

Final recommendations on the
future electoral arrangements
for West Berkshire

Report to the Electoral Commission

April 2002

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A large map illustrating the proposed ward boundaries for Newbury and Thatcham is inserted inside the back cover of this report.

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. The functions of the Local Government Commission for England were transferred to the Electoral Commission and its Boundary Committee on 1 April 2002 by the Local Government Commission for England (Transfer of Functions) Order 2001 (SI 2001 No 3692). The Order also transferred to the Electoral Commission the functions of the Secretary of State in relation to taking decisions on recommendations for changes to local authority electoral arrangements and implementing them.

Members of the Committee are:

Pamela Gordon (Chair)

Archie Gall (Director)

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

This report sets out our final recommendations on the electoral arrangements for the district of West Berkshire.

SUMMARY

The Local Government Commission for England (LGCE) began a review of West Berkshire's electoral arrangements on 27 March 2001. It published its draft recommendations for electoral arrangements on 9 October 2001, after which it undertook an eight-week period of consultation. As a consequence of the transfer of functions referred to earlier, it falls to us, the Boundary Committee for England, to complete the work of the LGCE and submit final recommendations to the Electoral Commission.

- **This report summarises the representations received by the LGCE during consultation on its draft recommendations, and contains our final recommendations to the Electoral Commission.**

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

- **in 14 of the 31 wards the number of electors represented by each councillor varies by more than 10 per cent from the average for the district and four wards vary by more than 20 per cent;**
- **by 2006 electoral equality is expected to worsen, with the number of electors per councillor forecast to vary by more than 10 per cent from the average in 15 wards and by more than 20 per cent in three wards.**

Our main final recommendations for future electoral arrangements (see Tables 1 and 2 and paragraphs 129-130) are that:

- **West Berkshire District Council should have 52 councillors, two less than at present;**
- **there should be 30 wards, one fewer than at present;**
- **the boundaries of 28 of the existing wards should be modified, resulting in a net reduction of one, and three wards should retain their existing boundaries.**

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

- **In 24 of the proposed 30 wards the number of electors per councillor would vary by no more than 10 per cent from the district average.**
- **This improved level of electoral equality is forecast to continue, with the number of electors per councillor in only two wards, Kintbury and Purley on Thames, expected to vary by more than 10 per cent from the district average in 2006.**

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

- **new warding arrangements for Cold Ash, Newbury, Thatcham and Tilehurst parishes.**

All further correspondence on these final recommendations and the matters discussed in this report should be addressed to the Electoral Commission, which will not make an Order implementing them before 15 May 2002:

**The Secretary
Electoral Commission
Trevelyan House
30 Great Peter Street
London SW1P 2HW**

Table 1: Final Recommendations: Summary

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Constituent areas	Map reference
1	Aldermaston	1	the parishes of Aldermaston, Brimpton, Midgham, Wasing and Woolhampton	Map 2
2	Basildon	1	the parishes of Aldworth, Basildon and Streatley	Map 2
3	Birch Copse	3	the proposed Birch Copse parish ward of Tilehurst parish	Map 2, Map A2 and Map A3
4	Bucklebury	2	the parishes of Bradfield, Bucklebury, Frilsham, Hermitage and Stanford Dingley	Map 2
5	Burghfield	2	<i>unchanged</i> ; the parish of Burghfield	Map 2
6	Calcot	3	the parish of Holybrook and the proposed Calcot parish ward of Tilehurst parish	Map 2 and Map A3
7	Chieveley	1	the parish of Chieveley	Map 2
8	Clay Hill	2	the proposed Manor Park & Manor Fields parish ward of Cold Ash parish and the proposed Clay Hill parish ward of Newbury parish	Map 2 and the large map
9	Cold Ash	1	the proposed Cold Ash parish ward of Cold Ash parish	Map 2
10	Compton	1	the parishes of Ashampstead, Compton, Hampstead Norreys and Yattendon	Map 2
11	Downlands	1	the parishes of Beedon, Brightwalton, Catmore, Chaddleworth, East Ilsley, Farnborough, Fawley, Leckhampstead, Peasmore and West Ilsley	Map 2
12	Falkland	2	the proposed Falkland parish ward of Newbury parish	Map 2 and the large map
13	Greenham	2	the parish of Greenham and the proposed Pyle Hill parish ward of Newbury parish	Map 2 and the large map
14	Hungerford	2	<i>unchanged</i> ; the parish of Hungerford	Map 2
15	Kintbury	2	the parishes of Combe, Enborne, Hampstead Marshall, Inkpen, Kintbury, Welford and West Woodhay	Map 2
16	Lambourn Valley	2	the parishes of East Garston, Great Shefford and Lambourn	Map 2
17	Mortimer	2	the parishes of Beech Hill, Padworth, Stratfield Mortimer, Ufton Nervet and Wokefield	Map 2
18	Northcroft	2	the proposed Northcroft parish ward of Newbury parish	Map 2 and the large map
19	Pangbourne	1	<i>unchanged</i> ; the parish of Pangbourne	Map 2
20	Purley on Thames	2	the parishes of Purley on Thames, Sulham and Tidmarsh and the proposed Denefield parish ward of Tilehurst parish	Map 2
21	St Johns	2	the proposed St Johns parish ward of Newbury parish	Map 2 and the large map

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Constituent areas	Map reference
22	Speen	2	the parishes of Boxford, Shaw-cum-Donnington, Speen and Winterborne and the proposed Brummell Grove parish ward of Newbury parish	Map 2
23	Sulhamstead	1	the parishes of Beenham, Englefield and Sulhamstead	Map 2
24	Thatcham Central	2	the proposed Thatcham Central parish ward of Thatcham parish	Map 2 and the large map
25	Thatcham North	2	the proposed Thatcham North parish ward of Thatcham parish	Map 2 and the large map
26	Thatcham South & Crookham	2	the proposed Thatcham South & Crookham parish ward of Thatcham parish	Map 2 and the large map
27	Thatcham West	2	the proposed Thatcham West parish ward of Thatcham parish	Map 2 and the large map
28	Theale	1	the parish of Theale	Map 2
29	Victoria	2	the proposed Victoria parish ward of Newbury parish	Map 2 and the large map
30	Westwood	1	the proposed Westwood parish ward of Tilehurst parish	Map 2

Notes: 1 The entire district is parished

2 Map 2 and Appendix A1, including the large map in the back of the report, illustrate the proposed wards outlined above

Table 2: Final Recommendations for West Berkshire

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2001)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2006)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
1	Aldermaston	1	2,105	2,105	-2	2,123	2,123	-6
2	Basildon	1	2,232	2,232	4	2,234	2,234	-1
3	Birch Copse	3	6,524	2,175	2	6,147	2,049	-9
4	Bucklebury	2	4,258	2,129	0	4,904	2,452	9
5	Burghfield	2	4,398	2,199	3	4,664	2,332	3
6	Calcot	3	6,637	2,212	3	6,638	2,213	-2
7	Chieveley	1	1,878	1,878	-12	2,219	2,219	-2
8	Clay Hill	2	4,338	2,169	1	4,529	2,265	0
9	Cold Ash	1	2,257	2,257	6	2,296	2,296	2
10	Compton	1	2,308	2,308	8	2,238	2,238	-1
11	Downlands	1	2,320	2,320	8	2,382	2,382	6
12	Falkland	2	4,698	2,349	10	4,603	2,302	2
13	Greenham	2	3,558	1,779	-17	4,383	2,192	-3
14	Hungerford	2	4,440	2,220	4	4,610	2,305	2
15	Kintbury	2	3,865	1,933	-10	3,951	1,976	-12
16	Lambourn Valley	2	4,430	2,215	4	4,612	2,306	2
17	Mortimer	2	3,982	1,991	-7	4,537	2,269	1
18	Northcroft	2	4,411	2,206	3	4,361	2,181	-3
19	Pangbourne	1	2,251	2,251	5	2,344	2,344	4
20	Purley on Thames	2	5,057	2,529	18	5,044	2,522	12
21	St Johns	2	4,370	2,185	2	4,645	2,323	3
22	Speen	2	4,046	2,023	-5	4,693	2,347	4
23	Sulhamstead	1	2,174	2,174	2	2,193	2,193	-3
24	Thatcham Central	2	4,707	2,235	10	4,670	2,335	3
25	Thatcham North	2	3,666	1,833	-14	4,413	2,207	-2
26	Thatcham South & Crookham	2	3,867	1,934	-10	4,606	2,303	2
27	Thatcham West	2	4,835	2,418	13	4,385	2,193	-3
28	Theale	1	2,203	2,203	3	2,174	2,174	-4

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2001)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2006)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
29	Victoria	2	3,168	1,584	-26	4,704	2,352	4
30	Westwood	1	2,251	2,251	5	2,068	2,068	-8
	Totals	52	111,234	-	-	117,370	-	-
	Averages	-	-	2,139	-	-	2,257	-

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

Note: The 'variance from average' column shows by how far, in percentage terms, the number of electors per councillor varies from the average for the 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 final recommendations on the electoral arrangements for the district of West Berkshire. The districts in Berkshire have now been reviewed as part of the programme of periodic electoral reviews (PERs) of all 386 principal local authority areas in England started by the LGCE in 1996. We have inherited that programme, which we currently expect to complete in 2004.

2 This was our first review of the electoral arrangements of West Berkshire. The area, formerly Newbury district, was last reviewed by the Local Government Boundary Commission (LGBC), which reported to the Secretary of State in March 1979 (Report no. 321). Since undertaking that review, West Berkshire has become a unitary authority (April 1998). The change in unitary status has led to the gain of nine councillors, bringing the total number of councillors for West Berkshire from 45 to 54.

3 In making final recommendations to the Electoral Commission, we have had regard to:

- the statutory criteria contained in section 13(5) of the Local Government Act 1992 (as amended by SI 2001 No 3692), i.e. the need to:
 - (a) reflect the identities and interests of local communities;
 - (b) secure effective and convenient local government; and
 - (c) achieve equality of representation.
- Schedule 11 to the Local Government Act 1972.

4 Details of the legislation under which the review of West Berkshire was conducted are set out in a document entitled *Guidance and Procedural Advice for Local Authorities and Other Interested Parties* (LGCE, fourth edition published in December 2000). This *Guidance* sets out the approach to the review.

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

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

7 The LGCE was not prescriptive on council size. Insofar as West Berkshire is concerned, it started from the assumption that the size of the existing council already secures effective and convenient local government, but was willing to look carefully at arguments why this might not be so. However, the LGCE found it necessary to safeguard against upward drift in the number of councillors, and that any proposal for an increase in council size would need to be fully justified. In particular, it did not accept that an increase in electorate should automatically result in an increase in the number of councillors, nor that changes should be made to the size of a council simply to make it more consistent with the size of other similar councils.

8 This review was in four stages. Stage One began on 27 March 2001, when the LGCE wrote to West Berkshire District Council inviting proposals for future electoral arrangements. It also notified Thames Valley Police Authority, the local authority associations, Berkshire Association of Local Councils, parish and town councils in the district, the Members of Parliament with constituencies in the district, the Members of the European Parliament for the South East region, and the headquarters of the main political parties. It placed a notice in the local press, issued a press release and invited the District Council to publicise the review further. The closing date for receipt of representations, the end of Stage One, was 16 July 2001. At Stage Two it considered all the representations received during Stage One and prepared its draft recommendations.

9 Stage Three began on 9 October 2001 with the publication of the LGCE's report, *Draft recommendations on the future electoral arrangements for West Berkshire* and ended on 3 December 2001. During this period comments were sought from the public and any other interested parties on the preliminary conclusions. Finally, during Stage Four the draft recommendations were reconsidered in the light of the Stage Three consultation and we now publish the final recommendations.

