arrangements for Herefordshire*, and ended on 5 March 2001. During this period we sought comments from the public and any other interested parties on our preliminary conclusions. On 24 April we wrote to the District Council, the relevant parish councils and other interested parties outlining our draft recommendations and one alternative option in the Walford area and invited respondents to state a preference for one of the two options. Finally, during Stage Four we reconsidered our draft recommendations in the light of the Stage Three consultation and now publish our final recommendations.

2 CURRENT ELECTORAL ARRANGEMENTS

12 Herefordshire District Council (hereafter referred to as 'Herefordshire Council') is a unitary authority serving a population of 167,000. It was formed in 1998 from the former County Council of Hereford & Worcester. It is situated on the Welsh border, with Powys lying to the west, Shropshire to the north, Worcestershire to the east and Gloucestershire to the south-east. The district includes Hereford City, with a population of 55,000, and the five primary market towns of Leominster, Ledbury, Ross-on-Wye, Bromyard and Kington. The remainder of the area is primarily rural, comprising many Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and conservation areas.

13 Herefordshire is linked to the West Midlands via the M50 and M5, while direct trains run from Hereford to London Paddington. Bristol and Cardiff airports are also situated within easy travelling distance. The electorate of the district is forecast to increase by 8 per cent from 133,573 to 144,385 in the next five years, with the majority of the growth forecast to take place in the parish of Ledbury and the newly created parish of Belmont Rural.

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

15 The electorate of the district is 133,573 (October 2000). The Council presently has 60 members who are elected from 44 wards, 14 of which are relatively urban in Hereford City and the towns of Ledbury, Leominster and Ross-on-Wye, with the remainder being predominantly rural. Sixteen are each represented by two councillors and 28 are single-member wards. The whole Council is elected every four years. The district comprises 237 parishes, of which there are 139 separate or grouped parish councils.

16 At present, each councillor represents an average of 2,226 electors, which the Council forecasts will increase to 2,406 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 19 of the 44 wards varies by more than 10 per cent from the district average, in six wards by more than 20 per cent and in two wards by more than 30 per cent. The worst imbalance is in Marcle Ridge ward, where the councillor represents 65 per cent more electors than the district average.

Table 3: Existing Electoral Arrangements

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2000)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average (%)	Electorate (2005)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average (%)
1	Aylestone	2	4,423	2,212	-1	4,560	2,280	-5
2	Backbury	1	2,187	2,187	-2	2,297	2,297	-5
3	Belmont	2	3,894	1,947	-13	4,007	2,004	-17
4	Bircher	1	2,252	2,252	1	2,363	2,363	-2
5	Bringsty	1	2,325	2,325	4	2,430	2,430	1
6	Bromyard	2	4,198	2,099	-6	4,367	2,184	-9
7	Burmarsh	1	3,139	3,139	41	3,280	3,280	36
8	Castle	1	2,410	2,410	8	2,595	2,595	8
9	Central	2	3,914	1,957	-12	4,210	2,105	-13
10	Clehonger	1	2,317	2,317	4	3,069	3,069	28
11	Credenhill	1	2,331	2,331	5	2,629	2,629	9
12	Dinmore Hill	1	2,482	2,482	11	2,922	2,922	21
13	Doward	1	2,430	2,430	9	2,579	2,579	7
14	Frome	1	2,432	2,432	9	2,580	2,580	7
15	Golden Cross	1	1,943	1,943	-13	2,079	2,079	-14
16	Golden Valley	1	2,335	2,335	5	2,579	2,579	7
17	Hagley	1	2,581	2,581	16	2,720	2,720	13
18	Hampton Court	1	1,991	1,991	-11	2,220	2,220	-8
19	Hinton	2	3,569	1,785	-20	3,956	1,978	-18
20	Hollington	1	2,348	2,348	5	2,847	2,847	18
21	Holmer	2	5,509	2,755	24	5,697	2,849	18
22	Hope End	2	4,453	2,227	0	4,724	2,362	-2
23	Kingsthorpe	1	2,223	2,223	0	2,335	2,335	-3
24	Kington Town	1	2,674	2,674	20	3,071	3,071	28
25	Ledbury	2	4,285	2,143	-4	4,715	2,358	-2
26	Leominster East & South	2	4,310	2,155	-3	4,654	2,327	-3
27	Leominster North	2	4,305	2,153	-3	4,648	2,324	-3
28	Lyonshall-with-Titley	1	1,777	1,777	-20	1,867	1,867	-22
29	Marcle Ridge	1	3,677	3,677	65	5,028	5,028	109
30	Merbach	1	2,054	2,054	-8	2,218	2,218	-8
31	Mortimer	1	2,059	2,059	-8	2,287	2,287	-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 (%)
32 Old Gore	1	2,156	2,156	-3	2,289	2,289	-5
33 Penyard	1	2,501	2,501	12	2,642	2,642	10
34 Pontrilas	1	2,465	2,465	11	2,609	2,609	8
35 Ross-on-Wye East	2	4,504	2,252	1	4,799	2,400	0
36 Ross-on-Wye West	2	3,468	1,734	-22	3,762	1,881	-22
37 St Martins	2	3,397	1,699	-24	3,498	1,749	-27
38 St Nicholas	2	3,408	1,704	-23	3,509	1,755	-27
39 Stoney Street	1	2,224	2,224	0	2,328	2,328	-3
40 Three Elms	2	4,504	2,252	1	4,649	2,325	-3
41 Tupsley	2	5,307	2,654	19	5,471	2,736	14
42 Upton	1	2,314	2,314	4	2,428	2,428	1
43 Weobley	1	2,489	2,489	12	2,705	2,705	12
44 Wilton	1	2,009	2,009	-10	2,163	2,163	-10
Totals	60	133,573	-	-	144,385	-	-
Averages	-	-	2,226	-	-	2,406	-

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

Note: The 'variance from average' column shows by how far, in percentage terms, the number of electors per councillor varies from the average for the district. The minus symbol (-) denotes a lower than average number of electors. For example, in 2000, electors in St Martins ward were relatively over-represented by 24 per cent, while electors in Marcle Ridge ward were relatively under-represented by 65 per cent. Figures have been rounded to the nearest whole number.

3 DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS

17 During Stage One we received 24 representations, including district-wide schemes from Herefordshire Council and Leominster Constituency Liberal Democrats. In the light of these representations and evidence available to us, we reached preliminary conclusions which were set out in our report, *Draft Recommendations on the Future Electoral Arrangements for Herefordshire*.

18 Our draft recommendations were based on a council size of 58, as proposed by the Council. We concluded that the Council did not provide sufficient supporting argumentation for its proposed warding arrangements and we therefore proposed basing our draft recommendations on Leominster Constituency Liberal Democrats' proposed wards in the north and west of the district. However, in the absence of any complete submissions, we proposed our own wards in the remainder of the district. We were not persuaded that a pattern of single-member wards in the rural area would best represent these communities and therefore put forward a mixture of multi- and single-member wards. We proposed that:

- Herefordshire Council should be served by 58 councillors, compared with the current 60, representing 34 wards, 10 fewer than at present;
- the boundaries of 39 of the existing wards should be modified, while four wards should retain their existing boundaries;
- there should be new warding arrangements and the redistribution of councillors for the parishes of Hereford, Ledbury, Leominster, Lower Bullingham, Ross-on-Wye, Ross Rural and Withington Group Parish Council.

Draft Recommendation

Herefordshire Council should comprise 58 councillors, serving 34 wards. The whole council should continue to be elected every four years.

19 Our proposals would have resulted in significant improvements in electoral equality, with the number of electors per councillor in 30 of the 34 wards varying by no more than 10 per cent from the district average. This level of electoral equality was forecast to improve further, with only one ward (Doward) varying by more than 10 per cent from the average in 2005.

4 RESPONSES TO CONSULTATION

20 During the consultation on our draft recommendations report, 88 representations were received. A list of all respondents is available on request from the Commission. All representations may be inspected at the offices of Herefordshire Council and the Commission.

Herefordshire Council

21 Herefordshire Council put forward a district-wide scheme at Stage Three based on a council size of 50. The Council stated that it believed it could “provide more meaningful roles for the 50 members elected” and that this reduction in council size would mean that “representation in Herefordshire would be at or slightly below that of other unitary authorities”. Its scheme also provided for single-member wards in rural areas, no combined urban and rural wards and no parish warding.

22 The Council put forward proposals for 39 wards, a reduction of five. It put forward two three-member wards for the towns of Ross-on-Wye and Leominster, a pattern of seven two-member wards covering the city of Hereford, two two-member Ledbury wards and single-member wards covering the remainder of the district.

Leominster Conservative Association

23 The Leominster Conservative Association made detailed comments on our 58-member draft recommendations and Herefordshire Council’s 50-member proposals. However, it supported Herefordshire Council’s proposal for 50 councillors arguing that it “would give a better numerical and community fit in [Hereford] and more focused representation in Leominster, Ross, Bromyard and Kington”. It further contended that the Council’s proposal “still retains sensible community boundaries in the rural areas”.

Leominster Constituency Liberal Democrats

24 Leominster Constituency Liberal Democrats supported our proposal for 58 members, however they put forward modifications to our proposed wards. They were opposed to multi-member wards in the rural area and also put forward comments on our proposals for Hereford, Ledbury, Leominster and Ross-on-Wye. The Liberal Democrats also made comments on Herefordshire Council’s proposals for a council size of 50. The Liberal Democrats did not submit ward names for their proposals but stated “the difficulty is that until proposals are finalised ward naming may be misplaced”.

25 The proposed wards put forward by the Liberal Democrats were identical to those put forward by Councillor Morris. He also made comments on Herefordshire Council’s 50-member scheme and put forward modifications to the electoral arrangements of Leominster Town Council.

Herefordshire Association of Local Councils

26 The Herefordshire Association of Local Councils stated that it could support both a council size of 50 and of 58. Consequently it put forward modifications to both our 58-member draft recommendations and Herefordshire Council’s 50-member proposals. Herefordshire Association of Local Councils stated that whichever council size was adopted it should include single-member wards

representing the rural areas of the district. It did not submit ward names for its proposals, contending that “it is considered that the Commission should consult further on ward names”.

Parish Councils

27 During Stage Three we received 41 representations from town and parish councils and a parish meeting. Our proposal for a council size of 58 was supported by Bromyard & Winslow and Kington town councils and Holmer & Shelwick, Kington Rural & Lower Harpton and Much Cowarne Group parish councils. Kington Town Council, Holmer & Shelwick and Much Cowarne Group parish councils also made comments on the proposed electoral arrangements for their areas.

28 Herefordshire Council’s proposal for a council size of 50 was supported by Eaton Bishop, Welsh Newton & Llanrothal Group and Wyese Group parish councils. Moreton on Lugg Parish Council based proposals for its parish on a 50-member scheme and Withington Group Parish Council stated that it was “minded” to support the Council’s proposed 50-member Council, although it stated that a 58-member scheme based on single-member rural wards “could be acceptable”.

29 Ledbury Town Council and Leominster Town Council put forward modifications to our proposed wards in their areas as did the parish councils of Belmont Rural, Marden and Pipe & Lyde. Bartestree with Lugwardine Group, Bodenham, Goodrich & Welsh Bicknor Group, Madley, Monkland & Stretford and Wellington parish council’s opposed our draft recommendations in their areas but did not put forward alternative warding arrangements.

30 Aconbury Parish Meeting and Birley with Upper Hill, Burghill, Callow & Haywood Group, Colwall, Dorstone, Hatfield & District Group, Llangarron, Lyonshall, Much Dewchurch, The Pyons Group, Upton Bishop, Walford, Weobley, Weston-under-Penyard and Yarkhill Parish Councils all stated that they wished to see the retention of the existing electoral arrangements in their areas.

31 Luston Group Parish Council stated that it was “opposed to any changes that would join one of the rural parishes with Leominster Town”. Much Birch Parish Council stated it wished to “retain its current link with Little Birch” parish. Shobden Parish Council stated that large rural wards would result in “diluting and diverting the attention of councillors”. Ocle & Pychard Group Parish Council stated that it “will accept whatever is the most suitable arrangement for the unitary authority”. Kilpeck Group Parish Council and Abbeydore & Bacton Group Parish Council supported the Commission’s proposals to maintain parish groupings but contended that the Kilpeck Group had closer links with the proposed Golden Valley South ward.

32 The representations received from town and parish councils and a parish meeting during Stage Three are outlined in greater detail in the following chapter.

Other Representations

33 A further 41 representations were received in response to our draft recommendations from local political groups, local organisations, councillors and residents.

