

Draft recommendations on the future electoral arrangements for Welwyn Hatfield in Hertfordshire

Further electoral review

November 2006

Translations and other formats

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What is the Boundary Committee for England?

The Boundary Committee for England is a committee of the Electoral Commission, an independent body set up by Parliament under the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000. It is responsible for conducting reviews as directed by the Electoral Commission or the Secretary of State.

Members of the Committee are:

Pamela Gordon (Chair)

Robin Gray

Joan Jones CBE

Ann M. Kelly

Professor Colin Mellors

Director:

Archie Gall

When conducting reviews our aim is to ensure that the number of electors represented by each councillor in an area is as nearly as possible the same, taking into account local circumstances. We can recommend changes to ward boundaries, the number of councillors and ward names. We can also recommend changes to the electoral arrangements of parish and town councils.

Executive summary

The Boundary Committee for England is the body responsible for conducting electoral reviews of local authorities. A further electoral review of Welwyn Hatfield is being undertaken to provide improved levels of electoral equality across the district. It aims to ensure that the number of voters represented by each district councillor is approximately the same. The Electoral Commission directed the Boundary Committee for England to undertake this review on 12 May 2005.

Current electoral arrangements

Under the existing arrangements, seven wards currently have electoral variances of more than 10% from the district average. Due to development in Hatfield North ward it currently has 23% more electors than the district average; by 2009 this is expected to rise to 59% more electors than the district average if the existing arrangements remain in place.

This review will be conducted in four stages:

Stage	Stage starts	Description
One	6 September 2005	Submission of proposals to us
Two	13 December 2005	Our analysis and deliberation
Three	7 November 2006	Publication of draft recommendations and consultation on them
Four	13 February 2007	Analysis of submissions received and formulation of final recommendations

Submissions received

We received nine submissions during Stage One. The District Council, Welwyn Hatfield Conservatives and Welwyn Hatfield Liberal Democrats proposed district-wide schemes and Welwyn Hatfield Labour Party proposed a partial scheme. We also received submissions from Charles Walker MP, two parish councils, a parish councillor and a joint submission from two local residents.

Analysis and draft recommendations

Electorate figures

The District Council has forecast an increase in electorate of approximately 7% between 2004 and 2009, most of which is anticipated in Hatfield North ward. Having discussed these figures with the council officers, the development which is currently under construction and received details of how the District Council calculated these figures we are satisfied that they currently provide the best estimation of the 2009 electorate of Welwyn Hatfield that can reasonably be made at this time, and we have used them when making our draft recommendations.

Council size

During Stage One we received proposals from the District Council, the Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats for council sizes of 48, 48 and 49 respectively. The District Council and the Conservatives provided good council size argument. The Liberal Democrats' arguments proved less convincing. After further investigation we were satisfied that the District Council's proposed council size of 48 would provide for the best representation of the district. Therefore we propose to retain the current council size of 48 members.

General analysis

We are making recommendations based largely on the District Council's proposals with amendments proposed by the Liberal Democrats and the Labour Party, as well as some of our own in Hatfield town and Welwyn Garden City in order to form wards that secure good levels of electoral equality and strong boundaries. We are proposing to adopt the District Council's proposals in full in the rural areas to the north and south of the district. We are recommending 17 wards in the district; 14 three-member and three two-member wards.

What happens next?

There will now be a consultation period, during which we encourage comment on our draft recommendations on future electoral arrangements for Welwyn Hatfield contained in the report. We welcome views from all parts of the community and believe that the more feedback we receive, based on clear evidence, the better informed we will be in forming our final recommendations. We will take into account all submissions received by 12 February 2007. Any received **after** this date may not be taken into account.

We have not finalised our conclusions on the electoral arrangements for Welwyn Hatfield and welcome comments from interested parties. In particular, we found our decisions regarding the boundary between Peartree and Hollybush wards a difficult judgement between the various strands of the statutory criteria. This was due to conflicting proposals put forward as to which areas should be transferred between the wards. We would particularly welcome local views, backed up by demonstrable evidence, during Stage Three. We will consider all the evidence submitted to us during the consultation period before preparing our final recommendations.

Express your views by writing directly to us:

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The full report is available to download at www.boundarycommittee.org.uk.

Table 1: Draft recommendations: Summary

Ward name	Number of councillors	Constituent areas
1 Brookmans Park & Little Heath	3	The existing Brookmans Park & Little Heath ward (Little Heath and Brookmans Park parish wards of North Mymms Parish and the proposed Newgate Street & Wildhill parish ward of Hatfield Parish)
2 Haldens	3	The existing Haldens ward; part of the existing Panshanger ward;
3 Handside	3	The existing Handside ward; part of the existing Sherrards ward
4 Hatfield Central	3	Part of the existing Hatfield Central ward and part of the existing Hatfield West ward (the proposed Hatfield Central parish ward of Hatfield parish)
5 Hatfield East	3	The existing Hatfield East ward; and part of the existing Hatfield North ward (the proposed Hatfield East parish ward of Hatfield parish and Essendon Parish)
6 Hatfield Garden Village & Lemsford	3	Part of the existing Hatfield North ward; part of the existing Hatfield West ward (the proposed Hatfield Garden Village & Lemsford parish ward of Hatfield parish)
7 Hatfield North	3	Part of the existing Hatfield North ward; part of the existing Hatfield Central ward (the proposed Hatfield North parish ward of Hatfield parish)
8 Hatfield South	2	The existing Hatfield South ward; part of the existing Hatfield West ward (the proposed Hatfield South parish ward of Hatfield parish)
9 Hollybush	3	Part of the existing Hollybush ward
10 Howlands	3	Part of the existing Howlands ward
11 Northaw & Cuffley	3	The existing Northaw ward (Northaw & Cuffley parish)
12 Panshanger	3	Part of the existing Panshanger ward; part of the existing Howlands ward

Table 1 (continued): Draft recommendations: Summary

Ward name	Number of councillors	Constituent areas
13 Peartree	3	The existing Peartree ward; part of the existing Hollybush ward; part of the existing Howlands ward
14 Sherrards	3	Part of the existing Sherrards ward
15 Welham Green	2	The existing Welham Green ward (Welham Green parish ward of North Mymms Parish)
16 Welwyn East	3	The existing Welwyn North ward (Woolmer Green Parish and the proposed Oaklands & Mardley Heath parish ward of Welwyn Parish); part of the existing Welwyn South ward (the proposed Digswell parish ward of Welwyn Parish)
17 Welwyn West	2	Part of the existing Welwyn South ward (the parishes of Ayot St Lawrence and Ayot St Peter and the proposed Welwyn Village parish ward of Welwyn Parish)

Notes:

1. The district comprises eight parishes and the unparished area of Welwyn Garden City.
2. The maps accompanying this report illustrate the proposed wards outlined above.
3. We have made a number of minor boundary amendments to ensure that existing ward boundaries adhere to ground detail. These changes do not affect any electors.

Table 2: Draft recommendations for Welwyn Hatfield district

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2004)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2009)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
1	Brookmans Park & Little Heath	3	4,452	1,484	2	4,532	1,511	-3
2	Haldens	3	4,647	1,549	6	4,651	1,550	-1
3	Handside	3	4,982	1,661	14	5,103	1,701	9
4	Hatfield Central	3	4,972	1,657	13	5,021	1,674	7
5	Hatfield East	3	4,150	1,383	-5	4,482	1,494	-4
6	Hatfield Garden Village & Lemsford	3	2,468	823	-44	4,490	1,497	-4
7	Hatfield North	3	4,409	1,470	1	4,872	1,624	4
8	Hatfield South	2	3,342	1,671	14	3,344	1,672	7
9	Hollybush	3	4,129	1,376	-6	4,894	1,631	4
10	Howlands	3	4,166	1,389	-5	4,848	1,616	3
11	Northaw & Cuffley	3	4,132	1,377	-6	4,182	1,394	-11

Figure 2 (continued): Draft recommendations for Welwyn Hatfield district

Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2004)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2009)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
12 Panshanger	3	4,648	1,549	6	4,653	1,551	-1
13 Peartree	3	4,809	1,603	10	4,912	1,637	5
14 Sherrards	3	4,324	1,441	-1	4,388	1,463	-6
15 Welham Green	2	2,780	1,390	-5	2,788	1,394	-11
16 Welwyn East	3	4,728	1,576	8	4,831	1,610	3
17 Welwyn West	2	3,036	1,518	4	3,069	1,535	-2
Totals	48	70,174	-	-	75,060	-	-
Averages	-	-	1,462	-	-	1,564	-

Note: The 'variance from average' column shows by how far, in percentage terms, the number of electors per councillor in each ward 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.

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

1 Introduction

1 This report contains our draft proposals for the electoral arrangements for the district of Welwyn Hatfield, on which we are now consulting.

2 At its meeting on 12 February 2004 the Electoral Commission agreed that the Boundary Committee should make on-going assessments of electoral variances in all local authorities where the five-year forecast period following a periodic electoral review (PER) has elapsed. More specifically, it was agreed that there should be closer scrutiny where either:

- 30% of wards in an authority had electoral variances of over 10% from the average, or
- any single ward had a variance of more than 30% from the average

3 The intention of such scrutiny was to establish the reasons behind the continuing imbalances, to consider likely future trends, and to assess what action, if any, was appropriate to rectify the situation.

