

Draft recommendations on the
future electoral arrangements for
Darlington in County Durham

December 2000

LOCAL GOVERNMENT COMMISSION FOR ENGLAND

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

Members of the Commission are:

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

Barbara Stephens (Chief Executive)

We are statutorily required to review periodically the electoral arrangements – such as the number of councillors representing electors in each area and the number and boundaries of wards and electoral divisions – of every principal local authority in England. In broad terms our objective is to ensure that the number of electors represented by each councillor in an area is as nearly as possible the same, taking into account local circumstances. We can recommend changes to ward boundaries, and the number of councillors and ward names. We can also make recommendations for change to the electoral arrangements of parish councils in the borough.

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CONTENTS

	page
SUMMARY	<i>v</i>
1 INTRODUCTION	<i>1</i>
2 CURRENT ELECTORAL ARRANGEMENTS	<i>5</i>
3 REPRESENTATIONS RECEIVED	<i>9</i>
4 ANALYSIS AND DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS	<i>11</i>
5 NEXT STEPS	<i>29</i>
APPENDICES	
A Proposed Electoral Arrangements from: – Darlington Borough Council – Darlington Borough Council Conservative Group	<i>31</i>
B The Statutory Provisions	<i>35</i>

A large map illustrating the existing and proposed ward boundaries for the town of Darlington is inserted inside the back cover of this report.

SUMMARY

The Commission began a review of the electoral arrangements for Darlington on 16 May 2000.

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

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

- **in 14 of the 25 wards the number of electors represented by each councillor varies by more than 10 per cent from the average for the borough and six wards vary by more than 20 per cent from the average;**
- **by 2005 this unequal representation is not expected to improve, with the number of electors per councillor forecast to vary by more than 10 per cent from the average in 17 wards and by more than 20 per cent in nine wards.**

Our main draft recommendations for future electoral arrangements (Figures 1 and 2 and paragraphs 94-95) are that:

- **Darlington Borough Council should have 53 councillors, one more than at present;**
- **there should be 24 wards, instead of 25 as at present;**
- **the boundaries of 23 of the existing wards should be modified and two wards should retain their existing boundaries;**
- **elections should continue to take place every four years.**

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

- **In 20 of the proposed 24 wards the number of electors per councillor would vary by no more than 10 per cent from the borough average, one of which would vary by more than 20 per cent.**
- **This improved level of electoral equality is expected to improve further, with the number of electors per councillor in 23 of the 24 wards expected to vary by no more than 10 per cent from the average for the borough in 2005.**

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

- **new warding arrangements for Whessoe parish.**

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

- **We will consult on our draft recommendations for 10 weeks from 12 December 2000. Because we take this consultation very seriously, we may move away from our draft recommendations in the light of Stage Three responses. It is therefore important that all interested parties let us have their views and evidence, *whether or not* they agree with our draft recommendations.**
- **After considering local views, we will decide whether to modify our draft recommendations and then make our final recommendations to the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions.**
- **It will then be for the Secretary of State to accept, modify or reject our final recommendations. He will also determine when any changes come into effect.**

You should express your views by writing directly to the Commission at the address below by 19 February 2001:

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Figure 1: The Commission's Draft Recommendations: Summary

Ward name	Number of councillors	Constituent areas
1 Bank Top	2	Bank Top ward (part); Lingfield ward (part); Lascelles ward (part)
2 Central	2	Central ward (part); College ward (part); Haughton East ward (part); Northgate North ward (part)
3 Cockerton East	3	Cockerton East ward (part)
4 Cockerton West	2	Cockerton East ward (part); Cockerton West ward
5 College	2	College ward (part); Pierremont ward (part)
6 Eastbourne	3	Eastbourne North ward; Eastbourne South ward
7 Faverdale	1	Cockerton East ward (part); Whessoe ward (part – Archdeacon Newton parish)
8 Harrowgate Hill	3	Harrowgate Hill ward (part); Whessoe ward (part – Harrowgate ward of Whessoe parish as proposed)
9 Haughton East	2	Haughton East ward (part); Haughton West ward (part)
10 Haughton North	2	Haughton East ward (part)
11 Haughton West	3	Haughton West ward (part)
12 Heighington & Coniscliffe	2	Heighington ward (Heighington parish); Whessoe ward (part – Denton, High Coniscliffe, Houghton-le-Side, Killerby, Low Coniscliffe & Merrybent, Piercebridge, Summerhouse and Walworth parishes)
13 Hummersknott	2	Hummersknott ward (part); Mowden ward (part)
14 Hurworth	2	<i>Unchanged</i> (Hurworth, Neasham and Sockburn parishes)
15 Lascelles	2	Lascelles ward (part); Bank Top ward (part)
16 Lingfield	2	Central ward (part); Lingfield ward (part)
17 Middleton St George	2	<i>Unchanged</i> (Middleton St George and Low Dinsdale parishes)
18 Mowden	2	Mowden ward (part)
19 Northgate	2	Northgate South ward; Northgate North ward (part); Pierremont ward (part)
20 North Road	3	Harrowgate Hill ward (part); Northgate North ward (part); North Road ward
21 Park East	3	Park East ward; Park West ward (part); Central ward (part)
22 Park West	2	Park West ward (part); Hummersknott ward (part)
23 Pierremont	3	Northgate North (part); Pierremont ward (part)

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Constituent areas
24	Sadberge & Whessoe	1	Sadberge ward (Barmpton, Bishopton, Brafferton, East & West Newbiggin, Great Burdon, Great Stainton, Little Stainton, Morton Palms and Sadberge parishes); Whessoe ward (part – Coatham Mundeville parish and Whessoe Rural ward of Whessoe parish as proposed)

Notes: 1 The borough contains 26 parishes. The urban area of Darlington is not parished and comprises 21 wards, under existing arrangements.

2 Map 2 and the large map at the back of this report illustrate the proposed wards outlined above.

Figure 2: The Commission's Draft Recommendations for Darlington

Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2000)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2005)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
1 Bank Top	2	2,895	1,448	1	2,827	1,414	-2
2 Central	2	2,812	1,406	-2	2,750	1,375	-4
3 Cockerton East	3	3,793	1,264	-12	4,060	1,353	-6
4 Cockerton West	2	3,109	1,555	9	2,959	1,480	3
5 College	2	2,973	1,487	4	3,003	1,502	4
6 Eastbourne	3	4,100	1,367	-5	4,109	1,370	-5
7 Faverdale	1	909	909	-36	1,383	1,383	-4
8 Harrowgate Hill	3	4,109	1,370	-4	4,431	1,477	3
9 Haughton East	2	3,002	1,501	5	2,904	1,452	1
10 Haughton North	2	2,974	1,487	4	2,877	1,439	0
11 Haughton West	3	4,163	1,388	-3	4,168	1,389	-3
12 Heighington & Coniscliffe	2	2,453	1,227	-14	2,743	1,372	-5
13 Hummersknott	2	2,974	1,487	4	2,958	1,479	3
14 Hurworth	2	2,867	1,434	0	3,074	1,537	7
15 Lascelles	2	2,724	1,362	-5	2,768	1,384	-4
16 Lingfield	2	2,782	1,391	-3	2,752	1,376	-4
17 Middleton St George	2	2,870	1,435	0	2,885	1,443	0
18 Mowden	2	3,123	1,562	9	3,015	1,508	5
19 Northgate	2	3,156	1,578	10	2,963	1,482	3
20 North Road	3	4,677	1,559	9	4,485	1,495	4
21 Park East	3	4,432	1,477	3	4,388	1,463	2
22 Park West	2	2,912	1,456	2	2,775	1,388	-3
23 Pierremont	3	4,426	1,475	3	4,305	1,435	0
24 Sadberge & Whessoe	1	1,615	1,615	13	1,621	1,621	13
Totals	53	75,850	-	-	76,203	-	-
Averages	-	-	1,431	-	-	1,438	-

Source: Electorate figures are based on Darlington Borough Council's submission.