34 Councillor Robert Preece stated that he believed our draft recommendations to be the “fair and correct way to go regarding electoral arrangements for this county”. Councillor J.G.S. Guthrie opposed the Council’s recommendations for 50 members, stating a preference for 58 members. He also opposed the idea of multi-member wards in rural areas and put forward alternative warding arrangements for

single-member wards as an alternative to the proposed three-member Credenhill ward. Parish Councillor Withnell argued that Brilley should remain part of the Kington Town ward on the basis of community identity. Councillor Cave supported a 58-member council and also proposed amendments to our proposals in the Bromyard area. Councillor Edwards commented on the Council's electorate forecasts and also objected to our proposals for Belmont parish.

35 A resident of Brilley opposed transferring Brilley to the Castle ward on the basis of the town's strong community links with its current ward of Kington. Another resident of Brilley argued that the parish should remain part of the existing Kington ward. A resident of Kington contended that Huntingdon parish should form part of the Kington ward. A resident couple of Kington supported the proposed council of 58 but argued that the rural area of Herefordshire should comprise single-member wards.

36 A resident of Leominster generally supported proposals for Leominster parish but suggested an alteration to the boundary between Leominster and Kimbolton parishes. The resident also opposed our proposed Leominster North ward and supported the retention of a council size of 60. Another resident of Leominster expressed concern about the Council's recommendations regarding council size and its procedures for public consultation. She also voiced concerns over the relevance of the PER and motivation behind it. A resident couple from Leominster opposed the recommendations and expressed concern over the lack of publicity involved, and contended that the reduction of councillor numbers from 60 to 58 was "somewhat pointless". The couple further contended that the town of Leominster should be kept quite separate from the rural areas surrounding it. Another resident of Leominster supported a 58-member Council, arguing that anything smaller could result in a larger wards and a lack of community identity.

37 A resident of Ledbury proposed including the new housing development at New Mills in the Ledbury Town ward rather than the Ledbury Rural ward. Parish Councillor Havard, the chairman of the Foxley Parish Group and a resident of Weobley opposed dividing the existing Weobley ward. Another resident of Weobley objected to the loss of Weobley as a district ward name. The South Wye Regeneration Partnership commented on the possible socio-economic effects of our draft recommendations within Hereford City.

38 Protect Ross on Wye, Ross & District Community Development Group, Walford Parish Residents' Association, Councillor Bedford and seventeen residents of Walford parish objected to our proposed Ross-on-Wye West ward, arguing that the rural identity and interests of Walford parish would conflict with the identity and interests of the more urban Ross parish.

39 A resident of How Caple argued that the consultation period was too short. A resident of Peterchurch supported a council of 50 members.

Further Consultation

40 In the light of representations received regarding our draft recommendations for Ross-on-Wye West ward, we carried out a further period of consultation on the most appropriate warding arrangements for the area. On 24 April 2001 we wrote to the District Council, the relevant parish councils and other interested parties outlining our draft recommendations and one alternative option. We invited respondents to state a preference for one of these two options by 12 June 2001. As part of this consultation we received 28 responses.

41 Twenty-two respondents, including the District Council, stated a preference for the Commission's revised proposals for a single-member Kerne Bridge ward, comprising the parishes of Walford, Goodrich, Whitchurch, Ganarew and Welsh Bicknor.

42 Three respondents did not state a preference for either of the options while two further respondents preferred our draft recommendations to the revised Kerne Bridge ward.

5 ANALYSIS AND FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS

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

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

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

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

Electorate Forecasts

47 At Stage One the District Council submitted electorate forecasts for the year 2005, projecting an increase in the electorate of approximately 8 per cent from 133,573 to 144,385 over the five-year period from 2000 to 2005. It expects most of the growth to be in Ledbury parish, although some is also expected in Clehonger ward. In order to prepare these forecasts, the Council estimated rates and locations of housing development with regard to structure and local plans, the expected rate of building over the five-year period and assumed occupancy rates. We accept that this is an inexact science and, having considered the forecast electorates, we stated in our draft recommendations report that we were satisfied that they represented the best estimates that could reasonably be made at the time.

48 At Stage Three, several respondents queried the Council’s electorate projections. Leominster Constituency Liberal Democrats argued that “it would appear that the growth in Ledbury has been misplaced”, contending that “the new development in the New Mills area is actually in the Ledbury Rural parish”.

49 In response to our draft recommendations report, Councillor Phillip Edwards and Belmont Rural Parish Council disagreed with the Council’s electorate forecasts for Belmont Rural parish. Councillor Edwards stated, “it is my judgement that electors will not top 2,625 during the review period or indeed during the UDP planned period to 2015”.

50 Moreton on Lugg Parish Council contended that Herefordshire Council's projections were "excessively high" and concluded that "an error of calculation must have occurred at some stage".

51 In response to the queries, the Council conceded that the Liberal Democrats observations were accurate and made appropriate adjustments to the electorate projections to reflect the correct allocation of electors. Under its revised allocations the number of electors in Ledbury polling districts S1-L and TB3-L would be 3,171 and 1,239 by 2,005 respectively. The number of electors in Ledbury Rural polling district TB2-L would therefore be 3,560.

52 In response to the queries from Moreton on Lugg Parish Council and Councillor Edwards regarding the methodology for making the electorate forecasts, the Council argued that it had "seen no argument for using any alternative methodology". In doing so, it stated that "the projections are developed from population projections from the Registrar General which the Council has accepted. However, it is accepted that because this information is not available at parish level there may be some disagreement about how these figures are reflected for individual parishes within wards, particularly when parishes are looked at in isolation. Although the Council conceded that the forecast increases in electorate for the wards of Belmont Rural and Dinmore Hill are "well above the average for the county", it argued that "there is no evidence to suggest that the Registrar General's projections are inaccurate". It further contended that "there is no supporting evidence" to support Moreton on Lugg Parish Council's assumptions that growth in Moreton on Lugg and Wellington parishes will only reflect the county average.

53 While we note that Moreton on Lugg Parish Council put forward revised electorate projections for the parishes of Moreton on Lugg and Wellington, we believe that Herefordshire Council, as local planning authority, is best placed to make a judgement on its future electorate. In the light of the Council's response to the enquiries we remain satisfied that its electorate projections represent the most accurate forecasts that could have been made at the time. We also accept the Council's revised allocations for the parishes of Ledbury and Ledbury Rural but we note that the revised electorate projections would affect the electoral equality provided under our draft recommendations for Ledbury and under Ledbury's existing electoral arrangements.

Council Size

54 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.

55 Herefordshire Council presently has 60 members. At Stage One the Council proposed two schemes, one based on a 50-member council and another based on a 58-member council. It stated that the 50-member scheme provides "a better fit into the Commission's principles" but contended that "members do see this as a minimum level of representation given the geographic size of the county". In conclusion, when it subsequently expressed a preference, the Council contended that the 58-member option was its preferred option "as it results in little change to the existing historic arrangements and the elimination of some multi-member wards with local agreement".

56 When formulating our draft recommendations, we considered whether retaining the current council size of 60 members (as proposed by the Liberal Democrats) would give greater parity of representation than either 50 or 58 members (as proposed by the Council); we also noted the general lack of consensus regarding council size. We concluded that although a 50-member council would provide a better

allocation of councillors across the district as a whole, a 58-member council would be more appropriate in view of the overall support for minimal change to the existing council size and lack of cross-party support for a large decrease.

57 We noted that a 58-member council would also provide reasonable representation and electoral equality throughout the district. We considered the Liberal Democrats' resolution to propose an unchanged council size of 60 members but, having calculated the appropriate allocation of councillors across the district as a whole, we noted that a 58-member council would give better representation based on the 2005 electorate figures.

58 Therefore, in view of the improvement to the balance of representation and having considered the size and distribution of the electorate, the geography and other characteristics of the area, together with the representations received, we concluded that the achievement of electoral equality and the statutory criteria would best be met by a council of 58 members. We therefore based our draft recommendations on this council size.

59 During Stage Three the Council undertook a further stage of consultation for a revised 50-member scheme. Following this stage of consultation, the Council stated that "a clear message from all nine of the Council's Local Area Forums was a wish to see single-member rural wards and wards that did not combine urban and rural towns/parishes". However, it further stated that "despite those clearly expressed prerequisites, Forums came to differing views about the number of councillors". Although Herefordshire's electorate expressed differing views as to the most appropriate council size for the district, the Council approved the revised model based on 50 councillors.

60 The Council supported its decision to support a council size of 50 by arguing that it would enable its draft constitution to be "effectively supported in democratic terms and will provide more meaningful roles for the 50 members elected". The Council also stated, "it's reassuring in terms of securing appropriate levels of representation to establish that even in establishing a Council of 50 members representation in Herefordshire would be at or slightly below that of other unitary councils".

61 In the remainder of Stage Three submissions there was again no conclusive opinion as to the correct number of councillors for the district. This was further complicated by the Council's decision to move away from its preferred Stage One proposal for a 58-member scheme and its subsequent Stage Three proposal for a 50-member scheme. Herefordshire Association of Local Councils and Leominster Conservative Association put forward district-wide schemes for both a 50-member and a 58-member council size, while Leominster Constituency Liberal Democrats and Councillor Morris put forward district-wide schemes based on a council size of 58. There was a degree of support for a 50-member council from other respondents, but more respondents expressed support for a 58-member scheme on the condition that the rural area of Herefordshire was represented by single-member wards.

62 Representatives from the Commission visited Herefordshire Council at the beginning of Stage Three of the review in order to give a special briefing to the Chief Executive and officers of the Council. During the briefing, we were notified that it was the Council's intention to endorse a council size of 50. It was made clear that if the Council wanted to pursue this option at that late stage of the review, significant supporting argumentation would be required, explaining the Council's decision to move away from its original endorsement of a 58-member model. It was also explained that the Council must provide detailed argumentation for each of its proposed individual wards across the district.

63 Having given full consideration to the views expressed regarding council size at Stage Three, we have not been persuaded that we should move away from our proposed council size of 58. We consider that the Council has not provided significant supporting argumentation for its decision to move away from its original endorsement of a council size of 58. Furthermore, we have received a good level of support for a 58-member council size and it is clear from the responses received that there is no consensus for a move to a 50-member council size at this stage of the review. We therefore remain of the view that a 58-member council can provide good representation to the district as a whole while providing good levels of electoral equality, having regard to the statutory criteria. We are therefore confirming a council size of 58 as part of our final recommendations.

Electoral Arrangements

64 Stage One of this review was unusual, in that we did not receive any comprehensive schemes for the authority. Both the schemes we did receive lacked ward names, and details of ward boundaries and projected electorates were incomplete.

65 We carefully considered the representations received at Stage One. However, while we recognised that Herefordshire Council's scheme provided reasonable levels of electoral equality, we did not endorse its proposals because of the absence of any supporting argumentation and because there was no local consultation on either the 50- or 58-member scheme. We also considered that the Council's scheme did not address the urban overspill in the parishes surrounding Hereford City and the town of Ledbury. We therefore developed our own scheme for Herefordshire based on a mixture of the existing warding arrangements and the Liberal Democrats' proposals, which we considered used more easily identifiable boundaries and better reflected community ties.

66 The submissions received during Stage Three from political groups, parish and town councils and other local interests have highlighted specific local issues, particularly in terms of local community identities and interests, and have been valuable in drawing up our final proposals. Although we remain of the view that a council size of 58 would provide good representation for the district, we accept the strong consensus that the rural area of the district should be represented by single-member wards. The submissions received at Stage Three have highlighted the importance of single-member rural wards in Herefordshire and we have therefore made this a priority in making amendments to our draft recommendations. However, as a result of our decision to endorse a 58-member council, the extent to which we have been able to endorse the Council's revised proposals for a 50-member council has been limited. Similarly, we have limited scope to adopt the 50-member schemes submitted by Herefordshire Association of Local Councils and Leominster Conservative Association. Therefore, we have not discussed these schemes during Chapter Five of the report.