2 CURRENT ELECTORAL ARRANGEMENTS

10 The district of West Berkshire lies between the counties of Oxfordshire, Wiltshire and Hampshire. It achieved unitary status on 1 April 1998. The district is a blend of open countryside and hi-tech industry and contains the main towns of Hungerford in the west, Thatcham in the centre, and Theale and Tilehurst in the east, with the remainder of the district being predominantly rural. The main urban area is Newbury, famed for its race course. The district possesses excellent transport links, with the M4 motorway bisecting the district from east to west. West Berkshire is wholly parished, containing some 60 parishes, with Newbury town comprising 19 per cent of the district's total electorate.

11 The electorate of the district is 111,234 (February 2001). The Council presently has 54 members who are elected from 31 wards, 12 of which are relatively urban and the remainder being predominantly rural. Six of the wards are each represented by three councillors, 11 are each represented by two councillors and 14 are single-member wards. The Council is elected as a whole every four years.

12 To compare levels of electoral inequality between wards, the LGCE calculated, in percentage terms, 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'.

13 At present, each councillor represents an average of 2,060 electors, which the District Council forecasts will increase to 2,174 by the year 2006 if the current number of councillors is maintained. However, due to demographic and other changes over the past two decades, the number of electors per councillor in 14 of the 31 wards varies by more than 10 per cent from the district average, four wards by more than 20 per cent and one ward by more than 30 per cent. The worst imbalance is in Thatcham South ward, where the councillor represents 31 per cent more electors than the district average.

Map 1: Existing Wards in West Berkshire

Table 3: Existing Electoral Arrangements

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2001)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2006)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
1	Aldermaston	1	1,853	1,853	-10	1,842	1,842	-15
2	Basildon	1	2,008	2,008	-2	2,024	2,024	-7
3	Birch Copse	2	4,601	2,301	13	4,407	2,204	1
4	Bradfield	1	2,625	2,625	27	2,491	2,491	15
5	Bucklebury	1	1,901	1,901	-8	2,106	2,106	-3
6	Burghfield	2	4,398	2,199	7	4,664	2,332	7
7	Calcot	1	2,625	2,625	29	2,548	2,548	17
8	Chieveley	1	1,901	1,901	17	2,753	2,753	27
9	Cold Ash	2	3,959	1,980	-4	4,000	2,000	-8
10	Compton	1	2,054	2,054	0	2,001	2,001	-8
11	Downlands	1	1,935	1,935	-6	1,964	1,964	-10
12	Falkland	3	5,876	1,959	-4	6,294	2,098	-3
13	Greenham	1	1,940	1,940	-6	2,783	2,783	28
14	Hermitage	1	2,015	2,015	-1	2,454	2,454	13
15	Hungerford	2	4,440	2,220	8	4,610	2,220	6
16	Kintbury	2	3,428	1,714	-17	3,466	1,733	-20
17	Lambourn	2	4,867	2,434	18	5,097	2,549	17
18	Mortimer	2	3,303	1,652	-20	3,579	1,790	-18
19	Northcroft	3	5,231	1,744	-15	5,658	1,886	-13
20	Pangbourne	1	2,251	2,251	9	2,344	2,344	8
21	Purley on Thames	2	3,657	1,829	-11	3,598	1,799	-17
22	St Johns	3	5,917	1,972	-4	6,433	2,144	-1
23	Speen	1	2,157	2,157	5	2,273	2,273	5
24	Sulhamstead	1	1,685	1,685	-18	2,150	2,150	-1
25	Thatcham East	2	4,312	2,156	5	5,019	2,510	15
26	Thatcham North	3	5,047	1,682	-18	5,209	1,736	-20
27	Thatcham South	2	5,385	2,693	31	5,527	2,764	27
28	Thatcham West	1	2,274	2,274	10	2,307	2,307	6
29	Theale	3	7,664	2,555	24	7,605	2,535	17
30	Turnpike	3	5,299	1,766	-14	6,252	2,084	-4

Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2001)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2006)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
31 Westwood	2	4,082	2,041	-1	3,912	1,956	-10
Totals	54	111,234	–	–	117,370	–	–
Averages	–	–	2,060	–	–	2,174	–

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

Note: The 'variance from average' column shows by how far, in percentage terms, the number of electors per councillor varies from the average for the district. The minus symbol (-) denotes a lower than average number of electors. For example, in 2001, electors in Mortimer ward were relatively over-represented by 20 per cent, while electors in Thatcham South ward were significantly under-represented by 31 per cent. Figures have been rounded to the nearest whole number.

3 DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS

14 During Stage One the LGCE received seven representations, including district-wide schemes from West Berkshire District Council and from West Berkshire Conservative Group. In the light of these representations and evidence available to it, the LGCE reached preliminary conclusions which were set out in its report, *Draft recommendations on the future electoral arrangements for West Berkshire*.

15 The LGCE's draft recommendations were based on the Conservatives' proposals, which achieved some improvement in electoral equality, and provided a mixed pattern of single- and two-member wards in the district. However, it moved away from the Conservatives' scheme in the southern Tilehurst area, using some of its own proposals, creating two three-member wards. It proposed that:

- West Berkshire District Council should be served by 52 councillors, compared with the current 54, representing 28 wards, three less than at present;
- the boundaries of 29 of the existing wards should be modified, while two wards should retain their existing boundaries;
- there should be new warding arrangements for Cold Ash, Newbury, Thatcham and Tilehurst parishes.

Draft Recommendation

West Berkshire District Council should comprise 52 councillors, serving 28 wards. The Council should continue to be elected every four years.

16 The LGCE's proposals would have resulted in significant improvements in electoral equality, with the number of electors per councillor in 24 of the 28 wards varying by no more than 10 per cent from the district average. This level of electoral equality was forecast to improve further, with only one ward, Kintbury ward, varying by more than 10 per cent from the average by 2006.

4 RESPONSES TO CONSULTATION

17 During the consultation on the draft recommendations report, 54 representations were received. A list of all respondents is available from us on request. All representations may be inspected at our offices and those of West Berkshire District Council.

West Berkshire District Council

18 West Berkshire District Council, in its response to the draft recommendations, proposed a number of changes to the proposals for West Berkshire. Its changes resulted in a 52-member council, as recommended, representing 31 wards, two more wards than recommended. It proposed that the recommended Chieveley ward be subdivided into two single-member wards. As a result of these proposals it considered the creation of the proposed Dunston Park North parish ward of Cold Ash parish, was no longer necessary. It proposed that the two-member St Barts ward be divided into two single-member wards.

19 The District Council also proposed new warding arrangements for the proposed Ashampstead, Beenham, Birch Copse, Pangbourne, Purley on Thames and Westwood wards. The Council also proposed retaining the existing Pangbourne ward while creating a new single-member Purley on Thames ward. In Tilehurst the District Council proposed creating a new two-member Westwood ward and a new Birch Copse ward. The District Council proposed an amendment to the boundary between Thatcham Central and Thatcham South & Crookham wards, and to the boundaries of Holybrook and Beenham wards.

20 The District Council also proposed a number of ward name changes. It proposed that Ashampstead ward be renamed Compton ward, Holybrook ward be renamed Calcot ward, Newbury North West ward be renamed Northcroft ward, Newbury Central ward be renamed Victoria ward, Turnpike ward be renamed Clay Hill ward, Beenham ward be renamed Sulhamstead ward and Lambourn ward be renamed Lambourn Valley ward. The District Council stated they would be happy to endorse any name suggested by Newbury Town Council for the proposed Newbury South East parish ward.

21 In regard to the draft proposals for Parish and Town Council Electoral Arrangements, the Council requested that consideration be given to amendments to the number of parish councillors per parish ward in Tilehurst parish and Newbury town. The Council also proposed changes in the representation in Cold Ash and Purley on Thames parishes.

West Berkshire Conservative Group

22 West Berkshire Conservative Group (hereafter referred to as the Conservatives) welcomed the draft recommendations, supporting the proposals across the district subject to some name changes and boundary amendments in Thatcham and Tilehurst. The Conservatives also proposed amendments to town council arrangements for Newbury Town Council.

23 The Conservatives also commented on the District Council's submission, supporting the creation of two single-member wards for Chieveley and Cold Ash but opposing the creation of a new single-member Wash Common ward in south Newbury. They opposed the Council's proposals for Purley on Thames and Westwood wards and also opposed the Council's proposals for linking Birch Copse and Sulham and for grouping Tidmarsh with Sulhamstead while, on balance, supporting the proposals for Basildon, Pangbourne and Streatley parishes.

West Berkshire Liberal Democrat Group

24 The Liberal Democrat Group supported the District Council's comments on the draft recommendations, particularly the community issues raised and local consensus for two single-member wards in Chieveley and Cold Ash, the creation of a single-member Wash Common ward and the community issues for the extensive re-warding of Basildon, Purley on Thames and Tilehurst wards.

Parish and Town Councils

25 Representations were received from two town councils and 12 parish councils. Newbury Town Council proposed that Newbury North West ward be renamed Northcroft ward, Newbury Central ward be renamed Victoria ward, Turnpike ward be renamed Clay Hill ward and Newbury South East parish ward be renamed Pyle Hill parish ward. It also proposed changes to the town council arrangements with five parish wards being each represented by four councillors with Pyle Hill and Brummell Grove parish wards being represented by two councillors and one councillors respectively. Thatcham Town Council "reluctantly accepted" the reduction in council size from 54 to 52, expressing concern that a reduction would increase the individual workload of the councillor. Overall, Thatcham Town Council accepted the draft recommendations apart from the creation of Dunston Park North parish ward.

26 Holybrook Parish Council supported the draft proposal to extend the proposed Holybrook district ward northward while Tilehurst Parish Council considered the proposals for Tilehurst to be both "unhelpful and impractical". Bucklebury Parish Council considered the proposed Bucklebury ward to be too large and diverse an area. Hermitage Parish Council also disagreed with the proposed Bucklebury ward. It stated that it would prefer the parish to remain within the present area with Hampstead Norreys, Yattendon and Frilsham parishes. Compton Parish Council stated that it was disappointed to have been removed from the Downland group of villages and consider the parish has little in common with the proposed grouping.

27 Boxford Parish Council considered that grouping rural and urban parishes separately makes for more efficient and equitable governance and opposed the recommendation for its parish on this principle. Speen Parish Council generally supported the draft recommendations with some reservation. Enborne Parish Council was "delighted" at the retention of its historical link with Hampstead Marshall.

28 The proposal to link the parishes of Beenham, Englefield and Sulhamstead was opposed by Beenham Parish Council. It proposed that Sulhamstead should be grouped with the parishes of Padworth and Ufton Nervet while linking Beenham with Woolhampton and possibly Midgham parish which are connected by the A4. Pangbourne Parish Council had no objections to the draft recommendations concerning Pangbourne parish while Purley on Thames Parish Council also broadly supported the proposals for its area and objected to the amendments submitted by the District Council at Stage Three.

29 Cold Ash Parish Council considered the draft recommendations "threatening to the identity and unity of Cold Ash as a parish and a village". It provided three new parish councillor distribution options on the basis that the parish is to be warded.

Other Representations

30 A further 37 representations were received in response to the draft recommendations from local political groups, local organisations, councillors and residents. Newbury Constituency Liberal Democrats proposed amendments to the draft recommendations for Newbury Town wards. They also provided new proposals for town council electoral arrangements based on 22 councillors, as proposed in the draft recommendations. Seven local residents objected to the proposed warding arrangements for Cold Ash parish, in particular the creation of Dunston Park North parish ward. One resident of West Berkshire also objected to the recommendations for Cold Ash parish and proposed new arrangements for Cold Ash/Chieveley parishes. He also objected to the proposed Pangbourne ward and considered it more appropriate to include Fawley parish in the proposed Lambourn ward while suggesting that Ashampstead ward should be renamed Compton ward.

31 A total of 16 local residents of Basildon and Streatley parishes objected to the proposals linking the two parishes with Pangbourne, Sulham and Tidmarsh parishes, citing urban and rural differences between the parishes as opposition to the proposed ward. Local residents considered that a more suitable option would be to link Basildon and Streatley parishes with either Aldworth or Ashampstead parishes with which they have more in common. Goring & Streatley Amenity Association also objected to the proposals for Streatley parish, preferring the status quo.