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

1 INTRODUCTION

1 This report contains our draft recommendations on the electoral arrangements for the borough of Darlington in County Durham on which we are now consulting. We are reviewing Darlington as part of our programme of periodic electoral reviews (PERs) of all 386 principal local authority areas in England. We completed reviews of the seven two-tier districts in County Durham in October 1998, and Durham County Council earlier this year. Our programme started in 1996 and is currently expected to be completed by 2004.

2 This is our first review of the electoral arrangements of Darlington. The last such review was undertaken by our predecessor, the Local Government Boundary Commission (LGBC), which reported to the Secretary of State in February 1976 (Report No. 136). Since undertaking that review, Darlington has become a unitary authority on its existing boundaries (1 April 1997).

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

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

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

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

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

7 The broad objective of PERs is to achieve, as far as possible, equality of representation across the borough as a whole. Having regard to the statutory criteria, our aim is to achieve as low a level of electoral imbalance as is practicable. We will require particular justification for schemes which would result in, or retain, an electoral imbalance of over 10 per cent in any ward. Any imbalances of 20 per cent or more should only arise in the most exceptional circumstances, and will require the strongest justification.

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

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

Figure 3: Stages of the Review

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

10 In July 1998 the Government published a White Paper, *Modern Local Government – In Touch with the People*, which set out legislative proposals for local authority electoral arrangements. Following publication of the White Paper, we advised all authorities in our 1999/2000 PER programme, including Darlington borough, that the Commission would continue to maintain its current approach to PERs as set out in the October 1999 *Guidance*. Nevertheless, we considered that local authorities and other interested parties might wish to have regard to the Secretary of State’s intentions and legislative proposals in formulating electoral schemes as part of PERs of their areas. The proposals have been taken forward in the Local Government Act 2000 which, among other matters, provides that the Secretary of State may make Orders to change authorities’ electoral cycles. However, until such time as the Secretary of State makes any Order under the 2000 Act, we will continue to operate on the basis of existing legislation, which provides for elections by thirds or whole-council elections, and our present *Guidance*.

11 Stage One began on 16 May 2000, when we wrote to Darlington Borough Council inviting proposals for future electoral arrangements. We also notified Durham Police Authority, the local authority associations, Durham Association of Parish and Town Councils, parish councils in the borough, the Members of Parliament with constituency interests in the borough, the Members of the European Parliament for the North East Region, and the headquarters of the main political parties. We placed a notice in the local press, issued a press release and invited the Borough Council to publicise the review further. The closing date for receipt of representations, the end of Stage One, was 21 August 2000.

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

13 Stage Three began on 12 December 2000 and will end on 19 February 2001. This stage involves publishing the draft recommendations in this report and public consultation on them. **We take this consultation very seriously and it is therefore important that all those interested in the review should let us have their views and evidence, whether or not they agree with our draft recommendations.**

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

2 CURRENT ELECTORAL ARRANGEMENTS

15 The borough of Darlington is a unitary authority located in north-eastern England. The River Tees forms the borough boundary with North Yorkshire and it is bounded to the north and west by the County Durham districts of Sedgfield and Teesdale and to the east by Stockton-on-Tees. It is a compact and cohesive authority, covering an area of 19,800 hectares. The town of Darlington is the focal point for the borough, with a population of 87,900, and is surrounded by rural countryside containing a number of villages, including Hurworth, Middleton St George and Heighington. The borough is served by the East Coast main railway line and a well-developed road network, including the A1(M) and the A66 linking the M6 to Teesside. There are 26 parishes in the borough, although Darlington town itself is not parished.

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

17 The electorate of the borough is 75,850 (February 2000). The Council presently has 52 members who are elected from 25 wards, 20 of which are relatively urban with the remainder being predominantly rural. Three of the wards are each represented by one councillor, 17 are each represented by two councillors and five are three-member wards. Elections are held for the whole council every four years.

18 Since the last electoral review there has been a moderate increase in the electorate in Darlington borough, with around 4 per cent more electors than two decades ago as a result of new housing developments. The most notable increases have been in Haughton West and Whessoe wards.

19 At present, each councillor represents an average of 1,459 electors, which the Borough Council forecasts will increase to 1,465 by the year 2005 if the present number of councillors is maintained. However, due to demographic and other changes over the past two decades, the number of electors per councillor in 14 of the 25 wards varies by more than 10 per cent from the borough average and in six wards by more than 20 per cent. The worst imbalances are in Haughton West and Whessoe wards where each of the councillors represents 44 per cent more electors than the borough average.

Map 1: Existing Wards in Darlington

Figure 4: Existing Electoral Arrangements

Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2000)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2005)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
1 Bank Top	2	2,688	1,344	-8	2,620	1,310	-11
2 Central	2	2,350	1,175	-19	2,280	1,140	-22
3 Cockerton East	3	5,197	1,732	19	5,859	1,953	33
4 Cockerton West	2	2,297	1,149	-21	2,225	1,113	-24
5 College	2	2,556	1,278	-12	2,602	1,301	-11
6 Eastbourne North	2	1,838	919	-37	1,908	954	-35
7 Eastbourne South	2	2,262	1,131	-22	2,201	1,101	-25
8 Harrowgate Hill	3	4,107	1,369	-6	4,001	1,334	-9
9 Haughton East	3	5,959	1,986	36	5,764	1,921	31
10 Haughton West	2	4,204	2,102	44	4,209	2,105	44
11 Heighington	1	1,444	1,444	-1	1,707	1,707	16
12 Hummersknott	2	3,371	1,686	16	3,365	1,683	15
13 Hurworth	2	2,867	1,434	-2	3,074	1,537	5
14 Lascelles	2	2,638	1,319	-10	2,685	1,343	-8
15 Lingfield	2	3,075	1,538	5	3,042	1,521	4
16 Middleton St George	2	2,870	1,435	-2	2,885	1,443	-2
17 Mowden	2	3,433	1,717	18	3,314	1,657	13
18 North Road	2	3,181	1,591	9	3,036	1,518	4
19 Northgate North	2	2,744	1,372	-6	2,615	1,308	-11
20 Northgate South	2	2,480	1,240	-15	2,300	1,150	-22
21 Park East	3	3,772	1,257	-14	3,767	1,256	-14
22 Park West	2	2,865	1,433	-2	2,690	1,345	-8
23 Pierremont	3	4,309	1,436	-2	4,270	1,423	-3
24 Sadberge	1	1,242	1,242	-15	1,286	1,286	-12

Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2000)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2005)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
25 Whessoe	1	2,101	2,101	44	2,498	2,498	70
Totals	52	75,850	–	–	76,203	–	–
Averages	–	–	1,459	–	–	1,465	–

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

Note: The 'variance from average' column shows by how far, in percentage terms, the number of electors per councillor varies from the average for the borough. The minus symbol (-) denotes a lower than average number of electors. For example, electors in Eastbourne North ward are currently relatively over-represented by 37 per cent, while electors in Haughton West and Whessoe wards are relatively under-represented by 44 per cent. Figures have been rounded to the nearest whole number.