67 In the west and parts of the north of the district, our draft recommendations put forward single-member wards based on existing wards and proposals for the Liberal Democrats. These wards were supported by the Liberal Democrats and Councillor Morris as part of their Stage Three schemes. We have also received a measure of support from local residents and parish councils in these areas. However, we received particular opposition to our proposals in the centre of the district where we put forward multi-member rural wards. We have therefore considered amendments in this area for revised single-member rural wards based on locally generated proposals. Similarly, elsewhere in the district, consideration has been given to the impact that each individual representation would have in forming part of a scheme which provides the most suitable electoral arrangements for the district as a whole. However, in the north-east of the district we have been unable to use locally generated proposals and have devised our own single-member wards. These are discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

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

HEREFORD CITY

- (a) Aylestone, Belmont, Central, Hinton, Holmer, St Martins, St Nicholas, Three Elms and Tupsley wards

LEDBURY, LEOMINSTER AND ROSS-ON-WYE

- (b) Ledbury, Leominster East & South, Leominster North, Ross-on-Wye East and Ross-on-Wye West wards

RURAL AREA

- (c) Bircher, Bringsty, Hampton Court, Mortimer and Upton wards
- (d) Castle, Golden Cross, Golden Valley, Kington Town, Lyonshall with Titley and Merbach wards
- (e) Burmarsh, Clehonger, Credenhill, Dinmore Hill, Hagley, Stoney Street and Weobley wards
- (f) Backbury, Bromyard, Frome, Hope End, Marcle Ridge and Old Gore wards
- (g) Doward, Hollington, Kingsthorpe, Pontrilas, Penyard and Wilton wards

Aylestone, Belmont, Central, Hinton, Holmer, St Martins, St Nicholas, Three Elms and Tupsley wards

69 These nine wards comprise the City of Hereford, and are bounded by Hereford parish boundary. Belmont, St Martins and Hinton wards lie to the south of the River Wye and are each represented by two councillors. Aylestone, Central, Holmer, St Nicholas, Three Elms and Tupsley wards lie to the north of the River Wye and are also each represented by two councillors. Under the existing council size of 60 members the number of electors per councillor in Aylestone, Belmont, Central, Hinton and Holmer wards is 1 per cent below (5 per cent below by 2005), 13 per cent below (17 per cent below by 2005), 12 per cent below (13 per cent below by 2005), 20 per cent below (18 per cent below by 2005) and 24 per cent above (18 per cent above by 2005) the district average respectively. In St Martins, St Nicholas, Three Elms and Tupsley wards the number of electors per councillor is 24 per cent below (27 per cent below by 2005), 23 per cent below (27 per cent below by 2005), 1 per cent above (3 per cent below by 2005) and 19 per cent above (14 per cent above by 2005) the district average respectively.

70 At Stage One, Herefordshire Council proposed under its 58-member scheme that Hereford should comprise eight two-member wards, with minor amendments to all of the existing wards. However, it did not submit argumentation in support of its proposals other than acknowledging that “multi-member wards have some benefit, offering the electorate a choice of representative in the more urban areas of the county”. To the south of the River Wye, the Council proposed two two-member wards, suggesting a small extension to the current Belmont ward and a combined St Martins & Hinton ward (minus properties bounded by Hinton Road and Holme Lacy Road). To the north of the River Wye, the Council proposed small amendments to the existing boundaries and proposed including the area bounded by Hinton Road and Holme Lacy Road to the south of the River Wye in its proposed Central ward, north of the river. Under Herefordshire Council’s proposals for a 58-member scheme, there would be improved electoral equality in all Hereford City wards.

71 The Liberal Democrats did not put forward any detailed warding arrangements for the city of Hereford.

72 When formulating our draft recommendations we attempted to secure improvements to electoral equality while providing a better reflection of local communities in Hereford City, and proposed amendments to all of the existing wards. We were concerned that the Council proposed a ward straddling the River Wye and proposed using the river as the boundary between the two proposed wards to the south and the five wards to the north. Moreover, we noted that the Council's proposals had not accounted for the urban overspill in the new Belmont Rural parish and in Lower Bullingham parish. We considered that these areas have more affinity with Hereford City and should therefore be combined with Hereford City's urban wards. Consequently we proposed an enlarged three-member Belmont ward including Belmont rural parish (currently comprising Clehonger ward) while utilising the Great Western Way and cycle path as the eastern boundary, which incorporates the urban overspill to the west of the city. We proposed creating a three-member St Martins & Hinton ward comprising the area to the east of this boundary as we considered that this area is encapsulated within easily identifiable boundaries and this would not involve breaching the strong natural boundary of the river. We also proposed that a new Withy Brook parish ward of Lower Bullingham parish should be created to the north of the railway line. This parish ward would be included in the proposed St Martins & Hinton ward, thereby including the urban overspill to the east of the city in an urban ward.

73 To the north of the River Wye we endorsed the Council's proposed St Nicholas ward as it would utilise clearly identifiable boundaries while maintaining reasonable electoral equality. However, we considered that the Council's proposed wards to the north of Kings Acre Road and White Cross Road divided this area without using the more easily identifiable boundaries available. We were also not convinced that these arrangements would best reflect community identity and ties in the area. Accordingly, we proposed a three-member Three Elms ward comprising the existing Three Elms ward and the majority of Holmer ward (less the area to the east of the railway line), with the addition of those properties to the west of Edgar Street, currently in Central ward. We proposed a revised two-member Aylestone ward including that part of Holmer ward east of the railway line and half of polling district XC from the current Tupsley ward. In our amended three-member Tupsley ward, we proposed extending the boundaries to include part of polling district PC from the existing Aylestone ward, with the addition of those properties south of Ledbury Road, St James Road and Nelson Street, currently in Central ward.

74 As a consequence of our proposals in this area, we proposed a more compact single-member Central ward, less the aforementioned properties to be included in our proposed Tupsley and Three Elms wards, as shown on the large map at the back of the report.

75 Under our draft recommendations, the number of electors per councillor in our proposed Belmont and St Martins & Hinton wards would be 6 per cent below the district average (1 per cent below by 2005) and 3 per cent above (2 per cent above by 2005) respectively. The number of electors per councillor in our proposed Central, St Nicholas and Three Elms wards would be 4 per cent below the district average (1 per cent above by 2005), 5 per cent above (equal to the average by 2005) and 15 per cent above (10 per cent above by 2005) respectively.

76 As part of their district-wide schemes at Stage Three, Leominster Constituency Liberal Democrats and Town Councillor Morris both proposed the same warding arrangements for Hereford as under our draft recommendations. However, Leominster Constituency Liberal Democrats contended that our draft proposals in Hereford City had joined "distinct communities who would not regard themselves as

having any association with other parts of the ward you propose”. The Liberal Democrats resolved not to amend the Commission’s proposals as they did not have access to Hereford City’s electoral rolls but stated, “We hope that people in Hereford have picked up on a similar theme and made more detailed submissions”. Councillor Edwards contended that combining Belmont Rural parish with a Hereford City ward “could lead to considerable disquiet amongst the electorate” while Belmont Rural Parish Council argued that Belmont Rural parish has “little affinity with the Belmont ward of Hereford City”. Both respondents argued that Belmont Rural Parish should remain as a single-member ward. Lower Bullingham Parish Council objected to our proposal to ward part of its parish, contending that this “may cause confusion and division in the parish”.

77 Leominster Conservative Association stated, “We would make no changes to the Commission’s proposals in wards north of the river”, although it expressed reservations about our proposed three-member Belmont ward, contending that “the Belmont Rural ward has a very different social and economic profile to existing city Belmont parish”. It contended that “the joining of these wards may also impact on future funding for this very fragile area”. As an alternative, the Conservatives proposed redrawing the boundary along the “A465 to the roundabout and along Southolme Avenue”.

78 South Wye Regeneration Partnership made comments regarding the socio-economic effects of our proposed St Martin’s & Hinton and Belmont wards. However, we cannot have regard to these factors when undertaking a Periodic Electoral Review. The Partnership supported the Council’s Stage Three proposals, although it conceded that “this reduces the number of residential wards within the South Wye area of benefit from 3 to 2”.

79 We have given further consideration to our draft proposals in the light of comments made at Stage Three. However, we have been unable to devise warding arrangements for the whole of Hereford that would provide an equivalent balance between providing electoral equality, easily identifiable boundaries and a good reflection of communities. We considered the alternative proposals from the Conservatives but note that the proposals were not submitted in any detail; it has therefore been difficult to interpret the intended boundary modifications. In the absence of any further alternative proposals at Stage Three, we remain of the view that our draft recommendations would provide the best balance between utilising easily identifiable boundaries and reflecting the statutory criteria. We therefore propose endorsing our draft proposals as part of our final recommendations. The electoral equality in these wards would be the same as under our draft recommendations. These wards are illustrated in more detail on the large map at the back of the report.

Ledbury, Leominster East & South, Leominster North, Ross-on-Wye East and Ross-on-Wye West wards

80 Ledbury ward is currently a detached ward and incorporates the town of Ledbury and the parishes of Eastnor and Donnington in the east of the district. It is currently served by two councillors, and under the existing arrangements the number of electors per councillor is 4 per cent below the district average (2 per cent below by 2005). The parish of Leominster is currently divided between the wards of Leominster East & South and Leominster North. These two wards cover the town of Leominster in the north of the district and are both represented by two councillors. Under the existing arrangements, the number of electors per councillor in both Leominster East & South and Leominster North wards is 3 per cent below the district average (3 per cent below by 2005).

81 Ross-on-Wye East and Ross-on-Wye West wards are situated in the town of Ross-on-Wye in the south of the district. Ross-on-Wye East ward incorporates the Ross-on-Wye (East) parish ward of Ross-

on-Wye parish, while Ross-on-Wye West ward incorporates both the Ross-on-Wye (West) parish ward of Ross-on-Wye parish and Ross Rural parish. Both wards are currently represented by two councillors. Under the existing arrangements, the number of electors per councillor in Ross-on-Wye East and Ross-on-Wye West wards is 1 per cent above the district average (equal to the average by 2005) and 22 per cent below (22 per cent below by 2005) respectively.

82 At Stage One, Herefordshire Council proposed as part of its 58-member scheme that Donnington parish, currently in Ledbury ward, be transferred to a ward with the rural area of Ledbury parish. In Leominster town, it proposed linking the parish of Monkland & Stretford with Leominster North ward. It also proposed transferring the parish of Newton to Leominster East & South ward. In Ross-on-Wye, the Council proposed that the existing Ross-on-Wye West ward should be combined in a ward with the parishes of Bridstow and Brampton Abbots but proposed no change to the current Ross-on-Wye East ward.

83 Under Herefordshire Council's 58-member scheme, there would be improved electoral equality in these wards.

84 Leominster Constituency Liberal Democrats proposed a three-member ward including the whole of Ledbury parish and Wellington Heath parish. This would result in an electoral variance of 16 per cent in 2005 under a 60-member council. In Leominster and Ross-on-Wye they proposed four councillors representing each area but did not provide a detailed scheme for either town.

85 Leominster Town Council recommended retaining the "historic boundaries of Leominster Town". It contended that the outward extension of existing town wards to incorporate surrounding rural areas "would be to the disadvantage of those rural areas in the democratic process, through the strong weighting of the urban concentration".

86 A resident argued that the current Ledbury ward is anomalous, as part of the urban area of the town forms part of the existing Marcle Ridge ward which is predominantly rural. He therefore proposed that Ledbury ward's boundaries should be amended to include this area with the remainder of the town.

87 When formulating our draft recommendations, we gave careful consideration to the views expressed with regard to this area. We considered that the Liberal Democrats' proposal resulted in an unacceptably high level of electoral inequality given the alternative warding arrangements available in the area. Having considered Herefordshire Council's proposal for Ledbury town, we were of the opinion that it failed to address the urban overspill at the edge of the town, currently in Marcle Ridge ward. We were therefore concerned that it would not provide the most appropriate reflection of local communities. In acknowledging this situation, we proposed extending the boundaries of the town ward to include this area in a three-member Ledbury district ward, while retaining the parish of Eastnor in Ledbury ward. We also noted that our proposed Ledbury ward would result in improved electoral equality by 2005.

88 Having considered the representations received for Leominster at Stage One, we proposed adopting the Council's proposals subject to a number of amendments. We recommended a slight amendment to improve the boundary between the two-member wards of Leominster East & South and Leominster North so that it would follow the centre of Bargates and Kenwater. Having received no supporting argumentation for the Council's proposal, we were unsure as to the rationale for linking Newton parish with Leominster East & South ward and therefore proposed that this parish be included in the new Hampton Court ward (detailed later). We also noted Leominster Town Council's opposition to

combining the town wards with rural parishes. Nevertheless, we considered that Herefordshire Council's proposal to combine Leominster North ward with Monkland & Stretford parish would address the electoral inequality in Leominster North ward without any detrimental effect on the identity of Monkland & Stretford parish. We welcomed the views of the Parish Council at Stage Three.

89 In Ross-on-Wye town, we considered that the Council's submission did not address some of the current anomalies between the two wards. In particular, we recognised that the area to the west of Brampton Road, north of the railway line, has more affinity with the Ross-on-Wye West ward than Ross-on-Wye East ward and we therefore proposed creating a Ross Rural West parish ward of Ross Rural parish, to be incorporated in an amended two-member Ross-on-Wye West district ward. As a consequence of this proposal, we proposed modifying the existing boundary between the two wards so that it would follow the centre of Kennedy Place, Brampton Street and Brampton Road. We proposed that the remainder of Ross Rural parish, to be included in Ross-on-Wye East district ward, be named Ross Rural East parish ward (detailed at the end of the chapter). We also considered that there is a closer affinity between Ross-on-Wye and Walford parish, as proposed by the Liberal Democrats, than there is between Ross-on-Wye and the parishes of Brampton Abbots and Bridstow, as proposed by the Council. We therefore proposed that Walford parish be combined with the proposed Ross-on-Wye West parish ward and Ross Rural West parish ward of Ross Rural parish to form a two-member Ross-on-Wye West ward. We welcomed further views at Stage Three.

