

Draft recommendations on the
future electoral arrangements for
Huntingdonshire in Cambridgeshire

November 2001

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

WHAT IS THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT COMMISSION FOR ENGLAND?

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

Members of the Commission:

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

Barbara Stephens (Chief Executive)

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

SUMMARY

We began a review of Huntingdonshire's electoral arrangements on 17 April 2001.

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

We found that the current arrangements provide unequal representation of electors in Huntingdonshire:

- **in 20 of the 34 wards the number of electors represented by each councillor varies by more than 10 per cent from the average for the district and 15 wards vary by more than 20 per cent;**
- **by 2006 this situation is expected to worsen, with the number of electors per councillor forecast to vary by more than 10 per cent from the average in 23 wards. However, the number of wards in which the variance is more than 20 per cent will decrease from 15 to 13.**

Our main proposals for Huntingdonshire's future electoral arrangements (see Tables 1 and 2 and paragraphs 114 - 115) are that:

- **Huntingdonshire District Council should have 52 councillors, one less than at present;**
- **there should be 28 wards, instead of 34 as at present;**
- **the boundaries of 31 of the 34 existing wards should be modified, resulting in a net reduction of six wards;**
- **elections should continue to take place by thirds.**

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

- **In 22 of the proposed 28 wards the number of electors per councillor would vary by no more than 10 per cent from the district average.**
- **An improved level of electoral equality is forecast to continue 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 2006.**

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

- **revised warding arrangements and the redistribution of councillors for the parishes of Eynesbury Hardwicke, Hemingford Grey, Houghton & Wyton, Huntingdon, St Ives, St Neots and The Stukeleys.**

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

- **We will consult on these proposals for nine weeks from 27 November 2001. We take this consultation very seriously. We may decide to move away from our draft recommendations in the light of comments or suggestions that we receive. It is therefore important that all interested parties let us have their views and evidence, *whether or not* they agree with our draft recommendations.**
- **After considering local views, we will decide whether to modify our draft recommendations. We will then submit our final recommendations to the Electoral Commission.**
- **The Electoral Commission will decide whether to accept, modify or reject our final recommendations. It will also decide when any changes come into effect.**

You should express your views by writing directly to us at the address below by 28 January 2002:

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Table 1: Draft Recommendations: Summary

Ward name	Number of councillors	Constituent areas	Map reference
1 Alconbury & The Giddings	1	The parishes of Alconbury; Alconbury Weston; Great Gidding; Little Gidding; Steeple Gidding; Upton & Copingford; Winwick	Map 2
2 Brampton & Buckden	3	The parishes of Brampton; Buckden; Diddington; Grafham; Hail Weston; Southoe & Midloe	Map 2
3 Bury & Warboys	2	The parishes of Bury; Warboys; Wistow	Map 2
4 Earith	2	The parishes of Bluntisham; Earith; Holywell cum Neeingworth	Map 2
5 Ellington	1	The parishes of Barham & Woolley; Brington & Molesworth; Buckworth; Bythorn & Keystone; Catworth; Covington; Easton; Ellington; Hamerton; Leighton; Old Weston; Spaldwick; Stow Longa	Map 2
6 Elton	1	The parishes of Alwalton; Chesterton; Elton; Folksworth & Washingley; Haddon; Morborne; Sibson cum Stibbington; Water Newton	Map 2
7 Fenstanton	1	The parish of Fenstanton	Map 2
8 Godmanchester	2	The parish of Godmanchester	Map 2
9 Gransden & The Offords	2	The parishes of Abbotsley; part of Eynesbury Hardwicke parish (the existing Spinney parish ward); Great Gransden; Great Paxton; Offord Darcy; Offord Cluny; St Neots Rural; Tetworth; Toseland; Waresley; Yelling	Map 2
10 Huntingdon East	3	Huntingdon North ward (part), Huntingdon West ward (part)	Map 2 and large map
11 Huntingdon North	2	Huntingdon North ward (part); Huntingdon West ward (part)	Map 2 and large map
12 Huntingdon West	1	Huntingdon West ward (part); part of The Stukeleys parish (the proposed Hinchingsbrooke parish ward)	Map 2 and large map
13 Kimbolton & Staughton	1	The parishes of Great Staughton; Kimbolton; Perry; Tilbrook	Map 2
14 Little Paxton	1	The parish of Little Paxton	Map 2
15 Ramsey	3	The parish of Ramsey	Map 2
16 St Ives East	2	St Ives North ward (part); St Ives South ward (part)	Map 2 and large map
17 St Ives South	2	St Ives North ward (part); St Ives South ward (part); part of Hemingford Grey parish (the proposed Armes Corner parish ward)	Map 2 and large map
18 St Ives West	1	St Ives North ward (part); St Ives South ward (part)	Map 2 and large map
19 St Neots Eaton Ford	2	St Neots Eaton Ford ward (part)	Map 2 and map A2
20 St Neots Eaton Socon	2	St Neots Eaton Ford ward (part); St Neots Eaton Socon ward	Map 2 and map A2
21 St Neots Eynesbury	2	Part of Eynesbury Hardwicke parish (the existing Town parish ward); St Neots Eynesbury ward (part)	Map 2, A3 A4
22 St Neots Priory Park	2	St Neots Eynesbury ward (part); St Neots Priory Park ward	Map 2 and map A3
23 Sawtry	2	The parishes of Conington; Glatton; Sawtry; Wood Walton	Map 2
24 Somersham	2	Part of Houghton & Wyton parish (the proposed Airfield parish ward); Old Hurst; Pidley cum Fenton; Somersham; Woodhurst	Map 2 and large map