3 REPRESENTATIONS RECEIVED

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

21 During this initial stage of the review, officers from the Commission visited the area and met with officers and members from the Borough Council. We are grateful to all concerned for their co-operation and assistance. During Stage One, we received a borough-wide scheme from the Borough Council, which included 16 representations it had received as part of its own consultation exercise. All representations may be inspected at the offices of the Borough Council and the Commission.

Darlington Borough Council

22 The Borough Council proposed a council size of 53, one more than at present, and a mixed pattern of wards (19 two-member and five three-member wards). It proposed broadly retaining the existing pattern of wards in the urban area, with modifications to all but one of the wards in order to improve electoral equality and provide for more clearly identifiable boundaries. The most significant changes proposed were the division of the current Haughton East ward into a new Haughton North ward and a revised Haughton East ward and combining the existing Eastbourne North and Eastbourne South wards to form a new three-member Eastbourne ward.

23 In the rural part of the borough, the Council proposed retaining the existing Hurworth and Middleton St George wards and combining the three parishes of Archdeacon Newton, Coatham Mundeville and Whessoe with the current Sadberge ward to form a revised Sadberge ward, to be represented by two councillors. Finally, it proposed a new Heighington & Whessoe ward comprising the remaining part of Whessoe ward together with the existing Heighington ward. The Borough Council's proposals would result in three of the proposed 24 wards varying by more than 10 per cent from the borough average currently. By 2005, however, it is forecast that no ward would have an electoral variance of more than 10 per cent from the average.

24 The Borough Council enclosed, as part of its submission, copies of 16 representations it had received as part of its own consultation exercise. Of these, the Rt Hon Tony Blair MP (Member of Parliament for Sedgefield), the Rt Hon Alan Milburn MP (Member of Parliament for Darlington), Dr Gordon Adam (a Member of the European Parliament for the North East of England), Darlington Constituency Labour Party, Hurworth Parish Council and one local resident supported the Borough Council's proposals. Darlington Borough Council Conservative Group generally supported the Borough Council's proposals, but proposed two boundary amendments affecting four wards: Cockerton East, Cockerton West, Haughton North and Haughton West. Wesley Court Residents opposed the Borough Council's proposals for their area, arguing that the area should not be transferred from Lingfield ward to Bank Top ward. A local resident favoured a pattern of single-member wards for the borough.

25 Archdeacon Newton Parish Meeting opposed the Borough Council's proposal to transfer the parish to a revised Sadberge ward and proposed combining the parish with the areas to its west. Sedgefield Constituency Conservative Association and Councillor Roberts (Whessoe ward) proposed that Archdeacon Newton parish should form part of a ward with Heighington. Whessoe Parish Council proposed that Sadberge ward should be renamed Whessoe & Sadberge ward. Heighington Parish Council favoured retaining the existing Heighington ward, while Low Coniscliffe & Merrybent Parish Council generally supported the Borough Council's proposals, but favoured renaming Heighington ward to reflect the area covered by the new ward.

26 The Borough Council's proposals, and the Conservative Group's alternative proposals for four wards, are summarised at Appendix A.

4 ANALYSIS AND DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS

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

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

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

30 Our *Guidance* states that we accept that the achievement of absolute electoral equality for the authority as a whole is likely to be unattainable. However, we consider that, if electoral imbalances are to be kept to the minimum, the objective of electoral equality should be the starting point in any review. We therefore strongly recommend that, in formulating electoral schemes, local authorities and other interested parties should start from the standpoint of electoral equality, and then make adjustments to reflect relevant factors, such as community identity and interests. Regard must also be had to five-year forecasts of changes in electorates.

Electorate Forecasts

31 The Borough Council submitted electorate forecasts for the year 2005, projecting a marginal increase in the electorate of less than 1 per cent from 75,850 to 76,203 over the five-year period from 2000 to 2005. Notwithstanding this, significant growth is predicted for the current Cockerton East and Whessoe wards, due to new housing developments over the next five years. The Council has estimated rates and locations of housing development with regard to structure and local plans, the expected rate of building over the five-year period and assumed occupancy rates.

32 We accept that forecasting electorates is an inexact science and, having given consideration to the Borough Council’s figures, are content that they represent the best estimates that can reasonably be made at this time.

Council Size

33 As already explained, the Commission’s starting point is to assume that the current council size facilitates effective and convenient local government, although we are willing to look carefully at arguments why this might not be the case.

34 Darlington Borough Council presently has 52 members. The Borough Council proposed increasing the council size to 53 members. It proposed allocating the additional councillor to a revised Sadberge ward “which would encompass significant recent and future residential development in the Harrowgate Village and Faverdale areas”, currently in Whessoe and Archdeacon Newton parishes. It argued that increasing council size by one would provide for improved electoral equality for the borough as a whole, whilst taking into account community identities.

35 Having considered the size and distribution of the electorate, the geography and other characteristics of the area, together with the Borough Council’s submission, we have concluded that the achievement of electoral equality and the statutory criteria would best be met by a council of 53 members.

Electoral Arrangements

36 We have carefully considered the Borough Council’s proposals and consider that they would provide for an improved level of electoral equality for the borough as a whole, taking into account community identities and interests. We are aware that the Council conducted an extensive consultation exercise and that information regarding the review was sent to every household in the borough. We are content, therefore, to base our draft recommendations on the Borough Council’s scheme. We do, however, propose departing from the Borough Council’s proposals in the north of Darlington town and the rural area, as we consider that areas of urban development on the fringe of Darlington town should be included in urban wards rather than rural wards. Additionally, this would allow ward boundaries to be tied to ground detail. For borough warding purposes, the following areas, based on existing wards, are considered in turn:

(a) **Darlington Town**

- Hummersknott, Mowden, Park East and Park West wards;
- Cockerton East, Cockerton West, College and Pierremont wards;
- Central, Northgate North and Northgate South wards;
- Harrowgate Hill and North Road wards;
- Haughton East and Haughton West wards;
- Bank Top, Eastbourne North, Eastbourne South, Lascelles and Lingfield wards.

(b) **Rural wards**

- Hurworth and Middleton St George wards;
- Heighington, Sadberge and Whessoe wards.

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

Darlington Town (20 wards)

38 Darlington town contains the majority of the borough's electorate and comprises 20 of the 25 existing wards. It is the focus of the borough's community in terms of work, shopping, business, leisure, culture and administration, with all principal roads and public transport radiating out from the town centre.

Hummersknott, Mowden, Park East and Park West wards

39 These four wards are located in the south-west of Darlington. Hummersknott, Mowden and Park West wards are each represented by two councillors, while Park East ward is represented by three councillors. Under existing arrangements, Hummersknott and Mowden wards are under-represented, with 16 per cent and 18 per cent more electors per councillor than the borough average respectively (15 per cent and 13 per cent more by 2005). Park East and Park West are relatively over-represented, with 14 per cent and 2 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the borough average (14 per cent and 8 per cent fewer by 2005).

