

Final recommendations on the
future electoral arrangements
for Cannock Chase in Staffordshire

Report to the Secretary of State for the
Environment, Transport and the Regions

October 2000

LOCAL GOVERNMENT COMMISSION FOR ENGLAND

This report sets out the Commission's final recommendations on the electoral arrangements for the district of Cannock Chase in Staffordshire.

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Local Government Commission for England

10 October 2000

Dear Secretary of State

On 28 September 1999 the Commission began a periodic electoral review of Cannock Chase under the Local Government Act 1992. We published our draft recommendations in May 2000 and undertook an eight-week period of consultation.

We have now prepared our final recommendations in the light of the consultation. We have substantially confirmed our draft recommendations, although some modifications have been made (see paragraph 100) in the light of further evidence. This report sets out our final recommendations for changes to electoral arrangements in Cannock Chase.

We recommend that Cannock Chase District Council should be served by 41 councillors representing 15 wards, and that changes should be made to ward boundaries in order to improve electoral equality, having regard to the statutory criteria. We recommend that the Council should continue to hold elections by thirds.

The Local Government Act 2000, contains provisions relating to changes to local authority electoral arrangements. However, until such time as Orders are made implementing those arrangements we are obliged to conduct our work in accordance with current legislation, and to continue our current approach to periodic electoral reviews.

I would like to thank members and officers of the District Council and other local people who have contributed to the review. Their co-operation and assistance have been very much appreciated by Commissioners and staff.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Malcolm Grant'.

PROFESSOR MALCOLM GRANT
Chairman

SUMMARY

The Commission began a review of Cannock Chase on 28 September 1999. We published our draft recommendations for electoral arrangements on 9 May 2000, after which we undertook an eight-week period of consultation.

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

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

- **in 10 of the 15 wards the number of electors represented by each councillor varies by more than 10 per cent from the average for the district, and five wards vary by more than 20 per cent from the average;**
- **by 2004 there will still be high levels of electoral inequality, with the number of electors per councillor forecast to vary by more than 10 per cent from the average in ten wards and by more than 20 per cent in four wards.**

Our main final recommendations for future electoral arrangements (Figures 1 and 2 and paragraphs 100–101) are that:

- **Cannock Chase District Council should have 41 councillors, one less than at present;**
- **there should be 15 wards, as at present;**
- **the boundaries of 12 of the existing wards should be modified and three wards should retain their existing boundaries;**
- **elections should continue to take place by thirds.**

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

- **In 10 of the proposed 15 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 expected to improve further, with the number of electors per councillor in all wards expected to vary by no more than 10 per cent from the average for the district in 2004.**

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

- **revised warding arrangements and the redistribution of councillors for the parishes of Brindley Heath, Heath Hayes & Wimblebury, Hednesford and Rugeley.**

All further correspondence on these recommendations and the matters discussed in this report should be addressed to the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, who will not make an order implementing the Commission's recommendations before 20 November 2000:

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

Figure 1: The Commission's Final Recommendations: Summary

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Constituent areas
1	Brereton & Ravenhill	3	<i>Unchanged</i>
2	Cannock East	3	Cannock South ward (part); Chadsmoor ward (part); Pye Green Valley ward (part – part of Pye Green Valley parish ward of Hednesford parish)
3	Cannock North	3	Broomhill ward; Chadsmoor ward (part); Parkside ward (part)
4	Cannock South	3	Cannock South ward (part); Longford ward (part); Parkside ward (part)
5	Cannock West	3	Chadsmoor ward (part); Longford ward (part); Parkside ward (part)
6	Etching Hill & The Heath	3	Brindley Heath ward (part – part of Brindley Heath parish); Etching Hill ward (part – part of Etching Hill parish ward of Rugeley parish); Hagley ward (part – part of Hagley parish ward of Rugeley parish)
7	Hagley	2	Hagley ward (part – part of Hagley parish ward of Rugeley parish)
8	Hawks Green	3	Heath Hayes ward (part – part of Heath Hayes & Wimblebury parish)
9	Heath Hayes East & Wimblebury	3	Heath Hayes ward (part – part of Heath Hayes & Wimblebury parish)
10	Hednesford Green Heath	2	Anglesey ward (part – part of Anglesey parish ward of Hednesford parish); Pye Green Valley ward (part – part of Pye Green Valley parish ward of Hednesford parish)
11	Hednesford North	3	Anglesey ward (part – part of Anglesey parish ward of Hednesford parish); Brindley Heath ward (part – part of Brindley Heath parish); Pye Green Valley ward (part – part of Pye Green Valley parish ward of Hednesford parish)
12	Hednesford South	2	Anglesey ward (part – part of Anglesey parish ward of Hednesford parish)
13	Norton Canes	3	<i>Unchanged</i>
14	Rawnsley	2	<i>Unchanged</i>
15	Western Springs	3	Etching Hill ward (part – part of Etching Hill parish ward of Rugeley parish); Western Springs ward

Notes: 1 Cannock town is an unparished part of the district and comprises the four wards indicated above.

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

Figure 2: The Commission's Final Recommendations for Cannock Chase

Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (1999)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2004)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
1 Brereton & Ravenhill	3	5,007	1,669	-3	5,007	1,669	-9
2 Cannock East	3	5,672	1,891	9	5,672	1,891	3
3 Cannock North	3	5,598	1,866	8	5,665	1,888	3
4 Cannock South	3	5,372	1,791	4	5,547	1,849	1
5 Cannock West	3	5,666	1,889	9	5,756	1,919	4
6 Etching Hill & The Heath	3	5,608	1,869	8	5,397	1,799	-2
7 Hagley	2	2,596	1,298	-25	3,466	1,733	-6
8 Hawks Green	3	4,374	1,458	-16	5,262	1,754	-5
9 Heath Hayes East & Wimblebury	3	3,895	1,298	-25	5,180	1,727	-6
10 Hednesford Green Heath	2	3,486	1,743	1	3,680	1,840	0
11 Hednesford North	3	5,745	1,915	11	5,745	1,915	4
12 Hednesford South	2	4,028	2,014	17	3,895	1,948	6
13 Norton Canes	3	5,118	1,706	-1	5,938	1,979	8
14 Rawnsley	2	3,683	1,842	7	3,683	1,842	0
15 Western Springs	3	5,021	1,674	-3	5,452	1,817	-1
Totals	41	70,869	–	–	75,345	–	–
Averages	–	–	1,729	–	–	1,838	–

Source: Electorate figures are based on Cannock Chase District Council's submission.

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

1 INTRODUCTION

1 This report contains our final recommendations on the electoral arrangements for the district of Cannock Chase in Staffordshire. We have now reviewed the eight districts in Staffordshire and the City of Stoke-on-Trent as part of our programme of periodic electoral reviews (PERs) of all 386 principal local authority areas in England. Our programme started in 1996 and is currently expected to be completed by 2004.