Ward name	Number of councillors	Constituent areas	Map reference
25 Stilton	1	The parishes of Denton & Caldecote; Holme; Stilton	Map 2
26 The Hemingfords	2	The parishes of Hemingford Abbots; Hilton; part of Hemingford Grey parish (the proposed Hemingford Grey parish ward); part of Houghton & Wyton parish (the proposed Houghton & Wyton parish ward)	Map 2 and large map
27 Upwood & The Raveleys	1	The parishes of Abbots Ripton; Broughton; Kings Ripton; part of The Stukeleys parish (the proposed Great Stukeley parish ward)	Map 2
28 Yaxley & Farcet	3	The parishes of Farcet; Yaxley	Map 2

Notes: 1 The entire district is parished.

2 Maps 2, A2, A3 and A4 and the large map at the back of this report illustrate the proposed wards outlined above.

Table 2: Draft Recommendations for Huntingdonshire

	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	Alconbury & The Giddings	1	2,200	2,200	-2	2,230	2,230	-5
2	Brampton & Buckden	3	6,999	2,333	4	7,080	2,360	0
3	Bury & Warboys	2	4,386	2,193	-2	4,850	2,425	3
4	Earith	2	4,666	2,333	4	4,670	2,335	-1
5	Ellington	1	2,371	2,371	6	2,400	2,400	2
6	Elton	1	2,150	2,150	-4	2,150	2,150	-9
7	Fenstanton	1	2,246	2,246	1	2,450	2,450	4
8	Godmanchester	2	4,522	2,261	1	4,790	2,395	2
9	Gransden and The Offords	2	3,531	1,766	-21	4,740	2,370	1
10	Huntingdon East	3	6,538	2,179	-2	6,543	2,181	-7
11	Huntingdon North	2	4,220	2,110	-6	4,447	2,224	-6
12	Huntingdon West	2	4,128	2,064	-8	4,460	2,231	-5
13	Kimbolton & Staughton	1	2,534	2,534	13	2,520	2,520	7
14	Little Paxton	1	2,449	2,449	10	2,410	2,410	2
15	Ramsey	3	5,933	1,978	-11	6,920	2,307	-2
16	St Ives East	2	4,762	2,381	7	5,005	2,525	6
17	St Ives South	2	5,205	2,603	16	5,001	2,503	6
18	St Ives West	1	2,409	2,409	8	2,474	2,474	5
19	St Neots Eaton Ford	2	5,307	2,654	19	5,090	2,545	8
20	St Neots Eaton Socon	2	4,287	2,144	-4	4,800	2,400	2
21	St Neots Eynesbury	3	6,593	2,198	-2	7,000	2,333	-1
22	St Neots Priory Park	2	4,387	2,194	-2	4,350	2,175	-8
23	Sawtry	2	4,607	2,304	3	4,580	2,290	-3
24	Somersham	2	4,608	2,304	3	5,050	2,525	7
25	Stilton	1	2,310	2,310	3	2,310	2,310	-2
26	The Hemingfords	2	4,433	2,217	-1	4,410	2,205	-6