40 The Borough Council proposed broadly retaining the existing Mowden ward, with the exception of transferring the Baydale Meadows Estate to a revised two-member Hummersknott ward. Its proposed Hummersknott ward would also comprise the existing ward less the area to the south of and including Coniscliffe Road, which it proposed transferring to a revised two-member Park East ward. It argued that this change would ensure "that the major part of Blackwell lies in one ward (Park West) rather than being split into two by Carmel Road South". The Borough Council proposed amending the boundary between Park East and Park West wards to follow Oakdene Avenue, Grange Road and the River Skerne to the south of Parkside, thereby transferring around 600 electors from Park West ward to a three-member Park East ward. Under the Borough Council's proposals, Hummersknott, Mowden and Park East wards would have 4 per cent, 9 per cent and 3 per cent more electors per councillor than the borough average, improving to 3 per cent, 5 per cent and 1 per cent more by 2005. Park West ward would have 3 per cent more electors per councillor than the average initially and 3 per cent fewer by 2005.

41 As part of the Borough Council's own consultation exercise, Darlington Constituency Labour Party supported the Borough Council's proposed changes to Park East, Park East and Hummersknott wards. Darlington Borough Council Conservative Group supported the use of Coniscliffe Road as a boundary between Park West and Hummersknott wards.

42 We have carefully considered the Borough Council's proposals for this area and note that they would provide for improved electoral equality in all four wards by 2005, while broadly retaining the existing warding arrangements. We consider that they would provide for a reasonable balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria. Having received no further views regarding this area, we are content to put them forward as part of our draft recommendations, subject to a minor amendment to the boundary between Park East and Park West wards. We consider that the whole of Oakdene Avenue should be located within one ward and propose transferring 22 electors on the west side of Oakdene Avenue, currently in Park West ward, to a revised Park East ward. This amendment would not significantly affect electoral equality in either of the proposed wards.

43 Under our draft recommendations, Hummersknott and Mowden wards would have 4 per cent and 9 per cent more electors per councillor than the borough average respectively, improving to 3 per cent and 5 per cent more by 2005. Park East and Park West wards would have 3 per cent and 2 per cent more electors per councillor than the borough average respectively (2 per cent more and 3 per cent fewer than the average by 2005).

Cockerton East, Cockerton West, College and Pierremont wards

44 The two wards of Cockerton East and Cockerton West are located in the north-western part of Darlington, while College and Pierremont wards are located to the west of the town centre. Cockerton West and College wards are each represented by two councillors, while Cockerton East and Pierremont wards are each represented by three councillors. Under existing arrangements, Cockerton East and Cockerton West wards have 19 per cent more and 21 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the borough average respectively and are expected to worsen to 33 per cent more and 24 per cent fewer than the average by 2005. College and Pierremont wards currently have 12 per cent and 2 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the borough average respectively (11 per cent and 3 per cent fewer by 2005).

45 The Borough Council proposed amending the boundary between Cockerton East and Cockerton West ward to follow Bowen Road and West Auckland Road, thereby transferring around 2,400 electors from Cockerton East to a revised three-member Cockerton West ward. It proposed a revised two-member Cockerton East ward comprising the remaining part of the existing ward, less the Brinkburn Road development and Lady Kathryn Grove, which it proposed transferring to a revised Northgate Road ward, as discussed below. The Borough Council proposed a revised two-member College ward comprising the majority of the existing ward to the west of Stanhope Road North and the part of Pierremont ward to the south of Woodland Road. It also proposed a revised two-member Pierremont ward comprising the part of the existing ward to the north of Woodland Road, Hollyhurst Road and Reid Street. Under its proposals, the area to the south and east of Reid Street and Hollyhurst Road would be transferred from Pierremont ward to a revised Northgate South ward, as discussed in further detail below.

46 Under the Council's proposal, Cockerton West, College and Pierremont wards would each have 4 per cent more electors per councillor than the borough average (8 per cent, 4 per cent and 3 per cent more by 2005 respectively). Its proposed Cockerton East ward would have 13 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the borough average, improving to 2 per cent fewer than average by 2005.

47 As part of the Borough Council's consultation exercise, the Conservative Group generally supported the Borough Council's proposals, but proposed retaining a two-member Cockerton West ward and a three-member Cockerton East ward, with the boundary between these two wards following Nickstream Avenue. Under the Conservative Group's proposals, Cockerton East and Cockerton West wards would have 10 per cent fewer and 9 per cent more electors per councillor than the borough average respectively, improving to 5 per cent and 3 per cent more by 2005. Darlington Constituency Labour Party supported the use of Auckland Road as a boundary between Cockerton East and Cockerton West wards.

48 We have carefully considered the submissions received at Stage One. While both the Borough Council's and the Conservatives' proposals would provide for improved electoral equality, we note that neither would address the issue of urban overspill to the north of Darlington town. Due to recent housing developments in Faverdale (High Grange), urban development now straddles the boundary between the unparished ward of Cockerton East and Archdeacon Newton parish (in Whessoe ward). Under both proposals, the existing boundary between the urban area of Darlington and the rural parished areas to its north would be retained, with an additional councillor being allocated to Sadberge ward to deal with the urban growth in this area and the Harrowgate (Burtree Lane) area, as detailed below.

49 As a consequence, the electors located in the Faverdale housing development would remain divided between borough wards, with a number of streets being located in Sadberge ward but only having access to their ward through Cockerton East ward. We do not consider that such an electoral arrangement would be conducive to effective and convenient local government. Furthermore, the development means that the parish boundary, and thus the Borough Council's and Conservatives' proposed ward boundary, is no longer tied to ground detail.

50 However, our ability to propose alternative warding arrangements in this area is limited by the status of Archdeacon Newton parish, which does not have a parish council and therefore cannot be divided between wards. As a result of recent development, the electorate of Archdeacon Newton parish, has grown from 35 in 1995 to 317 at present. Under Section 16(2) of the Local Government Act 1997, a parish council must be created for any area with more than 200 electors. Archdeacon Newton does not currently have a parish council, but as the area now contains 317 electors, the Council has a statutory duty to create a parish council for Archdeacon Newton.

51 At the time that we formulated our draft recommendations, the Borough Council had yet to create a parish council for Archdeacon Newton. We are only able to make recommendations based upon the current parishing arrangements, and cannot make assumptions relating to possible future changes to parishing arrangements. Had a parish council been formed, we could have recommended alternative warding arrangements whereby the rural hamlet of Archdeacon Newton would form part of a rural ward and the Faverdale area would be combined with unparished area of Darlington. At a future review of parishing arrangements, residents of the Faverdale development could decide whether or not they wished to remain part of Archdeacon Newton parish, should there be local support for such an option.

52 In the absence of such a situation, we propose including the whole of Archdeacon Newton parish in a new two-member Faverdale ward, together with the northern part of Cockerton East ward to the north of the dismantled railway line. We propose a revised two-member Cockerton West ward, as proposed by the Conservative Group, and a revised three-member Cockerton East ward, covering the remainder of the existing ward to the east of Nickstream Avenue and to the south of the Faverdale industrial estate. Under our proposals, the existing southern boundaries of Cockerton East and Cockerton West wards would be retained.