4 This is our first review of the electoral arrangements of Welwyn Hatfield. Welwyn Hatfield's last review was carried out by the Local Government Commission for England (LGCE), which reported to the Secretary of State in February 1998. An electoral change Order implementing the new electoral arrangements was made on 16 October 1998 and the first elections on the new arrangements took place in May 1999.

5 In carrying out our work, the Boundary Committee has to work within a statutory framework.¹ This refers to the need to:

- reflect the identities and interests of local communities
- secure effective and convenient local government
- achieve equality of representation

In addition we are required to work within Schedule 11 to the Local Government Act 1972.

6 Details of the legislation under which the review of Welwyn Hatfield is being conducted are set out in a document entitled *Guidance and procedural advice for periodic electoral reviews* (published by the Electoral Commission in July 2002). This *Guidance* sets out the approach to the review and will be helpful in both understanding the approach taken by the Boundary Committee for England and in informing comments interested groups and individuals may wish to make about our recommendations.

7 Our task is to make recommendations to the Electoral Commission 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 any parish and town councils in the district. We cannot consider changes to the external boundaries of either the district or of parish areas as part of this review.

¹ As set out in section 13(5) of the Local Government Act 1992 (as amended by SI 2001 No. 3962).

8 The broad objective of an electoral review is to achieve, as far as possible, equal representation across the district as a whole, i.e. that all councillors in the local authority represent similar numbers of electors. Schemes which would result in, or retain, an electoral imbalance of over 10% in any ward will have to be fully justified. Any imbalances of 20% or more should only arise in the most exceptional circumstances, and will require the strongest justification.

9 Electoral equality, in the sense of each elector in a local authority having a 'vote of equal weight' when it comes to the election of councillors, is a fundamental democratic principle. Accordingly, the objective of an electoral review is to ensure that the number of electors represented by each councillor is, as near as is possible, the same across a district. In practice, each councillor cannot represent exactly the same number of electors given geographic and other constraints, including the make up and distribution of communities. However, our aim in any review is to recommend wards that are as close to the district average as possible in terms of the number of electors per councillor, while also taking account of evidence in relation to community identity and effective and convenient local government.

10 We are not prescriptive about council size and acknowledge that there are valid reasons for variations between local authorities. However, we believe that any proposals relating to council size, whether these are for an increase, a reduction, or the retention of the existing size, should be supported by strong evidence and arguments. Indeed, we believe that consideration of the appropriate council size is the starting point for our reviews and whatever size of council is proposed to us should be developed and argued in the context of the authority's internal political management structures, put in place following the Local Government Act 2000. It should also reflect the changing role of councillors in the new structure.

11 As indicated in its *Guidance*, the Electoral Commission requires the decision on council size to be based on an overall view about what is right for the particular authority and not just by addressing any imbalances in small areas of the authority by simply adding or removing councillors from these areas. While we will consider ways of achieving the correct allocation of councillors between, say, a number of towns in an authority or between rural and urban areas, our starting point must always be that the recommended council size reflects the authority's optimum political management arrangements and best provides for convenient and effective local government and that there is evidence for this.

12 In addition, we do not accept that an increase or decrease in the electorate of the authority should automatically result in a consequent increase or decrease in the number of councillors. Similarly, we do not accept that changes should be made to the size of a council simply to make it more consistent with the size of neighbouring or similarly sized authorities; the circumstances of one authority may be very different from that of another. We will seek to ensure that our recommended council size recognises all the factors and achieves a good allocation of councillors across the district.

13 Where multi-member wards are proposed, we believe that the number of councillors to be returned from each ward should not exceed three, other than in very exceptional circumstances. Numbers in excess of three could result in an

unacceptable dilution of accountability to the electorate and we have not, to date, prescribed any wards with more than three councillors.

14 The review is in four stages (see Table 3, below).

Table 3: Stages of the review

Stage	Stage starts	Description
One	6 September 2005	Submission of proposals to us
Two	13 December 2005	Our analysis and deliberation
Three	7 November 2006	Publication of draft recommendations and consultation on them
Four	13 February 2007	Analysis of submissions received and formulation of final recommendations

15 Stage One began on 6 September 2005, when we wrote to Welwyn Hatfield District Council inviting proposals for future electoral arrangements. We also notified Hertfordshire Police Authority, the Local Government Association, Hertfordshire Local Councils Association, parish and town councils in the district, Members of Parliament with constituency interests in the district, Members of the European Parliament for the Eastern Region and the headquarters of the main political parties. We placed a notice in the local press, issued a press release and invited Welwyn Hatfield District Council to publicise the review further. The closing date for receipt of representations, the end of Stage One, was 12 December 2005.

16 During Stage Two we considered all the submissions received during Stage One and prepared our draft recommendations.

17 We are currently at Stage Three. This stage, which began on 7 November 2006 and will end on 12 February 2007, involves publishing the draft proposals in this report and public consultation about them. **We take this consultation very seriously and it is therefore important that all those interested in the review should let us have their views and evidence, whether or not they agree with these draft proposals.**

18 During Stage Four we will reconsider the draft recommendations in the light of the Stage Three consultation, decide whether to modify them, and submit final recommendations to the Electoral Commission. It will then be for the Commission to accept, modify or reject our final recommendations. If the Commission accepts the recommendations, with or without modification, it will make an electoral changes Order. The Commission will determine when any changes come into effect.

Equal opportunities

19 In preparing this report the Boundary Committee has had regard to the general duty set out in section 71(1) of the Race Relations Act 1976 and the statutory Code of Practice on the Duty to Promote Race Equality (Commission for Racial Equality, May 2002), i.e. to have due regard to the need to:

- eliminate unlawful racial discrimination

- promote equality of opportunity
- promote good relations between people of different racial groups

National Parks, Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and the Broads

20 The Boundary Committee has also had regard to:

- Section 11A(2) of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949 (as inserted by section 62 of the Environment Act 1995). This states that, in exercising or performing any functions in relation to, or so as to affect, land in a National Park, any relevant authority shall have regard to the Park's purposes. If there is a conflict between those purposes, a relevant authority shall attach greater weight to the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage of the Park.
- Section 85 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000. This states that, in exercising or performing any functions in relation to, or so as to affect, land in an AONB, a relevant authority shall have regard to the purpose of the AONB.
- Section 17A of the Norfolk and Suffolk Broads Act (as inserted by section 97 Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000). This states that, in exercising or performing any functions in relation to, or so as to affect, land in the Broads, a relevant authority shall have regard to the purposes of the Broads.

2 Current electoral arrangements

21 The district of Welwyn Hatfield is partially parished and comprises the large urban settlement of Welwyn Garden City to the east and the large parished town of Hatfield to the west. Welwyn Hatfield is unique in Britain in that it includes these two designated new towns, in addition to large rural areas. The district has excellent communication links, including the A1 (M) trunk road and the London-Edinburgh railway line.

22 The electorate of the district is 70,174 (December 2004). The District Council presently has 48 members who are elected from 17 wards. There are currently three two-member wards and 14 three-member wards. The district average councillor:elector ratio is calculated by dividing the total electorate of the district by the total number of councillors representing them on the council. At present, each councillor represents a district average of 1,462 electors (70,174 divided by 48), which the District Council forecasts will increase to 1,564 by the year 2009 if the present number of councillors is maintained (75,060 divided by 48).

23 During the last review of Welwyn Hatfield the District Council forecast there would be an increase of 1,511 electors between 1996 and 2001. However, a reduction in the electorate since that time has resulted in a significant amount of electoral inequality between wards. To compare levels of electoral inequality between wards, we calculated the extent to which the number of electors per councillor in each ward varies from the district average in percentage terms.

24 Data from the December 2004 electoral register showed that under these arrangements, electoral equality across the district met the criteria that the Electoral Commission agreed would warrant further investigation. The number of electors per councillor in seven of the 17 wards (41%) varies by more than 10% from the district average. This is forecast to worsen by 2009 where the worst imbalance will be in Hatfield North ward. The councillors in that ward are predicted to represent 59% more electors than the district average. Having noted that this level of electoral inequality is unlikely to improve, the Electoral Commission directed the Boundary Committee to undertake a review of the electoral arrangements of Welwyn Hatfield District Council on 12 May 2005.

Table 4: Existing electoral arrangements for Welwyn Hatfield district

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2004)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2009)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
1	Brookmans Park & Little Heath	3	4,452	1,484	2	4,532	1,511	-3
2	Haldens	3	4,345	1,448	-1	4,349	1,450	-7
3	Handside	3	4,982	1,661	14	5,103	1,701	9
4	Hatfield Central	3	3,866	1,289	-12	4,323	1,441	-8
5	Hatfield East	3	3,889	1,296	-11	4,221	1,407	-10
6	Hatfield North	3	5,410	1,803	23	7,438	2,479	59
7	Hatfield South	2	2,334	1,167	-20	2,336	1,168	-25
8	Hatfield West	3	3,842	1,281	-12	3,891	1,297	-17
9	Hollybush	3	4,464	1,488	2	5,229	1,743	11
10	Howlands	3	4,405	1,468	0	5,087	1,696	8
11	Northaw	3	4,132	1,377	-6	4,182	1,394	-11
12	Panshanger	3	4,726	1,575	8	4,731	1,577	1

Table 4 (continued): Existing electoral arrangements Welwyn Hatfield district

Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2004)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2009)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
13 Peartree	3	4,459	1,486	2	4,562	1,521	-3
14 Sherrards	3	4,324	1,441	-1	4,388	1,463	-6
15 Welham Green	2	2,780	1,390	-5	2,788	1,394	-11
16 Welwyn North	2	3,463	1,732	18	3,541	1,771	13
17 Welwyn South	3	4,301	1,434	-2	4,359	1,453	-7
Totals	48	70,174	-	-	75,060	-	-
Averages	-	-	1,462	-	-	1,564	-

Note: The 'variance from average' column shows by how far, in percentage terms, the number of electors per councillor in each ward 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.