2 This was our first review of the electoral arrangements of Cannock Chase. The last such review was undertaken by our predecessor, the Local Government Boundary Commission (LGBC), which reported to the Secretary of State in October 1975 (Report No. 100). The electoral arrangements of Staffordshire County Council were last reviewed in July 1980 (Report No. 386). We expect to review the County Council's electoral arrangements in 2002.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

9 In July 1998, the Government published a White Paper, *Modern Local Government – In Touch with the People*, which set out legislative proposals for local authority electoral arrangements. In two-tier areas, it proposed introducing a pattern in which both the district and county councils would hold elections every two years, i.e. in year one half of the district council would be elected, in year two half the county council would be elected, and so on. The Government stated that local accountability would be maximised where every elector has an opportunity to vote every year, thereby pointing to a pattern of two-member wards (and divisions) in two-tier areas. However, it stated that there was no intention to move towards very large electoral areas in sparsely populated rural areas, and that single-member wards (and electoral divisions) would continue in many authorities.

10 Following publication of the White Paper, we advised all authorities in our 1999/2000 PER programme, including the Staffordshire districts, that until any direction is received from the Secretary of State, the Commission would continue to maintain its current approach to PERs as set out in our *Guidance*. Nevertheless, we considered that local authorities and other interested parties might wish to have regard to the Secretary of State's intentions and legislative proposals in formulating electoral schemes as part of PERs of their areas. The proposals have been taken forward in the Local Government Act 2000 which, among other matters, provides that the Secretary of State may make Orders to change authorities' electoral cycles. However, until such time as the Secretary of State makes any Orders under the 2000 Act, we will continue to operate on the basis of existing legislation, which provides for elections by thirds or whole-council elections in the two-tier district areas, and our current *Guidance*.

11 This review was in four stages. Stage One began on 28 September 1999, when we wrote to Cannock Chase District Council inviting proposals for future electoral arrangements. We also notified Staffordshire County Council, Staffordshire Police Authority, the local authority associations, Staffordshire Local Councils Association, parish and town councils in the district, the Members of Parliament with constituency interests in the district, the Members of the European Parliament for the West Midlands Region, and the headquarters of the main political parties. We placed a notice in the local press, issued a press release and invited the District Council to publicise the review further. The closing date for receipt of representations, the end of Stage One, was 10 January 2000. At Stage Two we considered all the representations received during Stage One and prepared our draft recommendations.

12 Stage Three began on 9 May 2000 with the publication of our report, *Draft recommendations on the future electoral arrangements for Cannock Chase in Staffordshire*, and ended on 3 July 2000. Comments were sought on our preliminary conclusions. Finally, during Stage Four we reconsidered our draft recommendations in the light of the Stage Three consultation and now publish our final recommendations.

2 CURRENT ELECTORAL ARRANGEMENTS

13 Cannock Chase contains within its boundaries the three towns of Cannock, Rugeley and Hednesford and large areas of forestry, especially in the Brindley Heath area. The district is served by the A5, A34 and A460 and is within easy reach of the M6. The district has a population of approximately 91,000, covers 7,893 hectares and contains eight parishes. Cannock town itself is unparished and comprises 22 per cent of the district's total electorate.

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

15 The electorate of the district is 70,869 (February 1999). The Council presently has 42 members who are elected from 15 wards, 11 of which are relatively urban with the remainder being predominantly rural. Thirteen wards are each represented by three councillors, one is represented by two councillors and one is a single-member ward. The Council is elected by thirds.

16 Since the last electoral review there has been an increase in the electorate in Cannock Chase district, with around 21 per cent more electors than two decades ago as a result of new housing developments. The most notable increases have been in Heath Hayes and Rawsley wards, with approximately 5,264 and 1,220 more electors respectively than 24 years ago.

17 At present, each councillor represents an average of 1,687 electors, which the District Council forecasts will increase to 1,794 by the year 2004 if the present number of councillors is maintained. However, due to demographic and other changes over the past two decades, the number of electors per councillor in ten of the 15 wards varies by more than 10 per cent from the district average, and five wards vary by more than 20 per cent. The worst imbalance is in Heath Hayes ward where the councillor represents 68 per cent more electors than the district average.

18 A parish council for the Hednesford area was recently created, for which orders were put in place by the Secretary of State for the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions and which were implemented on 1 April 2000. The final recommendations outlined in this report are based on the newly created parish boundaries.

Map 1: Existing Wards in Cannock Chase

Figure 3: Existing Electoral Arrangements

Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (1999)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2004)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
1 Anglesey	3	6,539	2,180	29	6,892	2,297	28
2 Brereton & Ravenhill	3	5,007	1,669	-1	5,280	1,760	-2
3 Brindley Heath	1	665	665	-61	650	650	-64
4 Broomhill	3	4,339	1,466	-13	4,411	1,470	-18
5 Cannock South	3	4,472	1,491	-12	4,812	1,604	-11
6 Chadsmoor	3	4,455	1,485	-12	4,571	1,524	-15
7 Etching Hill	3	5,113	1,704	1	5,259	1,753	-2
8 Hagley	3	2,855	952	-44	3,497	1,166	-35
9 Heath Hayes	3	8,504	2,835	68	9,674	3,225	80
10 Longford	3	4,394	1,465	-13	4,412	1,471	-18
11 Norton Canes	3	5,118	1,706	1	5,673	1,891	5
12 Parkside	3	4,428	1,476	-13	4,725	1,575	-12
13 Pye Green Valley	3	6,215	2,072	23	6,381	2,127	19
14 Rawnsley	2	3,684	1,842	9	3,821	1,911	6
15 Western Springs	3	5,021	1,674	-1	5,287	1,762	-2
Totals	42	70,869	–	–	75,345	–	–
Averages	–	–	1,687	–	–	1,794	–

Source: Electorate figures are based on information provided by Cannock Chase 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 1999, electors in Brindley Heath ward were over-represented by 61 per cent, while electors in Heath Hayes ward were under-represented by 68 per cent. Figures have been rounded to the nearest whole number.

3 DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS

19 During Stage One we received eight representations, including district-wide proposals from the District Council, Cannock Chase Conservative Association and Cannock Chase Liberal Democrats. In the light of these representations and evidence available to us, we reached preliminary conclusions which were set out in our report, *Draft recommendations on the future electoral arrangements for Cannock Chase in Staffordshire*.

20 Our draft recommendations were based on the District Council's proposals, however we did make a number of modifications to improve electoral equality and provide strong, clear boundaries. We proposed that:

- Cannock Chase District Council should be served by 41 councillors, compared with the current 42, representing 15 wards, as at present;
- the boundaries of 12 of the existing wards should be modified;
- there should be no change to the present system of elections by thirds.

Draft Recommendation

Cannock Chase District Council should comprise 41 councillors, serving 15 wards. The Council should continue to hold elections by thirds.

21 Our proposals would have resulted in significant improvements in electoral equality, with the number of electors per councillor in 11 of the 15 wards varying by no more than 10 per cent from the district average. This level of electoral equality was forecast to improve further, with no ward varying by more than 10 per cent from the average in 2004.

4 RESPONSES TO CONSULTATION

22 During the consultation on our draft recommendations report ten representations were received. A list of all respondents is available on request from the Commission. All representations may be inspected at the offices of Cannock Chase District Council and the Commission.

Cannock Chase District Council

23 The District Council stated that it had “no objection to the majority of the draft recommendations”; however, it opposed the boundary between the proposed Cannock South and Cannock West wards. It stated that its Stage One proposal for the area should be adopted. The Council stated that if its original boundary was unacceptable to the Commission, it wished to support the submission made by the members for Cannock South ward, except for the proposed renaming of Cannock South ward.