90 Under our draft recommendations for a 58-member council, the number of electors per councillor in our proposed Ledbury, Leominster East & South and Leominster North wards would be 23 per cent below the district average (5 per cent below by 2005), 4 per cent below (4 per cent below by 2005) and 5 per cent below (4 per cent below by 2005) respectively. In Ross-on-Wye East and Ross-on-Wye West wards, the number of electors per councillor would be 3 per cent above the district average (1 per cent above by 2005) and 6 per cent below (6 per cent below by 2005).

91 At Stage Three Ledbury Town Council argued that our draft recommendations for Ledbury "only partially address the problem of urban overspill" while splitting the grouped parish council of Donnington & Eastnor. The Town Council proposed creating a three-member ward comprising the existing Ledbury Town and Ledbury Rural wards, arguing that there has been an imbalance in the number of nominations in each ward resulting in "expensive and time wasting by-elections or co-options". Leominster Constituency Liberal Democrats and Councillor Morris also observed that the New Mills development had been wrongly allocated to the Ledbury Town parish ward. Consequently, they both proposed that the parish of Ledbury form a three-member ward with the addition of Donnington parish.

92 In its 58-member scheme, Leominster Conservative Association proposed combining the parishes of Donnington and Eastnor with the Ledbury Town ward in order to facilitate its proposals in surrounding wards. Herefordshire Association of Local Councils proposed that the town area of Ledbury parish comprise a two-member ward.

93 We have considered the representations received at Stage Three of the review for Ledbury. As mentioned earlier, Herefordshire Council have notified us that the New Mills development in Ledbury parish should be allocated to the Ledbury Rural ward of Ledbury parish. This would result in a deterioration in the electoral equality of the Ledbury ward proposed under our draft recommendations. We therefore considered the other alternatives put forward at Stage Three. We note that the proposals of Ledbury Town Council for a three-member Ledbury ward would fully address the urban overspill of the New Mills development. Although this development is due to take place in the Ledbury Rural

parish ward, the Town Council's proposal enables the whole of Ledbury parish to comprise a single district ward, thus uniting the new development in a ward with the remainder of the town. In addition we propose that the parishes of Eastnor and Donnington comprise part of the new ward as we consider that these areas have more in common with Ledbury parish than with the area further north. Although we note that the electoral equality achieved would be slightly worse than under our draft recommendations, we consider that this proposal would provide the best balance between electoral equality and the other statutory criteria. We therefore propose putting this ward forward as part of our final recommendations. Under our final recommendations, the number of electors per councillor in our proposed Ledbury ward would be 5 per cent below the district average initially and 11 per cent above by 2005.

94 At Stage Three, Leominster Town Council did not support the inclusion of the parish of Monkland & Stretford in a revised Leominster North ward, arguing that such an arrangement "would be to the disadvantage or the rural areas in the democratic process". However, the Town Council supported the proposed realignment of the boundary between Leominster North and Leominster East & South wards. The Town Council also proposed that the parish wards in Ledbury reflect the proposed district wards and that the new wards be named Leominster North and Leominster South. The Conservatives also put forward this amendment to our draft recommendations for Leominster.

95 Monkland & Stretford Parish Council argued that it was "unanimous in rejecting the Commission's proposal", anticipating that "they would be swamped by the larger urban conurbation to the disadvantage of this rural area whose needs and character are very different". The Parish Council proposed that it be combined with other neighbouring rural wards. Luston Group Parish Council and two local residents were also opposed to the inclusion of any rural parishes in Leominster Town wards.

96 Leominster Constituency Liberal Democrats contended that the electoral equality in Leominster is "within an acceptable margin to keep four members within two wards in Leominster Town boundaries" and therefore submitted the same proposals as the Town Council.

97 Herefordshire Association of Local Councils proposed combining the parish of Monkland & Stretford with the Leominster North ward and proposed that Leominster South ward merge with the parish of Birley with Upper Hill. However, it did not submit detailed proposals for boundary amendments between the two Leominster wards.

98 We have given careful consideration to the views expressed in response to our draft recommendations for Leominster. In particular, we note the level of opposition to our proposal to link the parish of Monkland & Stretford with Leominster North ward. Therefore, we consider that Herefordshire Association of Local Councils' proposals would not reflect the identity and interests of local communities. In the light of the opposition to our draft recommendations, we are of the view that Leominster Town Council's revised proposals would provide a better balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria and propose that they form part of our final recommendations. The number of electors per councillor in the proposed Leominster North and Leominster South wards would be 9 per cent below the district average and 4 per cent below respectively (no change by 2005). These wards are illustrated in further details on Map A3 in Appendix A of the report.

99 At Stage Three, the Conservatives supported our proposed Ross-on-Wye West and Ross-on-Wye East wards. The Liberal Democrats and Councillor Morris supported our proposed Ross-on-Wye West ward but proposed that Ross-on-Wye East ward merge with the parish of Weston under Penyard. However, they did not provide detailed proposals for boundary amendments with Ross-on-Wye parish itself.

100 Herefordshire Association of Local Councils did not provide detailed warding arrangements for Ross-on-Wye but proposed that it should be allocated three councillors.

101 We also received a number of representations in opposition to our proposed Ross-on-Wye West ward. Protect Ross on Wye, Ross & District Community Development Group, Walford Parish Residents' Association, Walford Parish Council, Councillor Bedford and 17 local residents all opposed combining Walford parish with Ross-on-Wye West parish ward, contending that the rural interests of Walford would be overlooked if they were to merge with a more urban area. Walford Parish Residents' Association argued that our proposed Ross-on-Wye West ward would be "impracticable and undesirable as urban and rural areas have totally different requirements", while Protect Ross-on-Wye stated that "the interests of the two communities are often completely opposed". Local residents also expressed the view that the identities and interests of Walford would be "compromised" if it was combined in a ward with Ross-on-Wye. One local resident described our proposal as a "retrograde step", while another stated that "mixing rural needs with urban ones is a recipe for disaster".

102 Weston under Penyard Parish Council stated that it preferred the existing arrangements but commented that our draft recommendations would be "acceptable".

103 We noted the considerable amount of opposition and evidence against our proposed Ross-on-Wye West ward and therefore sought alternatives to our draft recommendations in this area. We sought to devise alternative warding arrangements which would not significantly alter the achievement of a good electoral scheme elsewhere in the district and were therefore of the view that the amendments should be contained within this part of the district. We proposed a new Kerne Bridge ward combining the parishes of Walford, Goodrich, Welsh Bicknor, Whitchurch and Ganarew, noting that these parishes are rural parishes with similar identities and interests as they are linked by the A40 and have Kerne Bridge as a central crossing point between the areas. Although we considered that this ward would provide a good balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria with a minimal knock-on effect in other wards, we noted that the parishes concerned had not been consulted and therefore undertook a further period of limited consultation. We contacted Herefordshire Council, the parishes and respondents concerned to obtain views as to whether the proposals would be supported locally and requesting that respondents state a preference for our proposed single-member Kerne Bridge ward or our draft recommendations.

104 Following our further consultation process, during which we contacted 38 interested parties, we received 28 responses. Twenty-two respondents, including Herefordshire Council, stated a preference for the Commission's revised proposal for a single-member Kerne Bridge ward. However, the Council also contended that "either option under the 58-member model was significantly inferior to the local representation which would be obtained under the 50-member model submitted by the Council". Walford Parish Council and a local resident argued that they would prefer to remain in the existing Penyard ward if possible but otherwise stated that they would support our revised Kerne Bridge ward. A local resident stated that the revised Kerne Bridge ward was a "brilliant solution".

105 Weston-under-Penyard Parish Council, Councillor Saunders and a local resident also preferred the existing arrangements but did not state a preference for either option. Councillor Roger Phillips argued that we should consider "new proposals" or move to a "preferred 50-seat model". Two respondents, including Goodrich & Welsh Bicknor Group Parish Council, stated a preference for our draft proposals.

106 In the light of the majority support for the revised proposals, we are persuaded that they would better reflect the identities and interests of local communities than our draft recommendations and we propose putting them forward as part of our final recommendations. While we recognise that several respondents have expressed support for the existing Penyard ward we are unable to consider any area in isolation and must consider the effects that such a proposal would have on the district as a whole. We note that the retention of this ward under a 58-member scheme would adversely affect the statutory criteria in the remainder of the district. The number of electors per councillor in the proposed single-member Kerne Bridge ward would be 6 per cent above the district average initially and 2 per cent above by 2005.

107 As a consequence of our decision to endorse a 58-member council, we propose that Ross-on-Wye town should continue to be represented by four councillors. We therefore propose a minor amendment to the boundary between the existing Ross-on-Wye East and Ross-on-Wye West wards. As outlined in our draft recommendations, we were of the view that the electors to the west of Brampton Road have more affinity with the current Ross-on-Wye West ward. We therefore propose transferring the area bounded by Brampton Road and the railway line to the proposed Ross-on-Wye West ward. The number of electors per councillor in the proposed Ross-on-Wye East and Ross-on-Wye West wards would be 11 per cent below the district average and 16 per cent below respectively (12 per cent below and 16 per cent below by 2005). These wards are illustrated in more detail on Map A2 in Appendix A of the report.

Bircher, Bringsty, Hampton Court, Mortimer and Upton wards

108 These five wards are situated in the north of the district and are each currently represented by a single councillor. Under the existing arrangements, the number of electors per councillor in Bircher ward (comprising the parishes of Croft, Yarpole & Bircher, Kingsland, Lucton, Orleton and Richards Castle), Bringsty ward (comprising the parishes of Linton, Tedstone Delamere, Whitbourne, Hampton Charles, Norton, Brockhampton, Wolferow, Upper Sapey, Thornbury, Edwyn Ralph, Tedstone Wafre, Edwin Loach & Saltmarshe, Collington, Wacton, Grendon Bishop and Bredenbury) and Hampton Court ward (comprising the parishes of Docklow & Hampton Wafre, Hatfield & Newhampton, Pudleston, Bodenham, Hope-under-Dinmore, Newton, Humber and Ford & Stoke Prior) are 1 per cent above the district average (2 per cent below by 2005), 4 per cent above (1 per cent above by 2005) and 11 per cent below (8 per cent below by 2005) respectively. The number of electors per councillor in Mortimer ward (comprising the parishes of Aymestrey, Burrington, Downton, Pipe Aston, Elton, Leinthall Starks, Wigmore, Adforton, Stanway, Paytoe & Grange, Walford, Letton & Newton, Brampton Bryan, Buckton & Coxall, Leintwardine and Lingen) and Upton ward (comprising the parishes of Eye, Moreton & Ashton, Kimbolton, Middleton-on-the-Hill, Leysters, Eyton, Luston, Brimfield and Little Hereford) is 8 per cent below the district average (5 per cent below by 2005) and 4 per cent above (1 per cent above by 2005) respectively.

109 At Stage One, Herefordshire Council proposed boundary amendments to all five wards which would result in improvements in electoral equality. The Liberal Democrats proposed including the parishes of Combe and Byton in the existing Mortimer ward. They proposed no change to the existing Bircher, Bringsty, Hampton Court and Upton wards.

110 Having given consideration to all the proposals for warding arrangements in this area when formulating our draft recommendations, we noted the merit in the Liberal Democrats' scheme to retain the existing wards for this area largely unchanged, given that reasonable electoral equality would be achieved. We therefore proposed endorsing the Liberal Democrats' Mortimer ward and retaining the existing arrangements for Bircher, Bringsty and Upton wards. However, as a consequence of our

proposals elsewhere in the district, we were unable to endorse the Liberal Democrats' proposals in full and proposed some amendments to the existing Hampton Court ward. We proposed extending the boundaries of Hampton Court ward to incorporate the parishes of Pencombe with Grendon Warren, Ullingswick, Little Cowarne, Felton, Ocle Pychard, Sutton and Marden. Although we noted that Herefordshire Council's proposals would result in reasonable levels of electoral equality throughout this area, we had reservations about their impact on community interests and identities. Furthermore, in the absence of supporting argumentation we were unable to justify dividing the existing wards where it appeared to be unnecessary.

111 Under our draft proposals for a 58-member council the number of electors per councillor in our proposed Bircher ward, Bringsty ward and Hampton Court ward would be 2 per cent below the district average (5 per cent below by 2005), 1 per cent above (2 per cent below by 2005) and equal to the average (equal to the average by 2005) respectively. The number of electors per councillor in our proposed Mortimer ward and Upton ward would be 1 per cent above the district average (4 per cent above by 2005) and equal to the average (2 per cent below by 2005) respectively.