32 Five local residents fully supported the draft recommendations to include the proposed Denefield parish ward with Purley on Thames parish. A resident of Tilehurst proposed that the boundary of the proposed Holybrook ward be extended northward, while also suggesting that this ward be named Calcot ward. A local resident proposed including the Langley Hill Estate in the proposed Holybrook ward, and a Purley on Thames resident supported the proposals for the Purley/Tilehurst/Pangbourne area and opposed the Liberal Democrat's proposed amendments to this area. Another local resident proposed that the northern boundary of the proposed Holybrook ward be extended.

33 Another local resident considered the proposals to retain the link between Enborne parish and Hampstead Marshall parish as "eminently sensible" while Councillor Hall-Craggs stated that the recommendation for Downland ward is contrary to the aims of the Rural White Paper. Another local resident considered a 51-member council to be suitable and also proposed that Ashampstead ward be renamed Downlands East ward and Downlands ward be renamed Downlands West ward. A resident of Newbury agreed with the recommendations and in particular supported a 52-member council and the creation of two new parish wards in Cold Ash parish.

5 ANALYSIS AND FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS

34 As described earlier, our prime objective in considering the most appropriate electoral arrangements for West Berkshire is to achieve electoral equality. In doing so we have regard to section 13(5) of the Local Government Act 1992 (as amended) – the need to secure effective and convenient local government; reflect the identities and interests of local communities; and secure the matters referred to in paragraph 3(2)(a) of Schedule 11 to the Local Government Act 1972 (equality of representation). 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”.

35 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 within the next five years. We also must have regard to the desirability of fixing identifiable boundaries and to maintaining local ties.

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

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

Electorate Forecasts

38 Since 1975 there has been a 30 per cent increase in the electorate of West Berkshire district. At Stage One the District Council submitted electorate forecasts for the year 2006, projecting an increase in the electorate of approximately 5 per cent from 111,234 to 117,370 over the five-year period from 2001 to 2006. It expects most of the growth to be in Newbury town, and also the more rural Hermitage ward. In order to prepare these forecasts, the Council estimated rates and locations of housing development with regard to structure and local plans, the expected rate of building over the five-year period and assumed occupancy rates. Having accepted that this is an inexact science and, having considered the forecast electorates, the LGCE stated in its draft recommendations report that it was satisfied that they represented the best estimates that could reasonably be made at the time.

39 One submission was received in relation to the Council’s electorate forecasts during Stage Three, with Compton Parish Council querying the projected decrease in its electorate by 2006, stating that it had a planning application currently under discussion for an additional 50 properties. However, as this planning application has not been approved, we are unable to consider it as part of this review. We therefore remain satisfied that the figures provided by the District Council represent the best estimates currently available.

Council Size

40 As already explained, the LGCE started its review by assuming that the current council size facilitates effective and convenient local government, although they were willing to look carefully at arguments why this might not be the case.

41 In its draft recommendations report the LGCE adopted the Conservatives' proposal for a council of 52 members as it considered that there was little justification or local support for an increase in council size and under the Conservatives' 52-member scheme it was possible to achieve acceptable levels of electoral equality with minimal parish warding. With these considerations in mind it was of the opinion that a council size of 52 members would provide for the best balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria.

42 During Stage Three five representations were received in relation to council size with Thatcham Town Council reluctantly accepting the 52-member council while it was supported by Speen Parish Council and two local residents.

43 At Stage Three, the only submission received in opposition to the proposed council size of 52 members was the alternative council sizes investigated by a local resident. The local resident concluded that a 54- or 51-member council may be more appropriate for the district but in the absence of any supporting argumentation and local support we are of the opinion that a council size of 52 members would best meet the statutory criteria.

Electoral Arrangements

44 As set out in the draft recommendations report, all the representations received during Stage One were carefully considered, including the district-wide schemes put forward by the District Council and the Conservatives.

45 In formulating the draft recommendations, the warding arrangements proposed by the District Council and the Conservatives were looked at closely and having adopted a 52-member council, the draft recommendations were based largely on the Conservatives' proposal. The LGCE moved away from the Conservatives' scheme in Cold Ash, Chieveley, Speen and Tilehurst and proposed its own warding arrangements in these areas. It also proposed minor boundary amendments to their scheme in Newbury and Thatcham.

46 In response to the draft recommendations report, the District Council proposed new warding arrangements across the district, which were largely supported by the Liberal Democrat Group. The Conservatives broadly supported the draft recommendations and proposed minor amendments in Thatcham, Cold Ash and Tilehurst. Minor changes were also proposed by Thatcham Town Council and Newbury Town Council, with Newbury Constituency Liberal Democrats proposing a new warding arrangement for Newbury town. This re-warding of Newbury was considered too extensive and without sufficient argumentation or detailed figures to adopt at Stage Three. We also considered that the draft recommendations for Newbury satisfied the statutory criteria by grouping similar communities in single wards and achieved good levels of electoral equality. Considerable opposition was also received to the proposed Chieveley ward and the creation of a new Dunston Park North parish ward in Cold Ash parish. A number of responses objecting to the proposed Pangbourne ward were also received. In the light of the objections and argumentation received, we propose changes to the LGCE's draft recommendations for the proposed Chieveley and Pangbourne wards and also propose minor boundary amendments to Thatcham Central and Calcot wards.

47 The draft recommendations have been reviewed in the light of further evidence and the representations received during Stage Three. For district warding purposes, the following areas, based on existing wards, are considered in turn:

- a) Hungerford, Kintbury and Lambourn wards;
- b) Chieveley, Cold Ash, Downlands and Speen wards;
- c) Bradfield, Bucklebury, Compton and Hermitage wards;
- d) Falkland, Greenham, Northcroft, St Johns and Turnpike wards;
- e) Thatcham East, Thatcham North, Thatcham South and Thatcham West wards;
- f) Aldermaston, Burghfield, Mortimer and Sulhamstead wards;
- g) Basildon, Pangbourne and Purley on Thames wards;
- h) Birch Copse, Calcot, Theale and Westwood wards;

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

Hungerford, Kintbury and Lambourn wards

49 Hungerford, Kintbury and Lambourn wards cover the western area of the district. Hungerford ward (comprising the parish of Hungerford), Kintbury ward (comprising the parishes of Combe, Enborne, Hampstead Marshall, Inkpen, Kintbury and West Woodhay) and Lambourn ward (comprising the parishes of East Garston, Great Shefford, Lambourn and Welford) are each represented by two councillors. Under the current arrangements of a 54-member council, the number of electors per councillor in the three wards varies from the district average by 8 per cent, 17 per cent and 18 per cent respectively. This level of electoral equality is expected to improve marginally in Hungerford and Lambourn wards, but is projected to deteriorate slightly over the next five years in Kintbury ward to vary by 6 per cent, 17 per cent and 20 per cent respectively.

50 At Stage One the District Council proposed that this area should be represented by three wards with the modified Hungerford, Kintbury and Lambourn wards each being represented by two councillors. It proposed that Lambourn ward should be retained, less Great Shefford and Welford parishes which would be included in the existing Kintbury ward. It also proposed that a new parish ward, Hungerford Newtown, be created in the northern part of Hungerford ward and be included in the existing Kintbury ward. The remainder of Hungerford ward would constitute a ward on its own. It proposed that Enborne parish, in the east of Kintbury ward, should be transferred to a newly created Speen ward.

51 The Conservatives proposed that this area should be represented by three wards, with the proposed Hungerford, Kintbury and Lambourn wards each being represented by two councillors. They proposed retaining Lambourn ward less Welford parish, which they proposed including in the amended Kintbury ward. They proposed that Hungerford ward should retain its existing boundaries.

52 The Liberal Democrat Group objected to the Conservatives' proposed Kintbury ward on the basis of high electoral variance. It also pointed out that the Conservatives' claim that there was support for their proposed Kintbury ward was unfounded.

53 Enborne Parish Council objected to the District Council's proposal to separate it from Hampstead Marshall parish to which it "has been aligned for over 1000 years".

54 Having considered the representations received at Stage One carefully, it was noted that both the District Council and the Conservatives proposed minimal change in this area and the LGCE concurred with this view. It proposed adopting the Conservatives' proposals, creating a new Kintbury ward (comprising the parishes of Combe, Enborne, Hampstead Marshall, Inkpen, Kintbury, Welford and West Woodhay) and Lambourn ward (comprising the parishes of East Garston, Great Shefford and Lambourn) while retaining the existing Hungerford ward. It considered that the Conservatives' proposals resulted in good electoral equality and retained community identity within the proposed wards. It noted the relatively high electoral variance in Kintbury ward but considered it to be justified, in that natural communities are contained within the proposed wards. The adopted scheme also resulted in no parish warding.

55 Under the draft recommendations for a 52-member council, the number of electors per councillor in Hungerford, Kintbury and Lambourn wards would vary from the district average by 4 per cent, 10 per cent and 4 per cent respectively. This level of electoral equality is expected to improve marginally in Hungerford and Lambourn wards, but is projected to deteriorate slightly over the next five years in Kintbury ward, to vary by 2 per cent, 2 per cent and 12 per cent respectively by 2006.

56 At Stage Three Enborne Parish Council "expressed its delight" at the retention of its link with Hampstead Marshall parish while a local resident also considered the retention of this link to be "eminently sensible". The Conservatives supported the draft recommendations for this area, subject to Lambourn ward being renamed Lambourn Valley ward. This ward name change was also proposed by the District Council at Stage Three. A local resident proposed that the parish of Fawley should be included in Lambourn ward as it has more in common with this ward due to its connections with the Racehorse industry, and the fact that it is the only parish in the proposed Downlands ward to the west of the A338.

57 In the light of the representations received in relation to this area and the degree of support for the draft recommendations we propose to endorse the draft recommendations in full, subject to Lambourn ward being renamed Lambourn Valley ward. We note the local resident's proposal for Fawley parish to be included in Lambourn ward. Although we consider that this proposal has merit, in the absence of wider support, we do not consider there is justification for its adoption.

58 Under our final recommendations for a 52-member council, the number of electors per councillor in Hungerford, Kintbury and Lambourn Valley wards would vary from the district average by 4 per cent, 10 per cent and 4 per cent respectively. This level of electoral equality is expected to improve marginally in Hungerford and Lambourn Valley wards, but is projected to deteriorate slightly over the next five years in Kintbury ward to vary by 2 per cent, 2 per cent and 12 per cent respectively by 2006. Our final proposals are illustrated on Tables 1 and 2 and on Map 2.

Chieveley, Cold Ash, Downlands and Speen wards

59 The existing wards of Chieveley, Cold Ash, Downlands and Speen run from the north of the district to the north of Newbury and Thatcham. Chieveley ward (comprising the parishes of Boxford, Chieveley and Winterbourne), Downlands ward (comprising the parishes of Beedon, Brightwalton, Catmore, Chaddleworth, Farnborough, Fawley, Leckhampstead, Peasmore and West Ilsley) and Speen ward (comprising the parish of Speen) are each represented by one councillor, while Cold Ash ward (comprising the parishes of Cold Ash and Shaw-cum-Donnington) is represented by two councillors. Under the current arrangements, the number of

electors per councillor in Chieveley, Cold Ash, Downlands and Speen wards varies by 17 per cent, 4 per cent, 6 per cent and 5 per cent respectively from the district average. This level of electoral equality is projected to deteriorate over the next five years in Chieveley, Cold Ash and Downlands wards to vary by 27 per cent, 8 per cent and 10 per cent respectively, while remaining constant in Speen ward.

60 At Stage One, the District Council proposed that this area be represented by four wards with the modified Chieveley, Cold Ash and Downlands wards being represented by one councillor and the modified Speen ward being represented by two councillors. It proposed retaining the existing Downlands ward but proposed placing the Curridge parish ward of Chieveley parish and joining it with Hermitage parish to create a new Hermitage ward, as discussed below. The District Council proposed the creation of two new parish wards in southern Cold Ash parish to accommodate the urban overspill from Newbury and Thatcham, called Manor Park & Manor Fields and Dunston Park North parish wards, as discussed below. It proposed that the remainder of Cold Ash parish become a single-member ward on its own with Shaw-cum-Donnington parish joining Enborne and Speen parishes in the new Speen ward.