Cannock Chase Conservative Association

24 The Conservative Association stated that although it had “certain minor reservations in the Cannock Town area [it] considered the proposals to be well balanced and to reflect the identities of the local communities” and supported the recommendations “on the understanding that they are to go unaltered and in entirety as outlined in the Draft”. However, we made clear in our draft recommendations report that our proposals can change between the draft and final stages of the review, in the light of representations received.

Rugeley Town Council

25 Rugeley Town Council proposed modifications to the wards of Etching Hill & The Heath, Hagley and Western Springs. It stated that its proposals would “provide neater boundary lines and at the same time minimise changes”. It also stated that these proposed changes would keep these wards’ electoral variances “within the criteria set by the Commission’s recommendations which range from [9 per cent below the district average] in Brereton & Ravenhill to [8 per cent above the district average] in Norton Canes”.

26 The Town Council also brought to our attention that the District Council had “made an omission in their calculations” for the projected electorate of Western Springs ward which it stated should be increased by 260 electors in the 2004 electorate forecast.

Members of Parliament

27 Dr Tony Wright, Member of Parliament for Cannock Chase, expressed his “support for the proposals submitted by Cannock Chase Council ... [which] have a significant level of local support”.

Other Representations

28 A further six representations were received in response to our draft recommendations, from the Staffordshire Parish Councils' Association, two county councillors, a joint submission from the three district councillors for Cannock South ward and two local residents.

29 Staffordshire Parish Councils' Association stated that there was "a feeling [in Hednesford Parish Council] that the proposals for a new Hednesford parish ward with only 51 electors does seem to be rather extraordinary". It noted the proposed parish review which Cannock Chase District Council intends to carry out in order to address this anomaly, and subsequently reiterated its objection "to any proposals which might result in a reduction of the parished area of the district of Cannock Chase".

30 County Councillor O'Leary, member for Hednesford division, proposed alterations to the proposed Hednesford Green Heath ward. He stated that the alternatives he suggested would provide more distinct boundaries.

31 During Stage Three we received four submissions proposing alterations to the boundary, put forward in our draft recommendations, between Cannock South ward and Cannock West ward. County Councillor Gribbin, member for Norton Canes division, stated that she agreed with the draft recommendations for Norton Canes ward, however she did not support our proposals for the wards of Cannock South and Cannock West. She stated that "the houses west of Bideford Way be put into Cannock West ward to reflect community identity" while the whole of Avon Road could be transferred into Cannock South ward to improve electoral equality. Councillors Kraujalis, Morgan and Toth, members for Cannock South ward, also proposed the transfer of all electors west of Bideford Way into Cannock West ward, stating that this proposal would provide a strong boundary between "distinctive communities". To improve electoral equality the Cannock South councillors proposed transferring the electors of "Wolverhampton Road and everything to the east of it out of Cannock West [ward] and into Cannock South [ward]". They also proposed renaming Cannock South ward, Bridgtown & Ascot ward. The councillors proposals were supported by a local resident of Cannock. A further resident of Cannock proposed transferring the electors west of Bideford Way out of Cannock South ward, on the grounds of community identity.

5 ANALYSIS AND FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS

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

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

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

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

Electorate Forecasts

36 At Stage One different views were expressed on the likely five-year electorate forecasts in Cannock Chase. The District Council submitted an electorate forecast, projecting an increase in the electorate of around 6 per cent from 70,869 to 75,125 over the five-year period from 1999 to 2004. It expects most of the growth to be in Heath Hayes, although a significant amount is also expected in Hagley, Hednesford and Norton Canes wards. 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.

37 During Stage One the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats forecast an increase in the electorate of approximately 7 per cent, over the same five-year period. The Conservatives’ electorate forecasts differed from the Council’s in the Heath Hayes area. The Liberal Democrats forecast an additional 260 electors in Western Springs ward and an additional 360 electors in Pye Green ward. They argued that the District Council had under-estimated likely housing development in this area.

38 We carefully considered the alternative electorate projections submitted to us during Stage One, together with the supporting argumentation put forward, and sought further clarification from the District Council. Consequently, we were not persuaded by the evidence available during Stage One of the review that the housing development included in the Conservatives' and Liberal Democrats' forecasts would be completed and occupied by electors by 2004.

39 At Stage Three Rugeley Town Council stated that it had been advised by Cannock Chase District Council that the forecast electorate (2004) of Western Springs ward would include a further 260 electors that had not been included in the Council's original forecasts. We sought confirmation of this adjustment to the projected electorate from Cannock Chase District Council. Officers from the District Council informed us that the site did indeed have planning permission; however, the District Council projected an increase of 220 electors by 2004. Consequently, we have based our final recommendations on the revised forecast for an additional 220 electors in the existing Western Springs ward. This adjustment means that the projected electorate for Cannock Chase district in 2004 is now 75,345.

40 We received no further comments on the Council's electorate forecasts during Stage Three, and after taking into account the alteration to the electorate of Western Springs ward we remain satisfied that they represent the best estimates presently available.

Council Size

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

42 Cannock Chase District Council presently has 42 members. At Stage One the District Council proposed a council of 41 members, upon which it undertook extensive local consultation. It expressed the view that not only would a 41-member scheme facilitate improved electoral equality and reflect community identities across the district, it would also be appropriate when considering the Government's proposals for new local political management structures. "The Council has given considerable thought to the new style of political management and the current experiment has indicated clearly there will be a reduction in Committee meetings and pre-meetings for members who serve on Committees." The Liberal Democrats proposed an increase in council size of four, from 42 to 46 members. It argued that the recent increase in population, and forecast increase, coupled with the introduction of "cabinet-style" administration, had led to an increased workload for councillors. It added that such an increase was necessary to achieve effective local representation, particularly in an area such as Cannock Chase.

43 We considered the arguments put forward for both a 41-member and a 46-member council. We concluded that the arguments from the Liberal Democrats, for a council size of 46, were not specific to the district of Cannock Chase, but were broader arguments based on the problems they felt councillors faced in carrying out their roles. We were pleased to note that the District Council had conducted widespread public consultation on its 41-member scheme, and that this scheme would command the support of the Cannock Chase Conservative Association. The Council also provided strong justification for the proposed decrease in council size, from 42 to 41 members. The Commission was not convinced that an increase in council size to 46 members was justified

within the remit of this review, and therefore recommended that the District Council's and Conservatives' proposal for a 41-member scheme be adopted.

44 We received no further representations on council size during Stage Three and, having considered the size and distribution of the electorate, the geography and other characteristics of the area, together with the representations received during Stage One, we have concluded that the achievement of electoral equality and the statutory criteria would best be met by a council of 41 members, as proposed in our draft recommendations.

Electoral Arrangements

45 As set out in our draft recommendations report, we carefully considered all the representations received at Stage One, including the district-wide schemes from Cannock Chase District Council, Cannock Chase Conservative Association and Cannock Chase Liberal Democrats. From these representations some considerations emerged which helped to inform us when preparing our draft recommendations.

46 In our draft recommendations we decided to recommend a council size of 41, as outlined earlier in the chapter. Although the Conservative Association's proposals were based on a 41-member council, we were concerned that its scheme, although based on the same council size as the District Council's proposals and achieving similar improvements in electoral equality across the district, was based on boundaries that were less identifiable than those proposed by the District Council at Stage One.