112 At Stage Three, the Liberal Democrats, the Conservatives and Councillor Morris supported our proposed Bircher, Mortimer and Upton wards. The Conservatives also proposed no change to the existing Bringsty ward but The Liberal Democrats and Councillor Morris proposed enlarging the existing Hampton Court ward to include the parishes of Grendon Bishop and Hampton Charles from Bringsty ward. The Conservatives proposed retaining the existing Hampton Court and Bringsty wards. Herefordshire Association of Local Councils proposed slight amendments to the existing Bircher and Mortimer wards, proposing the transfer of Richards Castle parish to Mortimer ward and the inclusion of Shobdon parish in its revised Bircher ward. It proposed that Pudleston parish merge with the current Upton ward and that Pencombe with Grendon Warren, Hampton Charles and Grendon Bishop parishes be transferred to Hampton Court ward. Herefordshire Association of Local Councils also proposed that Bromyard & Winslow parish form part of a revised Bringsty ward.

113 Bodenham Parish Council stated that our proposal to increase the size of Hampton Court ward would not "represent the local electors' best interests", arguing that the roads linking our proposed ward are "poor B standard or worse". Hatfield & District Parish Council contended that the existing Hampton Court ward should remain as it is "with perhaps a small addition". Luston Group Parish Council stated that it was opposed to any changes that would involve combining a rural parish with a Leominster ward.

114 We have considered the views expressed at Stage Three of the review and note that with the exception of the two-member Hampton Court ward there is a degree of support for our draft recommendations in this part of the district. We also note that Herefordshire Association of Local Councils has put forward slightly different warding arrangements for this area but that its proposals are also based on existing wards. However, we are unable to endorse its scheme in this area as it would not facilitate our intended proposals in the remainder of the district. As mentioned earlier, we recognise the opposition to multi-member rural wards and therefore propose amending our proposed Hampton Court ward in line with the proposals of the Liberal Democrats and Councillor Morris. We note the merit of this proposal as it would reflect the local preference for a single-member ward without detrimentally affecting the statutory criteria in the remainder of the district. Hampton Court ward would comprise the parishes of Bodenham, Docklow & Hampton Wafer, Hampton Charles, Hatfield & Newhampton, Pudleston, Humber, Ford & Stoke Prior, Newton and Hope under Dinmore. We remain of the view that our proposed Bringsty ward would provide a good balance between electoral equality and community identities and interests but propose transferring the parish of Grendon Bishop to Hampton Court ward in order to facilitate the revised single-member Hampton Court ward. We also propose

confirming our draft proposals for Mortimer, Bircher and Upton wards as final. Under our final recommendations the number of electors per councillor in the proposed Bringsty and Hampton Court wards would be 4 per cent below and 9 per cent below the district average respectively (7 per cent below and 6 per cent below by 2005). The electoral variances for Mortimer, Bircher and Upton wards be the same as under our draft recommendations. These wards are illustrated on Map 2 in Appendix A of the report.

Castle, Golden Cross, Golden Valley, Kington Town, Lyonshall with Titley and Merbach wards

115 These six wards are situated in the west of the district and are each represented by a single councillor. Under the existing arrangements, the number of electors per councillor in Castle ward (comprising the parishes of Eardisley, Whitney-on-Wye, Willersley & Winforton, Almeley, Kinnersley, Letton, Norton Canon, Sarnesfield, Blakemere, Preston-on-Wye, Moccas, Brobury with Monnington-on-Wye and Staunton-on-Wye), Golden Cross ward (comprising the parishes of Pembridge, Monkland & Stretford, Dilwyn and Eardisland) and Golden Valley ward (comprising the parishes of Kingstone, Thrupton, St Devereux, Treville, Wormbridge, Abbeydore, Bacton, Peterchurch, St Margarets, Turnastone and Vowchurch) are 8 per cent above the district average (8 per cent above by 2005), 13 per cent below (14 per cent below by 2005) and 5 per cent above (7 per cent above by 2005) respectively. The number of electors per councillor in Kington Town ward (comprising the parishes of Brilley, Kington, Huntington, Kington Rural and Lower Harpton), Lyonshall with Titley ward (comprising the parishes of Lyonshall, Staunton-on-Arrow, Rodd, Nash & Little Brampton, Titley, Knill, Shobdon, Byton, Coombe, Kinsham and Stapleton) and Merbach ward (comprising the parishes of Clifford, Cusop, Dorstone, Bredwardine, Craswall, Michaelchurch Escley, Llanveynoe, Longtown, Walterstone and Newton) are 20 per cent above the district average (28 per cent above by 2005), 20 per cent below (22 per cent below by 2005) and 8 per cent below (8 per cent below by 2005).

116 At Stage One Herefordshire Council proposed changes to all wards which would result in improvements to electoral equality. The Liberal Democrats also proposed amendments to the wards in this area which would secure improved electoral equality.

117 Staunton-on-Wye Group Parish Council stated that Castle ward should continue to be represented by a single councillor.

118 We gave careful consideration to the views received with regard to this area. We noted that Herefordshire Council's scheme would achieve reasonable levels of electoral equality but were concerned that it did not appear to reflect the geographical characteristics of the Golden Valley. We noted that the Liberal Democrats' proposal did achieve this distinction while maintaining an effective balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria and we therefore proposed adopting their proposals in this area. With regard to Castle ward, we noted that the Liberal Democrats' proposal retained the body of the existing ward. Although it encompassed some surrounding parishes, we considered that it would achieve good electoral equality and would not adversely affect their interests and identities. Consequently we adopted this ward as part of our draft recommendations.

119 Although we recognised that there were limited options in the Kington area, we endorsed the Liberal Democrats' proposal, as it included Lower Harpton parish, which is part of Kington Rural & Lower Harpton Group Parish Council. We considered the Council's proposals for the existing Golden Cross and Lyonshall-with-Titley wards but we noted that their proposed wards combined groups of parishes linked only by a narrow area and unnecessarily divided the existing Golden Cross ward, given

that alternative warding arrangements were available. We therefore considered that this did not constitute an effective balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria and would not provide effective and convenient local government. We therefore adopted the Liberal Democrats' scheme for this area as we noted that their proposals built on the existing wards without adversely affecting community identities and interests. We therefore considered that this arrangement attained an effective balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria.

120 Under our draft recommendations, the number of electors in our proposed Castle ward, Golden Cross ward, Golden Valley North ward and Golden Valley South ward would be 2 per cent above the district average (2 per cent above by 2005), 7 per cent above (5 per cent above by 2005), 1 per cent below (1 per cent below by 2005) and 1 per cent above (3 per cent above by 2005) respectively. In our proposed Kington Town ward and Pembridge & Lyonshall-with-Titley ward, the number of electors per councillor would be 4 per cent above (10 per cent above by 2005) and 1 per cent below (5 per cent below by 2005) respectively.

121 At Stage Three the Liberal Democrats and Councillor Morris supported our proposed Castle, Pembridge & Lyonshall-with-Titley, Golden Valley North, Golden Valley South and Kington Town wards. However, they proposed transferring the parish of Monkland & Stretford to a revised Golden Cross ward and proposed transferring King's Pyon parish to a new single-member Dinmore Hill ward. The Conservatives supported our proposed Kington Town, Golden Valley North and Golden Valley South wards but proposed that Lyonshall parish form part of their proposed Castle ward. The Conservatives also proposed that the parishes of Eardisland and Monkland & Stretford form part of an amended Pembridge ward.

122 Herefordshire Association of Local Councils supported our proposed Golden Valley North and Golden Valley South wards but proposed some amendments to the remainder of our draft proposals in this area.

123 Dorstone Parish Council argued that the existing Merbach ward should be retained. Lyonshall Parish Council argued that "the concept of the 10 per cent criteria for electoral equality was probably valid for densely populated urban areas, but not in a sparsely populated area such as Lyonshall with Titley". Kington Rural and Lower Harpton Parish Council supported the Commission's recommendations against those submitted by Herefordshire Council. Kington Town Council expressed concern that the parishes of Huntingdon and Brilley "will lose their historic connection with Kington" but conceded that it would prefer the 58-member scheme to the Council's 50-member model. Two local residents opposed our proposal to transfer Brilley parish from Kington Town ward, one arguing that it showed "a complete disregard to the identities and interests of the local communities". The director of Herefordshire & Worcestershire Community Council stated that the Council would prefer to see Huntingdon parish remain in the Kington ward. Wyese Group Parish Council argued that its constituent parishes should all form part of the same district ward. Shobdon Parish Council stated that "the inclusion of Shobdon in Ward 24 in principle is acceptable". However, it contended that "diluting and diverting the attention of the councillor across a larger sector of the community risks poorer service". Weobley Parish Council expressed "disbelief" that the name of Weobley was not included as a proposed ward name. It also contended that it should form part of a single-member ward and that we should consider changes to the Kington ward in order to further equalise the number of electors per councillor.

124 We have considered the representations received at Stage Three and note that the district-wide schemes from the Liberal Democrats, Councillor Morris and the Conservatives largely support our draft

recommendations for this area. We also note that Herefordshire Association of Local Councils supported our Golden Valley North and Golden Valley South wards. While we recognise that there is some opposition from individual parish councils in the area, we also note that the majority prefer the wards in this area provided under a 58-member council. We reviewed our proposal to transfer Brilley parish from the existing Kington Town ward in the light of local opposition to our draft recommendations. While we recognise that Brilley parish may share community identity with Kington town, we have not been persuaded that there is no common identity and interest with other parishes in our proposed Castle ward.

125 After due consideration, we remain of the view that our draft recommendations for this area would provide the best balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria and propose confirming our draft recommendations for the proposed Golden Valley North, Golden Valley South, Castle, Kington Town, Pembridge & Lyonshall with Titley wards as final. The electoral equality in these wards would be the same as under our draft recommendations. As mentioned earlier, we noted the opposition to the inclusion of the Monkland & Stretford parish in our proposed Leominster North ward. We are therefore of the view that transferring this parish to our proposed Golden Cross ward would better represent the local identities and interests of this rural parish. We also note the merit of Councillor Guthrie's, the Liberal Democrats' and Councillor Morris' proposal to transfer the parish of King's Pyon to the proposed Dinmore Hill ward as we are of the view that this would combine parishes with similar identities and interests and would facilitate the creation of single-member wards to the south. We therefore propose adopting the Liberal Democrats and Councillor Morris' proposed Golden Cross ward, but in the light of the representation from Weobley Parish Council we propose naming the ward Golden Cross with Weobley. The number of electors per councillor in this ward would be 5 per cent above the district average initially and 3 per cent above by 2005. These wards are illustrated on Map 2 in Appendix A of the report.

Burmarsh, Clehonger, Credenhill, Dinmore Hill, Hagley, Stoney Street and Weobley wards

126 These seven wards are situated in the centre of the district and are each represented by a single councillor. Under the existing arrangements the number of electors in Burmarsh ward (comprising the parishes of Holmer & Shelwick, Marden, Pipe & Lyde and Sutton), Clehonger ward (comprising the parish of Belmont Rural), Credenhill ward (comprising the parishes of Breinton, Credenhill, Kenchester and Stretton Sugwas) and Dinmore Hill ward (comprising the parishes of Burghill, Moreton on Lugg, Dinmore and Wellington) is 41 per cent above the district average (36 per cent above by 2005), 4 per cent above (28 per cent above by 2005), 5 per cent above (9 per cent above by 2005) and 11 per cent above (21 per cent above by 2005) respectively. The number of electors per councillor in Hagley ward (comprising the parishes of Bartlestree, Lugwardine, Preston Wynne, Westhide and Withington), Stoney Street ward (comprising the parishes of Clehonger, Eaton Bishop, Madley and Tyberton) and Weobley ward (comprising the parishes of Birley with Upper Hill, Canon Pyon, Kings Pyon, Weobley, Byford, Bishopstone, Bridge Sollars, Mansel Gamage, Brinsop & Wormsley, Mansel Lacy and Yazor) is 16 per cent above the district average (13 per cent above by 2005), equal to the average (3 per cent below by 2005) and 12 per cent above (12 per cent above by 2005) respectively.

127 At Stage One, Herefordshire Council proposed changes to all of the existing wards in this area resulting in improvements in electoral equality. The Liberal Democrats also proposed changes to all wards which would improve the current levels of electoral equality.

128 Pembridge Parish Council stated that it did not wish to be warded and contended that there is "no need for the pattern of representation to be drastically altered". It further opposed the creation of large

wards with more than one councillor. Parish Councillor Guthrie requested an amendment to the external parish boundaries of Dinmore parish but was informed by the Commission that this does not fall within the remit of this review.