	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 %
27	Upwood & The Raveleys	1	1,819	1,819	-19	2,340	2,340	-1
28	Yaxley & Farcet	3	6,577	2,192	-2	7,420	2,473	5
	Totals	52	116,177	-	-	122,490	-	-
	Averages	-	-	2,234	-	-	2,356	-

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

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

1 INTRODUCTION

1 This report contains our proposals for the electoral arrangements for the district of Huntingdonshire in Cambridgeshire, on which we are now consulting. We are reviewing the eight districts in Cambridgeshire 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 expected to finish in 2004.

2 This is our first review of the electoral arrangements of Huntingdonshire. Huntingdonshire's last review was carried out by our predecessor, the Local Government Boundary Commission (LGBC), which reported to the Secretary of State in 1976 (Report no. 142). The electoral arrangements of Cambridgeshire County Council were last reviewed in 1983 (Report no. 460). We expect to review the County Council's electoral arrangements in 2002.

3 In carrying out these reviews, we must have regard to:

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

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

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

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

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

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

9 The review is in four stages (see Table 3).

Table 3: Stages of the Review

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

10 In July 1998 the Government published a White Paper called *Modern Local Government – In Touch with the People*, which set out legislative proposals for local authority electoral arrangements. In two-tier areas, it proposed introducing a pattern in which both the district and county councils would hold elections every two years, i.e. in year one, half of the district council would be elected, in year two, half of 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 wards in sparsely populated rural areas, and that single-member wards (and electoral divisions) would continue in many authorities. The proposals were taken forward in the Local Government Act 2000 which, among other matters, states that the Secretary of State may make Orders to change authorities' electoral cycles. However, until such time as the Secretary of State makes any Order under the 2000 Act, we will continue to operate on the basis of existing legislation, which provides for elections by thirds or whole-council elections in two-tier areas, and our current *Guidance*.

11 Stage One began on 17 April 2001, when we wrote to Huntingdonshire District Council inviting proposals for future electoral arrangements. We also notified Cambridgeshire County Council, Cambridgeshire Police Authority, the local authority associations, Cambridgeshire Local Councils Association, parish and town councils in the district, the Members of Parliament with constituencies in the district, the Members of the European Parliament for the Eastern Region and the headquarters of the main political parties. We placed a notice in the local press, issued a press release and invited Huntingdonshire District Council to publicise the review further. Our Stage One consultation period was put into abeyance from 10 May 2001 until 7 June 2001 due to the General Election. Consequently the closing date for receipt of submissions at the end of Stage One was 13 August 2001.

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

13 We are currently at Stage Three. This stage, which began on 27 November 2001 and will end on 28 January 2001, involves publishing the draft proposals in this report and public consultation on them. **We take this consultation very seriously and it is therefore important that all those interested in the review should let us have their views and evidence, whether or not they agree with these draft proposals.**

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

15 From 1 April 2002, subject to Parliamentary approval, the Electoral Commission will assume the functions of the Local Government Commission for England and take over responsibility for making Orders putting in place the new arrangements resulting from PERs (powers which currently reside with the Secretary of State). As part of this transfer the Electoral Commission will set up a Boundary Committee which will take over responsibility for the conduct of PERs from the Local Government Commission. The Boundary Committee will conduct electoral reviews following the same rules and in the same manner as the Local Government Commission. The Boundary Committee's final recommendations on future electoral arrangements will then be presented to the Electoral Commission which will be able to accept, modify or reject the Boundary Committee's findings. Under these new arrangements there will remain a further opportunity to make representations directly to the Electoral Commission after the publication of the final recommendations, as was previously the case with the Secretary of State. Interested parties will have a further six weeks to send comments to the Electoral Commission.

2 CURRENT ELECTORAL ARRANGEMENTS

16 The district of Huntingdonshire is a predominately rural area in the west of Cambridgeshire. It is bordered by the districts of Peterborough to the north, Fenland and East Cambridge to the east and South Cambridgeshire to the south. It contains three significantly populated market towns, those of Huntingdon, St Ives, and St Neots. The district has excellent transport links and economic growth and commercial activity is concentrated along the road and rail corridors. The current population of the district is 144,075, which is spread over 90,957 hectares.