47 In view of the degree of consensus behind elements of the Council's proposals, the consultation exercise which it undertook with interested parties, and our proposed 41-member council, we concluded that our draft recommendations should be based on the District Council's scheme. We endorsed many of the boundaries put forward by the Council as we considered they provide strong and clear boundaries while having regard for community identities and resulted in good electoral equality across the district.

48 We considered that the Council's scheme would provide a better balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria than the current arrangements or the other schemes submitted at Stage One by the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats.

49 Having concluded that our draft recommendations should be based on a 41-member council for the reasons outlined above, and that the scheme should be broadly based upon the District Council's proposed ward configuration, we were unable to make detailed comparisons with the boundaries proposed under the Liberal Democrats 46-member scheme, as the different elector:councillor ratio means that the size and configuration of wards varied substantially. It is important to note that (based on the 1999 electorate) under a council size of 41 the number of electors per councillor would be 1,729, while under a council size of 46 the number of electors per councillor would be 1,541, a difference of nearly 200 electors per ward. We did, however, move away from the proposals put forward by the District Council in order to improve electoral equality and to have regard to the statutory criteria. Where appropriate, we made comparisons between the proposed boundaries under each scheme, comparing them with those of the District Council, and attempted to draw on the local knowledge that each scheme provided.

50 We have reviewed our draft recommendations 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) Broomhill, Cannock South, Chadsmoor, Longford and Parkside wards;
- (b) Anglesey, Heath Hayes and Pye Green Valley wards;
- (c) Etching Hill, Hagley and Western Springs wards;
- (d) Brereton & Ravenhill and Brindley Heath wards;
- (e) Norton Canes and Rawsley wards.

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

Broomhill, Cannock South, Chadsmoor, Longford and Parkside wards

52 These five wards cover the town of Cannock, situated in the south-west of the district. Under the existing arrangements each of the five wards is represented by three councillors, and all are over-represented. Cannock South ward and Chadsmoor ward have electoral variances of 12 per cent each (11 per cent and 15 per cent respectively by 2004), while the wards of Broomhill, Longford and Parkside have electoral variances of 13 per cent each (18 per cent, 18 per cent and 12 per cent respectively by 2004).

53 At Stage One the District Council proposed reducing the number of wards in Cannock town from five to four, with each new ward being represented by three councillors. It proposed a new Cannock East ward, to include the majority of electors in Chadsmoor ward, the electors north of Lichfield Road from the existing Cannock South ward and Blake Close, currently in Pye Green Valley ward, part of Hednesford parish. The Council proposed that the electors from the Calving Hill area of Parkside ward be included in a new Cannock North ward, with the existing Broomhill ward and a small part of Chadsmoor ward on Old Fallow Road. It also proposed a revised Cannock South ward to include that part of the existing Cannock South ward south of Lichfield Road in a ward with the electors south of Longford Road and east of Poplar Lane, currently in Longford ward. Finally, the Council proposed a new Cannock West ward comprising the remainder of Longford and Parkside wards. These proposals would improve electoral equality. The number of electors per councillor would be above the district average in the four wards of Cannock East, Cannock North, Cannock South and Cannock West by 9 per cent, 13 per cent, 2 per cent and 5 per cent respectively (improving to 3 per cent, 8 per cent, equal to the district average and 1 per cent by 2004).

54 The Conservatives proposed significant boundary modifications to the wards covering Cannock town at Stage One. They suggested the creation of a Cannock Central ward, to include electors from between Lichfield Road and the Goldthorne Avenue area (part of the existing Cannock South ward) and from Longford and Parkside wards, between Avon Road and Dartmouth Road. A revised Cannock South ward would then comprise the remainder of the existing Cannock South ward. They proposed a Cannock West ward, to include the remainder of Longford ward and the electors south of the golf course (part of the existing Parkside ward). They also proposed a Cannock North ward comprising Broomhill ward and the electors to the east of Pye Green Road and north of the golf course, currently in Parkside ward. Finally, they proposed

a Cannock East ward comprising Chadsmoor ward and the remainder of Parkside ward and the electors on Blake Close, currently in Pye Green Valley ward. They proposed that the wards of Cannock East and Cannock North should be represented by three councillors while Cannock Central, Cannock South and Cannock West wards should return two councillors.

55 In our draft recommendations we carefully considered all the representations received and proposed that the town of Cannock should be represented by four three-member wards, as suggested by the District Council. However, we put forward modifications to the boundaries proposed by the District Council, to further improve electoral equality and provide better boundaries. We adopted the District Council's proposed Cannock East ward without modification. We proposed extending the Cannock South ward put forward by the District Council, to include the electors west of Poplar Lane (part of the District Council's proposed Cannock West ward). We also proposed modifying the boundary between Cannock North and Cannock West wards, to run west along the middle of Old Fallow Road and north to include electors on Stafford Road in Cannock North ward.

56 We proposed adopting the ward names put forward by the District Council of Cannock East, North, South and West. Under our draft recommendations the number of electors per councillor in the wards of Cannock East, Cannock North, Cannock South and Cannock West would be above the average by 9 per cent, 8 per cent, 7 per cent and 6 per cent respectively (3 per cent, 3 per cent, 4 per cent and 1 per cent by 2004).

57 At Stage Three we received five representations concerning our proposed boundary between the wards of Cannock South and Cannock West, from Cannock Chase District Council, the local county councillor, the three district councillors for Cannock South ward and two local residents. The District Council proposed that Poplar Lane should be used as the boundary between Cannock South and Cannock West wards, as it had proposed at Stage One. However, it stated that if the Commission was not satisfied that Poplar Lane provided a good boundary then it would support the submission from the three district councillors of Cannock South ward. However, it stated it would not support the renaming of Cannock South ward "as this would be at odds with the other ward names" proposed in Cannock town.

58 The other four submissions proposed using Bideford Way as the boundary between Cannock South ward and Cannock West ward. Councillors Kraujalis, Morgan and Toth, members for Cannock South ward, stated that the electors to the west of Bideford Way should be transferred from Cannock South ward to Cannock West ward, as they hold common community identity and interests with the electors of Shoal Hill, situated in the proposed Cannock West ward, and have little in common with the communities of Ascot, Rumer Hill and Bridgtown. This was supported by County Councillor Gribbin, member for Norton Canes division, and two local residents. The councillors for Cannock South ward noted that transferring the electors west of Bideford Way into Cannock West ward would have an adverse affect on electoral equality in these two wards. They therefore proposed transferring the electors of Wolverhampton Road and all those to the east from Cannock West ward into Cannock South ward, to improve electoral equality. Finally they proposed that Cannock South ward should be renamed Bridgtown & Ascot as this "would clearly identify the communities and their interests would be better served". Councillors Kraujalis, Morgan and Toth's proposal was supported by a local resident. Councillor Gribbin additionally suggested that the whole of Avon Road could be included in Cannock South ward to improve electoral equality.

59 Cannock Chase Conservative Association stated that although it had “minor reservations in the Cannock Town area” it was happy to give our draft recommendations its approval.