129 When formulating our draft recommendations, we gave careful consideration to the views received in this area. We noted that the Council's proposals provided good levels of electoral equality but were again concerned that this factor was not balanced with the other statutory criteria. We noted that the Liberal Democrats' scheme also achieved reasonable electoral equality by 2005 and used the existing wards as the foundation of its new wards. Although these wards achieved a reasonable balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria, the lack of detail in their scheme elsewhere in the district did not permit us to endorse these proposals. We were unable to consider any area in isolation and we concluded that the consequential effects of implementing this scheme on surrounding wards would be to detrimentally affect both the levels of electoral equality and community interests and identities. Furthermore, the River Wye, Hereford City and the pattern of development within these wards restricts the number of available options.

130 With these considerations in mind, we proposed our own scheme in this area. We attempted to create a single-member wards or one two-member and one single-member ward to comprise the existing wards of Credenhill, Weobley, Dinmore Hill and Burmarsh, but were unable to do so due to the aforementioned constraints. We therefore proposed a three-member Credenhill ward comprising the existing Credenhill and Dinmore Hill wards with the addition of Pipe & Lyde and Holmer parishes from Burmarsh ward and Weobley ward (less Weobley and Kings Pyon parishes). We proposed that Clehonger ward be linked to Belmont ward in Hereford City, as described earlier. We proposed a two-member Stoney Street & Kingsthorpe ward which combined the parishes to the east of the Golden Valley and appeared to reflect the identity of the constituent parishes. In creating a new two-member Hagley & Backbury ward, we recognised the characteristic nature of the parishes to the east of the River Wye in the current Hagley ward and retained this arrangement while including parishes to the south, which we considered to be well linked, with similar identities.

131 Under our draft recommendations for a 58-member council, the number of electors per councillor in our proposed Credenhill ward, Hagley & Backbury ward and Stoney Street & Kingsthorpe ward would be 5 per cent above the district average (9 per cent above by 2005), 7 per cent above (4 per cent above by 2005) and 1 per cent above (2 per cent below by 2005) respectively.

132 At Stage Three we received a number of representations in opposition to our draft recommendations for wards in this area. As has already been mentioned, respondents clearly stated an aversion to multi-member wards in the rural areas; our proposals for a three-member Credenhill ward and a two-member Stoney Street & Kingsthorpe ward therefore raised particular objections. The Liberal Democrats and Councillor Morris proposed dividing our proposed Credenhill ward between three single-member wards with the addition of King's Pyon parish from our proposed Golden Cross ward but without adversely affecting proposals elsewhere in the district.

133 As part of its 58-member scheme, Hereford Association of Local Councils also proposed single-member wards in this area but proposed including a number of parishes from other wards which would have a consequential effect on the statutory criteria in surrounding wards.

134 Wellington Parish Council argued that the "many disparate interests" of electors within our proposed Credenhill ward could not be properly represented in a three-member ward. Burghill Parish Council contended that the rural identities of parishes within our proposed three-member Credenhill

ward “could be perceived as being overwhelmed”, arguing that the parishes of Holmer & Shelwick and Credenhill are “partially urbanised”. It therefore supported the retention of the status quo. Moreton on Lugg Parish Council argued that it is “imperative” that it be part of the same ward as Wellington parish, with a single district councillor. It contended that the two parishes have “far-reaching historical links, carried through the generations to the present day”. Madley Parish Council was “unanimously” opposed to our two-member Stoney Street & Kingsthorne ward, arguing that “two councillors would be unable to maintain a mutually agreeable role due to the very large area covered”.

135 Birley with Upper Hill Parish Council argued that it has always had close links with the Pyons Group Parish Council and argued that the current Weobley ward should be retained. The Pyons Group Parish Council argued that our proposals did not account for the “close-knit community ties established over many years by the people of Weobley ward”. It further contended that it did not have any links with the proposed Credenhill ward, describing it as a “predominantly urban area” and argued that it is “vital” that the interests of the parish be represented by a single councillor. Two local residents and the chairman of Foxley Group Parish Council also objected to the omission of Weobley from the proposed ward names, the chairman arguing that they would be “losing a piece of history for the sake of bureaucratic tidiness”. Eaton Bishop Parish Council stated that our proposed Stoney Street & Kingsthorne ward “bear[s] no relationship to the geography, communications, or common interests of the parishes concerned”.

136 Councillor Guthrie stated that the “Herefordshire Council model is not acceptable to the people of Burmarsh or the Dinmore Local Area Forum”. As an alternative to our draft recommendations for the proposed Credenhill ward, Councillor Guthrie proposed combining the parishes of Canon Pyon, King’s Pyon, Yazor, Mansell Lacey, Mansell Gamage, Bishopstone, Bridge Sollers, Byford and Brinsop & Wormsley to form another single-member ward. He contended that all of these communities live to the western side of the the A49 trunk road and all look to each other. This ward would also result in good electoral equality by 2005. Councillor Guthrie also proposed a single-member Sutton Walls ward comprising the parishes of Marden, Sutton and Moreton on Lugg. He reasoned that Marden and Sutton parishes have a close affinity, using the same services and local facilities, and stated that Moreton on Lugg parish is a common link between Marden and Sutton parishes. This ward was supported by the Conservatives and Marden Parish Council who argued that this ward would be “a relevant and vital ward, working together for many common goals”. The Conservatives and Councillor Guthrie also proposed a single-member ward comprising the parishes of Holmer & Shelwick, Pipe & Lyde and Burghill, stating that local residents in the area use the shopping facilities in the Bobblestock area. Pipe & Lyde Parish Council proposed that the parishes of Pipe & Lyde, Sutton and Marden form a single-member ward. The Conservatives proposed a single-member Credenhill ward (based on the existing ward) and also proposed dividing the proposed two-member Stoney Street & Kingsthorne ward between a single-member Stoney Street ward based on the existing ward (less the parish of Tyberton) and a single-member Vallets ward, comprising the remainder of the proposed two-member ward. The Conservatives argued that these two wards would be “sensible community based wards”.

137 Holmer & Shelwick Parish Council supported a council size of 58 and stated that it was “strongly of the mind that there should be single-member wards throughout Herefordshire”. As an alternative to our draft proposals, the Parish Council also proposed that the parishes of Holmer & Shelwick, Burghill and Pipe & Lyde be combined to form a single-member ward.

138 Having noted the opposition to our proposed Credenhill and Stoney Street & Kingsthorne wards, we have given further consideration to the creation of single-member wards in this area. We considered the scheme put forward by Herefordshire Association of Local Councils and have noted that they

achieve a reasonable balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria. However, its proposals in this area would have a detrimental effect on electoral equality and the statutory criteria on our proposals elsewhere in the district. We are therefore unable to endorse the scheme of Herefordshire Association of Local Councils in this area. We note that the Conservatives proposed dividing the Stoney Street & Kingsthorpe ward between two single-member wards which would appear to reflect the statutory criteria while providing reasonable electoral equality. We also note the merit of this proposal as it would not adversely affect electoral equality in surrounding wards. We therefore propose amending our draft recommendations to reflect the proposal of the Conservatives in retaining the existing Credenhill ward and creating a revised single-member Stoney Street ward and a new single-member Vallets ward comprising the parishes of Kentchurch, Kilpeck, Kenderchurch, Wormbridge, Much Dewchurch, St Devereux, Trevill, Thrupton, Allensmore and Kingstone. Under our final recommendations, the number of electors per councillor in our proposed Stoney Street and Vallets wards would be 6 per cent below and 8 per cent above the district average respectively (5 per cent above and 9 per cent below by 2005).

139 We have also noted the level of opposition to our proposed three-member Credenhill ward and have considered the alternative proposals submitted at Stage Three. In particular we note the merit of Councillor Guthrie's revised proposals for new single-member wards as they are largely contained within the proposed three-member ward and therefore would not have a significant knock-on effect elsewhere in the district. We consider that Councillor Guthrie's proposals provide a good balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria and we note that good supporting evidence has been submitted in support of his proposals. We also note that his proposed Sutton Walls and Burghill, Holmer & Lyde wards have also received local support. We therefore propose adopting Councillor Guthrie's proposed single-member Burghill, Holmer & Lyde, Dinmore Hill and Sutton Walls wards as part of our final recommendations. The number of electors per councillor in these wards would be 4 per cent above the district average, 11 per cent below and 5 per cent above respectively (5 per cent above, 5 per cent below and 6 per cent above by 2005). These wards are illustrated on Map 2 in Appendix A of the report.

Backbury, Bromyard, Frome, Hope End, Marcle Ridge and Old Gore wards

140 These six wards are situated in the east of the district. Backbury ward (comprising the parishes of Brockhampton with Much Fawley, Dormington, Fownhope, Hampton Bishop, Mordiford, Stoke Edith and Weston Beggard), Frome ward (comprising the parishes of Acton Beauchamp, Ashperton, Avenbury, Bishops Frome, Canon Frome, Castle Frome, Eggleton, Evesbatch, Much Cowarne, Stanford Bishop, Stretton Grandison, Tarrington and Yarkhill), Marcle Ridge ward (comprising the parishes of Aylton, part of Ledbury, Little Marcle, Much Marcle Munsley, Pixley, Putley and Woolhope) and Old Gore ward (comprising the parishes of Aston Ingham, Brampton Abbots, Foy, How Caple, Linton, Sollershope and Upton Bishop) are each represented by a single councillor. The number of electors per councillor in these wards is 2 per cent below the district average (5 per cent below by 2005), 9 per cent above (7 per cent above by 2005), 65 per cent above (109 per cent above by 2005) and 3 per cent below (5 per cent below by 2005) respectively.

141 Bromyard ward (comprising the parishes of Bromyard & Winslow, Felton, Little Cowarne, Moreton Jefferies, Ocle Pychard, Pencombe with Grendon Warren, Stoke Lacy and Ullingswick) and Hope End ward (comprising the parishes of Bosbury, Coddington, Colwall, Cradleigh, Mathon and Wellington Heath) are both represented by two councillors. The number of electors per councillor in these wards is 6 per cent below the district average (9 per cent below by 2005) and equal to the average (2 per cent below by 2005) respectively.

142 At Stage One, Herefordshire Council proposed changes to all of the existing wards which would result in improved electoral equality. The Liberal Democrats also proposed changes to each of the wards in this area, resulting in improvements to electoral equality.

143 Yarkhill Parish Council stated that “the present system of electoral arrangements suits the area very well” and therefore opposed any changes.

144 When formulating our draft recommendations, we carefully considered the representations received in relation to this area. We acknowledged that the available warding arrangements in the south-east of the district are restricted by the River Wye. We considered Herefordshire Council’s proposals and noted that they were built on existing wards and provided reasonable levels of electoral equality. However, we were unable to look at the proposals for any single area in isolation and had to consider the impact which any modification would have on the proposals for the district as a whole. Similarly, we were unable to endorse the Liberal Democrats’ proposed wards in this area because they would detrimentally affect electoral equality our proposals in surrounding wards. Consequently we created our own wards in this area which we considered provided reasonable electoral equality while having regard to the statutory criteria.

145 As mentioned earlier, we proposed combining Hagley and Backbury wards to form a two-member ward and incorporated the urban overspill at the edge of Ledbury town in the proposed three-member Ledbury ward. As a consequence of our proposal in this area, we proposed creating a single-member Ledbury Rural ward, incorporating the remainder of Ledbury parish (Ledbury Rural parish ward of Ledbury parish) with parishes to the west which are linked by the A4172 road. We proposed retaining the existing ward of Hope End as it represents a good balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria. In considering our proposed Bromyard ward, we again combined parishes which are well linked and have similar geographical characteristics and created a two-member ward comprising the parishes of Bromyard & Winslow, Moreton Jeffries and Stoke Lacy from the current Bromyard ward and the parishes of Avenbury, Acton Beauchamp, Evesbatch, Bishop’s Frome, Much Cowarne, Stanford Bishop and Stoke Lacy from the northern half of the existing Frome ward. We also proposed maintaining part of the existing single-member Old Gore ward with the inclusion of Kings Caple, Brockhampton with Much Fawley, Much Marcle and Woolhope parishes, less the parishes of Aston Ingham and Linton. In creating the new Old Gore ward, we sought to incorporate the parishes to the east of the River Wye, using the M50 as the southern boundary.

146 Under our draft recommendations for a 58-member council, the number of electors per councillor in our proposed Bromyard ward and Hope End ward would be 3 per cent above the district average (1 per cent below by 2005) and 3 per cent below (5 per cent below by 2005) respectively. The number of electors per councillor in our proposed Ledbury Rural and Old Gore wards would be 6 per cent above (equal to the average by 2005) and 3 per cent above (2 per cent by 2005).