61 The Conservatives proposed that this area should be represented by four wards, with a modified Cold Ash ward being represented by two councillors, and proposed Chieveley, Downlands and Speen wards being represented by one councillor each. They proposed including East Ilsley parish in the existing Downlands ward and creating a Chieveley ward comprising Chieveley parish. They also proposed combining the existing Cold Ash ward with Boxford and Winterbourne parishes, formerly in Chieveley ward. The Conservatives further proposed creating a new parish ward in southern Cold Ash, named Manor Park & Manor Fields, as discussed below and also proposed that Speen ward should retain its existing boundary. The Liberal Democrats objected to the Conservatives' proposed Cold Ash ward which retained the Cold Ash/Shaw-cum-Donnington link.

62 Having considered the representations received at Stage One carefully, the LGCE noted that significant boundary modifications in this area are unavoidable given the high level of electoral imbalance in the existing Chieveley ward. It did not consider that the District Council's proposals for this area promoted community identity and it considered that the high degree of parish warding entailed would unnecessarily split communities. Although Chieveley parish is bisected by the M4 motorway it was persuaded that the north and south are linked by the A34. In the light of this the LGCE put forward its own set of proposals for much of this area while retaining the Conservatives' proposed Downlands ward.

63 In relation to Cold Ash parish, the LGCE proposed creating two new parish wards in the southern area of the parish, as previously mentioned in the District Council's and Conservatives' proposals. It proposed that these two parish wards be named Manor Park & Manor Fields, and Dunston Park North, with the remainder of the parish to be named Cold Ash parish ward. The Conservatives only proposed the creation of one new parish ward, Manor Park & Manor Fields for the south eastern area, but suggested that the Commission investigate further the possibility of a parish ward for the south western area of the parish. Its main reason for not creating a new Dunston Park North parish ward was that it would affect representation in their proposed Cold Ash ward, giving it an electoral variance of 10 per cent from the district average (15 per cent by 2006). The LGCE were of the opinion that both these new parish wards are justifiable in their creation, as they would contain the urban overspill in the Manor Park & Manor Fields area which would then be included in Turnpike ward, while the urban overspill in Dunston Park North area would then be included in Thatcham North ward. It believed that these two areas have greater links with the town than with the more rural remainder of Cold Ash

parish. Therefore, by virtue of their creation and its consequential effect on levels of electoral equality, it proposed alternative warding arrangements in the remainder of the area.

64 The LGCE proposed creating a new Chieveley ward (comprising the parishes of Chieveley and the Cold Ash parish ward of Cold Ash) and a new Speen district ward (comprising the parishes of Boxford, Speen, Shaw-cum-Donnington, Winterbourne and the proposed Brummell Grove parish ward of Newbury North West parish). The proposed Brummell Grove parish ward is situated in the north-western corner of Newbury parish and its inclusion in Speen ward would facilitate good electoral equality and reflect community identity. The LGCE was of the opinion that these wards provided the best balance available between community identity and electoral equality. These new warding arrangements allowed for the new parish wards of Dunston Park North and Manor Park & Manor Fields to be created, and facilitated the separation of Cold Ash and Shaw-cum-Donnington parishes.

65 Under the LGCE's draft recommendations for a 52-member council, the number of electors per councillor in Chieveley, Downlands and Speen wards would vary from the district average by 10 per cent, 8 per cent and 5 per cent respectively. This level of electoral equality is expected to improve in all three wards over the next five years to vary by 7 per cent, 6 per cent and 4 per cent from the district average respectively by 2006.

66 In response to the draft recommendations the District Council proposed two single-member wards for Chieveley and Cold Ash parishes, with the proposed Chieveley ward comprising Chieveley parish and the Cold Ash ward comprising Cold Ash parish less the new Manor Park & Manor Fields parish ward, on the basis that this would better reflect the local communities. The Conservatives welcomed the draft proposals for this area, which it stated overcame the difficulties of linking Cold Ash and Shaw-cum-Donnington parishes and better reflect the community. It also stated that the draft proposals address the fact that Manor Park & Manor Field and Dunston Park North should be part of Newbury and Thatcham respectively. The Conservatives commented on the District Council's proposals and stated that the splitting of Chieveley and Cold Ash parishes to create two single-member wards has merit and this would better reflect the identity of the local communities in Chieveley and Cold Ash parishes. The Liberal Democrat Group supported the proposal for two single-member wards for Chieveley and Cold Ash parishes.

67 Boxford Parish Council stated that it did not consider that the draft recommendation to have served small rural parishes like Boxford well. It stated that it would like to be linked to more rural parishes as opposed to the more urban Speen parish. Speen Parish Council generally supported the draft recommendations, including the 52-member council proposal, although it stated that would have preferred the status quo. Councillor Hall-Craggs objected to the proposed Downlands ward, due to it comprising ten parishes being represented by only one district councillor. He argued that this would play down the role of the parish council and is contrary to the aims of the Rural White Paper. A local resident proposed new ward names for the proposed Ashampstead and Downlands wards, renaming them Downlands East and Downlands West respectively on a geographic continuity basis. A local resident proposed removing Fawley parish from Downlands ward and including it in Lambourn ward on a community basis, as previously mentioned.

68 We have given careful consideration to the evidence and representations received at Stage Three. We note the comments made regarding the proposed Speen ward but consider that the draft proposals better reflect the identities of the comprising parishes and consider that Boxford parish should be linked to the rural Winterborne parish. Both parishes have good transport links

to Shaw-cum-Donnington and Speen parishes which make up the remainder of Speen ward. We note Councillor Hall-Craggs' objection to the proposed Downlands ward but as we are unable to consider any area in isolation or take into account the Rural White Paper, we propose endorsing the draft Downlands ward as we consider it groups like parishes together in a single ward with good levels of electoral equality.

69 In the light of representations received in relation to the LGCE's proposed Chieveley ward we note the level of opposition and propose moving away from the draft recommendations in this area, creating two single-member wards for Chieveley and Cold Ash parishes. The new Chieveley ward would comprise the entire parish of Chieveley while the proposed Cold Ash ward would comprise the entire Cold Ash parish less the new Manor Park & Manor Fields parish ward, which would be included in the proposed Clay Hill ward of Newbury town. These new proposals are in response to the views of residents within the proposed Dunston Park North parish ward who have highlighted the historic and community ties that the area has with Cold Ash Village and that they look towards Cold Ash Village. Having visited the area we are agreed that the Dunston Park North area is in close proximity to Cold Ash Village and linked via Cold Ash Hill to which many of the properties within the proposed Dunston Park North parish ward have access. We note the consensus between the District Council, Liberal Democrat Group and the Conservatives, that two single-member wards should be created for Chieveley and Cold Ash parishes on the basis that they are very separate communities. Although a local resident considered the creation of both Dunston Park North and Manor Park & Manor Fields parish wards would "tidy things up", we are proposing as part of the final recommendations to create only the Manor Park & Manor Fields parish ward, as we consider that this would offer the best balance between the statutory criteria for the local community and facilitate the creation of two single-member wards for Chieveley and Cold Ash that are locally supported. We have been convinced by the argumentation received at Stage Three that Dunston Park North parish ward has closer ties with Cold Ash village.

70 Under our final recommendations for a 52-member council, the number of electors per councillor in Chieveley, Cold Ash, Downlands and Speen wards would vary from the district average by 12 per cent, 6 per cent, 8 per cent and 5 per cent respectively. This level of electoral equality is expected to improve in all four wards over the next five years to vary by 2 per cent, 2 per cent, 6 per cent and 4 per cent from the district average respectively by 2006. Our final proposals are illustrated on Tables 1 and 2, Map 2 and the large map.

Bradfield, Bucklebury, Compton and Hermitage wards

71 The existing wards of Bradfield, Bucklebury, Compton and Hermitage largely cover the east central area of the district with Compton to the north of the district. Bradfield ward (comprising the parishes of Beenham, Bradfield, Englefield and Stanford Dingley), Bucklebury ward (comprising the parishes of Bucklebury and Midgham), Compton ward (comprising the parishes of Aldworth, Ashampstead, Compton and East Ilsley) and Hermitage ward (comprising the parishes of Frilsham, Hampstead Norreys, Hermitage and Yattendon) are each represented by a single councillor. Under current arrangements, the number of electors per councillor in Bradfield, Bucklebury, Compton and Hermitage wards varies from the district average by 27 per cent, 8 per cent, 0 per cent and 1 per cent respectively. This level of electoral equality is projected to improve in Bradfield and Bucklebury wards over the next five years, but is expected to deteriorate in Compton and Hermitage wards, with the number of electors per councillor projected to vary by 15 per cent, 3 per cent, 8 per cent and 13 per cent respectively from the district average by 2006.

72 At Stage One, the District Council stated that this area should be represented by five wards with the proposed Ashampstead, Beenham, Bucklebury, Compton and Hermitage wards being represented by a single councillor each. It proposed a new Compton ward and a new Ashampstead ward. Further to this the District Council proposed creating a new parish ward in the south-west corner of Bradfield parish, named Bradfield Southend, and including this in the proposed Beenham ward. It proposed reducing the existing Bucklebury ward by transferring Midgham parish to the proposed Beenham ward, and Stamford Dingley parish to the proposed Bucklebury ward. Due to the high level of growth in Hermitage parish, the District Council proposed an amended single-member Hermitage ward, comprising Hermitage parish and the newly created Curridge parish ward of Chieveley parish.

73 The Conservatives proposed that this area be represented by three wards, with their proposed Bucklebury ward being represented by two councillors and the proposed Ashampstead and Beenham wards each being represented by a single councillor. They proposed a new Ashampstead ward comprising the parishes of Aldworth, Ashampstead and Compton, all formerly in Compton ward, and Hampstead Norreys and Yattendon parishes, formerly in Hermitage ward. They proposed an enlarged Bucklebury ward, comprising Bradfield, Bucklebury, Frilsham, Hermitage and Stanford Dingley parishes. A new Beenham ward was also proposed containing Beenham, Englefield and Sulhamstead parishes.

74 Midgham Parish Council supported the District Council's proposal linking the parish with Beenham, Englefield and Woolhampton parishes.

75 The LGCE carefully considered the representations received at Stage One and noted that significant change had been proposed by both the District Council and the Conservatives. While it recognised that the District Council's proposal offered slightly better electoral equality it considered that the Conservatives' proposals achieved acceptable levels of electoral equality and provided for the best balance between this and the reflection of community identity. Within the Conservatives' proposal, the M4 motorway provided a natural ward boundary between the Ashampstead and Bucklebury wards, with the parishes to the north of the motorway in the proposed Bucklebury ward being connected by good road links to the rest of Bucklebury ward. It was also of the opinion that the Conservatives' proposal grouped together natural communities and avoided the warding of parishes.

76 Under the draft recommendations for a 52-member council, the number of electors per councillor in Ashampstead, Beenham and Bucklebury wards would vary from the district average by 12 per cent, 2 per cent and 0 per cent respectively. This level of electoral equality is expected to improve in Ashampstead ward, but is projected to deteriorate slightly over the next five years in Beenham and Bucklebury wards to vary by 8 per cent, 3 per cent and 9 per cent from the district average respectively by 2006.

77 At Stage Three the District Council proposed a new Compton ward. It proposed that this ward should comprise the Ashampstead ward proposed as part of the LGCE's draft recommendations less Aldworth parish which would be included in a new Basildon ward. It proposed a new Sulhamstead ward which would include Tidmarsh parish along with the draft Beenham ward. It proposed no change to the proposed Bucklebury ward. The Conservatives supported the recommendations for this area, citing them as the best option possible to reflect community identity and satisfy the statutory criteria. They also considered that the proposed Bucklebury ward joins rather than divides parishes. The Conservatives proposed that Ashampstead ward be renamed Compton ward. The Conservatives also stated that Tidmarsh did not fit well in the proposed District Council's Sulhamstead ward on a community basis as it

is separated from the remainder of the ward by the M4. The Liberal Democrat Group commented on the consequential arrangements for Tidmarsh and Sulham parishes and stated that Tidmarsh is similar to those parishes in the proposed Beenham ward. It also considered that if a proposal was adopted to go outside the electoral equality guidelines, a new arrangement could be made for the parishes of Sulham and Tidmarsh.