60 Having carefully considered the representations received, we have decided to endorse our draft recommendations for the wards of Cannock East and Cannock North. However, we have decided to move away from our draft recommendation and modify the boundary between Cannock South and Cannock West wards. We have concluded that the boundaries put forward by Councillors Kraujalis, Morgan and Toth represent a better balance between electoral equality and the statutory criteria. However, we have decided not to adopt the proposed ward name of Bridgtown & Ascot, as we agree with the District Council that this would not be consistent with the ward names proposed in the remainder of Cannock town.

61 Our final recommendations for Cannock East and Cannock North wards would provide the same levels of electoral equality as our draft recommendations. Under our final recommendations for Cannock South and Cannock West wards the number of electors per councillor will be 4 per cent and 9 per cent above the district average respectively (1 per cent and 4 per cent by 2004). Our proposals are illustrated on Map 2 and the large map inside the back cover.

62 We are aware that our recommendations would have consequential effects on the parish warding of Hednesford, and in order to assess the impact of this, we visited the area during Stage One. Staffordshire Parish Councils’ Association stated its objection to the creation of this parish ward at Stage Three, as outlined later in this chapter. We have not been persuaded to alter our recommendations as it remains our view that the electors of Blake Close look towards Cannock town, rather than Hednesford town, and agree that a new Hednesford parish ward of 51 electors should be created, in order that an identifiable boundary between the two towns can be drawn. The District Council has indicated that it intends addressing the issue of this boundary anomaly in a parish review, following the completion of this PER.

Anglesey, Heath Hayes and Pye Green Valley wards

63 These three wards are predominantly urban in character, covering the settlement of Heath Hayes and the town of Hednesford, and are situated in the west of the district. The existing Heath Hayes ward is coterminous with Heath Hayes & Wimblebury parish, and the wards of Anglesey and Pye Green Valley cover the parish of Hednesford, established on 1 April 2000. At present all three wards are each represented by three councillors and are under-represented: Anglesey ward by 29 per cent (28 per cent by 2004), Heath Hayes ward by 68 per cent (80 per cent by 2004) and Pye Green Valley ward by 23 per cent (19 per cent by 2004).

64 At Stage One Cannock Chase District Council proposed two district wards to cover the existing Heath Hayes ward and three wards to replace the existing wards of Anglesey and Pye Green Valley. It proposed that the wards of Hawks Green and Heath Hayes East & Wimblebury should comprise the electors from the existing Heath Hayes ward, with the boundary between the two wards following Hednesford Road and Gorsemoor Road. It suggested that the area north of Hemlock Way, currently in Heath Hayes ward, should be transferred into the proposed Hednesford South ward. It also proposed transferring the 273 electors of Hill Street from Anglesey ward into the proposed Heath Hayes East & Wimblebury ward.

65 The District Council also proposed major boundary realignments in Hednesford. It proposed a Hednesford Green Heath ward, including the electors south of Green Heath Road, east of the railway line and north of Belt Road, to be represented by two councillors. It proposed a three-member Hednesford North ward, comprising the southern half of the existing Brindley Heath ward (south of Marquis Drive) and the electors north of Green Heath Road and east of the railway, although it did propose crossing the railway line to include the electors of Valley Road and Stringers Hill estate. The proposed two-member Hednesford South ward would then comprise the remainder of the existing Anglesey ward and 38 electors north of Hemlock Way, currently in Heath Hayes ward. These proposals would significantly improve electoral equality. The number of electors per councillor would be below the district average in the two wards of Hawks Green and Heath Hayes East & Wimblebury by 13 per cent and 23 per cent respectively (improving to 2 per cent and 1 per cent by 2004). The number of electors per councillor in the wards of Hednesford Green Heath, Hednesford North and Hednesford South would be above the average by 1 per cent, 7 per cent and 15 per cent respectively (equal to the district average, 1 per cent and 1 per cent above by 2004).

66 The Conservatives supported the District Council's Stage One proposals for the creation of Hawks Green and Heath Hayes East & Wimblebury wards, however they proposed the alternative ward names of Heath Hayes West and Heath Hayes East respectively. Their proposals for Hednesford town were similar to those put forward by the District Council, but they differed in two areas. The Conservatives proposed that the Hednesford Hills area, up to and including the Stadium, should be included in its proposed Hednesford North East ward rather than Hednesford Town ward. They also proposed that the electors directly east of Cannock Road and south of Green Heath Road should be included in Hednesford North East ward rather than Pye Green ward. The names put forward by the Conservatives were different from those proposed by the District Council, with Pye Green ward rather than Hednesford Green Heath, Hednesford North East ward rather than Hednesford North and Hednesford Town rather than Hednesford South.

67 Heath Hayes & Wimblebury Parish Council proposed modifications to its parish warding arrangements, which are detailed later in the chapter.

68 Our draft recommendations for the wards of Anglesey, Heath Hayes and Pye Green Valley broadly reflected those put forward by Cannock Chase District Council as we considered that these proposals best reflected existing communities ties. However, we proposed further modifications to the boundaries of all five wards.

69 The existing boundary between the wards of Anglesey and Heath Hayes is coterminous with the boundary between the parishes of Heath Hayes & Wimblebury and Hednesford. The District Council proposed moving away from this boundary, as outlined earlier. We can only propose dividing a parish between different district council wards if we divide that parish into parish wards, so that, for example, one parish ward would form part of one district council ward while another parish ward would form part of a different district council ward. Moving the existing boundary would result in the creation of a Heath Hayes & Wimblebury parish ward (to include 38 electors) and a Hednesford parish ward (to include 273 electors). We considered that such a proposal would not provide convenient and effective local government at parish level. We noted that this may appear contradictory to our proposals for the boundary between Cannock East ward and Hednesford Green Heath ward, which had led to the creation of a Hednesford parish ward

of 51 electors. However, we also noted that the existing boundary between Heath Hayes and Hednesford is clearly identifiable and reflects the existing communities, unlike the existing boundary between Cannock town and Hednesford town.

70 Consequently, we did not adopt the District Council's boundary (broadly following Hemlock Way and Hill Street) between its proposed wards of Hednesford South, Hawks Green and Heath Hayes East & Wimblebury. Instead, we proposed retaining the existing boundary in this area. Such a proposal would have an adverse impact on electoral equality in neighbouring wards and therefore we proposed slight modifications to the District Council's proposed boundaries for the new wards of Hawks Green, Heath Hayes East & Wimblebury, Hednesford Green Heath, Hednesford North and Hednesford South, to improve electoral equality in the area as a whole.

71 We recommended an adjustment to the Council's proposed boundary between Hawks Green and Heath Hayes East & Wimblebury wards to include the electors of Hednesford Road, Gorsemoor Road and Kensington Place (from Hawks Green ward) in Heath Hayes East & Wimblebury ward. We also proposed extending the District Council's proposed boundary between Hednesford South and Hednesford North wards to include the electors north of Eskrett Street and Cheviot Rise, all the electors in Market Street and those east of Rugeley Road in Hednesford North ward. This proposal was similar to the suggested boundary put forward by the Liberal Democrats. Finally, we proposed modifying the District Council's proposals for Hednesford Green Heath to take the boundary along Spruce Road and along the middle of Tower Road to include the electors of Brindley Road and numbers 70 to 102 Broadhurst Green.