17 The district is parished in its entirety, containing 84 civil parishes. The three major towns, detailed above, comprise 49 per cent of the district's total electorate.

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

19 The electorate of the district is 116,177 (April 2001). The Council presently has 53 members who are elected from 34 wards, eight of which are relatively urban in Huntingdon, St Ives and St Neots, with the remainder being mainly rural. Four of the wards are each represented by three councillors, 11 are each represented by two councillors and 19 are single-member wards. The Council is elected by thirds.

20 At present, each councillor represents an average of 2,192 electors, which the District Council forecasts will increase to 2,311 by the year 2006 if the present number of councillors is maintained. However, due to demographic change and migration since the last review, the number of electors per councillor in 20 of the 34 wards varies by more than 10 per cent from the district average, 15 wards by more than 20 per cent and seven wards by more than 30 per cent. The worst imbalance is in St Ives North ward where the councillor represents 57 per cent more electors than the district average.

Map 1: Existing Wards in Huntingdonshire

Table 4: 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 Brampton	2	3,701	1,851	-16	3,680	1,840	-20
2 Buckden	1	2,025	2,025	-8	2,110	2,110	-9
3 Bury	1	1,612	1,612	-26	1,960	1,960	-15
4 Earith	2	3,313	1,657	-24	3,320	1,660	-28
5 Eaton Ford	2	4,091	2,046	-7	4,090	2,045	-12
6 Eaton Socon	2	5,503	2,752	26	5,470	2,735	18
7 Ellington	1	1,860	1,860	-15	1,880	1,880	-19
8 Elton	1	1,415	1,415	-35	1,420	1,420	-39
9 Eynesbury	3	6,098	2,033	-7	6,160	2,053	-11
10 Farcet	1	1,340	1,340	-39	1,320	1,320	-43
11 Fenstanton	1	2,246	2,246	2	2,450	2,450	6
12 Godmanchester	2	4,522	2,261	3	4,790	2,395	4
13 Gransden	1	2,121	2,121	-3	4,030	4,030	74
14 Hemingford Abbots & Hilton	1	1,289	1,289	-41	1,300	1,300	-44
15 Hemingford Grey	1	2,075	2,075	-5	2,040	2,040	-12
16 Houghton & Wyton	1	1,674	1,674	-24	2,120	2,120	-8
17 Huntingdon North	3	7,110	2,370	8	7,460	2,487	8
18 Huntingdon West	3	7,058	2,353	7	7,260	2,420	5
19 Kimbolton	1	1,706	1,706	-22	1,700	1,700	-26
20 Needingworth	1	1,957	1,957	-11	1,960	1,960	-15
21 Paxton	1	2,850	2,850	30	2,810	2,810	22
22 Priory Park	2	4,177	2,089	-5	4,140	2,070	-10
23 Ramsey	3	5,933	1,978	-10	6,920	2,307	0
24 St Ives North	2	6,867	3,434	57	6,780	3,390	47
25 St Ives South	2	5,329	2,665	22	5,520	2,760	19
26 Sawtry	2	4,610	2,305	5	4,600	2,300	0
27 Somersham	1	2,830	2,830	29	2,810	2,810	22
28 Staughton	1	2,134	2,134	-3	2,150	2,150	-7
29 Stilton	1	3,296	3,296	50	3,290	3,290	42

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 %
30 The Offords	1	2,115	2,115	-4	2,090	2,090	-10
31 The Stukeleys	1	2,918	2,918	33	3,410	3,410	48
32 Upwood & The Raveleys	1	1,462	1,462	-33	1,520	1,520	-34
33 Warboys	2	3,703	1,852	-16	3,830	1,915	-17
34 Yaxley	2	5,237	2,619	19	6,100	3,050	32
Totals	53	116,177	–	–	122,490	–	–
Averages	–	–	2,192	–	–	2,311	–

Source: Electorate figures are based on information provided by Huntingdonshire 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 Warboys ward were relatively over-represented by 16 per cent, while electors in Yaxley ward were relatively under-represented by 19 per cent. Figures have been rounded to the nearest whole number.