78 Hermitage Parish Council expressed grave concerns about the proposed changes and strongly opposed being grouped with Bradfield, Bucklebury and Stanford Dingley parishes. The Parish Council unanimously agreed that it would be better placed with Frilsham, Hampstead Norreys and Yattendon parishes. The Parish Council also stated that given the projected population increase of the parish, it should comprise a single-member ward on its own. Compton Parish Council was disappointed that it would be separated from the Downland group of villages and stated that the parish has little affinity with the other parishes in the proposed ward. The Parish Council also proposed that the ward should be named Compton ward, as it is by far the largest village within the proposed ward. A local resident also proposed this name change. Beenham Parish Council conceded that the parish has common links with Englefield parish but did not consider it to have links with Sulhamstead parish as it is very separate geographically. It considered that it would be better joined to Midgham parish and possibly Woolhampton parish. Bucklebury Parish Council considered the proposed Bucklebury parish to include too large and diverse a geographical area. It also stated that there was a danger of split representation in villages and that the proposal would diminish the strength of representation for its parish.

79 Having considered all the representations at Stage Three we propose endorsing the LGCE's draft recommendations for the area, subject to removing Aldworth parish from the proposed Ashampstead ward and including it in a new Basildon ward, as detailed later and proposed by the District Council. We also propose that Ashampstead ward be renamed Compton ward as proposed by Compton Parish Council and the District Council and propose that Beenham ward be renamed Sulhamstead ward as proposed by the District Council. We also note the District Council's proposal for the proposed Sulhamstead ward but do not consider that the inclusion of Tidmarsh parish, which is east of the M4, would provide for effective and convenient local government or promote community identity in the area. We noted the objections expressed by Bucklebury and Hermitage parish councils but consider that the draft proposals to link like parishes provide the best balance between the statutory criteria for the area as a whole. We concur with the Conservatives that the proposed Bucklebury ward groups similar parishes rather than separating them. We note the projected population of Hermitage parish and although we have investigated the possibility of making it a single-member ward on its own, the knock on effect of this arrangement would adversely affect the electoral equality and community identity for the surrounding wards and we are unable consider any area in isolation from the remainder of the district.

80 Under our final recommendations for a 52-member council, the number of electors per councillor in Bucklebury, Compton and Sulhamstead wards would vary from the district average by 0 per cent, 8 per cent and 2 per cent respectively. This level of electoral equality is expected to improve in Compton ward, but is projected to deteriorate slightly over the next five years in Bucklebury and Sulhamstead wards to vary by 1 per cent, 9 per cent and 3 per cent from the district average respectively by 2006. Our final proposals are illustrated on Tables 1 and 2 and on Map 2.

Falkland, Greenham, Northcroft, St Johns and Turnpike wards

81 The existing wards of Falkland, Northcroft, St Johns and Turnpike, comprising the parish wards of the same names, cover the Newbury town area of the district, with Greenham ward (comprising Greenham parish), situated on the eastern side of the town. Each urban ward is represented by three councillors, with the more rural Greenham ward being represented by two councillors. Under current arrangements, the number of electors per councillor in the four urban wards varies from the district average by 4 per cent, 15 per cent, 4 per cent and 14 per cent, with Greenham ward varying by 6 per cent. This level of electoral equality is projected to improve slightly in all the urban wards, with Greenham ward deteriorating significantly to vary by 28 per cent from the district average by 2006.

82 At Stage One, the District Council proposed that this area should be represented by seven wards, with the proposed Newbury Central ward being represented by three councillors, and Greenham, Newbury North West, St Barts, St Johns and Turnpike wards being represented by two councillors each. The proposed Wash Common ward would be represented by a single councillor. It proposed that the new Turnpike ward should cover a significantly smaller area than at present, comprising the north east area of the town to the north of Ham Marsh together with the proposed Manor Park & Manor Fields parish ward of Cold Ash parish. The proposed Newbury North West ward would cover the area to the north of the Kennet and Avon Canal and London Road. The proposed Newbury Central ward would span the town centre, to the north of the railway in the west and north of East Fields in the east. Three wards, St Barts ward, St Johns ward and Wash Common ward would cover the southern area of the town. The Council also proposed that a new parish ward be created to the east of the A339. It proposed naming this new parish ward Newbury South East and including it with Greenham parish to form a new Greenham district ward.

83 The Conservatives proposed that this area should be divided into six wards, with the proposed wards of Greenham, Newbury Central, Newbury North West, St. Barts, St. Johns and Turnpike being represented by two councillors each. They also proposed that the new Turnpike ward be reduced in size and that its boundary should run along the River Lambourn, along the centre of Newport Road and continue along the centre of London Road, finally following the eastern side of the Ham Marsh depot to the Kennet and Avon Canal. Turnpike ward would also contain the proposed Manor Park & Manor Fields parish ward of Cold Ash parish. The proposed Newbury North West ward would contain the properties north of the London Road from the A34 roundabout and north of the railway line while covering the area west of Strawberry Hill and West Street, with the boundary running along the centre of Northcroft Road and also running along the eastern side of the leisure centre and joining the Kennet and Avon Canal to Kennet Road. It would continue along the centre of Craven Road and Bartholomew Street. They proposed that Newbury Central ward cover the main commercial and industrial areas in Newbury including Ham Marsh and Speenhamland, running south to the A343 and Eastfields (north of St Johns Road) below the railway line. The proposed St Johns ward would have the centre of the A339 as its eastern boundary and the centre of Andover Road as its western boundary, also covering the city area of Newbury. The north-western boundary of St Johns ward would follow the centre of Buckingham Road, Fifth Road and north to Enborne Road along Salcombe Road, finally reaching the railway line by running along the western side of properties at the end of Westgate Road. St Barts ward would consist of the existing Falkland ward less those properties north of Buckingham Road, Fifth Road and west of Salcombe Road, this ward will stretch to the south of the town. A new parish ward of Newbury South East would be created east of the A339, with this new parish ward being combined with Greenham parish to form a new Greenham district ward.

84 The LGCE carefully considered the representations received at Stage One. They decided to adopt the Conservatives' scheme in this area, subject to minor boundary modifications and the creation of a new parish ward in the north west of Newbury in the interest of improving electoral equality and better reflecting community identity. It considered that the District Council's proposals had merit but having adopted a 52-member council size, the LGCE concluded that the Conservatives' proposal offered the better balance between electoral equality and the other statutory criteria. As both the Conservatives and District Council proposed the creation of new Manor Park & Manor Fields and Newbury South East parish wards, the LGCE was of the opinion that the creation of both these new parish wards would be incorporated best by including them in Turnpike and Greenham district wards respectively, as this resulted in good electoral equality and recognised the community identity and ties that currently exist. It proposed following the District Council's proposed boundary for the new Newbury South East parish ward as it provided for better community identity. It also proposed creating a new parish ward in the north west of the town. It proposed that the boundary of this parish ward should run east along the centre of Western Avenue in the south, to Grove Road in the north, following the rear of properties on the east of Digby Road and Chaucer Crescent. It proposed naming this area Brummell Grove parish ward and including it in Speen ward, giving a much improved level of electoral equality in this area.

85 Under the draft recommendations for a 52-member council, the number of electors per councillor in Greenham, Newbury Central, Newbury North West, St Barts, St Johns and Turnpike wards would vary from the district average by 17 per cent, 26 per cent, 3 per cent, 4 per cent, 2 per cent and 1 per cent respectively. This level of electoral equality is expected to improve in Greenham, Newbury Central, St Barts and Turnpike wards, slightly deteriorate in St Johns ward while remaining constant in Newbury North West ward over the next five years, with the number of electors per councillor projected to vary by 3 per cent, 4 per cent, 2 per cent, 0 per cent, 3 per cent and 3 per cent respectively from the district average by 2006.

86 In response to the draft recommendations the District Council proposed that the draft St Barts ward be divided along the Essex Road to create two single-member wards with the southernmost being named Wash Common ward. It proposed this on the basis that these two areas form distinct separate communities within Newbury. It proposed no further change to the Newbury wards other than a series of name changes. It proposed that Newbury North West be renamed Northcroft, Newbury Central be renamed Victoria and Turnpike be renamed Clay Hill while the District Council stated that it would also support any name change to Newbury South East parish ward recommended by the Town Council. The Conservatives supported the draft recommendations subject to the following ward name changes, Newbury Central ward to be renamed Newbury Victoria ward, Newbury North West ward to be renamed Newbury Goldwell ward, St Barts ward to be renamed Newbury Falkland ward, St Johns ward to be renamed Newbury St Johns ward and Turnpike ward to be renamed Newbury Clay Hill ward. The Conservatives stated that the Wash Common ward proposed by the District Council has no merit.

87 Newbury Town Council supported the three ward name changes proposed by the District Council and also requested that Newbury South East be renamed Newbury Pyle Hill ward. Newbury Constituency Liberal Democrats proposed an entirely new warding arrangement for Newbury town which they considered would retain familiar boundaries that followed major physical features and kept residents on both roadsides within the same ward. They proposed five new wards all illustrated in map format, but no current or projected figures were supplied. The Newbury Constituency Liberal Democrats' proposal reflected the main areas of the draft

ward areas with the western wards spanning the railway line and did not include the creation of Brummell Grove parish ward. They proposed district ward name changes for the proposed wards, with St Barts ward to be renamed Falkland ward, Newbury Central ward to be renamed Craven ward and Newbury North West ward to be renamed Victoria (or Northcroft) ward and Newbury South East parish ward to be renamed Nightingales parish ward.

88 Having considered the representations received we propose endorsing the LGCE's draft recommendations in full for this area, subject to some ward name changes. We note the District Council's proposed Wash Common ward but in the absence of argumentation and local support we propose no change to the draft St Barts ward as we consider the proposed two-member ward would provide more effective and convenient local government. We also note the Newbury Constituency Liberal Democrats new warding arrangement for the town but in the absence of local support and argumentation for its proposals we are content to endorse the draft recommendations in this area. Newbury Town Council proposed no change to the draft warding arrangement but supported the majority of the District Council's ward name changes which we are proposing to adopt. We propose adopting the following ward name changes in Newbury: Newbury Central ward to be renamed Victoria ward, Newbury North West ward to be renamed Northcroft ward, Newbury South East parish ward to be renamed Pyle Hill parish ward and Turnpike ward to be renamed Clay Hill ward based on those ward names proposed by the District Council and by Newbury Town Council. We also propose that St Barts ward be renamed Falkland ward on a historical basis as proposed by the Conservatives but we do not propose to adopt the Newbury prefix as we considered it would make the ward name too unwieldy.

89 Under our final recommendations for a 52-member council, the number of electors per councillor in Clay Hill, Greenham, Falkland, Northcroft, St Johns and Victoria wards would vary from the district average by 1 per cent, 17 per cent, 10 per cent, 3 per cent, 2 per cent and 26 per cent respectively. This level of electoral equality is expected to improve in Clay Hill, Falkland, Greenham and Victoria wards, slightly deteriorate in St Johns ward while remaining constant in Northcroft ward over the next five years, with the number of electors per councillor projected to equal the district average and vary by 2 per cent, 3 per cent, 4 per cent, 3 per cent and 3 per cent respectively from the district average by 2006. Our final proposals are illustrated on Tables 1 and 2, Map 2 and on the large map at the rear of the report.