53 We consider that the Borough Council's proposal to amend the southern boundary of Pierremont ward, thereby transferring around 1,300 electors to College and Northgate South wards, has merit and propose adopting it as part of our draft recommendations. However, as a consequence of our proposals in the Faverdale and Cockerton areas, we propose including the

area to the west of and including Hopetown Lane, currently located in Northgate North ward, in a revised Pierremont ward, and increasing the number of councillors for the ward from two to three. We consider that our proposals would unite similar communities around Brinkburn Dene and Cocker Beck, in addition to providing for reasonable levels of electoral equality both now and in five years' time.

54 We note that the Borough Council's proposed two-member College ward would provide for reasonable levels of electoral equality both now and in 2005, and consider that it reflects community ties well. We are content therefore to put it forward as part of our draft recommendations.

55 Under our draft recommendations, Cockerton West, College and Pierremont wards would have 9 per cent more, 4 per cent more and 3 per cent more electors per councillor than the borough average respectively (3 per cent more, 4 per cent more and equal to the average by 2005). Cockerton East ward would have 12 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the borough average initially, improving to 6 per cent fewer by 2005.

Central, Northgate North and Northgate South wards

56 The two-member Central ward broadly covers the Darlington town centre area. Northgate North and Northgate South wards, each represented by two councillors, are located to the north and north-west of the town centre. Under existing arrangements, Central, Northgate North and Northgate South wards have 19 per cent, 6 per cent and 15 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the borough average respectively (22 per cent, 11 per cent and 22 per cent fewer by 2005).

57 The Borough Council proposed broadly retaining the existing two-member Central ward, but expanding it to include the part of College ward to the east of Stanhope Road North and Stanhope Road South and the part of Northgate North ward to the east of High Northgate. It argued that Stanhope Road and High Northgate constitute "more natural boundaries" for the ward. The Council also proposed revised two-member Northgate North and Northgate South wards. Under its proposals, Northgate South ward would comprise the existing ward, together with the part of Pierremont ward to the south-east of Hollyhurst Road and around 190 electors located around the North Road Railway Centre and Museum area, currently in Northgate North ward. The revised Northgate North ward would comprise the existing ward less the area around High Northgate and an area containing 180 electors in the north-east of the ward, which it proposed transferring to North Road ward in order to unite the whole of the estate in one ward. It would also include the Brinkburn Road development area of Cockerton East ward, as previously discussed.

58 Under the Borough Council's proposals, Central, Northgate North and Northgate South wards would have 1 per cent fewer, 1 per cent fewer and 10 per cent more electors per councillor than the borough average respectively (3 per cent fewer, 3 per cent fewer and 3 per cent more than the average by 2005).

59 As part of the Borough Council's own consultation exercise, Darlington Constituency Labour Party welcomed the retention of the well-established wards of Northgate South and Central and the correction of the anomalous boundary between North Road and Northgate North wards.

60 We have carefully considered the Borough Council's proposals for this area. As discussed previously, our proposals for the north-west of the Darlington town area limit the extent to which we are able to consider the Council's proposals in the adjoining areas, including its proposed Northgate North ward. We recognise that the Borough Council's proposed Northgate North ward would have a reasonable level of electoral equality, but consider that it would combine a number of distinct communities with few direct links. We also consider that the Darlington to Bishop Auckland railway line constitutes a significant boundary between areas to its north and south, as a number of light industrial and retail developments neighbour it, particularly to the north. In the light of these considerations, we propose transferring the whole of the area to the north of the railway line to a revised three-member North Road ward, as discussed in further detail below. Also, as discussed previously, we propose transferring the part of Northgate North ward to the west of and including Hopetown Lane to a revised three-member Pierremont ward.

61 We consider that the Borough Council's proposed Central and Northgate South wards would reflect community ties reasonably well and note that they would provide for improved levels of electoral equality both now and by 2005. We propose therefore putting them forward as part of our draft recommendations, subject to two minor boundary amendments. We propose that all properties on High Northgate should be located in Northgate South ward, rather than transferring the electors on the eastern side of the road to Central ward, where they would be relatively isolated. Similarly, we propose transferring a part of Haughton Road containing 24 electors from Haughton East ward to Central ward, as this area appears relatively isolated from the remainder of Haughton East ward. We recognise that, as a result of our proposals, Northgate North ward would no longer exist. To reflect this change we propose renaming Northgate South ward as Northgate ward.

62 Under our draft recommendations, Central and Northgate wards would both continue to be represented by two councillors each, and would have 2 per cent fewer and 10 per cent more electors per councillor respectively (4 per cent fewer and 3 per cent more by 2005).

Harrowgate Hill and North Road wards

63 The two wards of Harrowgate Hill and North Road are located in the northern part of Darlington town. Harrowgate Hill ward is currently represented by three councillors and has 6 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the borough average (9 per cent fewer by 2005). North Road ward is represented by two councillors and has 9 per cent more electors per councillor than the borough average (4 per cent more by 2005).

64 The Borough Council proposed a revised three-member Harrowgate Hill ward, comprising the existing ward, together with some 300 electors on Thompson Street West, Ruby Street, Peabody Street, China Street and Dublin Street, currently located in North Road ward. It argued that the proposed boundary change would not adversely affect community identities in either Harrowgate Hill or North Road wards. The Council also proposed a revised two-member North Road ward, comprising the remaining part of the existing ward, as well an area containing 180 electors in the north-east of the existing Northgate North ward, in order to unite the whole of the estate in one ward. Under the Borough Council's proposals Harrowgate Hill and North Road wards would have 2 per cent and 8 per cent more electors per councillor than the borough average respectively (1 per cent fewer and 2 per cent more than the average by 2005).

65 As part of the Borough Council's own consultation exercise, Darlington Constituency Labour Party argued that the proposed adjustment to Harrowgate Hill ward would largely retain the well-established ward. It also supported the Council's proposal to modify the boundary between North Road and Northgate North wards, which it regarded as currently anomalous.

66 We have carefully considered the Borough Council's proposals for this area and several considerations have emerged. We note that while its proposals would provide for improved electoral equality, they did not address the issue of urban overspill to the north of Darlington town. Due to recent housing developments, the Harrowgate (Burtree Lane) community now straddles the boundary between Harrowgate Hill ward and Whessoe parish in Sadberge ward, with a number of roads being arbitrarily divided between wards, and the parish and ward boundary no longer being tied to identifiable ground detail.

67 We do not consider that the existing defaced boundary between Harrowgate Hill ward and the adjoining parished area of Whessoe reflects community ties or is conducive to effective and convenient local government, and we have not been persuaded to put forward the Borough Council's proposals in this area. We consider that the whole of the Harrowgate (Burtree Lane) community should be united within one ward and propose combining the existing Harrowgate Hill ward with the area around Burtree Lane and Harrowgate Village in Whessoe parish (currently located in Sadberge ward) to form a revised three-member Harrowgate Hill ward. We recognise that as a result of this change Whessoe parish will be divided between borough wards, but consider such an arrangement would enable the more urban and rural parts of the parish to be represented separately. To improve electoral equality in our proposed ward, we propose transferring around 400 electors located on Crosby Street, Fulford Place and the northern side of Thompson Street West from Harrowgate Hill ward to a revised North Road ward.