3 SUBMISSIONS RECEIVED

21 At the start of this review we invited members of the public and other interested parties to write to us giving their views on the future electoral arrangements for Huntingdonshire District Council and its constituent parish and town councils.

22 During this initial stage of the review, officers from the Commission visited the area and met officers and members from the District Council. We are grateful to all concerned for their co-operation and assistance. We received 46 submissions during Stage One, including district-wide schemes from Huntingdonshire District Council, the North West Cambridgeshire Liberal Democrats and the Huntingdon Liberal Democrats, all of which may be inspected at our offices and those of the District Council.

Huntingdonshire District Council

23 The Council proposed a reduction in council size from 53 to 49, arguing that this would appropriately reflect the council's organisation and political structure, and would facilitate a good electoral scheme reflecting the statutory criteria.

24 It proposed a reduction in the number of district wards from 34 to 28 but proposed retaining a pattern of single- and multi-member wards across the district. Under the District Council's proposals there would be improved electoral equality, with the number of electors per councillor varying by no more than 10 per cent from the district average in 22 wards and by no more than 20 per cent in 27 of the 28 wards. This level of electoral equality is projected to improve by 2006, with the number of electors per councillor varying by no more than 10 per cent in all wards. It proposed the retention of the existing electoral cycle. The District Council carried out local consultation on its proposals.

Political Groups

25 We received two district-wide schemes from different branches of the Liberal Democrats, who both proposed an increase in council size. North West Cambridgeshire Liberal Democrats proposed that the size of the Council should be increased to 54 members serving 30 wards. Its proposals would also result in good levels of electoral equality, with the number of electors per councillor varying by no more than 10 per cent in all wards by 2006. The North West Cambridgeshire Liberal Democrats largely proposed a combination of one and two-member wards although this would be achieved by dividing a number of parishes between different district wards.

26 Huntingdon Liberal Democrats proposed that the council size should be increased to 55, representing 36 wards. Its scheme would result in good levels of electoral equality, with no ward varying by more than 10 per cent from the district average by 2006. Huntingdon Liberal Democrats did not supply a detailed scheme for Huntingdon, St Ives and St Neots, stating that they would attempt to do this if the Commission adopted a council of 55.

27 We received a submission from Huntingdonshire District Labour Party who "in broad terms" supported the District Council's submission. The Labour Party opposed three of the rural wards proposed by the Council and the two wards in Huntingdon. It supported

“wherever practicable” single-member rural wards and argued that multi-member wards are more appropriate in urban areas. The Labour Party put forward alternative warding proposals where it opposed the Council’s proposals. Huntingdon Constituency Labour Party contended that Huntingdon parish should comprise three wards and supported including part of The Stukeleys parish in Huntingdon West ward. Huntingdon Constituency Conservative Association supported the District Council’s submission stating, “we understand that the Council has consulted widely and, bearing in mind that not everyone is going to reach the same conclusion, we believe the final report is as fair as can be possibly achieved”. However, it argued that wards within towns should have more specific names, arguing that they “should be readily identifiable within their communities”.

Parish and Town Councils

28 We received responses from 21 parish councils and three town councils during Stage One. Huntingdon Town Council submitted alternative warding arrangements for the town of Huntingdon. Ramsey Town Council stated that it had no wish to see the parish of Bury form a ward with Ramsey. St Neots Town Council submitted proposals that were broadly in accordance with the proposals submitted by the District Council for its area.

29 Alwalton Parish Council contended that a reduction in the number of councillors would “not improve the representation of the electorate” and opposed the merger of Elton and Stilton wards. It also stated that the Commission should not combine rural and urban wards. Brampton Parish Council stated that it would prefer to retain the existing ward boundaries and representation by two councillors. Buckden Parish Council stated it wished to retain the status quo, however, it acknowledged its community link with the parishes of Diddington, Grafham and Southoe & Midloe. Catworth Parish Council stated that it preferred to remain in the existing Kimbolton ward. Earith Parish Council stated that it “fully supports” the District Council’s proposals for the proposed Earith ward. Ellington Parish Council opposed any link with Brampton parish, and opposed a reduction in council size. Farcet Parish Council did not support the Council’s proposal to combine the current Farcet and Yaxley wards to form a new three-member ward. Great Staughton Parish Council opposed the District Council’s proposed Staughton & the Offords ward. Hemingford Grey Parish Council opposed any proposal whereby it would be included in a three-member ward. Leighton Bromswold Parish Council opposed the Council’s revised proposals for its parish and supported the retention of the existing Ellington ward.