72 Our draft recommendations provided good electoral equality across the area as a whole, while continuing to reflect existing communities ties. We noted that the electoral variances in the wards of Hawks Green and Heath Hayes East & Wimblebury would be high initially; however, they are expected to improve by 2004 due to the completion of proposed housing developments. Under our draft recommendations the number of electors per councillor in the wards of Hawks Green and Heath Hayes East & Wimblebury would be 16 per cent and 25 per cent below the district average respectively (4 per cent and 6 per cent by 2004). Hednesford Green Heath, Hednesford North and Hednesford South wards would be 3 per cent, 9 per cent and 17 per cent above the average respectively (3 per cent, 3 per cent and 6 per cent by 2004).

73 At Stage Three we received general support for our draft recommendations from Cannock Chase District Council and Cannock Chase Conservative Association. We also received a submission from County Councillor O'Leary, member for Hednesford division, who put forward modifications to Hednesford Green Heath ward which would consequently alter the boundaries of Hednesford South and Hednesford North wards. Councillor O'Leary stated that the boundary between Hednesford Green Heath ward and Hednesford North ward should run straight down Broadhurst Green, which would result in the transfer of Brindley Road, Spruce Road and Tower Road back into Hednesford North ward, as proposed by the District Council at Stage One. Councillor O'Leary also put forward modifications to our proposed Hednesford Green Heath ward boundary in the area south of Market Street. He proposed three options, two of which involved transferring electors from Hednesford North ward and one involved transferring electors from Hednesford South ward into Hednesford Green Heath ward in all three options.

74 Staffordshire Parish Councils' Association submitted its objection to the creation of Blake Close parish ward of Hednesford parish and the intention of Cannock Chase District Council to

address this boundary anomaly, as it would result in a reduction of the parished area of Cannock Chase.

75 Having carefully considered the representations received, we have decided to endorse our draft recommendations for Hawks Green, Heath Hayes East & Wimblebury and Hednesford South wards. However, we have decided to move away from our draft recommendation and modify the boundary between Hednesford Green Heath ward and Hednesford North ward to run along Broadhurst Green, as proposed by Councillor O’Leary at Stage Three and Cannock Chase District Council at Stage One. We have concluded that this proposal will provide a strong boundary while not having an adverse effect on the electoral equality of the area. We have decided not to adopt the proposals put forward by Councillor O’Leary for the area south of Market Street, as we believe that the railway line, which is the boundary put forward in our draft recommendations, offers a stronger boundary than those put forward by Councillor O’Leary. Our draft recommendations also provide better electoral equality across Hednesford as a whole than would be the case if Councillor O’Leary’s proposals were adopted in the Market Street area.

76 Our final recommendations for Heath Hayes East & Wimblebury and Hednesford South wards would provide the same levels of electoral equality as our draft recommendations. Due to the increase in the projected electorate for Western Springs ward in 2004, and consequently the district as a whole, the electoral variance for Hawks Green ward has altered slightly from our draft recommendations. Under our final recommendations Hawks Green ward would have an electoral variance of 16 per cent below the district average (5 per cent by 2004). Our final recommendations for the wards of Hednesford Green Heath and Hednesford North would provide electoral variances of 1 per cent and 11 per cent respectively (equal to the district average and 4 per cent by 2004). Our proposals are illustrated on Map 2 and the large map inside the back cover.

77 As stated earlier in the chapter, we are aware that our recommendations would have consequential effects on the parish warding of Hednesford. We have not been persuaded to alter our recommendation that a new Hednesford parish ward of 51 electors should be created in order that an identifiable boundary between the two towns can be drawn. We conclude that under our recommendation the boundary between Cannock and Hednesford would be strong, clear and would help to provide convenient and effective local government at parish level. The boundary we have put forward was supported by all submissions received during Stage One and we have only received opposition from Staffordshire Parish Councils’ Association. The District Council has indicated that it intends to address the issue of this boundary anomaly in a parish review, following the completion of this PER.

Etching Hill, Hagley and Western Springs wards

78 These three-member wards cover Rugeley parish, situated in the north of the district. The number of electors per councillor is 1 per cent above the district average in Etching Hill ward (2 per cent below by 2004), 44 per cent below the average in Hagley ward (35 per cent by 2004) and 1 per cent below the average in Western Springs ward (2 per cent by 2004).

79 At Stage One Cannock Chase District Council proposed minor boundary modifications to the wards of Etching Hill and Western Springs. It also suggested that Hagley ward should retain its existing boundaries, though it should be represented by two councillors, rather than three as

at present. It proposed that Etching Hill ward should include the electors north of Marquis Drive, currently in Brindley Heath ward. It also proposed that the electors of Green Lane, and neighbouring cul-de-sacs, should be transferred from Etching Hill ward into Western Springs ward.

80 The Conservatives proposed major boundary realignments in Rugeley during Stage One. They proposed that the existing Etching Hill ward should be renamed Etching Hill & The Heath and should include the electors of Slitting Mill village, currently in Hagley ward. They also proposed that the electors currently in Etching Hill ward, polling districts UY1 and VY1, should be transferred into Western Springs ward. They proposed a modified Hagley ward, suggesting that the electors south of Swallow Close and east of Western Springs Road, currently in Western Springs ward, should be transferred into a ward with the remainder of the existing Hagley ward. The Conservatives suggested that Etching Hill & The Heath ward should be represented by two councillors, while the wards of Hagley and Western Springs should each return three councillors.

81 Brindley Heath Parish Council stated that it was “convinced that Slitting Mill should be included within the new Etching Hill ward”. It put forward suggestions for the transfer of approximately 300 electors from Etching Hill ward into Western Springs ward, in order to improve electoral equality. It also suggested that Hagley ward should be represented by two councillors, while Etching Hill ward and Western Springs ward should each be represented by three councillors.

82 As part of our draft recommendations we adopted the District Council’s proposed Western Springs ward. In the wards of Etching Hill & The Heath and Hagley we endorsed the suggestion put forward by Brindley Heath Parish Council and the Conservatives, to transfer the electors of Slitting Mill village from Hagley ward into Etching Hill & The Heath ward, as this would create a relatively urban ward of Hagley and a relatively rural ward of Etching Hill & The Heath. We considered that this reflects community interests while providing clear boundaries and good levels of electoral equality. We recommended that Hagley ward should be represented by two councillors, while Etching Hill & The Heath and Western Springs wards should each be represented by three councillors. When the proposed housing development is completed in Hagley ward, this would create clearly definable urban and rural wards and would also result in good electoral equality across Rugeley town by 2004. We proposed adopting the name Etching Hill & The Heath, as suggested by the Conservatives, for the existing Etching Hill ward, as we considered that this ward name would best reflect the communities within the proposed ward.

83 Under our draft recommendations the number of electors per councillor would be 8 per cent above the district average in Etching Hill & The Heath ward (2 per cent below by 2004) and 25 per cent and 3 per cent below the average in Hagley and Western Springs wards respectively (5 per cent below the average in both wards by 2004).

84 At Stage Three we received one submission regarding these three wards, from Rugeley Town Council. The Town Council proposed modifications to our draft recommendations for the wards of Etching Hill & The Heath, Hagley and Western Springs stating that the alterations it proposed would “provide neater boundary lines and ... minimise change”. It proposed that the electors of Slitting Mill village should be included in Hagley ward as opposed to Etching Hill & The Heath ward. The electors of Green Lane and neighbouring cul-de-sacs should be transferred from

Western Springs ward back into Etching Hill & The Heath ward. It also proposed that the electors south of Hagley Road and west of Western Springs Road should be transferred into Hagley ward from Western Springs ward. We also received general support from Cannock Chase District Council and the Cannock Chase Conservative Association for our draft recommendations for the wards of Etching Hill & The Heath, Hagley and Western Springs ward.