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

3 Submissions received

25 At the start of the review members of the public and other interested parties were invited to write to us giving their views on the future electoral arrangements for Welwyn Hatfield District Council and its constituent parish and town councils.

26 During this initial stage of the review, officers from the Committee visited the area and met with officers and members from the District Council. We are grateful to all concerned for their co-operation and assistance. We received nine representations during Stage One, including district-wide schemes from the District Council, the Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats, all of which may be inspected at both our offices and those of Welwyn Hatfield District Council. Representations may also be viewed on our website at www.boundarycommittee.org.uk.

Welwyn Hatfield District Council

27 The District Council proposed a council of 48 members, serving 17 wards, the same as at present. The District Council's scheme was based on a combination of two- and three-member wards using the existing wards as a starting point. It proposed to retain six of the existing 17 wards. The District Council used strong ground features to determine boundaries, such as the A1 (M) and the railway line. The Council provided some community identity argument for some of its proposed wards.

Political groups

28 Welwyn Hatfield Conservatives (the Conservatives) supported the District Council's proposals in full. It stated that the proposed wards attempted to maintain existing communities; however, it did not explain in detail how the proposed wards represent communities. Welwyn Hatfield Labour Party (the Labour Party) proposed a partial scheme for wards in the Welwyn Garden City and Hatfield areas, supported by limited community identity argument.

29 Welwyn Hatfield Liberal Democrats (the Liberal Democrats) proposed a council of 49 members, allocating the additional councillor to Hatfield town. The Liberal Democrats proposed a number of changes to wards in Welwyn Garden City and Hatfield. They supported some of their proposals with community identity evidence.

Member of Parliament

30 Charles Walker MP considered that the existing Northaw ward should remain unchanged.

Parish councils

31 Representations were received from two parish councils. Northaw & Cuffley Parish Council considered that the existing Northaw ward and parish arrangements should be retained. Welwyn Parish Council proposed reducing the number of wards in the parish from five to three, to create a new parish ward of Welwyn Village.

Other representations

32 A further two representations were received, from a parish councillor and jointly from two local residents. Parish Councillor Neville (Welwyn Parish) supported Welwyn Parish Council's proposal and provided strong community identity evidence in support of it. The two local residents considered that Northaw ward should be moved into the Broxbourne constituency and district. However, as explained in paragraph 39, it is not within the remit of this review to alter external district boundaries. We have therefore not been able to take this submission into account when formulating our draft recommendations.

4 Analysis and draft recommendations

33 Before finalising our recommendations on the electoral arrangements for Welwyn Hatfield we invite views on our initial thoughts as expressed in these draft recommendations. We welcome comments from all those interested relating to the number of councillors, proposed ward boundaries, ward names, and parish and town council electoral arrangements. In particular, we found our decisions regarding the boundary between Peartree and Hollybush wards to be a difficult judgement between the strands of our statutory criteria: electoral equality; community identities and interests; and effective and convenient local government. This was due to conflicting proposals put forward by the District Council and the Liberal Democrats as to which areas should be transferred between the wards. In this case, we have sought to achieve the best levels of electoral equality in the absence of any evidence reflecting the other two criteria, and would particularly welcome local views, backed up by demonstrable evidence, during Stage Three on our proposals for this area.

34 We will consider all the evidence submitted to us during the consultation period before preparing our final recommendations.

35 As described earlier, the prime aim in considering the most appropriate electoral arrangements for Welwyn Hatfield is to achieve electoral equality. In doing so we have regard to section 13(5) of the Local Government Act 1992 (as amended), with the need to:

- secure effective and convenient local government
- reflect the identities and interests of local communities
- secure the matters in respect of equality of representation referred to in paragraph 3(2)(a) of Schedule 11 to the Local Government Act 1972

36 Schedule 11 to the Local Government Act 1972 refers to the number of electors per councillor being 'as nearly as may be, the same in every ward of the district or borough'. 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 clearly identifiable boundaries and to maintaining local ties.

37 In reality, the achievement of absolute electoral equality is unlikely to be attainable. There must be a degree of flexibility. However, our approach, in the context of the statutory criteria, is to keep variances to a minimum.

38 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 should also be taken into account and we aim to recommend a scheme which provides improved electoral equality over this period.

39 The recommendations do not affect county, district or parish external boundaries, local taxes, or result in changes to postcodes. Nor is there any evidence that these recommendations will have an adverse effect on house prices, or car and house

insurance premiums. Our proposals do not take account of parliamentary boundaries, and we are not, therefore, able to take into account any representations which are based on these issues.

Electorate figures

40 As part of the previous review of Welwyn Hatfield district, the District Council forecast an increase in the electorate of 2% between 1996 and 2001. However, there was in fact a decrease in the electorate of just less than 1%. Between 2001 and the start of this review the electorate has further decreased by just under 2%. The District Council submitted electorate forecasts for the year 2009, projecting an increase in the electorate of approximately 7% from 70,174 to 75,060 over the five-year period from 2004 to 2009. It expects most of the growth to be in Hatfield North ward, although a significant amount is also expected in Hollybush ward.

41 We recognise that forecasting electorates is difficult and, having considered the District Council's figures, discussed the development which is currently under construction and received details of how the District Council calculated these figures from the council officers, we accept that they are the best estimates that can reasonably be made at this time.

Council size

42 Welwyn Hatfield District Council presently has 48 members. The District Council proposed to retain the existing council size of 48 members. It acknowledged that under its new Leader and cabinet structure decision-making had been 'streamlined' with 'fewer members involved.' However, it stated that the current number of councillors should be retained, because the 'diverse nature' of the district means that 'members are regarded as "champions" of their communities representing and supporting individual requirements.'

43 The Conservatives also considered that a council size of 48 should be retained stating that this 'enables a practical level of representation as well as ensuring that a member of the public can identify who represents them on the local council.' The Liberal Democrats proposed a council size of 49, an increase of one. They stated that they would prefer not to increase the number of councillors 'unless this provided a serious obstruction to evolving a best case solution.'

44 After considering the proposals received at Stage One we did not consider that we had received any evidence on which to base a decision on the council size for Welwyn Hatfield District Council. We did not consider that we had been provided with sufficient discussion of the ways in which the proposed council sizes would better reflect the District Council's political management structures, taking into account the representational elements of councillors' work in order to secure effective and convenient local government. We therefore wrote to all those who wrote to us at Stage One regarding the council size of Welwyn Hatfield and requested that they provide us with further evidence in relation to their proposed council sizes, and why they considered their proposed council size would be more appropriate than any other council size.

45 The District Council responded to this request by firstly stating that there was 'unanimity from all respondents about the council size.' It considered that since the

last review, councillor workload had increased due to changes to 'planning, licensing and housing amongst others.' It stated that considerations for the different communities across the district from 'small villages through larger villages to the two main settlements' as well as the geography of the district led to the 'conclusion that the number of councillors should not be reduced.' It continued that 'any reduction could have repercussions on the range of candidates who could consider becoming councillors.' It wanted to ensure that the council was represented by people from a wide range of backgrounds, not just the retired and those in a position to take time off work.

46 The District Council went on to discuss its Leader and cabinet structure. It noted that whilst significant decision-making rests with the cabinet, other council members have a more 'diversified role' of overview and scrutiny. It continued that, in 2005, the Council had increased its cabinet to seven members due to the demands of the position, particularly in conjunction with being a 'ward member and community champion.' It said that work undertaken by the District Council's Independent Remuneration Panel showed councillors spend 'around 16 hours a week on council business' and 'considerably more' for executive members. The District Council described its five non-executive committees, such as licensing and appeals and three overview and scrutiny committees for social, environment and resources, as well as cabinet panels. It stated that the cabinet meets at least monthly and overview and scrutiny committees at least seven times a year. It also stated that in addition to this workload the cabinet panels have specific tasks and meet frequently, as well as various non-executive committees. It also noted the increased time taken up by licensing committees.

47 The District Council discussed partnerships it has, such as the local strategic partnership working with other service providers to deliver 'joined up' services. This, it stated, also 'requires considerable member input.' It also highlighted the work councillors do in relation to the 'Quality Parish and Town Councils' agenda putting pressure on councillors to carry out an effective representational role. It highlighted work in conjunction with the Regional Development Agency, Regional Chamber, Government Office for the East of England as well as joint health scrutiny committees and inter-authority meetings, again requiring considerable time from councillors. It considered that this provided strong evidence in support of retaining a council size of 48 members.