68 We note that the Borough Council proposed transferring the north-eastern part of Northgate North ward to a revised North Road ward, in order to unite the whole of the housing estate within one ward. We consider that this proposal has merit and are content to put it forward as part of our draft recommendations. However, in the light of our proposals for Harrowgate Hill ward, as well as our proposals for a new Northgate ward and a revised Pierremont ward, as previously discussed, we propose amending the southern boundary of North Road ward to include the part of the existing Northgate North ward to the north-east of the Darlington to Bishop Auckland railway line. We consider that the railway line provides a clearly identifiable boundary and acts as a division between the central and northern parts of the town. As a result of including a larger area, under our draft recommendations, North Road ward would be represented by three councillors.

69 We consider that our proposals in this area would reflect the identities and interests of local communities well, as well as utilising strong boundaries such as the River Skerne and the East Coast main railway line and Darlington to Bishop Auckland railway line. We also consider that our proposed warding arrangements would provide for reasonable levels of electoral equality both now and in five years' time. Under our draft recommendations, Harrowgate Hill and North Road wards would have 4 per cent fewer and 9 per cent more electors per councillor than the borough average initially, improving to 3 per cent and 4 per cent more than the average by 2005.

Haughton East and Haughton West wards

70 The two wards of Haughton East and Haughton West are located in the north-eastern part of Darlington town and are represented by three and two councillors respectively. This area has been subject to significant growth since the last review. As a result, under existing arrangements Haughton East and Haughton West wards have 36 per cent and 44 per cent more electors per councillor than the borough average respectively. This level of electoral inequality is expected to remain relatively constant over the next five years.

71 The Borough Council proposed retaining the existing Haughton West ward, but increasing its representation from two to three councillors. It argued that this ward has a “separate community identity and relatively strong ward boundaries”. The Council proposed dividing the existing Haughton East ward into two two-member wards, utilising Whinfield Road as a ward boundary. The Council proposed creating a new Haughton North ward, covering the area to the north of Whinfield Road, and a revised Haughton East ward, covering the remaining part of the existing ward. Under the Council’s proposals, Haughton East and Haughton North wards would both have 4 per cent more electors per councillor than the borough average (equal to the average by 2005). Haughton West ward would have 2 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the borough average both now and in five years’ time.

72 As part of the Borough Council’s consultation exercise, the Conservative Group submitted alternative warding arrangements for the Haughton area. They also proposed creating a new Haughton North ward, but proposed also including the part of Haughton West ward to the north of Salters Lane North and Whinfield Road, and that the ward should be represented by three councillors. The Conservative Group proposed a revised two-member Haughton West ward, comprising the remaining part of the existing ward, and a revised Haughton East ward, identical to the Borough Council’s proposed ward. Under the Conservative Group’s proposals, Haughton North and Haughton West wards would have 6 per cent fewer and 9 per cent more electors per councillor than the borough average respectively (8 per cent fewer and 9 per cent more than the average by 2005).

73 Having carefully considered the representations received for this area, we note that the Borough Council and the Conservative Group concurred with regard to their proposals for a revised two-member Haughton East ward. We note that their proposed ward would have reasonable levels of electoral equality both now and in five years’ time, based on a council size of 53, and having received no further views regarding this area, we are content to put it forward as part of our draft recommendations, subject to two minor amendments. We propose amending the boundary between Haughton West and Haughton East wards in order to include the whole of Springwell Terrace in Haughton East ward. In addition, we propose transferring an area containing 24 electors on Haughton Road to Central ward, as this area is relatively isolated from the remainder of the ward.

74 We note that although both the Borough Council and the Conservative Group proposed a new Haughton North ward, they differed with respect to their proposed boundaries. The Borough Council proposed the retention of the existing Haughton West ward, which would achieve a reasonable level of electoral equality, while the Conservative Group’s proposals would modify this ward and would result in a poorer level of electoral equality for this area as a whole. We note

that the area to the north of Whinfield Road and Salters Lane North is relatively self-contained and are not persuaded that it has greater links to the area to its east than that to its north, or that a case for significant change to current ward boundaries has been made. We are therefore, for the purposes of consultation, putting forward the Borough Council's proposals for a revised Haughton West ward and a new Haughton North ward, subject to one minor boundary amendment as outlined above.

75 Under our draft recommendations, Haughton East and Haughton North wards would have 5 per cent and 4 per cent more electors per councillor than the borough average respectively, improving to 1 per cent more and equal to the borough average by 2005. Haughton West ward would have 3 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the borough average both now and in five years' time. We would, however, particularly welcome further local views regarding the most appropriate warding arrangements for Haughton at Stage Three.

Bank Top, Eastbourne North, Eastbourne South, Lascelles and Lingfield wards

76 The five wards of Bank Top, Eastbourne North, Eastbourne South, Lascelles and Lingfield are located in the south-eastern part of Darlington town, to the east of the East Coast main railway line, and are each represented by two borough councillors. Under existing arrangements, Bank Top and Lascelles wards have 8 per cent and 10 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the borough average respectively and are projected to have 11 per cent and 8 per cent fewer than the average by 2005. Eastbourne North and Eastbourne South wards are also significantly over-represented, with 37 per cent and 22 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the average respectively (35 per cent and 25 per cent fewer by 2005). Lingfield ward currently has 5 per cent more electors per councillor than the borough average and is expected to have 4 per cent more than the average by 2005.

77 The Borough Council proposed broadly retaining the existing warding arrangements for Bank Top, Lascelles and Lingfield wards, with some minor changes in order to improve electoral equality and provide clearer ward boundaries. It proposed a revised two-member Bank Top ward comprising the existing ward, less 99 electors on Falmer Road (including the Darlington Manor Nursing Home) which it proposed transferring to a revised two-member Lascelles ward. The revised Bank Top ward would also include an area containing 290 electors to the west of Hundens Lane, currently located in the south-western corner of Lingfield ward, and the southern part of Bank Top Mews, currently located in Lascelles ward. The Council proposed revised two-member Lascelles and Lingfield wards, comprising the remaining part of the respective existing wards.

78 The Council proposed combining Eastbourne North and Eastbourne South wards in a new three-member Eastbourne ward. It argued that "the new ward has the strong boundaries of Yarm Road and Geneva Road and the whole area can be regarded as a self-contained unit with a separate corporate identity". Under the Borough Council's proposals, Bank Top, Lascelles and Lingfield wards would have 1 per cent more, 5 per cent fewer and 3 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the borough average respectively (2 per cent, 4 per cent and 4 per cent fewer by 2005). Eastbourne ward would have 5 per cent fewer electors per councillor both now and in five years' time.

79 As part of the Borough Council's own consultation exercise, Wesley Court Residents opposed the Council's proposals for their area, arguing that the area should not be transferred from Lingfield ward to Bank Top ward. Darlington Constituency Labour Party supported the Council's proposals for Bank Top, Lingfield, Lascelles and Eastbourne wards.

80 We have carefully considered the Borough Council's proposed warding arrangements. We note that its proposals would broadly retain the existing arrangements in the south-east of Darlington town, with the exception of the Eastbourne area which it proposed combining in one ward. We also note that the Council's proposed wards would provide for improved electoral equality both now and in five years' time, and consider that they would reflect community interests and identities in this area reasonably well. We have noted the views expressed by Wesley Court Residents, as part of the Borough Council's consultation exercise, but in the absence of any detailed argumentation or alternative proposals at Stage One, we consider that this area should be transferred to a revised Bank Top ward.