Thatcham East, Thatcham North, Thatcham South and Thatcham West wards

90 The existing wards of Thatcham East, Thatcham North, Thatcham South and Thatcham West cover the urban Thatcham town area. Thatcham West ward (comprising the Thatcham West parish ward of Thatcham parish) is represented by one councillor, Thatcham East ward (comprising the Thatcham East parish ward of Thatcham parish) and Thatcham South ward (comprising the Thatcham South parish ward of Thatcham parish) are represented by two councillors each, and Thatcham North ward (comprising the Thatcham North parish ward of Thatcham parish) is represented by three councillors. Under the current arrangements for a 54-member council, the number of electors per councillor in Thatcham East, Thatcham North, Thatcham South and Thatcham West wards varies from the district average by 5 per cent, 18 per cent, 31 per cent and 10 per cent respectively. This level of electoral equality is projected to improve slightly in Thatcham South and Thatcham West wards while it is projected to deteriorate in Thatcham East and Thatcham North wards to vary from the district average by 27 per cent, 6 per cent, 15 per cent and 20 per cent respectively by 2006.

91 At Stage One the District Council proposed that this area should be covered by four wards. It proposed that Thatcham South West ward should be represented by three councillors and that Thatcham East & Crookham, Thatcham North and Thatcham West wards should each be represented by two councillors. It proposed that the Bath Road be used to divide Thatcham on a north/south basis. It also proposed the creation of a new parish ward in Cold Ash parish, named Dunston Park North parish ward that would be included in Thatcham North ward.

92 The Conservatives also proposed that this area should also be covered by four wards, and that the proposed Thatcham Central, Thatcham North, Thatcham South & Crookham and Thatcham West wards should each be represented by two councillors. They proposed that Thatcham West ward cover the area to the west of Northfield Road, St Johns Road and St Marks Close, the area west of, and including, Jubilee and Long Lakes and to the north of Widmead Lock. They proposed that Thatcham North ward comprise the area north of the Bath Road from the east and the area east of Park Lane, the area north of Chesterton Road, Lamb Close and Sagecroft Road, while being bordered by Northfields Road in the west. Its proposed Thatcham South & Crookham ward would consist of the existing Thatcham South ward less those properties west of Spurcroft Road and west of Spurcroft Primary School to the railway. Its proposed Thatcham Central ward would encompass the remaining central area of the parish spanning the Bath Road from the railway line in the south to the Sagecroft Road in the north.

93 Having carefully considered the representations received during Stage One the LGCE adopted the majority of the Conservatives' proposals for this area as it considered that they used easily identifiable boundaries and offered good levels of electoral equality while also reflecting the statutory criteria. However, it proposed minor boundary modifications to tie them to better ground detail, which did not affect any electors. It considered retaining the Bath Road as a boundary in its entirety; however, this did not result in the correct allocation of councillors for the parish, and resulted in poor levels of electoral equality. It adopted the District Council's proposal to create a new Dunston Park North parish ward as this allowed for the Thatcham urban overspill to be included in Thatcham North ward with which the LGCE considered it had more affinity and a common community identity.

94 Under the draft recommendations for a 52-member council, the number of electors per councillor in Thatcham Central, Thatcham North, Thatcham South & Crookham and Thatcham West wards would vary from the district average by 8 per cent, 7 per cent, 8 per cent and 13 per cent respectively. This level of electoral equality is expected to improve in all wards over the next five years to vary by 1 per cent, 5 per cent, 4 per cent and 3 per cent from the district average respectively by 2006.

95 At Stage Three the District Council proposed a minor boundary amendment between the proposed Thatcham Central and Thatcham South & Crookham wards. This new boundary would include the entire Moors Estate in Newbury Central ward. It proposed no further changes to Thatcham apart from the exclusion of the proposed Dunston Park North parish ward of Cold Ash parish which was to be included in Thatcham North ward, as previously discussed. The Conservatives supported the draft recommendations and also proposed the same minor boundary amendment between the proposed Thatcham Central and Thatcham South & Crookham wards. Thatcham Town Council, while reluctantly accepting a 52-member council size, overall accepted the draft recommendations apart from the creation of the proposed Dunston Park North ward which would be included in Thatcham North ward.

96 Having considered the representations received during Stage Three carefully we propose to substantially endorse the LGCE's draft recommendations subject to not including the proposed

Dunston Park North parish ward in Thatcham North ward, and a minor boundary amendment between the proposed Thatcham Central and Thatcham South & Crookham wards. We propose adopting the new Thatcham Central boundary as proposed by the District Council, the Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats as this includes the entire Moors estate within a single ward without adversely affecting electoral equality. We note Thatcham Town Council's general acceptance of the draft proposals and its concern about the creation of Dunston Park North parish ward and we consider this concern to be addressed within the final recommendations by abolishing the parish ward proposed as part of the draft recommendations, as discussed earlier, and creating four wards within Thatcham represented by eight members. We also do not propose creating Dunston Park North parish ward, due to the weight of local opposition and we consider that retaining this area in Cold Ash parish would help to promote community identity in the parish, as it facilitates the creation of single-member Chieveley and Cold Ash district wards, as discussed earlier and it also allows for effective and convenient local government in the area.

97 Under our final recommendations for a 52-member council, the number of electors per councillor in Thatcham Central, Thatcham North, Thatcham South & Crookham and Thatcham West wards would vary from the district average by 10 per cent, 14 per cent, 10 per cent and 13 per cent respectively. This level of electoral equality is expected to improve in all wards over the next five years to vary by 3 per cent, 2 per cent, 2 per cent and 3 per cent from the district average respectively by 2006. Our final proposals are illustrated on Tables 1 and 2, Map 2 and on the large map at the rear of the report.

Aldermaston, Burghfield, Mortimer and Sulhamstead wards

98 The existing wards of Aldermaston, Burghfield, Mortimer and Sulhamstead cover the south-eastern part of the district. Aldermaston ward (comprising the parishes of Aldermaston, Brimpton, Wasing and Woolhampton) and Sulhamstead ward (comprising the parishes of Padworth, Sulhamstead and Ufton Nervet) are each represented by one councillor, with Burghfield ward (comprising the parish of Burghfield) and Mortimer ward (comprising the parishes of Beech Hill, Stratfield Mortimer and Wokefield) being represented by two councillors each. Under current arrangements for a 54-member council, the number of electors per councillor in Aldermaston, Burghfield, Mortimer and Sulhamstead wards varies from the district average by 10 per cent, 7 per cent, 20 per cent and 18 per cent respectively. This level of electoral equality is projected to improve in Mortimer and Sulhamstead wards over the next five years and deteriorate in Aldermaston ward varying from the district average by 18 per cent, 1 per cent and 15 per cent respectively by 2006. The level of electoral equality is expected to remain constant in Burghfield ward.

99 At Stage One the District Council proposed that this area should be represented by three wards, with the proposed Burghfield ward being represented by three councillors, the proposed Mortimer ward being represented by two councillors and the proposed Aldermaston ward being represented by a single councillor. Effectively the District Council proposed disbanding the existing Sulhamstead ward, and redistributing it among the other proposed wards.

100 The Conservatives proposed that this area should be covered by three wards, with the proposed Burghfield and Mortimer wards being represented by two councillors and the proposed Aldermaston ward being represented by a single councillor. They proposed retaining the existing Burghfield ward while combining the existing Mortimer and Sulhamstead wards to

create a new Mortimer ward. They further proposed a new Aldermaston ward which would combine the existing Aldermaston ward with Midgham parish, formerly in Bucklebury ward, as detailed earlier.

101 Having carefully considered both the representations received, the LGCE noted the similarity between the Conservatives' and District Council's proposals. It recognised that both provided similar levels of electoral equality but were of the opinion that the Conservatives' proposal offered the best balance between electoral equality and community identity as it grouped similar parishes together. It was aware of the difficulty in trying to group parishes in this area to obtain good electoral equality while retaining community identity. It considered the Conservatives' proposal best met this requirement and decided to adopt the Conservatives' scheme in this area, without modification.

102 It noted that Midgham Parish Council supported the District Council's proposal to include the parish in its proposed Beenham ward as this would unite similar rural parishes within a district ward. However, the LGCE considered that Midgham Parish Council's inclusion in a proposed Aldermaston ward would also group it with similar parishes with which it would share community interests and therefore proposed this as part of its draft recommendations.

103 Under the draft recommendations for a 52-member council, the number of electors per councillor in Aldermaston, Burghfield and Mortimer wards would vary from the district average by 2 per cent, 3 per cent and 7 per cent respectively. This level of electoral equality is expected to improve in Mortimer ward, but is projected to deteriorate slightly over the next five years in Aldermaston ward while remaining constant in Burghfield ward to vary by 1 per cent, 6 per cent and 3 per cent from the district average respectively by 2006.

104 At Stage Three the Conservatives investigated other arrangements to keep Sulhamstead parish together with Padworth and Ufton Nervet parishes but recognised the difficulty in this, concluding that the proposal for Sulhamstead parish was logical. The District Council proposed no change to the draft recommendations.

105 In the light of the representations received at Stage Three we propose endorsing the LGCE's draft recommendations in full. We note the lack of opposition to the proposed Aldermaston, Burghfield and Mortimer wards and although we note the logic for Sulhamstead parish retaining its links with Padworth and Ufton Nervet parishes we concur with the Conservatives that it is difficult to achieve this as we cannot consider any area in isolation and to group these parishes together would result in poor levels of electoral equality in surrounding wards. We consider that our proposals achieve the best balance between electoral equality and community identity in the area and that any proposal to retain the existing Sulhamstead ward would result in unacceptably high electoral variances in surrounding wards given the alternative warding arrangements that are available. Our final recommendations would have the same electoral variances as at draft. Our final proposals are illustrated on Tables 1 and 2 and Map 2.

Basildon, Pangbourne and Purley on Thames wards

106 The existing wards of Basildon, Pangbourne and Purley on Thames cover the north-eastern part of the district. Basildon ward (comprising the parishes of Basildon and Streatley) and Pangbourne ward (comprising the parish of Pangbourne) are represented by one councillor each, and Purley on Thames ward (comprising the parishes of Purley on Thames, Sulham and Tidmarsh) is represented by two councillors. Under the current arrangements, the number of electors per councillor in Basildon, Pangbourne and Purley on Thames wards varies by 2 per

cent, 9 per cent and 11 per cent from the district average respectively. This level of electoral equality is projected to deteriorate in Basildon and Purley on Thames wards, while improving slightly in Pangbourne ward to vary by 7 per cent, 17 per cent and 8 per cent from the district average respectively by 2006.

107 At Stage One the District Council proposed that this area be represented by two wards, with the proposed Basildon ward being represented by a single councillor and the proposed Pangbourne ward being represented by three councillors. It proposed retaining the existing Basildon ward boundary while combining the existing Pangbourne and Purley on Thames wards to create a new Pangbourne ward.

108 The Conservatives proposed that this area should be covered by two wards, with the proposed Pangbourne and Purley on Thames wards being represented by two councillors each. They proposed combining the existing Basildon and Pangbourne wards together with Sulham and Tidmarsh parishes, currently in Purley on Thames ward, to create a new Pangbourne ward. They also proposed creating a new Purley on Thames ward, including the parish of Purley on Thames and also the proposed Denefield parish ward of Tilehurst parish. The new Denefield parish ward would consist of the properties north of Tidmarsh Lane, Long Lane and Dark Lane with the new district ward of Westwood bordering it to the east.

109 Careful consideration was given to the representations received at Stage One. The LGCE appreciated that the District Council's proposal offered the best electoral equality for the area under a 58-member council but under the adopted 52-member scheme these variances would increase. It considered that the Conservatives' proposals grouped together similar communities in the area and provided a good balance between electoral equality and the other statutory criteria. The Conservatives' proposals were therefore adopted for this area.

110 The LGCE noted Basildon Parish Council's preference for the District Council's 58-member option as it considered that any other option might see the parish divorced from the West Berkshire Unitary Authority at some time in the future. However, this is not a matter the LGCE could consider under the current periodic electoral review. Instead, it considered that placing the parish in Pangbourne ward would place it with other parishes with similar interests.

111 Under the draft recommendations for a 52-member council, the number of electors per councillor in Pangbourne and Purley on Thames would both vary from the district average by 9 per cent. This level of electoral equality is expected to improve in both wards to vary 5 per cent and 4 per cent from the district average respectively by 2006.