48 The Conservatives supported the District Council's evidence and discussed similar issues of meetings attended and workload. It also discussed councillors' commitments to outside bodies such as the Citizens Advice Bureau. It considered that 'time demands on members are now quite considerable' and that 'effective and convenient local government means having truly local members.'

49 The Liberal Democrats stated that they had originally thought there should be no increase in the number of councillors. However, they considered that increasing the council to 49 and placing the additional councillor in the Hatfield area would be the 'most sensible solution' to the increase in electorate in Hatfield North ward. The Liberal Democrats also proposed an alternative option for the council size of Welwyn Hatfield. They considered that the restructuring of the council has reduced individuals' work loads and therefore questioned the need for 'such a large number of councillors.' They proposed reducing the council size to 32 or 33 members with two-members representing each ward.

50 We did not consider that the Liberal Democrats proposal for a reduced council size of 32 or 33 was supported by substantive evidence, and we were therefore unable to consider it in terms of the council's political management structure and effective and convenient local government. Similarly, we did not consider that any compelling argument had been made in terms of the council's political management structure for the proposed increase of one to 49 members. Having considered the arguments and evidence put forward by the District Council and the Conservatives we were persuaded to retain the existing council size of 48 members. However, given the Liberal Democrats argument that development in Hatfield town would justify an additional councillor we looked at the councillor allocation for the district.

51 Using 2009 electorate figures, we examined the distribution of councillors across the district, compared with the distribution of electorate, in order to see which council size provided the best fit between the towns of Welwyn Garden City and Hatfield and the rural areas. From this it was possible to see that council sizes of 48 and 49 produce incorrect allocation between the areas. In fact a council size of 47 would provide a better allocation of councillors between the areas in the district. However, due to the geography and the pattern of settlements in the areas, as well as parish arrangements, particularly in the southern rural area, we discovered that better electoral equality could be achieved under a council size of 48. We also noted that a reduction in council size was argued against by the District Council and the Conservatives.

52 Therefore, having looked at the size and distribution of the electorate, the geography and other characteristics of the area, together with the responses received, we conclude that the statutory criteria would best be met by a council of 48 members.

Electoral equality

53 Electoral equality, in the sense of each elector in a local authority having a vote of equal weight when it comes to the election of councillors, is a fundamental democratic principle. The Electoral Commission expects the Boundary Committee's recommendations to provide for high levels of electoral equality, with variances normally well below 10%. Therefore, when making recommendations we will not simply aim for electoral variances of under 10%. Where inadequate justification is provided for specific ward proposals we will look to improve electoral equality seeking to ensure that each councillor represents as close to the same number of electors as is possible, providing this can be achieved without compromising the reflection of the identities and interests of local communities and securing effective and convenient local government. We take the view that any proposals that would result in, or retain, electoral imbalances of over 10% from the average in any ward will have to be fully justified, and evidence provided which would justify such imbalances in terms of community identity or effective and convenient local government. We will rarely recommend wards with electoral variances of 20% or more, and any such variances proposed by local interested parties will require the strongest justification in terms of the other two statutory criteria.

54 In the absence of strong community identity argument or evidence we have sought to improve electoral equality in Welwyn Hatfield. The District Council, the Conservatives, the Liberal Democrats and the Labour Party have all taken the approach of using the existing wards as a starting point and making amendments to

these in order to improve electoral equality. Similarly, we have used the existing wards as a starting point and improved upon them as far as electoral equality is concerned while having regard for communities. We have sought to improve electoral variances in the urban wards, even where the existing arrangements provide electoral variances under 10% of the district average. However, due to strong ground features it has not always been possible to improve the existing electoral variances. We have proposed two wards with electoral variances of more than 10% from the district average by 2009. However, given the geographical and parish constraints in these areas of the district we consider these variances to be acceptable given the circumstances. We also note that one of our proposed wards, Hatfield Garden Village & Lemsford, would initially have 44% fewer electors than the district average. However, having spoken to the officers at the District Council regarding growth in Hatfield Garden Village & Lemsford ward, we are content that the projected electoral variance of this ward (-4%) will have been achieved by 2009.

55 The district average (councillor:elector ratio) is calculated by dividing the total electorate of the district 70,174 by the total number of councillors representing them on the council, 48 under our draft proposals. Therefore, the average number of electors per councillor under our draft recommendations is 1,462, rising to 1,564 by 2009 (75,060 divided by 48).

General analysis

56 Our draft recommendations are based broadly on the District Council's and the Conservatives' proposals, taking account of proposals from the Liberal Democrats and the Labour Party, as well as some of our own. All the proposed schemes suggested some boundary amendments to the existing wards in the urban areas of Welwyn Garden City and Hatfield. We also made amendments in the rural Welwyn area. We propose retaining the existing rural wards in the southern part of the district as proposed by the District Council, the Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats; it is not possible to improve variances in those areas without creating parish wards that would not have enough electors to justify a single parish councillor, combined with the particular geography and settlement pattern in the area.

57 There was a general lack of argument and evidence in support of the proposed wards. The District Council, the Conservatives, the Liberal Democrats and the Labour Party all provided some argument, although it was not always compelling. We have used the A1 (M) and the railway line as strong ground features by which to divide wards. We consider that these provide strong boundaries and reflect existing communities.

58 We received alternative parish warding arrangements for Welwyn Parish. We considered that these proposals were supported by strong community identity evidence. We are therefore recommending Welwyn Parish Council's amended parish wards.

59 We are recommending 17 wards in the district; 14 three-member and three two-member wards. In Welwyn Garden City we are proposing small boundary amendments to all but two of the existing district wards to achieve better levels of electoral equality. In Hatfield town we are proposing larger amendments to take account of the projected development in the north of the town. Although there was a

lack of substantive evidence in most of the submissions we received, we have taken account of the issues of community identity where possible.

60 Having looked at the size and distribution of the electorate, the geography and other characteristics of the area, together with responses received, we conclude that the statutory criteria would best be met by these proposals.

Warding arrangements

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

- Welwyn North and Welwyn South wards (page 28)
- Welwyn Garden City: Haldens, Handside, Hollybush, Howlands, Panshanger, Peartree and Sherrards wards (page 29)
- Hatfield town: Hatfield Central, Hatfield East, Hatfield North, Hatfield South and Hatfield West wards (page 32)
- Brookmans Park & Little Heath, Northaw and Welham Green wards (page 37)

62 Details of our draft recommendations are set out in Tables 1 and 2 (on pages 9 and 11, respectively), and illustrated on the large maps accompanying this report.

Welwyn North and Welwyn South wards

63 Under the existing arrangements Welwyn North and Welwyn South wards are currently parished. Table 5 below shows the constituent parts of these wards. Table 4 (page 18) outlines the existing electoral variances for 2004 and the variances which the wards are forecast to have by 2009 if the existing arrangements were to remain in place.

Table 5: Existing arrangements

Ward	Constituent areas	Councillors
Welwyn North	Woolmer Green Parish; Mardley Heath parish ward of Welwyn Parish	2
Welwyn South	Ayot St Lawrence Parish; Ayot St Peter Parish; Digswell, Danesbury, Hawbush and Queensway parish wards of Welwyn Parish	3

64 We received three submissions in relation to the two Welwyn district wards, from the District Council, the Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats. Welwyn Parish and Councillor Neville put forward proposals for Welwyn Parish Council that are discussed in the parish warding section of this report on page 40. The District Council proposed to create two new wards to be named Welwyn East and Welwyn West. Its proposed Welwyn East ward would comprise those areas to the east of the A1 (M), the parish of Woolmer Green and Mardley Heath, Digswell and part of Danesbury parish wards of Welwyn parish. Its proposed Welwyn West ward would comprise those areas to the west of the A1 (M), Ayot St Lawrence Parish, Ayot St Peter Parish and Hawbush, Queensway and part of Danesbury parish wards of Welwyn Parish. The District Council considered that the three parish wards of Danesbury, Hawbush

and Queensway make up an area known as Welwyn Village. It considered that this area, together with Ayot St Lawrence and Ayot St Peter parishes, were identifiable rural communities which its proposed Welwyn West ward would reflect. It also considered that although the constituent areas of its proposed Welwyn East ward were 'separate and distinct communities' they should be contained in the same ward. The Council's proposed Welwyn East and Welwyn West wards would initially have 8% more and 4% more electors than the district average and 3% more and 2% fewer electors by 2009, respectively. The Conservatives supported this proposal and considered that the areas in both the proposed wards of Welwyn East and Welwyn West 'naturally form one single community.' In forming their proposals the Conservatives said they had in general, attempted to 'respect' issues of historical significance as well as community identity issues such as the 'location of libraries, clinics, doctors surgeries, schools and other local services.' They did not however, explain in detail how the proposals had achieved this for the two Welwyn wards.

65 The Liberal Democrats initially considered that the existing arrangements should remain in place for Welwyn North and Welwyn South wards. They did not consider that 'there are any viable solutions available that would not generate significant disruption to how electors vote at present,' taking the view that moving any electors from the existing Welwyn North ward into the Welwyn South ward would be a 'nuisance to residents in the affected area in terms of where they would need to go to vote.' However, in their further evidence the Liberal Democrats expressed support for the District Council's proposal for the area, considering it to 'make a great deal of sense.'