81 In the light of these considerations, we are content to put forward the Borough Council's proposals as part of our draft recommendations. Under our draft recommendations, Bank Top, Lascelles and Lingfield wards would have 1 per cent more, 5 per cent fewer and 3 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the borough average respectively (2 per cent, 4 per cent and 4 per cent fewer by 2005). Eastbourne ward would have 5 per cent fewer electors per councillor both now and in five years' time.

Rural wards (five wards)

82 There are five rural wards in Darlington borough, containing 26 parishes and comprising 13 per cent of the area's electorate.

Hurworth and Middleton St George wards

83 Hurworth and Middleton St George wards are located in the south-eastern part of the borough and are each represented by two councillors. Under existing arrangements, Hurworth ward contains the three parishes of Hurworth, Neasham and Sockburn, and has 2 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the borough average (5 per cent more by 2005). Middleton St George ward contains the two parishes of Low Dinsdale and Middleton St George, and has 2 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the borough average. This level of electoral equality is projected to remain unchanged in five years' time.

84 The Borough Council proposed retaining the existing Hurworth and Middleton St George wards, arguing that they provided for reasonable levels of electoral equality and that there was no reason to change the existing arrangements in this area. As part of the Borough Council's own consultation exercise, Hurworth Parish Council and Sedgefield Constituency Conservative Party supported the Borough Council's proposals.

85 In view of the reasonable level of electoral equality in these wards and support for their retention, we are content to put forward the Borough Council's proposal to retain the existing Hurworth and Middleton St George wards as part of our draft recommendations. Under our draft

recommendations, Hurworth and Middleton St George wards would both have equal to the average number of electors per councillor than the borough average (7 per cent more and equal to the average respectively by 2005).

Heighington, Sadberge and Whessoe wards

86 The three wards of Heighington, Sadberge and Whessoe cover the northern and the western areas of the borough, and are each represented by one councillor. Under existing arrangements Heighington ward comprises the parish of the same name and has 1 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the borough average. By 2005, however, this level of electoral equality is projected to deteriorate to 16 per cent more than the average, due to new housing developments. Sadberge ward comprises the nine parishes of Barmpton, Bishopton, Brafferton, East & West Newbiggin, Great Burdon, Great Stainton and Little Stainton, Morton Palms and Sadberge, and has 15 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the borough average (12 per cent fewer by 2005). Whessoe wards contains 11 parishes – Archdeacon Newton, Coatham Mundeville, Denton, High Coniscliffe, Houghton Le Side, Killerby, Low Coniscliffe, Piercebridge, Summerhouse, Walworth and Whessoe – and has 44 per cent more electors per councillor than the borough average. This is projected to increase to 70 per cent more than the average due to new housing developments at Harrowgate (Burtree Lane) in Whessoe parish.

87 In its submission, the Borough Council proposed a revised two-member Sadberge ward comprising the existing ward together with Archdeacon Newton, Coatham Mundeville and Whessoe parishes, currently located in Whessoe ward. It proposed combining the remaining part of Whessoe ward with Heighington ward in a new two-member Heighington & Whessoe ward. The Council argued that its proposals were “brought about primarily by the significant recent and future residential development in the Harrowgate Village [Whessoe parish] and Faverdale [Archdeacon Newton parish] areas.” Under the Borough Council’s proposals, Heighington & Whessoe and Sadberge wards would have 14 per cent and 18 per cent fewer electors per councillor than the borough average respectively, improving to 5 per cent and 4 per cent fewer than the average by 2005.

88 As part of the Borough Council’s own consultation exercise, Archdeacon Newton Parish opposed the proposal to transfer the parish to a revised Sadberge ward and proposed combining the parish with the areas to its west. Sedgefield Constituency Conservative Association and Councillor Roberts (Whessoe ward) argued that Archdeacon Newton parish strongly identifies with the neighbouring parish of Walworth and should therefore form part of a ward with Heighington ward (albeit that the ward should be renamed). Whessoe Parish Council proposed that Sadberge ward should be renamed Whessoe & Sadberge ward. Heighington Parish Council favoured retaining the existing Heighington ward, while Low Coniscliffe & Merrybent Parish Council generally supported the Borough Council’s proposals, but favoured renaming Heighington ward to reflect the area covered by the new ward.

89 We have carefully considered the Borough Council’s proposals, as well as the submissions received as part of its own consultation exercise. As previously discussed, we do not consider that the Borough Council’s proposals, which did not address the issue of urban growth in the northern part of Darlington town, would be conducive to effective and convenient local government or

would adequately reflect community interests and identities in this area. We propose, therefore, including the urban fringe developments at Faverdale (Archdeacon Newton parish) and Harrowgate Hill (Whessoe parish) in urban wards, as discussed previously.

90 In the light of our proposals for a new Faverdale ward and a revised Harrowgate Hill ward, we are unable to put forward the Borough Council's proposals for these rural wards. We propose a new single-member Sadberge & Whessoe ward, comprising the existing Sadberge ward together with Coatham Mundeville parish and the majority of Whessoe parish, excluding the Burtree Lane and Harrowgate Village areas, which we propose transferring to Harrowgate Hill ward, as discussed previously. The transfer of the developments on the fringe of Darlington would significantly reduce the number of electors in the ward and would, in our view, lead the new ward to retaining a rural focus. It would also mean that the ward would continue to be represented by a single councillor. We propose a new two-member Heighington & Coniscliffe ward comprising the existing Heighington ward, as well as Denton, High Coniscliffe, Houghton Le Side, Killerby, Low Coniscliffe, Piercebridge, Summerhouse and Walworth parishes, currently located in Whessoe ward.

91 In the absence of a parish council for Archdeacon Newton, we are unable to divide the parish and therefore must include the whole parish in one ward, Faverdale ward. As discussed previously, we must formulate our proposals on the basis of the current parishing arrangements, and at the time of consideration, the Borough Council had yet to create a parish council for Archdeacon Newton. The formation of a parish council for Archdeacon Newton would enable us to recommend alternative warding arrangements whereby the rural hamlet of Archdeacon Newton would form part of a rural ward and the Faverdale area would be combined with the adjoining unparished area of Darlington, should there be support for such an option.

92 Under our draft recommendations, Heighington & Coniscliffe and Sadberge & Whessoe wards would have 14 per cent fewer and 13 per cent more electors per councillor than the borough average (5 per cent fewer and 13 per cent more by 2005). We recognise that our proposed Sadberge & Whessoe ward would have the highest electoral variance in the borough, but consider that, in the light of our proposals in the adjoining areas of the borough, it would provide for the most reasonable balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria. We recognise, however, that our proposals differ from those submitted by the Borough Council, and would welcome further local views regarding this area at Stage Three, particularly in the light of the possible creation of a parish council for Archdeacon Newton.

Electoral Cycle

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

Conclusions

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

- there should be an increase in council size from 52 to 53;
- there should be 24 wards;
- the boundaries of 22 of the existing wards should be modified;
- elections should continue to be held for the whole council every four years.