112 In response to the draft recommendations the District Council proposed new warding arrangements for this north-eastern area of the district. It proposed a new Basildon ward (comprising the parishes of Aldworth, Basildon and Streatley), Pangbourne ward (comprising the parish of Pangbourne) and Purley on Thames ward (comprising the Purley on Thames parish ward of Purley on Thames). Its proposed Purley on Thames ward would comprise Purley on Thames parish less the proposed South Parish Ward in the south of the parish which would be included in the Council's proposed Westwood ward as discussed below. It proposed that the new Basildon ward should be as it is currently plus the addition of Aldworth parish, and that Pangbourne ward would retain its existing boundary. The Liberal Democrats supported these proposals, stating that they were driven by the concerns expressed by the local community in Basildon and Streatley parishes. The Conservatives fully supported the draft recommendations

for this area and objected to the District Council's amendments to Purley on Thames and Basildon and Pangbourne wards, although it considered that the inclusion of Aldworth parish with Basildon and Streatley parishes did have merit.

113 Pangbourne Parish Council had no objections to the draft recommendations as far as Pangbourne parish was concerned while Purley on Thames Parish Council also supported the draft recommendations for the proposed Purley on Thames ward. Purley on Thames Parish Council also pointed to the fact that it was neither consulted nor informed by West Berkshire Council of a change in its submission in relation to the proposed Purley on Thames ward and they strongly urged that we adhere to the original proposal. Five local residents supported the creation of a new Denefield Parish ward and including it in the proposed Purley on Thames ward, as mentioned later.

114 We received responses from 16 local residents in Basildon and Streatley, along with Goring & Streatley Amenity Association, who objected to the proposal to link Basildon and Streatley parishes with Pangbourne, Sulham and Tidmarsh parishes with which they considered that they have no common identity, while several of the residents expressed a view that it would be more appropriate for both Basildon and Streatley parishes to be grouped with Aldworth or Ashampstead parish. A local resident considered the Liberal Democrat Group's proposals for this area were bizarre and were focused upon their desire to retain a seat in the Basildon area. He therefore urged us to retain the original proposals.

115 Having considered all representations received at Stage Three carefully we propose moving away from the draft recommendations in this area. We propose adopting the District Council's proposed Basildon ward (comprising the parishes of Aldworth, Basildon and Streatley) as we note the level of local opposition to the proposed Pangbourne ward and that local residents wished retaining the existing Basildon ward or be included with Aldworth or Ashampstead parishes on the grounds that this groups similar parishes together. We also propose to retain the existing Pangbourne ward as proposed by the District Council as this achieves good electoral equality and allows us to accommodate a ward pattern with good community identity in the north-eastern area of the district as a whole. The Liberal Democrats supported the retention of Pangbourne parish as a single-member ward.

116 In addition to the new Basildon and Pangbourne wards we propose adopting a new Purley on Thames ward which will comprise the existing Purley on Thames ward and will include the proposed Denefield parish ward of Tilehurst parish. We note the District Council's proposal for this area but in the absence of local support for its proposal and in the light of the local support for the proposed ward we propose endorsing this arrangement for the north east of the district. This new Purley on Thames ward is based on the existing ward and with the addition of the locally supported Denefield parish ward, links similar parishes together and has good internal transport links. We note the high variance of 12 per cent for the proposed Purley on Thames ward but consider this to be justified as the proposed ward is also on the district boundary, making it difficult to formulate a suitable warding arrangement within a 10 per cent variance. Alternative warding arrangements were investigated but resulted in much higher electoral variances than achieved at draft recommendations and we consider that this is the best balance available between electoral equality, community identity and local support.

117 Under our final recommendations for a 52-member council, the number of electors per councillor in Basildon, Pangbourne and Purley on Thames would vary from the district average by 4 per cent, 5 per cent and 18 per cent respectively. This level of electoral equality is expected to improve in all wards to vary 1 per cent, 4 per cent and 12 per cent from the district

average respectively by 2006. Our final proposals are illustrated on Tables 1 and 2, Map 2 and Map A2.

Birch Copse, Calcot, Theale and Westwood wards

118 The existing wards of Birch Copse, Calcot, Theale and Westwood cover the town of Tilehurst and the parishes of Holybrook and Theale, which are situated to the south and southwest of the main urban area. Theale ward (comprising the parishes of Holybrook and Theale) is currently represented by three councillors, while Birch Copse ward (comprising the Birch Copse parish ward of Tilehurst parish) and Westwood ward (comprising the Westwood parish ward of Tilehurst parish) are each represented by two councillors. Calcot ward (comprising the Calcot parish ward of Tilehurst parish) is represented by a single councillor. Under the current arrangements, the number of electors per councillor in Birch Copse, Calcot, Theale and Westwood wards varies from the district average by 13 per cent, 29 per cent, 24 per cent and 1 per cent respectively. This level of electoral equality is projected to improve significantly in Birch Copse, Calcot and Theale wards, while it is expected to deteriorate in Westwood ward over the next five years to vary by 1 per cent, 17 per cent, 17 per cent and 10 per cent from the district average respectively.

119 At Stage One the District Council proposed that this area should be covered by five wards, with the proposed Birch Copse, Calcot, Holybrook and Westwood wards being represented by two councillors each, and the proposed Theale ward being represented by a single councillor. It proposed that Westwood ward retain its current boundary, while Birch Copse ward would be extended. Its proposed Calcot ward would incorporate an area to the north of Bath Road and a newly proposed Holybrook West parish ward, including the Fernhurst Road area. Its proposed Holybrook ward would contain the remainder of the area, comprising its proposed Holybrook Central and Holybrook East parish wards. Its proposed Theale ward would reflect the parish ward boundary of Theale parish ward.

120 The Conservatives proposed that this area be represented by five wards, with the proposed Birch Copse, Calcot and Holybrook wards being represented by two councillors each and the proposed Theale and Westwood wards each being represented by a single councillor. The proposed Westwood ward would retain the existing eastern boundary, but its western boundary would run to the rear of the properties on the eastern side of Talbot Way and Warbeck Drive. The area to the west of this would comprise the new Denefield parish ward of Tilehurst parish, which would be included in the proposed Purley on Thames district ward, as discussed earlier. Their proposed Birch Copse ward would cover the area to the south of Dark Lane and Tidmarsh Lane, containing all properties west of Starlings Drive.

121 Having considered all the submissions received at Stage One carefully, the LGCE decided to adopt the Conservatives' Westwood ward as this provided a good level of electoral equality and promoted community identity, while it proposed its own scheme for the mid to lower area of Tilehurst in the interests of community identity. It proposed that Theale parish should comprise a single-member ward as proposed by both the Conservatives and the District Council, as it is separated from the area to the west by the M4. It also adopted the Conservatives' new Denefield parish ward in Tilehurst parish and including it in the proposed Purley on Thames ward, as this provides good levels of electoral equality in this area of the district and allows for the grouping of similar communities.

122 It proposed creating two three-member wards covering the remainder of Tilehurst and Holybrook parishes, named Birch Copse and Holybrook wards. Birch Copse ward would

comprise the existing Birch Copse ward, plus those properties to the south of Tidmarsh Lane, Long Lane and Dark Lane, until the latter reaches the district boundary. It would also contain the properties formerly in Calcot ward that are north of Garston Crescent and Conway Road. It would also contain Curtis' Wood and the northern area of the golf course to the north of West Drive and East Drive. While it recognised that this ward would have a higher electoral variance than the arrangement proposed by either the District Council or the Conservatives, the LGCE considered that Holybrook parish should be retained within a single ward in order to reflect community identity. However, in order to improve electoral equality in this ward, it proposed that Holybrook ward should contain all the properties to the south of Bath Road. In addition it would include all those to the south of Curtis' Wood except Broadlands Close, which would be transferred to the new Calcot ward. The properties in the extreme south east of the former Calcot ward would also form part of a new Calcot parish ward of Tilehurst parish and be included in the proposed Holybrook ward. This warding arrangement would allow for good electoral equality and allows for the preservation of community identity. The proposals made by both the Conservatives and the District Council divided the community south of the Bath Road which the LGCE considered should be united as it shares a strong community identity. Alternative warding arrangements were considered including dividing Holybrook ward using natural boundaries. However, this resulted in unacceptably high levels of electoral equality.

123 Under the draft recommendations for a 52-member council, the number of electors per councillor in Birch Copse, Holybrook, Theale and Westwood wards would vary from the district average by 3 per cent, 2 per cent, 3 per cent and 5 per cent respectively. This level of electoral equality is expected to deteriorate slightly in all wards over the next five years to vary by 9 per cent, 3 per cent, 4 per cent and 8 per cent from the district average respectively by 2006.

124 At Stage Three, the District Council proposed amendments to the draft Birch Copse, Holybrook and Westwood wards. It proposed a new two-member Westwood ward to include the Westwood ward proposed in the draft recommendations and the majority of the proposed Denefield parish ward. It also proposed creating a new South parish ward in the south of Purley on Thames parish and including it in its proposed Westwood ward. The southern boundary of this new Westwood ward would form the northern boundary of its proposed Birch Copse ward which would also include Sulham parish. The southern boundary of Birch Copse ward would be amended as the District Council proposed extending the draft Holybrook ward northward to include the entire Calcot Golf Course and Curtis' Wood. The purpose of this amendment was to include Broadlands Close within the Holybrook ward as its road access is in this direction. This ward was also to be named Calcot ward. The Conservatives also proposed extending the Holybrook ward boundary north to include the entire Calcot Golf Course and Curtis' Wood area and also proposed that the ward be named Calcot ward. They objected to the Council's Birch Copse ward proposal as they considered Sulham parish to have little community identity with Birch Copse. The Liberal Democrat Group supported the District Council's proposals in Tilehurst on the basis that it better reflects the community identity of the area.

125 Holybrook Parish Council supported the draft recommendations for its parish while Tilehurst Parish Council considered the proposals to be unhelpful and impractical. A local resident, proposed the extension of the draft Holybrook ward northwards and that the ward be named Calcot ward, as proposed by the District Council and the Conservatives. This resident also requested that serious consideration be given to the inclusion of Langley Hill Estate in the proposed Calcot ward. Five local residents fully supported the creation of a Denefield parish ward and its inclusion in Purley on Thames ward, stating that the area looks towards Purley and has close community identity with the parish. A local resident supported the proposals for

Westwood ward and for the creation of Denefield Parish Ward; he highlighted the support by supplying a previously signed petition by local residents in the Denefield area wishing to be transferred to Purley on Thames parish. The same resident, having viewed the District Council's proposed amendments, suggested that the draft recommendations be retained in this area. He also considered the proposal to include Sulham parish in Birch Copse ward would be wholly inappropriate but supported the proposal to extend the proposed Holybrook ward boundary northward as proposed by the District Council and the Conservatives.

126 Having considered all the representations received at Stage Three we propose endorsing the draft recommendations in this area subject to one boundary amendment and one name change. We propose that Holybrook ward be renamed Calcot ward, as put forward by the District Council, the Conservatives and a local resident as it retains the original ward name. We also propose extending the proposed Calcot ward boundary north to include the entire Calcot Park Golf Course and Broadlands Close as this received local support from residents. This boundary amendment groups the entire Broadlands Close within a single ward containing the Bath Road to which it has access. We note the District Council's other proposals for this area but we do not consider that its proposed Birch Copse or Beenham wards groups similar communities together and we consider that our proposals offer a better balance between electoral equality and community identity for the area as a whole. Although the District Council's proposals for the north of Tilehurst also have some merit this would adversely affect surrounding wards. We did not consider such a major re-warding necessary in light of the support received for the draft recommendations in this area.

127 Under our final recommendations for a 52-member council, the number of electors per councillor in Birch Copse, Calcot, Theale and Westwood wards would vary from the district average by 2 per cent, 3 per cent, 3 per cent and 5 per cent respectively. This level of electoral equality is expected to deteriorate in Birch Copse, Theale and Westwood wards, and improve in Calcot ward over the next five years to vary by 9 per cent, 4 per cent, 8 per cent and 2 per cent from the district average, respectively by 2006. Our final proposals are illustrated on Tables 1 and 2, Map 2, Map A2 and Map A3.