66 Having considered the evidence received we propose to adopt the District Council's proposals for Welwyn East and Welwyn West wards in full. We consider that the use of the A1 (M) to divide the area uses a strong and identifiable boundary, whilst causing minimal disruption to existing communities. We also note the good level of electoral equality these wards would have by 2009. Our proposed Welwyn East and Welwyn West wards are expected to have electoral variances within 3% of the district average by 2009.

67 Tables 1 and 2 (on pages 9 and 11 respectively) provide details of the constituent parts and electoral variances of our draft recommendations for Welwyn East and Welwyn West wards. Our draft recommendations are shown on Map 1 and Map 2 accompanying this report.

Welwyn Garden City: Haldens, Handside, Hollybush, Howlands, Panshanger, Peartree and Sherrards wards

68 Under the existing arrangements the seven wards that make up Welwyn Garden City (Haldens, Handside, Hollybush, Howlands, Panshanger, Peartree and Sherrards) are currently unparished. Table 4 (on page 18) outlines the existing electoral variances for 2004 and also the variances which the wards are forecast to have by 2009 if the existing arrangements remained in place.

69 We received four submissions regarding the Welwyn Garden City area from the District Council, the Conservatives, the Liberal Democrats and the Labour Party. The District Council stated that in forming its proposals it took account of natural features and attempted to keep existing communities together. It proposed to retain the existing Handside, Howlands and Sherrards wards and proposed a number of

amendments to the remaining four wards in Welwyn Garden City. The District Council considered that both the existing Handside and Sherrards wards use clearly defined boundaries of the railway line to the east and the disused railway line between the two wards. It stated that Howlands ward had a 'strong community identity,' although it did not explain how this manifested itself.

70 The District Council proposed amended Haldens and Panshanger wards. It proposed transferring 302 electors from Panshanger into Haldens ward. These would be from properties bounded by Long Ley, using the centre of this road as the boundary, Moor Walk and east of Springmead School. It also proposed amended Hollybush and Peartree wards. It proposed to transfer 335 electors from the existing Hollybush ward into Peartree ward, from properties on Woodhall Lane and Moss Green, as well as properties on Cole Green Lane, Gooseacre and Hyde Valley. The District Council provided no detailed community identity argument for these amended wards. Under the District Council's proposals no ward would have an electoral variance of more than 9% from the district average by 2009. The Conservatives expressed broad agreement with the District Council's proposals, and highlighted that the existing Handside should be retained.

71 The Liberal Democrats proposed to retain the existing warding arrangements for the Welwyn Garden City wards with the exception of Peartree, Hollybush and Howlands wards to which they proposed small amendments. They considered that 'purely on the basis of the figures it would appear desirable' to transfer some electors out of Handside ward. However, the Liberal Democrats considered that the existing Handside ward has the distinct boundaries of the railway line and the disused railway line which create 'obstacles' to improving the electoral variance of Handside ward. They considered that these circumstances also applied to the existing Sherrards ward. They considered the existing Panshanger and Haldens wards should be retained and that changes could be made at 'a future date if the need arises.'

72 The Liberal Democrats proposed an amended Peartree ward. They proposed transferring Moss Green and Woodhall, up to its junction with Sandpit Road, from Hollybush ward into Peartree ward as well as Beehive Green, Beehive Lane and Marley Road. The Liberal Democrats also proposed to transfer properties on Sweet Briar east of its junction with Whitehorn into Peartree ward from Howlands ward, as well as those houses along Green Vale. They considered these were appropriate areas to transfer between wards as they are situated on the borders of the existing Peartree ward. However, they also stated that no amendments to Howlands ward were necessary.

73 The Liberal Democrats also considered that Bennett Close and Wyndhams End in Hatfield East ward should be transferred into Hollybush ward, as this area is considered to be part of Welwyn Garden City and therefore Hollybush ward.

74 The Labour Party considered that part of Panshanger ward should be transferred into the existing Haldens ward, but it did not specify a particular area to transfer. It also considered that the two areas of housing, to the west of Black Fan Road focused around Beauchamps and Cypress Avenue, should be transferred from the existing Howlands ward into Panshanger ward. It considered that the residents of these homes 'are more likely to feel part of Panshanger [ward] than Howlands [ward] and would be likely to use the shops, schools and facilities of Panshanger [ward] as these are all closer.'

75 The Labour Party expressed the view that the character of Hollybush ward 'had been altered considerably in recent times with several building schemes' and highlighted developments in the Chequers Field area of the ward, considering that this area is isolated from the rest of Hollybush ward. It therefore proposed to transfer properties on the west of Chequers into Handside ward. However, the Labour Party noted that this was not its final opinion as possible changes to Hatfield North ward could affect this proposal. The Labour Party did not discuss the other wards in the Welwyn Garden City area.

76 We carefully considered the representations received regarding Welwyn Garden City. We noted that we had received no substantial community identity evidence from either the District Council or the Liberal Democrats, and only limited evidence from the Labour Party. We noted the proposals to retain the existing Handside and Sherrards wards. We looked at the possibility of transferring electors from the existing Handside ward into the existing Sherrards ward in order to improve electoral equality in Handside ward, which is forecast to have 9% more electors than the district average by 2009. However, we did not consider that a suitable number of electors could be transferred from Handside ward that would have good access links to Sherrards ward. We also considered the Labour Party's proposal to transfer an area of the existing Hollybush ward into the existing Handside ward. However, we did not consider that it had provided any strong or compelling argument to suggest why this area would be better placed with Handside ward, particularly as it is separated from this ward by the railway line, with limited access between the areas. Therefore we agreed with the District Council that the disused railway line forms a strong boundary between Handside and Sherrards wards, as does the railway line separating these wards at their eastern boundaries from the rest of Welwyn Garden City. Therefore we propose to retain the existing Handside and Sherrards wards. However, we are making one small amendment to the boundary between these wards to better tie the boundary to ground detail. This amendment affects no electors.

77 We note the District Council's proposal to transfer part of the existing Panshanger ward into the existing Haldens ward. We also note that this was supported by the Conservatives and the Labour Party, although the latter did not specifically say which area should be transferred. We consider that the area the District Council proposes to transfer is fairly self-contained with good links to the remainder of Haldens ward. We also note that its proposals improve electoral equality by 2009. Under the District Council's proposal, Haldens and Panshanger wards would have 1% and 6% fewer electors than the district average by 2009. We are therefore proposing to adopt the District Council's proposed amendment in this area. We are also proposing a small amendment between Haldens and Howlands wards to better tie the boundary to ground detail; this affects no electors. We also note the Labour Party's proposal to transfer the housing to the west of Black Fan Road into an amended Panshanger ward from the existing Howlands ward. We note that this proposal was not supported by particularly strong evidence. However, we note that these areas face on to, and have good road access into Panshanger ward, and in fact have no direct access into Howlands ward in which they are currently placed. We also note that these amendments would further improve electoral equality in our proposed Panshanger ward. Combined with the aforementioned amendment as proposed by the District Council, our proposed Panshanger ward would have 1% fewer electors per councillor

than the district average by 2009. We are therefore also proposing to include the Labour Party's amendment to our proposed Panshanger ward.

78 We note that the Liberal Democrats did not propose any changes to the existing Panshanger or Haldens wards, although stated that changes could be made at a later date. However, we do not consider that the argument they put forward for making changes at a future date is convincing, particularly when alternatives that provide better electoral equality and community identity exist.

79 We carefully considered the opposing opinions from the District Council and the Liberal Democrats regarding Hollybush, Howlands and Peartree wards. We note that neither of the proposals for this area were supported by any compelling argument and that amendments were made entirely to improve electoral equality. We also note that both proposals result in similar levels of electoral equality. Consequently, it was difficult to judge which proposal would better reflect communities in the area. We therefore visited the area and looked at the two options proposed to us. Having been to see the areas concerned in these proposals we considered that the District Council's proposals, as described in paragraph 70, would better reflect communities in the area and use stronger more identifiable boundaries. We also note that its proposals were supported by the Conservatives. We found reaching conclusions on the best option for this area particularly difficult given the limited community identity argument and the similar levels of electoral equality each proposal returned. We would therefore welcome comments on our draft recommendations during Stage Three.

80 We also propose adopting the Liberal Democrats amendment to transfer Green Vale into Peartree ward from Howlands ward. We consider that Green Vale has better communication links to Peartree ward and uses a stronger boundary of the edge of the school playing field. We considered the Liberal Democrats proposal to transfer part of Hatfield East ward into Hollybush ward. However, this area is part of Hatfield East parish and would therefore need to become a parish ward in order to be included in a ward of Welwyn Garden City. In our view, such a parish ward would have too few electors to justify its own parish councillor. We were therefore not persuaded to adopt this amendment.

81 We therefore propose to adopt the District Council's proposed Hollybush, Howlands and Peartree wards with amendments from the Liberal Democrats and the Labour Party as discussed above. Under our draft recommendations our proposed Haldens, Handside, Hollybush, Howlands, Panshanger, Peartree and Sherrards wards would have electoral variances within 9% of the district average by 2009.