95 As already indicated, we have based our draft recommendations on the Borough Council's proposals, but propose departing from them in the following areas:

- in the north-west of Darlington town, we propose creating a new single-member Faverdale ward, a revised two-member Cockerton West ward and a revised three-member Cockerton East ward;
- in the northern part of Darlington town, we propose transferring the new housing developments at Burtree Lane/Harrowgate to a revised three-member Harrowgate Hill ward, and a revised three-member North Road ward;
- in the central part of Darlington town, resulting from our proposals in the adjoining areas to the north, we propose a revised three-member Pierremont ward and a new two-member Northgate ward;
- in the rural area in the north of the borough, we propose two new wards, Heighington & Coniscliffe and Sadberge & Whessoe, to be represented by two councillors and one councillor respectively;
- we propose minor amendments to the boundary between Haughton West and Haughton East wards and between Park East and Park West wards, in order to provide for more clearly identifiable boundaries.

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

Figure 5: Comparison of Current and Recommended Electoral Arrangements

	2000 electorate		2005 forecast electorate	
	Current arrangements	Draft recommendations	Current arrangements	Draft recommendations
Number of councillors	52	53	52	53
Number of wards	25	24	25	24
Average number of electors per councillor	1,459	1,431	1,465	1,438
Number of wards with a variance more than 10 per cent from the average	14	4	17	1
Number of wards with a variance more than 20 per cent from the average	6	1	9	0

97 As shown in Figure 5, our draft recommendations for Darlington Borough Council would result in a reduction in the number of wards varying by more than 10 per cent from the borough average from 14 to four. By 2005, only one ward – Sadberge & Whessoe – is forecast to vary by more than 10 per cent from the average for the borough.

Draft Recommendation

Darlington Borough Council should comprise 53 councillors serving 24 wards, as detailed and named in Figures 1 and 2, and illustrated on Map 2 and the large map inside the back cover. The Council should continue to hold whole-council elections every four years.

Parish Council Electoral Arrangements

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

99 The parish of Whessoe is currently served by seven councillors and is not warded. We have proposed a revised Harrowgate Hill ward and a new Sadberge & Whessoe ward, and as a result of our proposals, Whessoe parish would be divided between borough wards. As a consequence, we propose that Whessoe parish should be divided into two new parish wards – a four-member Harrowgate parish ward which would form part of our proposed Harrowgate Hill ward, and a three-member Whessoe Rural parish ward which would form part of our proposed Sadberge & Whessoe ward.

Draft Recommendation

Whessoe Parish Council should comprise seven councillors, as at present, representing two wards: Harrowgate parish ward (returning four councillors) and Whessoe Rural parish ward (returning three councillors). The parish ward boundaries should reflect the proposed district ward boundaries in the area, as illustrated and named on Map 2 and the large map at the back of this report.

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

Draft Recommendation

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

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

Map 2: The Commission's Draft Recommendations for Darlington

5 NEXT STEPS

102 We are putting forward draft recommendations on future electoral arrangements for consultation. We will take fully into account all representations received by 19 February 2001. Representations received after this date may not be taken into account. All representations will be available for public inspection by appointment at the offices of the Commission and the Borough Council, and a list of respondents will be available on request from the Commission after the end of the consultation period.

103 Views may be expressed by writing directly to us:

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

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

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

APPENDIX A

Darlington Borough Council's Proposed Electoral Arrangements

Our draft recommendations detailed in Figures 1 and 2 differ from those put forward by the Borough Council in 14 wards, where the Council's proposals were as follows:

Figure A1: Darlington Borough Council's Proposal: Constituent Areas

Ward name	Constituent areas
Central	Central ward; College ward (part); Northgate North ward (part)
Cockerton East	Cockerton East ward (part)
Cockerton West	Cockerton East ward (part); Cockerton West ward
Harrowgate Hill	Harrowgate Hill ward; North Road ward (part)
Haughton East	Haughton East ward (part)
Haughton West	<i>Unchanged</i>
Heighington & Whesoe	Heighington ward (Heighington parish); Whesoe ward (part – Denton, High Coniscliffe, Houghton Le Side, Killerby, Low Coniscliffe, Piercebridge, Summerhouse and Walworth parishes)
North Road	North Road ward (part); Northgate North ward (part)
Northgate North	Cockerton East ward (part); Northgate North ward (part)
Northgate South	Northgate North ward (part); Northgate South ward; Pierremont ward (part)
Park East	Park East ward; Park West ward (part)
Park West	Hummersknott ward (part); Park West ward (part)
Pierremont	Pierremont ward (part)
Sadberge	Sadberge ward (Barmpton, Bishopton, Brafferton, East & West Newbiggin, Great Burdon, Great Stainton, Little Stainton, Morton Palms and Sadberge parishes); Whesoe ward (part – Archdeacon Newton, Coatham Mundeville and Whesoe parishes)

Figure A2: Darlington Borough Council's Proposals: Number of Councillors and Electors by Ward

Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2000)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2005)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
Central	2	2,845	1,423	-1	2,780	1,390	-3
Cockerton East	2	2,504	1,252	-13	2,823	1,412	-2
Cockerton West	3	4,454	1,485	4	4,657	1,552	8
Harrowgate Hill	3	4,393	1,464	2	4,274	1,425	-1
Haughton East	2	2,985	1,493	4	2,887	1,444	0
Haughton West	3	4,204	1,401	-2	4,209	1,403	-2
Heighington & Whessoe	2	2,453	1,227	-14	2,743	1,372	-5
North Road	2	3,083	1,542	8	2,942	1,471	2
Northgate North	2	2,836	1,418	-1	2,796	1,398	-3
Northgate South	2	3,156	1,578	10	2,963	1,482	5
Park East	3	4,410	1,470	3	4,366	1,455	1
Park West	2	2,934	1,467	3	2,797	1,399	-3
Pierremont	2	2,977	1,489	4	2,950	1,475	3
Sadberge	2	2,334	1,167	-18	2,748	1,374	-4

Source: Electorate figures are based on Darlington Borough Council's submission.

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

Darlington Borough Council Conservative Group's Proposed Electoral Arrangements

Figure A3: Darlington Borough Council Conservative Group's Proposal: Constituent Areas

Ward name	Constituent areas
Cockerton East	Cockerton East ward (part)
Cockerton West	Cockerton East ward (part); Cockerton West ward
Haughton North	Haughton East ward (part); Haughton West ward (part)
Haughton West	Haughton West ward (part)

Figure A4: Darlington Borough Council Conservative Group's Proposals: Number of Councillors and Electors by Ward

Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2000)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2005)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
Cockerton East	3	3,849	1,283	-10	4,521	1,507	5
Cockerton West	2	3,109	1,555	9	2,959	1,480	3
Haughton North	3	4,057	1,352	-6	3,960	1,320	-8
Haughton West	2	3,121	1,561	9	3,126	1,563	9

Source: Electorate figures are based on Darlington Borough Council Conservative Group's submission.

APPENDIX B

The Statutory Provisions

Local Government Act 1992: the Commission's Role

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

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

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

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

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

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

4 Unlike the LGBC, the Commission may also make recommendations for changes in respect of electoral arrangements within parish and town council areas. Accordingly, in relation to parish or town councils within a principal authority's area, the Commission may make recommendations relating to:

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

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

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

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

7 In relation to shire districts:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