Electoral Cycle

128 By virtue of the amendments made to the Local Government Act 1992 by the Local Government Commission for England (Transfer of Functions) Order 2001, we have no powers to make recommendations concerning electoral cycle.

Conclusions

129 Having considered carefully all the representations and evidence received in response to the LGCE's consultation report, we have decided substantially to endorse those draft recommendations, subject to the following amendments:

- the creation of new single-member Cold Ash and Chieveley wards;
- the creation of amended Basildon, Compton and Purley on Thames wards;
- a boundary amendment between the proposed Birch Copse and Calcot wards;

- a minor boundary amendment between Thatcham Central and Thatcham South & Crookham wards;
- seven ward name changes across the district.

130 We conclude that, in West Berkshire:

- there should be a reduction in council size from 54 to 52;
- there should be 30 wards, one fewer than at present;
- the boundaries of 28 of the existing wards should be modified.

131 Table 4 shows the impact of our final recommendations on electoral equality, comparing them with the current arrangements, based on 2001 and 2006 electorate figures.

Table 4: Comparison of Current and Recommended Electoral Arrangements

	2001 electorate		2006 forecast electorate	
	Current arrangements	Final recommendations	Current arrangements	Final recommendations
Number of councillors	54	52	54	52
Number of wards	31	30	31	30
Average number of electors per councillor	2,060	2,139	2,174	2,257
Number of wards with a variance more than 10 per cent from the average	14	6	15	2
Number of wards with a variance more than 20 per cent from the average	4	1	3	0

132 As Table 4 shows, our final recommendations would result in a reduction in the number of wards with an electoral variance of more than 10 per cent from 14 to six, with one ward varying by more than 20 per cent from the district average. This level of electoral equality would improve further in 2006, with only two wards, Kintbury and Purley on Thames, varying by more than 10 per cent from the average, at 12 per cent each. We conclude that our recommendations would best meet the statutory criteria.

Final Recommendation

West Berkshire District Council should comprise 52 councillors serving 30 wards, as detailed and named in Tables 1 and 2, and illustrated on Map 2 and in Appendix A including the large map inside the back cover.

Parish and Town Council Electoral Arrangements

133 When reviewing parish electoral arrangements, we are required to comply as far as is reasonably practicable with the provisions set out in Schedule 11 to the 1972 Act. The Schedule states that if a parish is to be divided between different borough wards, it should also be divided into parish wards, so that each parish ward lies wholly within a single ward of the borough. In the LGCE's draft recommendations report it proposed consequential changes to the warding arrangements for Cold Ash, Newbury, Thatcham and Tilehurst parishes to reflect the proposed district wards.

134 In response to the consultation report, we received representations proposing new warding arrangements for Cold Ash, Newbury and Tilehurst. No further comments were received in relation to Thatcham Town Council arrangements.

135 The parish of Cold Ash is currently served by 11 councillors representing the entire parish. At Stage One the District Council proposed creating two new parish wards, Dunston Park North and Manor Park & Manor Fields, to contain urban overspill from Thatcham and Newbury. The Conservatives also proposed a new Manor Park & Manor Fields parish ward. In the light of the scheme adopted for district warding in the area, the LGCE proposed creating two new parish wards in southern Cold Ash, with the proposed Dunston Park North parish ward being included in Thatcham North ward and the proposed Manor Park & Manor Fields parish ward being included in Turnpike ward. The remainder of Cold Ash parish (Cold Ash parish ward) would be represented by seven councillors, while Dunston Park North parish ward would be represented by two councillors and Manor Park & Manor Fields parish ward would be represented by two councillors.

136 At Stage Three, the District Council proposed that Cold Ash be represented by 11 councillors representing two parish wards with the proposed Cold Ash parish ward of Cold Ash parish returning nine councillors and the proposed Manor Park & Manor Fields parish ward returning two councillors. Cold Ash parish investigated three options for parish arrangements before proposing three parish wards returning ten councillors in total with the proposed Cold Ash parish ward returning eight councillors and the proposed Dunston Park North and Manor Park & Manor Fields parish wards returning one councillor each.

137 Having considered all the representations received in relation to the parish electoral arrangements for Cold Ash parish and in the light of our revised district warding arrangements, we propose that Cold Ash parish should be represented by 11 councillors representing two wards as proposed by the District Council, with the proposed Cold Ash parish ward of Cold Ash parish returning nine councillors and the proposed Manor Park & Manor Fields parish ward returning two councillors.

Final Recommendation

Cold Ash Parish Council should comprise 11 councillors, as at present, representing two wards: Cold Ash (returning nine councillors) and Manor Park & Manor Fields (returning two councillors). The parish ward boundaries should reflect the proposed district ward boundaries in the area, as illustrated and named on the large map at the back of the report.

138 Newbury Town Council is currently served by 24 councillors representing four wards. At Stage One both the Conservatives and the District Council proposed new warding arrangements for Newbury, with both in agreement on the creation of a new Newbury South East parish ward to the east of the A339. The LGCE based the draft recommendations at a district level in this area on the Conservatives' scheme. However, in the interests of facilitating ward arrangements at a district level that provided better levels of electoral equality and a reflection of community identity, it proposed creating a new parish ward in the north west of Newbury, named Brummell Grove parish ward. It proposed that Newbury Town Council should comprise 22 councillors, a decrease of two, representing seven wards; Newbury Central, St Barts, St Johns and Turnpike parish wards, each returning four councillors and Brummell Grove, Newbury North West and Newbury South East parish wards, each returning two councillors.

139 At Stage Three, the District Council proposed, in line with its new warding proposal for Newbury, that the town council should comprise 23 members representing eight wards, with the proposed Newbury Central, Newbury North West, St Johns and Turnpike wards returning four councillors each, the proposed City, Newbury South East and Wash Common wards returning two councillors each and the proposed Brummell Grove ward returning one councillor. It proposed these amendments to address the obvious disparity in the number of electors per town councillor. The Conservatives proposed new arrangements based on a 23-member council and the draft ward proposals, with the proposed Newbury Clay Hill, Newbury Goldwell, Newbury St Barts, Newbury St Johns and Newbury Victoria wards returning four councillors each, with Newbury Pyle Hill parish ward returning two councillors and the proposed Brummell Grove parish ward returning one councillor, also to address the disparity in electors per town councillor. Newbury Town Council proposed the same town council arrangements as that of the Conservatives and similar to that of the District Council apart from splitting the proposed St Barts ward.

140 At Stage Three Newbury Constituency Liberal Democrats proposed 11 parish wards returning two parish councillors each for Newbury Town but having not pursued its revised district warding proposals at Stage Three we do not propose to adopt its parish warding proposals for Newbury Town.

141 We note the many representations we have received in relation to Newbury Town's electoral arrangements at Stage Three and acknowledge the District Council's and Conservatives' desire to address the imbalance of elector to town councillor ratio. As we propose to adopt the draft recommendations in this area which were based on the Conservatives proposals we propose to adopt the Conservatives' and Newbury Town Council's electoral arrangements for Newbury town with each ward being represented by four parish councillors apart from Brummell Grove and Pyle Hill parish wards which will be represented by one and two parish councillors respectively. These mirror the District Council's proposals apart from its proposed district ward amendment to St Barts ward.

Final Recommendation

Newbury Town Council should comprise 23 parish councillors, one fewer than at present, representing seven wards, three more than at present: Brummell Grove (returning one councillor), Clay Hill (returning four councillors), Falkland (returning four councillors), Northcroft (returning two councillors), Pyle Hill (returning four councillors), St Johns (returning four councillors) and Victoria (returning four councillors).

142 Thatcham Town Council is currently represented by 18 councillors and divided into four parish wards, Thatcham East, Thatcham North, Thatcham South and Thatcham West. At Stage One, the District Council proposed that Thatcham East & Crookham, Thatcham North and Thatcham West parish wards return four councillors each with Thatcham South West parish ward returning six councillors. However, the LGCE adopted the Conservatives' proposals as the draft recommendations at a district level at Stage One. Under the new warding arrangements as proposed by the Conservatives, Thatcham Central parish ward would be served by four councillors, Thatcham North parish ward served by four councillors, Thatcham South & Crookham parish ward served by six councillors and Thatcham West parish ward served by four councillors, totalling 18, as at present, with each parish ward sharing the same boundaries as the district ward of the same name.

143 At Stage Three, we received no representations in relation to the draft proposals for town council arrangements in Thatcham. Therefore we propose endorsing the draft recommendations in full for this area.

Final Recommendation

Thatcham Town Council should comprise 18 councillors, as at present, representing four wards: Thatcham Central, Thatcham North and Thatcham West parish wards, each returning four councillors with Thatcham South & Crookham parish ward returning six councillors. The boundaries between the four parish wards should reflect the proposed district ward boundaries, as illustrated and named on the large map at the rear of the report.

144 The parish of Tilehurst is currently served by 21 councillors representing three wards. At Stage One the District Council proposed that Tilehurst parish should comprise 20 councillors with Calcot parish ward being represented by four councillors, and Birch Copse and Westwood parish wards being represented by eight councillors each. The Conservatives also proposed reducing the council size to 20 councillors, representing four wards, to reflect their new district warding arrangements. However, the LGCE adopted its own scheme at a district level in the south of this area and therefore proposed adopting two of the parish wards proposed by the Conservatives; Deneffield parish ward which was to be included in Purley on Thames district ward and represented by three councillors and Westwood parish ward which would reflect the district ward of the same name and be represented by four councillors. The other two parish wards of Birch Copse and Calcot parishes would reflect the district wards of the same names and would be represented by 12 councillors and two councillors respectively.

145 At Stage Three, in accordance with its revised warding arrangement for Tilehurst parish, the District Council proposed that the parish be represented by three parish wards with the proposed Westwood ward returning ten councillors, Birch Copse ward returning nine councillors and the proposed Calcot ward returning two councillors. However, we propose endorsing the draft warding arrangement for Tilehurst parish, with one boundary amendment at district level, as proposed by the District Council, the Conservatives and local residents, creating three parish wards, with the proposed Birch Copse parish ward returning 12 councillors, Westwood parish ward returning four councillors, Deneffield parish ward returning three councillors and Calcot parish ward returning two councillors.

Final Recommendation

Tilehurst Parish Council should comprise 21 councillors, as at present, representing four wards: Birch Copse returning 12 councillors, Westwood returning four councillors, Denefield parish ward returning three councillors and Calcot parish ward returning two councillors. The boundary between the parish wards should reflect the proposed district ward boundaries, as illustrated and named on Map A2 and Map A3 in Appendix A.

146 Having received no representations in relation to the parish and town council electoral cycle we propose to endorse the draft recommendation as final.

Final Recommendation

Parish and town council elections should continue to take place every four years, at the same time as elections for the district ward of which they are part.

Map 2: Final Recommendations for West Berkshire

6 WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

147 Having completed the review of electoral arrangements in West Berkshire and submitted our final recommendations to the Electoral Commission, we have fulfilled our statutory obligation under the Local Government Act 1992 (as amended by SI 2001 No 3692).

148 It is now up to the Electoral Commission to decide whether to endorse our recommendations, with or without modification, and to implement them by means of an Order. Such an Order will not be made before 15 May 2002.

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

The Secretary
Electoral Commission
Trevelyan House
30 Great Peter Street
London SW1P 2HW

APPENDIX A

Final Recommendations for West Berkshire: Detailed Mapping

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

Map A1 illustrates, in outline form, the proposed wards for West Berkshire

Map A2 illustrates the proposed Denefield parish ward and Westwood ward

Map A3 illustrates the proposed Birch Copse and Calcot wards

The **large map** inserted at the back of this report illustrates the proposed warding arrangements for Newbury and Thatcham.

Map A1: Final Recommendations for West Berkshire: Key Map

Map A2: Proposed Denefield parish ward and Westwood ward

Map A3: Proposed Birch Cope and Calcot wards