82 Tables 1 and 2 (on pages 9 and 11 respectively) provide details of the constituent parts and electoral variances of our draft recommendations for Haldens, Handside, Hollybush, Howlands, Panshanger, Peartree and Sherrards wards that make up Welwyn Garden City. Our draft recommendations are shown on Map 1 and Map 3 accompanying this report.

Hatfield town: Hatfield Central, Hatfield East, Hatfield North, Hatfield South and Hatfield West

83 Under the existing arrangements Hatfield Central, Hatfield East, Hatfield North, Hatfield South and Hatfield West wards are currently parished. Table 6, shows the

constituent parts of these wards. Table 4 (page 18) outlines the existing electoral variances for 2004 and the variances which the wards are forecast to have by 2009 if the existing arrangements were to remain in place.

Table 6: Existing arrangements

Ward	Constituent areas	Councillors
Hatfield Central	Central parish ward of Hatfield parish	3
Hatfield East	East parish ward of Hatfield parish; Essendon parish	3
Hatfield North	North parish ward of Hatfield parish	3
Hatfield South	South parish ward of Hatfield parish	2
Hatfield West	West parish ward of Hatfield parish	3

84 We received four submissions in relation to the five Hatfield wards, from the District Council, the Conservatives, the Liberal Democrats and the Labour Party. The District Council proposed boundary amendments to all the existing Hatfield wards in order to take account of the extensive development occurring in the existing Hatfield North ward. It proposed a three-member Hatfield Garden Village & Lemsford ward comprising part of the existing Hatfield North ward, the area to the west of the A1 (M). It considered that this used a distinct boundary and created a new ward based on the communities of Hatfield Garden Village and Lemsford, each of which 'has its own community groups and unique identity.' The District Council proposed a three-member Hatfield North ward comprising the remainder of the existing Hatfield North ward, less the area south of the dismantled railway, and part of the existing Hatfield Central ward (the area north of Alban Way cycle track, St Albans Road West and New Briars School).

85 The District Council proposed a three-member Hatfield East ward comprising the existing Hatfield East ward as well as the area south of dismantled railway line from the existing Hatfield North ward and the area between Oxlease Drive and Woods Avenue from the existing Hatfield Central ward. The District Council proposed a three-member Hatfield Central ward comprising the remainder of the existing Hatfield Central ward and part of the existing Hatfield west ward (the area north of the University of Hertfordshire, following south behind the properties on Minster Close to the back of properties north of the Cotswolds and to the back of properties on the south side of Deerswood Avenue). It also proposed a Hatfield South ward comprising the existing Hatfield South ward with the remainder of Hatfield West ward. It also proposed to include a small unpopulated part of Welham Green in its proposed Hatfield South ward. Under the District Council's proposals no ward would have an electoral variance of more than 7% from the district average by 2009.

86 The Conservatives supported the District Council's proposals. It considered that they recognise 'that Hatfield is changing and tries its best to capture the necessary communities within the town.' The Liberal Democrats proposed an alternative scheme for Hatfield town. It proposed a three-member Hatfield North ward comprising the existing Hatfield North ward less the area south of Hatfield Avenue. They proposed to retain the existing Hatfield East ward less the Bennett Close area that they proposed to transfer into Hollybush ward, as discussed previously in paragraph 73. The Liberal Democrats proposed a Hatfield South ward comprising the

existing Hatfield South ward plus part of the existing Hatfield West ward, the area east of Bishops Rise with the exception of Minster Close. They expressed the view that residents use this area for 'local shops, doctor, dentist and post office, and thus consider themselves to be part of South Hatfield.' They proposed a Hatfield West ward comprising the remainder of the existing Hatfield West ward and the remainder of Hatfield North ward. They proposed to retain the existing Hatfield Central ward. The Liberal Democrats stated that ideally they would have 'preferred not to have increased the number of councillors.' However, they considered that due to the necessary amendments to the town an increase 'of one more councillor is a price worth paying.' The Liberal Democrats considered that their proposals would cause 'least disruption to existing ward boundaries, and preserve polling districts as far as possible.' They had taken this approach in order to maintain 'familiarity of voters with polling stations' and to prevent people being 'put off voting' and 'retain areas of build together.' They stated that the development phases of Hatfield can be identified through examples such as the road naming schemes, i.e. roads named after bird names or trees or flowers. The Liberal Democrats considered that none of their proposals 'dissociate electors from the locators' such as shops, schools, doctors, post offices. They stated that they had avoided taking the numeric approach 'that lead to the proposals put forward by the council.' The Liberal Democrats considered that the effect of the District Council's approach was to 'break up established communities and bring together areas with nothing in common whatsoever,' whereas their proposals retained existing communities.

87 The Labour Party considered that a two-member Hatfield North ward should be created comprising the airfield site, Hatfield Garden Village and the Ellenbrook area from the existing Hatfield North and Hatfield West wards. It was unsure whether the Lemsford and Stanborough areas should be united with Hatfield or Welwyn Garden City. It proposed that the built-up new town area of Hatfield East ward should be contained in a ward with other areas of Hatfield and that the remaining part of Hatfield East ward (the Ryde and Old Hatfield and the rural areas east of the Great North Road) should be combined with the existing Welham Green ward. It considered that with these areas in separate wards the new town of Hatfield could 'now become genuine wards representing the residents for the new town.'

88 We carefully considered the representations received regarding the Hatfield wards. The Liberal Democrats proposals were based on this area being allocated 15 councillors in total under a proposed council size of 49. However, under our proposed council size of 48, Hatfield town is only entitled to 14 councillors. Therefore it was difficult to adopt the Liberal Democrats proposals as they were based on an incorrect councillor allocation. However, we have attempted to take account of their proposals and community argument where possible. We considered the proposal from the Labour Party to separate the area east of Great North Road from the urban area of Hatfield. However, we did not consider that it had provided persuasive evidence to suggest why the urban areas of Old Hatfield and the Rye should be separated from the rest of the urban Hatfield town area. We also note that these areas have strong links to the rest of Hatfield town and considered that the communities would be better represented if this area remained linked to the other urban parts of Hatfield. Also, as noted below, we did not consider that the Labour Party's proposal to combine this part of the existing Hatfield East ward with Welham Green ward would create a ward with strong links as Millwards Park forms a significant boundary between Welham Green and Essendon villages. There would be

no direct vehicular links between the two villages; travel between them would be through another ward.

89 We also considered the Labour Party's proposals for the northern part of the Hatfield area. We note that the Labour Party was unsure whether Lemsford and Stanborough villages should be united with Hatfield or transferred into Welwyn Garden City. However, as these villages are part of Hatfield parish including them in Welwyn Garden City would require creating a parish ward that would have too few electors to justify a parish councillor. We therefore concluded that we could not recommend such a ward. We considered its alternative proposal to include the Lemsford and Stanborough areas in its proposed northern ward. However, this results in a ward where the councillors would represent 17% more electors than the district average by 2009. We were therefore not persuaded to adopt this proposal particularly as it had not been supported with strong community identity evidence to justify the high variance, and when alternatives with better levels of electoral equality exist.

90 We considered the District Council's proposed Hatfield Garden Village & Lemsford ward. We agreed with the District Council that the A1 (M) forms a strong eastern boundary to its proposed ward, and would allow for both distinct communities to be maintained. However, we were concerned that the proposed ward would initially have 44% fewer electors per councillor than the district average. We therefore contacted officers at the District Council to obtain details of the current electorate figures for Hatfield. From the information provided it is possible to see that growth has already occurred in the areas affected by the development in Hatfield North and, having examined these figures, we are content that the expected electorate growth for this ward will have occurred by 2009. We are therefore proposing to adopt the District Council's Hatfield Garden Village & Lemsford ward, which was supported by the Conservatives, as part of our draft recommendations. We also propose adopting the District Council's Hatfield North ward. We consider that the use of the A1 (M) the railway line and the disused railway line form strong identifiable boundaries. We consider that the area south of the disused railway line focused around Cecil Court and Ground Lane is better placed with those properties in Hatfield East ward as it has better communication and community identity links.

91 We considered the District Council's proposed Hatfield East ward. As noted above we propose to adopt its proposal to include the area centred on Cecil Court and Ground Lane from the existing Hatfield North ward into a proposed Hatfield East ward. We considered its proposal to transfer part of Hatfield Central ward into its proposed Hatfield East ward. However, when we examined this proposal we noted that this area has limited access to the rest of Hatfield East ward and is almost entirely separated from it by the railway line. While we note that there is one road that links the areas of the ward we did not consider we could recommend this amendment, particularly as the properties proposed to be transferred appear to have clearer links to the south and west of Oxlease Drive and Woods Avenue. We note that this would provide a marginally worse level of electoral equality for our proposed Hatfield East ward than the District Council's proposed Hatfield East ward (-4% under our draft recommendations rather than 1% under the District Council's proposals). However, we consider that this is justified given that the District Council's amendment would potentially isolate an area of housing from its community.

92 We acknowledge the Liberal Democrats proposal to transfer the Bennett Close area into Hollybush ward. However, as discussed previously this would require making a parish ward of the Bennetts End area that would be too small to justify the allocation of a parish councillor.