147 At Stage Three the Liberal Democrats and Councillor Morris proposed amendments to our draft recommendations in this part of the district as part of their revised 58-member scheme. They proposed single-member wards which would provide good levels of electoral equality.

148 The Conservatives supported our draft proposals for the Old Gore, Penyard and Ledbury Rural wards and for the retention of the existing Hope End ward. They also proposed dividing the proposed two-member Hagley & Backbury ward between two single-member wards; they proposed retaining the existing single-member Hagley ward and that Backbury ward be based on the existing ward with the addition of Tarrington parish. The Conservatives also put forward a revised Bromyard ward.

149 Herefordshire Association of Local Councils put forward the same amended single-member Backbury ward as the Conservatives but proposed amendments to the remainder of the wards in this area. It largely proposed single-member wards with the exception of a revised Bromyard ward which would be combined with much of the existing Bringsty ward. Herefordshire Association of Local Councils' proposals would result in reasonable levels of electoral equality in this area.

150 Bromyard & Winslow Town Council argued that our draft recommendations "ignore the practical and economical influence of the Town or the surrounding parishes for equalisation of electors per councillor" and therefore proposed an alternative Bromyard & Winslow ward.

151 Colwall Parish Council supported our draft recommendations to retain the existing Hope End ward but particularly objected to the Liberal Democrats' and Councillor Morris' proposal which would divide the existing two-member ward into single-member wards. Bartestree with Lugwardine Group Parish Council stated that problems within our proposed Hagley & Backbury ward could arise "should there be a breakdown in communication". Withington Group Parish Council objected to our proposed two-member Hagley & Backbury ward and proposed that single-member wards should represent this area. The Parish Council also resolved that the parish groupings should be retained within a single-member ward. Upton Bishop Parish Council argued that "however the numerical requirements are satisfied, the affinity of parishes in rural wards will be compromised or sacrificed". It further contended that it has a "geographical and social affinity with Linton & Gorsley parish" and supported retaining the existing Old Gore ward. Much Cowarne Group Parish Council stated that it "fully supports" our draft recommendations, contending that they provide "greater representation... and avoid splitting the Much Cowarne Group". Yarkhill Parish Council objected to becoming a member of the Ledbury Rural ward. Ocle Pychard Group Parish Council stated that it would "accept whatever is the most suitable arrangement for the Unitary Authority".

152 Town Councillor Cave supported the proposed 58-member council size but proposed some amendments to our proposals for the Bromyard area. In particular, Councillor Cave considered that it would be "beneficial" for the parishes of Linton and Norton to form part of a two-member Bromyard ward. Councillor Cave contended that these area have common interests and that such a ward would therefore satisfy the statutory criteria.

153 As discussed later in the report, we are putting forward the proposed Penyard ward as part of our final recommendations. We also propose endorsing Ledbury Town Council's revised proposals for the Ledbury area. We remain of the view that our proposed Old Gore ward provides a good balance between electoral equality and community identities and interests, and in the absence of any considerable opposition to this ward at Stage Three, we propose putting it forward as part of our final recommendations. Although we again recognise the merit of the proposals for single-member rural wards in this area submitted by the Liberal Democrats, Councillor Morris and Herefordshire Association of Local Councils, we are restricted in the extent to which we can adopt these proposals; we cannot consider this area in isolation and must therefore consider any knock-on effects when formulating a scheme for the district as a whole. We noted that the Conservatives endorsed the majority of our draft recommendations in this part of the district. Where they proposed alternatives, we also note that they supported our proposed Ledbury Rural ward but would not have been aware of the misallocation of the electorate projections in Ledbury parish. The revised electorate allocation would therefore affect the electoral equality of some of their proposals in this area and we are unable to endorse them under our final recommendations. However, we consider that their proposal to divide our proposed two-member Hagley & Backbury ward between two single-member wards reflects the local preference for single-member wards, combines parishes with common identities and provides

reasonable electoral equality, and we therefore propose endorsing the Conservatives' proposed single-member Backbury and single-member Hagley wards. The number of electors per councillor in Backbury and Hagley wards would be 3 per cent above the district average and 12 per cent above respectively (1 per cent below and 9 per cent above by 2005).

154 Although we again recognise the preference for single-member rural wards, we note that Colwall Parish Council has supported the retention of the existing two-member Hope End ward (as proposed in our draft recommendations) rather than the Liberal Democrats' and Councillor Morris' revised proposal which would divide it between single-member wards. In the absence of any further submissions in this area, we remain of the view that this two-member ward should form part of our final recommendations. The electoral equality for Hope End ward would therefore be the same as under our draft recommendations. In the light of these proposals, we are unable to endorse other proposals in this area and propose a revised two-member Bromyard ward based on the existing ward with the inclusion of Avenbury parish but less the parish of Moreton Jeffries. We consider that this would combine rural parishes that look to Bromyard as their centre and which share good road links. We consequently propose an amended single-member Frome ward which would amalgamate a number of very small rural parishes with similar interests, maintaining parish groupings and providing an improving level of electoral equality. Our proposed single-member Frome ward would comprise the parishes of Acton Beauchamp, Ashperton, Aylton, Bishop's Frome, Canon Frome, Castle Frome, Eggleton, Evesbatch, Little Marcle, Much Cowarne, Moreton Jeffries, Munsley, Pixley, Putley, Stanford Bishop, Stretton Grandison and Yarkhill. The number of electors per councillor in the proposed Bromyard and Frome wards would be 5 per cent below the district average and 7 per cent above respectively (9 per cent below and 4 per cent above by 2005). These wards are illustrated on Map 2 in Appendix A of the report.

Doward, Hollington, Kingsthorne, Penyard, Pontrilas and Wilton wards

155 These six wards are situated in the south of the district and are each represented by a single councillor. The number of electors per councillor in Doward ward (comprising the parishes of Ganarew, Goodrich, Llangarron, Welsh Bicknor and Whitchurch), Hollington ward (comprising the parishes of Ballingham, Bolstone, Dinedor, Holme Lacy, Kings Caple, Little Dewchurch and Lower Bullingham) and Kingsthorne ward (comprising the parishes of Aconbury, Allensmore, Callow, Dewesall, Grafton, Haywood, Little Birch, Much Birch and Much Dewchurch) is 9 per cent above the district average (7 per cent above by 2005), 5 per cent above (18 per cent above by 2005) and equal to the average (3 per cent below by 2005). The number of electors per councillor in Penyard ward (comprising the parishes of Hope Mansell, Lea, Walford and Weston-under-Penyard), Pontrilas ward (comprising the parishes of Dulas, Ewyas Harold, Garway, Kenderchurch, Kentchurch, Kilpeck, Llancillo, Llanrothal, Orcop, Rowstone, Welsh Newton and St Weonards) and Wilton ward (comprising the parishes of Bridstow, Harewood, Hentland, Llandinabo, Llanwarne, Pencoyd, Peterstow, Sellack and Tretire with Michaelchurch) is 12 per cent above the district average (10 per cent above by 2005), 11 per cent above (8 per cent above by 2005) and 10 per cent below (10 per cent below by 2005) respectively.

156 At Stage One, Herefordshire Council proposed retaining the existing Penyard ward and proposed a revised Doward ward less the parish of Ganarew. It put forward amended wards for the remainder of this area which would result in improved levels of electoral equality. The Liberal Democrats proposed amendments to all wards in this area with improved levels of electoral equality.

157 We gave careful consideration to the representations received at Stage One. As discussed previously, the proposals that we put forward for the surrounding wards somewhat limited our options for these six wards. Consequently, we proposed an enlarged two-member Doward ward, incorporating

the parishes of Welsh Newton and Llanrothal from the existing Pontrilas ward and the parishes of Bridstow, Hentland, Peterstow and Sellack from the current Wilton ward. We considered that these parishes have good communication links and appeared to share some degree of community identity. This ward would have an electoral variance of 11 per cent in 2005, and while we considered incorporating the parish of Tretire with Michaelchurch in order to improve the electoral equality, we recognised that this is currently grouped with the parishes to its north (Harewood, Llandinabo, Llanwarne and Pencoyd) to form a joint parish council. We therefore considered that combining these parishes within a single ward would better reflect their identity, and therefore united them within an amended single-member Pontrilas ward. We also proposed including the parishes of Aconbury, Little Birch and Much Birch (currently in Kingsthorpe ward), as they are all linked by, or very close to, the A49. As a consequence of our proposal to include Walford parish in an amended Ross-on-Wye West ward, we proposed that the remainder of Penyard ward be combined in a ward with the parishes of Linton and Aston Ingham to form an amended single-member Penyard ward. We also proposed extending the boundaries of the existing Hollington ward to include the parishes of Callow, Dewesall, Grafton and Haywood, thereby retaining the Callow & Haywood parish grouping.

158 Under our draft recommendations for a 58-member council, the number of electors per councillor in our proposed Doward and Hollington wards would be 8 per cent below and 14 per cent below the district average respectively (11 per cent below and equal to the average by 2005). The number of electors per councillor in Penyard and Pontrilas wards would be 9 per cent above and 3 per cent below the district average respectively (6 per cent above and 4 per cent below by 2005).

159 As part of their revised 58-member scheme submitted at Stage Three, the Liberal Democrats and Councillor Morris proposed amendments to all of our draft recommendations in this area although they proposed single-member rural wards. However, they supported our proposed Ross-on-Wye West ward and also proposed combining the parish of Weston under Penyard with Ross-on-Wye East parish ward to form a two-member ward.

160 As mentioned earlier in the report, the Conservatives proposed dividing the proposed Stoney Street & Kingsthorpe ward between two single-member wards which we propose endorsing as part of our final recommendations. They also supported our proposed Ross-on-Wye East and Ross-on-Wye West wards but put forward revised single-member wards for the remainder of this area.

161 Herefordshire Association of Local Councils supported our proposed single-member Hollington ward but submitted amendments to our other draft recommendations for this part of the district.

162 Goodrich & Welsh Bicknor Parish Council stated that it “strongly objects” to the enlargement of the Doward ward and the increase of more than one councillor. Aconbury Parish Meeting stated that there was a “universal desire” within the parish to retain the existing Kingsthorpe ward and argued that “we already have the right number of electors... and the logic of moving all the boundaries to get other numbers right makes no impact at all”. However, the Parish Meeting conceded that, if change was inevitable, it would have a “perverse preference” for the Commission’s recommendations. Callow & Haywood Group Parish Council also contended that the current Kingsthorpe ward should be retained as it already has reasonable electoral equality. Much Dewchurch Parish Council also stated that it would prefer to retain the existing Kingsthorpe ward but specified certain parishes as being “acceptable” additions to the ward.

163 Llangarron Parish Council expressed concern that any enlargement in its current single-member ward “would have a detrimental effect”. Welsh Newton & Llanrothal Group Parish Council stated that

it was “neutral” as to whether our draft recommendations or the existing ward would be proposed. Much Birch Parish Council stated that “the only option which would be acceptable for Much Birch Parish is one that retains their current link with Little Birch”.

164 As a consequence of our decision to contain boundary amendments in the Ross-on-Wye area within the boundaries of our draft wards, we remain of the view that our draft recommendations for Penyard ward represent a good balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria and propose endorsing this ward as part of our final recommendations. As already mentioned, we propose endorsing the Conservatives’ proposed single-member Vallets ward. Although a number of respondents expressed a preference for retaining the existing Kingthorne ward, we have not received any viable alternatives to our draft recommendations. We therefore remain of the view that our proposed single-member Hollington ward would provide a good balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria and propose that this ward form part of our final recommendations. As a consequence of our proposals in surrounding wards, we have limited scope to adopt the schemes of the Liberal Democrats and Councillor Morris or Herefordshire Association of Local Councils. We therefore propose our own amendments to our draft recommendations. As a consequence of our proposal to transfer the parish of Walford from the Ross-on-Wye West ward, the level of under-representation in the south of the district has been increased; in order to balance electoral equality in wards in this area, we propose including the parish of Hentland in the proposed single-member Pontrilas ward. We also propose that the parishes of Goodrich, Ganarew, Welsh Bicknor and Whitchurch be transferred from our proposed Doward ward to the proposed single-member Kerne Bridge ward. In order to more accurately reflect the nature of the ward we propose that it be renamed Llangaron ward. The number of electors per councillor in the revised Llangarron and Pontrilas wards would be 7 per cent above the district average and 16 per cent above respectively (6 per cent above and 14 per cent above by 2005). Although we acknowledge that the electoral equality in Pontrilas ward has slightly deteriorated, we are unable to improve on this figure due to the configuration of parishes in this part of the district.

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

Electoral Cycle

166 At Stage One we received no proposals in relation to the electoral cycle of the district. Accordingly, we made no recommendation for change to the present system of whole-council elections every four years.