30 Offord Cluny and Offord Darcy Parish Councils opposed the Council’s proposals, arguing that they had used the Offords “merely to make up the numbers”. They specifically opposed being linked with the parishes to the west of the A1, River Great Ouse and railway line. Perry Parish Council strongly objected to any proposal which would split the parish of Perry from the parish of Great Staughton, arguing that there is a “very clear relationship” between the two. Sawtry Parish Council opposed an increase in the number of district councillors, arguing that the average councillor:elector ratio should be approximately 2,300 per councillor. Southoe & Midloe Parish Council argued that it should not be linked with the parishes to the west of the A1, the River Ouse and railway line. Warboys Parish Council objected to the Council’s proposals for a revised three-member Warboys & Somersham ward, arguing that this would be too large “numerically and geographically”. Wistow Parish Council argued that transferring its parish to the proposed Warboys & Somersham ward was “purely to make up the numbers rather than taking the community’s needs into account”. Woodhurst Parish

Council expressed concern that Council's proposals for a new Warboys & Somersham ward would involve enlarging the ward to accommodate an extra councillor. Yelling Parish Council opposed the District Council's proposals to place them in a ward with the parishes of Abbotsley, Eynesbury Hardwicke, Great Gransden, St Neots Rural, Tetworth and Waresley. The council stated it was "strongly in favour of the status quo".

31 Abbotsley Parish Council contended that it would prefer to see proportional representation used in local elections and Colne Parish Council referred to a possible anomaly in its parish boundary. The Commission cannot have regard to these issues as part of a PER.

Other Submissions

32 We received a further 14 submissions from councillors and local residents. Councillor Duberly opposed the District Council's submission. The Councillor particularly objected to the proposals made for the Staughton ward. Councillor Mugglestone also opposed the Council's scheme, particularly in its proposed Brampton & Ellington, Houghton & Hemingford Abbots, Kimbolton and Staughton & The Offords wards and put forward alternative proposals in these areas. Councillor Garner did not support the Council's proposal to reduce the number of district councillors to 49. He expressed concern that councillors could become overstretched if this occurred. Councillor Lomax put forward comments on the proposed electoral arrangements of Huntingdon town. Councillor Downes made comments regarding the electoral cycle for the district.

33 A resident from Molesworth objected to the proposal to split the current Ellington ward, arguing that the revised ward would combine parishes with dissimilar identities and interests. A resident of Huntingdon contended that the Council's proposals for Huntingdon are "unacceptable" and that Huntingdon should be represented by three wards to enable more involvement by local residents. Five other residents of Huntingdon, including one who submitted a petition, objected to the Council's proposals for a revised Huntingdon West ward. A resident of Old Weston and another from Brington argued that Old Weston parish does not share any common identity or interest with Sawtry parish and that the two areas were poorly linked.

4 ANALYSIS AND DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS

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

35 As described earlier, our primary aim in considering the most appropriate electoral arrangements for Huntingdonshire is 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 of 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”.

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

37 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.

38 Our *Guidance* states that we accept that the achievement of absolute electoral equality for an 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

39 Since 1975 there has been a 64 per cent increase in the electorate of Huntingdonshire district. The District Council submitted electorate forecasts for the year 2006, projecting an increase in the electorate of approximately 5.4 per cent, from 116,177 to 122,490, over the five-year period from 2001 to 2006. It expects most of the growth to be in Gransden ward, in particular in St Neots Rural parish, in which there is an area earmarked for significant development. 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. Advice from the District Council on the likely effect on electorates of changes to ward boundaries has been obtained.

40 We know that forecasting electorates is difficult and, having looked at the District Council’s figures, accept that they are the best estimates that can reasonably be made at this time. We would welcome further evidence on electorate forecasts during Stage Three.

Council Size

41 As explained earlier, we start by assuming 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 Huntingdonshire District Council presently has 53 members. The District Council proposed a council of 49 members, after considering 48/49, 51/52 and 53/54. The council concluded that 49 councillors would “suit the requirements of the new models of political management, reflect changes to streamline the Council’s organisation and accountability in the delivery of services, particularly through new forms of partnership” and would “provide the best opportunity to formulate a submission which meets the requirements of the statutory criteria and guidance”.