93 We note the Liberal Democrats' community identity argument linking Hatfield South ward to part of the existing Hatfield West ward. While we consider that this is good argument it has not been possible to adopt the proposed Hatfield South ward as it is based on a council size of 49. Under our proposed council size this ward would have 11% fewer electors per councillor than the district average by 2009. Also, creating a three-member ward in this area would have knock-on effects for the rest of the Hatfield area and would result in other Hatfield wards having variances of more than 10% from the district average. In light of this we were not persuaded to adopt the Liberal Democrats' proposal, particularly as alternative ward arrangements exist which provide better electoral equality. We therefore propose adopting the District Council's proposed Hatfield South ward, with one amendment. We note that the District Council's proposed ward still incorporates some of the area proposed by the Liberal Democrats so therefore attempts to recognise the community identified by the Liberal Democrats in this area. The District Council proposed to transfer part of Welham Green into its proposed Hatfield South ward. This is part of North Mymms parish and would be required to be warded in order to be transferred into Hatfield South ward. However, the area is too small to justify the allocation of a parish councillor.

94 We are therefore proposing to adopt the District Council's proposals for Hatfield Central ward, with our own amendment as discussed previously, to retain the area between Oxlease Drive and Woods Avenue in Hatfield Central ward rather than transferring it to Hatfield East ward. We note that our amended Hatfield Central ward results in it having 7% more electors per councillor than the district average by 2009, whereas under the District Council's proposal it would have 2% more electors by 2009. We looked at ways to improve the variance achieved under the Council's modified proposal. However, we were unable to find a suitable area to transfer without transferring the variance to another ward. Therefore we are content to propose our amended Hatfield Central ward.

95 We therefore propose to adopt the District Council's proposed Hatfield Central, Hatfield East, Hatfield Garden Village & Lemsford, Hatfield North and Hatfield South wards with some of our own amendments as discussed above. Under our draft recommendations our proposed Hatfield Central, Hatfield East, Hatfield Garden Village & Lemsford, Hatfield North and Hatfield South wards would have electoral variances within 7% of the district average by 2009.

96 Tables 1 and 2 (on pages 9 and 11 respectively) provide details of the constituent parts and electoral variances of our draft recommendations for Hatfield Central, Hatfield East, Hatfield Garden Village & Lemsford, Hatfield North and Hatfield South wards. Our draft recommendations are shown on Maps 1, 3 and 4 accompanying this report.

Brookmans Park & Little Heath, Northaw and Welham Green wards

97 Under the existing arrangements Brookmans Park & Little Heath, Northaw and Welham Green wards are currently parished. Table 7 below, shows the constituent parts of these wards. Table 4 (page 18) outlines the existing electoral variances for 2004 and the variances which the wards are forecast to have by 2009 if the existing arrangements were to remain in place.

Table 7: Existing arrangements

Ward	Constituent areas	Councillors
Brookmans Park & Little Heath	Newgate Street/ Woodhill parish ward of Hatfield parish; Little Heath and Brookmans Park parish wards of North Mymms parish	3
Northaw	Northaw & Cuffley parish	3
Welham Green	Welham Green parish ward of North Mymms parish	2

98 We received six submissions in relation to the three existing rural wards in the southern part of the district. The District Council proposed to retain the existing Brookmans Park & Little Heath and Welham Green wards. It noted that Welham Green ward would have 11% fewer electors per councillor than the district average by 2009. However, it considered that Welham Green has its 'own community and as part of North Mymms Parish Council [it] has closer links with Brookmans Park than Hatfield'. It proposed to retain the existing Northaw ward but to rename it Northaw & Cuffley ward as it considered that the 'important role the village of Cuffley plays in this part of the district' should be recognised in the ward name, in line with the parish council name. The Conservatives supported the District Council and considered that these wards are distinct areas that should remain unchanged. The Liberal Democrats also supported the District Council proposal.

99 The Labour Party proposed that the rural part of Hatfield East ward, east of Great North Road, be combined with Welham Green ward. Charles Walker MP considered that the existing arrangements should be retained in Northaw ward. Northaw & Cuffley Parish Council also shared this opinion. It stated that the ward has its own bowls and tennis clubs and recreation grounds as well as village halls, youth clubs schools, and church charities.

100 We carefully considered all the representations received in relation to these rural wards. We note the strong support, from all but the Labour Party, to retain the existing wards. We considered that the Labour Party's proposal to combine part of Hatfield East ward and Welham Green ward. As a three-member ward its proposed ward would have 8% more electors per councillor than the district average. We note that this is an improvement in electoral equality. However, we do not consider that the road links between the areas are strong enough, particularly as Millwards Park forms a significant boundary between Welham Green and Essendon villages, and travelling from one village to the other would require leaving the Labour Party's proposed ward to do so. Also, as noted previously, we did not consider that the

Labour Party had provided any strong compelling arguments to explain why the Ryde and old Hatfield should be detached from the rest of Hatfield town.

101 We noted that the councillors of the three wards of Welham Green, Northaw and Brookmans Park & Little Heath are all forecast to represent fewer electors than the district average by 2009. It was therefore difficult to improve on these variances because transferring electors from one ward into another would worsen the level of electoral equality in the latter ward. We therefore considered alternative options to address the imbalances in this southern rural area. We looked at combining the rural areas of the existing Hatfield East ward with the three rural wards. In order to achieve reasonable levels of electoral equality it would be necessary to create new parish wards in Hatfield parish. However, these parish wards would have too few electors in them to justify representation by a parish councillor. We are therefore proposing to retain the existing wards of Welham Green, Northaw and Brookmans Park & Little Heath as part of our draft recommendations. We note that this would result in Welham Green and Northaw wards having electoral variances of over 10% by 2009. However, in light of the difficulty in achieving improved electoral equality and retaining links between areas, as well as the location of these wards on the edge of the district combined with the support to retain these wards, we consider that these wards would provide the best balance of the three criteria under which we make these recommendations. We are however proposing to rename Northaw ward Northaw & Cuffley ward as proposed by the District Council.

102 We therefore propose to adopt the District Council's proposed Brookmans Park & Little Heath, Northaw & Cuffley and Welham Green wards. Under our draft recommendations our proposed Brookmans Park & Little Heath, Northaw & Cuffley and Welham Green wards would have electoral variances within 11% of the district average by 2009.

103 Tables 1 and 2 (on pages 9 and 11, respectively) provide details of the constituent parts and electoral variances of our draft recommendations for Brookmans Park & Little Heath, Northaw & Cuffley and Welham Green wards. Our draft recommendations are shown on Map 1 and Map 4 accompanying this report.

Conclusions

104 Table 8 shows how our draft recommendations will affect electoral equality, comparing them with the current arrangements (based on 2004 electorate figures) and with forecast electorates for the year 2009.

105 As shown in Table 8, our draft recommendations for Welwyn Hatfield District Council would result in a reduction in the number of wards with an electoral variance of more than 10% from seven to four. By 2009 only two wards are forecast to have an electoral variance of more than 10%, and no ward would have an electoral variance of more than 11% from the district average. We propose to retain the existing council size and are recommending a council size of 48 members.

Table 8: Comparison of current and recommended electoral arrangements

	Current arrangements		Draft recommendations	
	2004	2009	2004	2009
Number of councillors	48	48	48	48
Number of wards	17	17	17	17
Average number of electors per councillor	1,462	1,564	1,462	1,564
Number of wards with a variance more than 10% from the average	7	7	4	2
Number of wards with a variance more than 20% from the average	1	2	1	0

Draft recommendation

Welwyn Hatfield District Council should comprise 48 councillors serving 17 wards, as detailed and named in Tables 1 and 2, and illustrated on the large maps accompanying this report.

Parish electoral arrangements

106 As part of an FER the Committee can make recommendations for new electoral arrangements for parishes. Where there is no impact on the district council's electoral arrangements, the Committee will generally be content to put forward for consideration proposals from parish and town councils for changes to parish electoral arrangements in FERs. However, the Boundary Committee will usually wish to see a degree of consensus between the district council and the parish council concerned. Proposals should be supported by evidence, illustrating why changes to parish electoral arrangements are required. The Boundary Committee cannot recommend changes to the external boundaries of parishes as part of an FER.

107 Responsibility for reviewing and implementing changes to the electoral arrangements of existing parishes, outside of an electoral review conducted by the Boundary Committee, lies with district councils.² If a district council wishes to make an Order amending the electoral arrangements of a parish that has been subject to an electoral arrangements Order made by either the Secretary of State or the Electoral Commission within the past five years, the consent of the Commission is required.

² Such reviews must be conducted in accordance with section 17 of the Local Government and Rating Act 1997.

108 During Stage One we received proposals for revised parish council electoral arrangements from the District Council, Welwyn Parish Council and Councillor Neville.

109 The parish of Welwyn is currently divided into five parish wards: Danesbury, Digswell, Hawbush, Mardley Heath and Queensway. In agreement with the District Council, Welwyn Parish Council proposed to retain the existing boundaries and number of parish councillors (two) for Digswell parish ward. It proposed that Mardley Heath parish ward should be renamed Oaklands & Mardley Heath parish ward 'in accordance with local usage' and that the number of councillors for this parish ward should be increased by one from three to four. It proposed to amalgamate Danesbury, Hawbush and Queensway parish wards into a new parish ward to be called Welwyn Village, returning five parish councillors. It considered that this proposal would 'accurately reflect the constituent communities of the parish, and the electors-per-councillor will be reasonably consistent throughout.' It considered that its proposed wards would be separated by 'clear geographic features' that would be consistent with our proposed district wards in the area.