85 Having carefully considered the representations received, we have decided to endorse our draft recommendations for the wards of Etching Hill & The Heath, Hagley and Western Springs. We conclude that the proposals submitted by Rugeley Town Council for Slitting Mill and the Green Lane area would provide worse electoral equality in Rugeley as a whole and no convincing evidence was brought forward as to why our draft recommendations failed to meet the statutory criteria. We have also concluded that the Town Council's proposal to transfer the electors south of Hagley Road and west of Western Springs Road into Hagley ward from Western Springs ward, although improving electoral equality, would not provide convenient and effective local government. The electors identified by the Town Council to be transferred would have no direct access to the ward in which they would vote, and the proposal would mean dividing an established community. No evidence was brought forward to support this proposal.

86 Due to the increase in the electorate projected for Western Springs ward in 2004, and consequently the district as a whole, the electoral variances for Hagley and Western Springs wards have altered slightly from our draft recommendations. Etching Hill & The Heath ward would have an electoral variance of 8 per cent above the average (2 per cent below by 2004). The wards of Hagley and Western Springs would be 25 per cent and 3 per cent below the average respectively (6 per cent and 1 per cent by 2004). Our proposals are illustrated on Map 2 and the large map inside the back cover.

Brereton & Ravenhill and Brindley Heath wards

87 Brereton & Ravenhill and Brindley Heath wards are situated in the north of the district. The single-member ward of Brindley Heath and the three-member ward of Brereton & Ravenhill are coterminous with the parishes of the same names. The number of electors per councillor is 61 per cent below the district average in Brindley Heath ward (64 per cent by 2004) and 1 per cent below the average in Brereton & Ravenhill ward (2 per cent by 2004).

88 During Stage One we received submissions from Brindley Heath Parish Council, the District Council, the Conservatives, the Liberal Democrats and Rugeley Town Council, all of which proposed that the electoral arrangements of Brereton & Ravenhill ward should remain unchanged.

89 All submissions received at Stage One stated that the electors of Brindley Heath ward should be transferred into neighbouring wards, with the electors of Brindley village and the surrounding area, in the south of the existing ward, being included in a Hednesford ward and the electors in the north of the ward being included in a revised Etching Hill ward.

90 In our draft recommendations we carefully considered all representations received and decided to adopt the District Council's proposals for this area, including its suggested boundary between the proposed wards of Etching Hill & The Heath and Hednesford North. We concluded that these arrangements would best reflect the existing communities while providing a good level

of electoral equality, and would command a significant degree of local support. Under our draft recommendations the district ward of Brindley Heath would cease to exist, with the electors being included in the wards of Etching Hill & The Heath and Hednesford North. Brereton & Ravenhill ward, under our proposals, would have an electoral variance of 3 per cent (9 per cent by 2004).

91 During Stage Three we received general support from Cannock Chase District Council and Cannock Chase Conservative Association for our draft recommendations for the ward of Brereton & Ravenhill. We received no other comments, and we have therefore decided to endorse our draft recommendations for this ward without modification. Consequently our final recommendation will provide the same levels of electoral equality as our draft recommendation. Our proposals are illustrated on Map 2 and the large map inside the back cover.

Norton Canes and Rawnsley wards

92 These two wards are situated in the south of the district. The three-member ward of Norton Canes is coterminous with the parish of the same name. Rawnsley ward is currently represented by two councillors and contains the parish of Cannock Wood while part of the ward is unparished. The number of electors per councillor is 1 per cent above the district average in Norton Canes ward (5 per cent by 2004) and 9 per cent above the average in Rawnsley ward (6 per cent by 2004).

93 During Stage One Cannock Chase District Council proposed no change to the wards of Norton Canes and Rawnsley. It stated that, due to the location of these two wards and the fact that Norton Canes ward is coterminous with Norton Canes parish, it was not in the interests of convenient and effective local government to modify the boundary and that the existing arrangements best reflected community interests. Cannock Chase Conservative Association and Norton Canes Parish Council supported the Council's proposals.

94 Given the good levels of electoral equality achieved and the local support expressed for the retention of the existing arrangements we recommended that the electoral arrangements of Norton Canes ward and Rawnsley ward should remain unchanged. Under our draft recommendations Norton Canes ward would have an electoral variance of 1 per cent (8 per cent by 2004) and Rawnsley ward would have an electoral variance of 7 per cent (1 per cent by 2004).

95 During Stage Three we received general support from Cannock Chase District Council and Cannock Chase Conservative Association for our draft recommendations for the wards of Norton Canes and Rawnsley. The county councillor for Norton Canes division, Councillor Gribbin, supported our draft recommendations for Norton Canes ward. We received no other comments on these wards, and we have therefore decided to endorse our draft recommendations for these two wards without modification.

96 Due to the increase in the projected electorate for Western Springs ward in 2004, and consequently the district as a whole, the electoral variance for Rawnsley ward has altered slightly from our draft recommendations. Norton Canes ward would have an electoral variance of 1 per cent (8 per cent by 2004) and Rawnsley ward would have a variance of 7 per cent (equal to the district average by 2004). Our proposals are illustrated on Map 2 and the large map inside the back cover.

Electoral Cycle

97 At Stage One we received one representation regarding the District Council's electoral cycle. Cannock Chase Conservative Association proposed that the whole council be elected every four years. However, it submitted no argumentation in support of its proposal.

98 We carefully considered the proposal for change in our draft recommendations. However, in the absence of cross-party support we were not persuaded to adopt the proposal. It is, of course, open to the Council, subject to a resolution supported by a two-thirds majority of members, to apply to the Secretary of State for a change in its electoral cycle.

99 During Stage Three we received no further submissions regarding the electoral cycle and accordingly we make no recommendation for change to the present system of elections by thirds.

Conclusions

100 Having carefully considered all the representations and evidence received in response to our consultation report, we have decided substantially to endorse our draft recommendations, subject to the following amendments:

- the electors to the west of Bideford Way should be included in Cannock West ward instead of Cannock South ward, and the electors of Wolverhampton Road and those to the east should be included in Cannock South ward instead of Cannock West ward;
- the electors of Brindley Road, Spruce Road and Tower Road and the north side of Broadhurst Green should be included in Hednesford North ward instead of Hednesford Green Heath ward.

101 We conclude that, in Cannock Chase:

- there should be a reduction in council size from 42 to 41;
- there should be 15 wards, as at present;
- the boundaries of 12 of the existing wards should be modified;
- the Council should continue to hold elections by thirds.

102 Figure 4 shows the impact of our final recommendations on electoral equality, comparing them with the current arrangements, based on 1999 and 2004 electorate figures.