167 At Stage Three Leominster Constituency Liberal Democrats stated, “We find it strange that no proposals to hold elections by thirds are made by the Commission”.

168 The Conservatives stated that the associations of Leominster and Hereford “totally support the Commission’s proposals regarding the electoral cycle”.

169 Welsh Newton & Llanrothal Group Parish Council supported the retention of whole council elections.

170 While we acknowledge the comments made by the Liberal Democrats, there appears to be a majority view at this stage that whole-council elections should be retained. We therefore confirm our draft recommendations for the retention of whole-council elections as final.

Conclusions

171 Having considered carefully all the representations and evidence received in response to our consultation report, we have moved away from our draft recommendations in a number of areas, as follows:

- The proposed Credenhill, Doward, Hagley & Backbury, Hampton Court and Stoney Street & Kingsthorpe wards should be divided into single-member wards based on proposals we received at Stage Three.
- We propose that the parishes of Ledbury, Donnington and Eastnor form a three-member Ledbury ward.
- We propose a new single-member Kerne Bridge ward and a slight amendment to the boundary between the existing Ross-on-Wye East and Ross-on-Wye West wards.
- We propose a minor amendment to the external boundary of the Leominster North ward.
- We propose our own single-member Bromyard and Frome wards.
- We propose confirming our draft recommendations as final in Hereford City and the wards of Aconbury, Bircher, Castle, Golden Valley North, Golden Valley South, Kington Town, Mortimer, Hope End, Old Gore, Penyard and Upton.

172 We conclude that, in Herefordshire:

- there should be a reduction in council size from 60 to 58;
- there should be 40 wards, four fewer than at present;
- the boundaries of 39 of the existing wards should be modified;
- the Council should continue to hold whole-council elections every four years.

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

Table 4: Comparison of Current and Recommended Electoral Arrangements

	2000 electorate		2005 forecast electorate	
	Current arrangements	Final recommendations	Current arrangements	Final recommendations
Number of councillors	60	58	60	58
Number of wards	44	40	44	40
Average number of electors per councillor	2,226	2,303	2,406	2,489
Number of wards with a variance more than 10 per cent from the average	19	7	18	4
Number of wards with a variance more than 20 per cent from the average	6	0	9	0

174 As Table 4 shows, our recommendations would result in a reduction in the number of wards with an electoral variance of more than 10 per cent from 19 to seven, with no wards varying by more than 20 per cent from the district average. This level of electoral equality would improve further in 2005, with four wards, Ross-on-Wye East, Ross-on-Wye West, Pontrilas and Ledbury, varying by more than 10 per cent from the average, at 12, 16, 14 and 11 per cent respectively. We conclude that our recommendations would best meet the need for electoral equality, having regard to the statutory criteria.

Final Recommendation

Herefordshire District Council should comprise 58 councillors serving 40 wards, as detailed and named in Tables 1 and 2, and illustrated on Map 2 and in Appendix A including the large map inside the back cover. The Council should continue to hold whole-council elections every four years.

Parish and Town Council Electoral Arrangements

175 In undertaking reviews of electoral arrangements, we are required to comply as far as possible with the provisions set out in Schedule 11 to the 1972 Local Government Act. The Schedule provides that if a parish is to be divided between different district wards it must also be divided into parish wards, so that each parish ward lies wholly within a single ward of the district. Accordingly, we proposed consequential warding arrangements for the parishes of Hereford, Ledbury, Leominster, Lower Bullingham, Ross-on-Wye, Ross Rural and the Withington Group.

176 At Stage One we received representations from Breinton, Credenhill, Fownhope, Hampton Bishop, Moreton on Lugg, Much Birch, Walford and Whitchurch & Ganarew parish councils, all requesting that

the current parishing arrangements be retained. We are therefore proposing no change to the existing arrangements for these parishes.

177 At Stage One we received two representations from residents proposing that the number of parish councillors representing Bromyard & Winslow Town Council be reduced from 18 to nine or 10. Given that this is a significant decrease in the number of councillors and does not appear to have been consulted on locally, we did not propose this as part of our draft recommendations. At Stage Three we received no further representations and are therefore not proposing any changes to the electoral arrangements of Bromyard & Winslow Town Council.

178 The town council of Hereford is currently served by 18 councillors representing nine wards: Aylestone, Belmont, Central, Hinton, Holmer, St Martins, St Nicholas, Three Elms and Tupsley. Each parish ward has the same boundaries as the district wards of the same name, and is represented by two parish councillors. We proposed that the level of representation on the town council be retained, but that the number of parish wards be reduced to seven, with the same boundaries as the proposed district wards.

179 We have received no further comments regarding town council arrangements in this area and are therefore confirming our draft recommendations as final.

Final Recommendation

Hereford Town Council should comprise 18 councillors, as at present, representing seven wards: Aylestone (returning two councillors), Belmont (returning three councillors), Central (returning one councillor), St Martins & Hinton (returning three councillors), St Nicholas (returning two councillors), Three Elms (returning four councillors) and Tupsley (returning three councillors). The parish ward boundaries should reflect the proposed district ward boundaries in the area, as illustrated and named on the large map at the back of the report.

180 The town council of Ledbury is currently served by 18 councillors representing two wards: Town (represented by 12 councillors) and Ledbury Rural (represented by six councillors). In formulating our draft recommendations, we proposed that the boundary between these two wards should be amended to follow the district ward boundary, thereby incorporating the urban overspill within the urban ward at district level. We did not propose altering the representation of each ward.

181 At Stage Three Ledbury Town Council rejected the proposal to alter the boundary of the town ward, arguing that this would only partially address the problem of urban overspill. As mentioned earlier in the report, we proposed endorsing the Town Council's proposal to create a three-member Ledbury ward comprising the whole of Ledbury parish. The Town Council consequently proposed that the Ledbury Town and Ledbury Rural wards should be merged to form one town ward, represented by 18 parish councillors. It argued that the "people of Ledbury parish all belong to one body and do not appreciate the separation". In view of our proposals for Ledbury at district level, we therefore propose that Ledbury parish comprise 18 councillors representing one town ward.

Final Recommendation

Ledbury Town Council should comprise 18 councillors, as at present, representing the parish as a whole.

182 The town council of Leominster is currently served by 16 councillors representing three wards: Leominster North (represented by six councillors), Leominster East (represented by four councillors) and Leominster South (represented by six councillors). In formulating our draft recommendations we proposed that the boundary between Leominster North and Leominster South parish wards be amended to follow the district ward boundary, along the centre of Bargates, and that the boundary between Leominster North and Leominster East parish wards be amended to follow Kenwater as these amendments provide more easily identifiable boundaries. We did not propose altering the representation of each ward.

183 In response to our draft recommendations report, Leominster Town Council proposed amendments to the three town wards. It contended that, at present, there is a “huge discrepancy” and that changes should take place “to afford fairer and more equal representation”. It therefore proposed that the number of town wards be reduced from three to two, in order to reflect the proposed district wards. It also proposed that eight town councillors should represent each ward. In the light of our proposals at district level, we propose endorsing the Town Council’s proposals, thereby reducing the number of town wards from three to two.

Final Recommendation

Leominster Town Council should comprise 16 councillors, as at present, representing two wards: Leominster North (returning eight councillors) and Leominster South (returning eight councillors). The boundary between the two parish wards should reflect the proposed district ward boundaries, as illustrated and named on Map A3 in Appendix A.

184 The parish of Lower Bullingham is currently represented by six councillors and is not warded. At Stage One Lower Bullingham Parish Council proposed an increase in the number of councillors representing the parish because of the “rapid growth ... in the parish due to the development in close proximity to the city boundary”. It did not specify its preferred number of councillors. At Stage One we proposed creating a new Withy Brook parish ward to the north of the railway line which would be incorporated in the proposed St Martins & Hinton district ward. This would incorporate the urban overspill in the parish in the more urban district ward. At Stage One we proposed an increase in council size to 10 members but particularly welcomed views at Stage Three on the proposed increase in representation.

185 In response to our draft recommendations report Lower Bullingham Parish Council stated that it was “delighted” to have a proposed increase in councillors but expressed concern about our proposal to divide the parish into two wards. The Parish Council contended that our proposal could “cause confusion and division” in the parish and therefore argued that we should reconsider splitting the parish into two wards. We have given further consideration to our draft proposal to divide the parish of Lower Bullingham into two wards. However, we remain of the view that the urban overspill should be addressed and that this part of the parish has a closer affinity with the St Martins & Hinton district ward.

We consider that our draft recommendation will afford a better representation to the parish as a whole and therefore propose confirming our draft recommendation for Lower Bullingham Parish Council as final.

Final Recommendation

Lower Bullingham Parish Council should comprise 10 councillors, four more than at present, representing two wards: Withy Brook (returning four councillors) and Lower Bullingham (returning six councillors). The boundary between the two parish wards should reflect the proposed district ward boundary, as illustrated and named on the large map at the back of the report.

186 Ross-on-Wye Town Council currently comprises 12 councillors representing two wards: Ross-on-Wye West and Ross-on-Wye East (both represented by six councillors). At Stage One we proposed that the parish ward boundary be amended to follow the proposed district ward boundary between the proposed Ross-on-Wye West and Ross-on-Wye East district wards. At Stage Three we did not receive any representations regarding the Town Council arrangements. As mentioned earlier in our report, we propose a slight amendment to the boundary between the existing Ross-on-Wye East and Ross-on-Wye West district wards. We therefore propose that the boundary between the two town wards should reflect that of the district wards. However, we are not proposing any change to the allocation of parish councillors in the two wards.

Final Recommendation

Ross-on-Wye Town Council should comprise 12 parish councillors, representing two wards: Ross-on-Wye West (returning six councillors) and Ross-on-Wye East (returning six councillors). The boundary between the two parish wards should reflect the proposed district ward boundary, as illustrated and named on Map A3 in Appendix A.

187 Ross Rural Parish Council is currently represented by eight parish councillors and is not warded. In order to facilitate our proposed district warding proposals we propose that two parish wards be created: Ross Rural East (returning two councillors) and Ross Rural West (returning six councillors). At Stage One we proposed that the parish ward boundary be amended to follow the proposed district ward boundary between the proposed Ross-on-Wye West and Ross-on-Wye East district wards.

188 As mentioned earlier in the report, we propose a minor amendment between the boundaries of the existing Ross-on-Wye East and Ross-on-Wye West wards. However, this would not affect our draft proposal to create the parish wards of Ross Rural East and Ross Rural West. We therefore propose endorsing our draft recommendations for Ross Rural parish as part of our final report

Final Recommendation

Ross Rural Parish Council should comprise eight parish councillors, representing two wards: Ross Rural East (returning two councillors) and Ross Rural West (returning six councillors). The boundary between the two parish wards should reflect the proposed district ward boundary, as illustrated and named on Map A2 in Appendix A.

189 Withington Group Parish Council comprises the parishes of Withington (represented by nine councillors), Preston Wynne (represented by three councillors) and Westhide (represented by three councillors). At Stage One Withington Group Parish Council requested that the number of councillors representing Withington be increased from nine to 10 due to recent and future housing development in the area. We were content to endorse this proposal as part of our draft recommendations.

190 In response to our draft recommendations report, Withington Group Parish Council stated that it “acknowledges” the Commission’s recommendation that the Parish Council should have an additional parish councillor. We therefore propose confirming our draft recommendations for Withington Group Parish Council as final.

Final Recommendations

Withington Group Parish Council should comprise 16 parish councillors representing three parishes: Withington (represented by 10 councillors), Preston Wynne (represented by three councillors) and Westhide (represented by three councillors).

191 At Stage One we did not propose any change to the electoral cycle of parish and town councils in the district. We have received no further comments regarding the electoral cycle of parish and town councils and are therefore confirming our draft recommendations as final.

Final 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 District Council.

6 WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

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

193 It is now up to the Secretary of State to decide whether to endorse our recommendations, with or without modification, and to implement them by means of an Order. Such an Order will not be made before 11 September 2001.

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

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

APPENDIX A

Final Recommendations for Herefordshire: Detailed Mapping

The following maps illustrate the Commission's proposed ward boundaries for the Herefordshire area.

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

Map A2 illustrates the proposed warding of Ross-on-Wye and Ross Rural parishes.

Map A3 illustrates the proposed warding of Leominster parish.

Existing and proposed warding arrangements for Herefordshire

At the back of the report are two A3 maps.

Map 1 shows the existing warding arrangements for Herefordshire.

Map 2 shows the Commission's draft recommendations for Herefordshire.

Map A1: Final Recommendations for Herefordshire: Key Map

Map A2: Proposed Warding of Ross-on-Wye and Ross Rural Parishes

Map A3: Proposed Warding of Leominster Parish