110 Councillor Neville supported Welwyn Parish Council's proposals in full. He provided a copy of *Welwyn Parish Guide* in which it clearly outlined that Danesbury, Hawbush and Queensway parish wards are known locally as Welwyn Village, which he considered would 'better reflect the community reality.' It also noted that the District Council's publication *What can I join – Clubs and societies in Welwyn Hatfield* 'contains no club or society with Hawbush or Queensway in its title [...and...] only two with Danesbury in the title.' Whereas he noted that the number of entries with Welwyn in the title, relating solely to the parish and not elsewhere in the district, is 18. He considered this was proportional to the eight clubs and societies listed under Digswell. The District Council also fully supported Welwyn Parish Council's proposal.

111 Our proposed district warding arrangements would allow for these amendments to the parish wards of Welwyn parish. Therefore we are content to put forward the Parish Council's proposal for consultation.

Draft recommendation

Welwyn Parish Council should comprise 11 parish councillors, as at present representing three wards: Digswell (returning two councillors), Oaklands & Mardley Heath ward (returning four councillors) and Welwyn Village (returning five councillors). The parish ward boundaries are illustrated and named on Maps 1 and 2.

112 When reviewing electoral arrangements, we are required to comply as far as possible with the rules set out in Schedule 11 to the 1972 Act. The Schedule provides that if a parish is to be divided between different district wards it must also be divided into parish wards, so that each parish ward lies wholly within a single ward of the district. Accordingly, we propose consequential warding arrangements for the town of Hatfield to reflect the proposed district wards.

113 The town of Hatfield is currently served by 15 councillors representing six wards: Central, East, Newgate & Wildhill, North, South and West. We do not propose changing the number of councillors but are making amendments to reflect the district wards. We are proposing the parish wards be given names that reflect the district wards, with the exception of Newgate & Wildhill which, after discussions with the

District Council and the town council, it is proposed be renamed Newgate Street and Wildhill parish ward.

Draft recommendations

Hatfield Town Council should comprise 15 councillors, as at present, representing six wards: Central (returning three councillors), East (returning three councillors), Garden Village & Lemsford (returning three councillors), Newgate Street & Wildhill (returning one councillor), Hatfield North (returning three councillors) and Hatfield South (returning two councillors). The parish ward boundaries should reflect the proposed district ward boundaries in the area, as illustrated and named on Maps 1, 3 and 4.

114 Woolmer Green parish is currently served by six councillors and is not warded. We are recommending retaining the existing arrangements for this parish.

Draft recommendations

Woolmer Green Parish Council should comprise six councillors, as at present, as illustrated and named on Map 1 and 2.

5 What happens next?

115 There will now be a consultation period of 14 weeks, during which everyone is invited to comment on the draft recommendations on future electoral arrangements for Welwyn Hatfield contained in this report. We will take into account fully all submissions received by 12 February 2007. Any received after this date may not be taken into account.

116 We have not finalised our conclusions on the electoral arrangements for Welwyn Hatfield and welcome comments from interested parties relating to the proposed ward boundaries, number of councillors, ward names, and parish council electoral arrangements. In particular, we found our decision regarding the boundary between Peartree and Hollybush ward a difficult judgement between the statutory criteria. This was due to conflicting proposals put forward by the District Council and the Liberal Democrats as to which areas should be transferred between the wards. In this case, we have sought to achieve the best levels of electoral equality in the absence of any evidence reflecting the other two criteria, and would particularly welcome local views, backed up by demonstrable evidence, during Stage Three. We will consider all the evidence submitted to us during the consultation period before preparing our final recommendations.

117 Express your views by writing directly to:

**Review Manager
Welwyn Hatfield Review
The Boundary Committee for England
Trevelyan House
Great Peter Street
London SW1P 2HW**

reviews@boundarycommittee.org.uk

Submissions can also be made online at
www.boundarycommittee.org.uk/our-work/ferfeedback.cfm.

118 Please note that the consultation stages of an electoral review are public consultations. In the interests of openness and transparency, the Committee now makes available for public inspection full copies of all representations it takes into account as part of a review. Accordingly, copies of all Stage Three representations will be placed on deposit locally at the offices of Welwyn Hatfield District Council, at the Committee's offices in Trevelyan House and on its website at www.boundarycommittee.org.uk. A list of respondents will be available from us on request after the end of the consultation period.

119 In the light of representations received, we will review our draft recommendations and consider whether they should be altered. As indicated earlier, it is therefore important that all interested parties let us have their views and evidence, **whether or not** they agree with our draft recommendations. We will then submit our final recommendations to the Electoral Commission. After the publication of our final recommendations, all further correspondence should be sent to the Electoral Commission, which cannot make the electoral change Order giving effect to our recommendations until six weeks after it receives them.

6 Mapping

Draft recommendations for Welwyn Hatfield

119 The following maps illustrate our proposed ward boundaries for Welwyn Hatfield District.

- **Sheet 1, Map 1** illustrates in outline form the proposed wards for Welwyn Hatfield District, including constituent parishes.
- **Sheet 2, Map 2** illustrates the proposed boundaries in Welwyn Hatfield District. Ward in Welwyn Parish.
- **Sheet 3, Map 3** illustrates the proposed Welwyn Hatfield District. Wards in Welwyn Garden City.
- **Sheet 4, Map 4** illustrates the proposed Welwyn Hatfield District. Wards in Hatfield Parish.

Appendix A

Glossary and abbreviations

AONB (Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty)	A landscape whose distinctive character and natural beauty are so outstanding that it is in the nation's interest to safeguard it
The Boundary Committee	The Boundary Committee for England is a committee of the Electoral Commission, responsible for undertaking electoral reviews
Constituent areas	The geographical areas that make up any one ward, expressed in parishes or existing wards, or parts of either
Consultation	An opportunity for interested parties to comment and make proposals at key stages during the review
Council size	The number of councillors elected to serve a council
Order (or electoral change Order)	A legal document which implements changes to the electoral arrangements of a local authority
The Electoral Commission	An independent body that was set up by the UK Parliament. Its mission is to foster public confidence and participation by promoting integrity, involvement and effectiveness in the democratic process
Electoral equality	A measure of ensuring that every person's vote is of equal worth

Electoral imbalance	Where there is a large difference between the number of electors represented by a councillor and the average for the district
Electorate	People in the authority who are registered to vote in local government elections
FER (or further electoral review)	A further review of the electoral arrangements of a local authority following significant shifts in the electorate since the last periodic electoral review conducted between 1996 and 2004
Multi-member ward	A ward represented by more than one councillor and usually not more than three councillors
National Park	<p>The 12 National Parks in England and Wales were designated under the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act of 1949 and will soon be joined by the new designation of the South Downs. The definition of a National Park is:</p> <p>‘An extensive area of beautiful and relatively wild country in which, for the nation's benefit and by appropriate national decision and action:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – the characteristic landscape beauty is strictly preserved; – access and facilities for open-air enjoyment are amply provided; – wildlife and buildings and places of architectural and historic interest are suitably protected; – established farming use is effectively maintained’
Number of electors per councillor	The total number of electors in a local authority divided by the number of councillors

Over-represented	Where there are fewer electors per councillor in a ward than the average the electors can be described as being over-represented
Parish	A specific and defined area of land within a single district enclosed within a parish boundary. There are over 10,000 parishes in England, which provide the first tier of representation to their local residents
Parish council	A body elected by residents of the parish who are on the electoral register, which serves and represents the area defined by the parish boundaries
Parish electoral arrangements	The total number of parish councillors; the number, names and boundaries of parish wards; and the number of councillors for each ward
Parish ward	A particular area of a parish, defined for electoral, administrative and representational purposes. Eligible electors vote in whichever parish ward they live for candidate or candidates they wish to represent them on the parish council
PER (or periodic electoral review)	A review of the electoral arrangements of all local authorities in England, undertaken periodically. The last programme of PERs was undertaken between 1996 and 2004 by the Boundary Committee for England and its predecessor, the now-defunct Local Government Commission for England

Political management arrangements	The Local Government Act 2000 enabled local authorities to modernise their decision making process. Councils could choose from three broad categories; a directly elected mayor and cabinet, a cabinet with a leader, or a directly elected mayor and council manager. Whichever of the categories it adopted became the new political management structure for the council
Under-represented	Where there are more electors per councillor in a ward than the average the electors can be described as being under-represented
Variance (or electoral variance)	How far the number of electors per councillor in a ward varies in percentage terms from the district average
Ward	A specific area of a district or borough, defined for electoral, administrative and representational purposes. Eligible electors vote in whichever ward they are registered for the candidate or candidates they wish to represent them on the district council

Appendix B

Code of practice on written consultation

The Cabinet Office's November 2000 *Code of Practice on Written Consultation* (available at www.cabinet-office.gov.uk/regulation/Consultation/Code.htm) requires all government departments and agencies to adhere to certain criteria, set out below, on the conduct of public consultations. Public bodies, such as the Boundary Committee for England, are encouraged to follow the Code.

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

Table B1: The Boundary Committee for England's compliance with Code criteria

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