Figure 4: Comparison of Current and Recommended Electoral Arrangements

	1999 electorate		2004 forecast electorate	
	Current arrangements	Final recommendations	Current arrangements	Final recommendations
Number of councillors	42	41	42	41
Number of wards	15	15	15	15
Average number of electors per councillor	1,687	1,729	1,794	1,838
Number of wards with a variance more than 10 per cent from the average	10	5	10	0
Number of wards with a variance more than 20 per cent from the average	5	2	4	0

103 As Figure 4 shows, our recommendations would result in a reduction in the number of wards with an electoral variance of more than 10 per cent from ten to five. This improved level of electoral equality would improve further in 2004, with no wards forecast to vary by more than 10 per cent from the average. We conclude that our recommendations would best meet the need for electoral equality, having regard to the statutory criteria.

Final Recommendation

Cannock Chase District Council should comprise 41 councillors serving 15 wards, as detailed and named in Figures 1 and 2, and illustrated on Map 2 and on the large map inside the back cover. The Council should continue to hold elections by thirds.

Parish and Town Council Electoral Arrangements

104 In undertaking reviews of 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 provides that if a parish is to be divided between different district wards, it must also be divided into parish wards, so that each parish ward lies wholly within a single ward of the district. Accordingly, in our draft recommendations report we proposed consequential changes to the warding arrangements for the parishes of Brindley Heath, Heath Hayes & Wimblebury, Hednesford and the town council of Rugeley to reflect the proposed district wards.

105 The parish of Brindley Heath is currently served by seven councillors serving two wards, with four councillors representing Brindley village and three councillors representing the

surrounding rural area. Brindley Heath Parish Council supported the District Council’s proposals for modifications to district ward boundaries in its area and was aware that this would lead to the subsequent re-warding of the parish. At Stage Three we received no further comments from the District Council or the Parish Council. Having considered all the evidence received, and in the light of the confirmation of our proposed district wards in the area, we are confirming our draft recommendation for the warding of Brindley Heath parish as final.

Final Recommendation
Brindley Heath Parish Council should comprise seven councillors, as at present, representing two wards: Brindley Village ward (returning five councillors) and Chase Side ward (returning two councillors). The boundary between the two parish wards should reflect the proposed district ward boundary, as illustrated on Map 2 and the large map inserted in the back of the report.

106 The parish of Heath Hayes & Wimblebury is currently served by 13 councillors and is not warded. The parish council submitted proposals to divide the parish into four wards as “the council believes representation would be more equitable if there were four wards, returning the councillors”. At Stage Three we received no further comments from the District Council or the Parish Council. Having considered all the evidence received, and in the light of the confirmation of our proposed district wards in the area, we confirm our draft recommendation for the warding of Heath Hayes & Wimblebury parish as final.

Final Recommendation
Heath Hayes & Wimblebury Parish Council should comprise 13 councillors, as at present, representing four wards: Old Heath Hayes ward (returning four councillors) and Hawks Green, New Heath Hayes and Wimblebury wards (each returning three councillors). The parish ward boundaries are illustrated on the large map inserted in the back of the report.

107 The parish of Hednesford is currently served by eleven councillors representing two wards, a five-member Anglesey ward and a six-member Pye Green Valley ward. As outlined earlier in the chapter, we are proposing the creation of a new Blake Close parish ward of Hednesford parish, in order to provide an identifiable boundary between Cannock town and Hednesford parish. The District Council has indicated that it intends to address this boundary anomaly in a later parish review.

108 At Stage Three we received submissions from County Councillor O’Leary and Staffordshire Parish Councils’ Association relating to Hednesford, outlined earlier in the chapter. Staffordshire Parish Councils’ Association submitted its objection to the creation of Blake Close parish ward of Hednesford parish and the intention of Cannock Chase District Council to address this boundary anomaly, as it would result in a reduction of the parished area of Cannock Chase.

109 We have decided to adopt Councillor O’Leary’s modification to the boundary between the district wards of Hednesford Green Heath and Hednesford North, outlined earlier in the chapter,

and consequently the parish ward boundaries in Hednesford will need to be amended to ensure that they are coterminous with the proposed district ward boundaries for the same area.

Final Recommendation
Hednesford Parish Council should comprise eleven councillors, as at present, representing four wards: Anglesey ward (returning three councillors), Blake Close ward (returning one councillor), Pye Green ward (returning three councillors) and West Hill ward (returning four councillors). The boundaries between the four parish wards should reflect the proposed district ward boundaries, as illustrated on the large map inserted in the back of the report.

110 The parish of Rugeley is currently served by 19 councillors, representing three town wards, Etching Hill ward (returning seven councillors), Hagley ward (returning five councillors) and Western Springs ward (returning seven councillors). During Stage One Rugeley Town Council submitted proposals for nine district councillors in Rugeley and modifications to the district wards, and subsequently the parish wards (Etching Hill, Hagley and Western Springs). However, in our draft recommendations we proposed that Rugeley should be represented by eight district councillors. Therefore we could not adopt the Town Council’s warding arrangements. The parish ward boundaries we proposed for Rugeley were coterminous with the proposed district ward boundaries for the same area, outlined earlier in the Chapter.

111 At Stage Three Rugeley Town Council proposed further modifications to our proposed district wards. We have decided not to adopt these modifications and we are endorsing our draft recommendations as final, as outlined earlier in the chapter. Therefore we are also confirming our draft recommendations for the parish wards in Rugeley as final.

Final Recommendation
Rugeley Town Council should comprise 19 councillors, as at present, representing three wards: Etching Hill ward (returning seven councillors), Hagley ward (returning five councillors) and Western Springs wards (returning seven councillors). The parish ward boundaries should reflect the proposed district ward boundaries in the area, as illustrated on Map 2 and the large map inserted in the back of the report.

112 In our draft recommendations report we proposed that there should be no change to the electoral cycle of parish councils in the district. We received no comments during Stage Three and are confirming this as final.

Final Recommendation
For parish councils, elections should continue to be held at the same time as elections for the District Council.

Map 2: The Commission's Final Recommendations for Cannock Chase

6 NEXT STEPS

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

114 It now falls to the Secretary of State to decide whether to give effect to our recommendations, with or without modification, and to implement them by means of an order. Such an order will not be made before 20 November 2000.

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

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

APPENDIX A

Draft Recommendations for Cannock Chase

Our final recommendations, detailed in Figures 1 and 2, differ from those we put forward as draft recommendations in respect of only four wards, where our draft proposals are set out below.

Figure A1: The Commission's Draft Recommendations: Constituent Areas

Ward name	Constituent areas
Cannock South	Cannock South ward (part); Longford ward (part)
Cannock West	Chadsmoor ward (part); Longford ward (part); Parkside ward (part)
Hednesford Green Heath	Anglesey ward (part – part of Anglesey parish ward of Hednesford parish); Pye Green Valley ward (part – part of Pye Green Valley parish ward of Hednesford parish)
Hednesford North	Anglesey ward (part – part of Anglesey parish ward of Hednesford parish); Brindley Heath ward (part – part of Brindley Heath parish); Pye Green ward (part – part of Pye Green Valley parish ward of Hednesford parish)

Figure A2: The Commission's Draft Recommendations: Number of Councillors and Electors by Ward

Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (1999)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2004)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
Cannock South	3	5,549	1,850	7	5,724	1,908	4
Cannock West	3	5,489	1,830	6	5,579	1,860	1
Hednesford Green Heath	2	3,566	1,783	3	3,760	1,880	3
Hednesford North	3	5,665	1,888	9	5,665	1,888	3

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

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