43 The Huntingdon Liberal Democrats proposed a council size of 55 members, arguing that the addition of two councillors would “stabilise the current level of electors per councillor”. They also suggested that “consideration” should be given to increasing the council size further, to accommodate 58 councillors. The group opposed any reduction in council size, concluding that “there is no case on the grounds of workload to reduce the number of councillors”.

44 North West Cambridgeshire Liberal Democrats proposed a council size of 54. The group argued that the number of councillors should not be reduced, because of the increasing workload assumed by councillors. They stated “it could be argued that a considerable increase would be justified, although our proposals only add a single councillor to the existing situation”.

45 We carefully considered the arguments put forward to us at Stage One concerning council size. We concluded that none of the three submissions regarding council size received at Stage One were sufficiently well argued to justify their adoption. We therefore wrote to the three parties who submitted the original representations regarding council size, inviting further argumentation in respect of their proposals. We also wrote to the Huntingdonshire District Labour Party, as it generally supported a council size of 49, inviting it to provide further evidence. We received responses from Huntingdonshire District Council, the Huntingdon Liberal Democrats and the North West Cambridgeshire Liberal Democrats.

46 Huntingdonshire District Council reasserted its proposal for a reduction of four members in the council. It put forward arguments based on a number of factors, including the fact that a significant amount of work in the housing sector had been contracted out to the Registered Social Landlord in March 2000, and that the new management structure adopted by the council releases time “which otherwise would not have been available to them under the former ‘Committee System’ to fulfil their representational and other roles”. The District Council’s submission concluded that “the potential benefits of a leaner, more dynamic organisation should be recognised from the perspective of delivering effective and convenient local government to the District’s electors”.

47 The second submission regarding council size received from the Huntingdon Liberal Democrats argued that the “Agenda for Modernising Local Government stresses the need for

increasing democratic accountability, openness and transparency and an ever-increasing quality of service delivery. In other words what is being provided now is not sufficient". The group's submission concluded that "there is a strong case for recognising that the number of councillors chosen in 1974 is no longer adequate. An increase is needed. Our original submission suggested 55 councillors. Higher numbers could be considered".

48 The North West Cambridgeshire Liberal Democrats argued that there should be an increase of one councillor on the basis of the changing role of councillors. The group argued that members of the council had three significant duties to carry out; namely, "to represent the interests of residents on the Council, to formulate and monitor the local authority's policies and priorities, and to represent the interests of both residents and the authority on and to a wide range of external bodies". They argued that the perceived increase in councillors' workloads justified the proposed increase in council size to 54 members.

49 After assessing the further evidence received from the three groups, we concluded that, although improved, the argumentation provided was still insufficient. We were not convinced by any group that the existing council size of 53 did not facilitate convenient and effective local government nor, furthermore, that their respective proposals would provide more convenient and effective local government than the existing council size. In particular, none of the submissions provided objective evidence of the reasons why a particular council size would match the model of political management adopted by the council.

50 Having decided that there was insufficient evidence to support a council size of 49, 54 or 55, we attempted to prepare our draft recommendations for Huntingdonshire based on a council size of 53. However, we noted that under the existing council size it was not possible to provide a good allocation of councillors between the three towns and the rural area by 2006. Consequently we considered a council size of 52 members and a councillor:elector ratio of 1:2,356. A council size of 52 results in a better allocation in two out of the three towns and the rural areas, while also securing a better level of electoral equality throughout the district, than a 53-member council. Therefore we propose basing our draft recommendations on a council size of 52, which we believe provides the best balance between achieving good electoral equality and meeting our statutory criteria.

Electoral Arrangements

51 We have carefully considered all the submissions received for Huntingdonshire and have decided to recommend a council of 52 members, as stated above. Consequently, we have been unable to make consistent district-wide comparisons with the submission received from Huntingdonshire District Council, as it proposed a council size of 49, which results in a significantly different councillor:elector ratio. As a result, we have been unable to accept the majority of the ward pattern proposed by the District Council. However, in certain areas the District Council's proposals were compatible with our scheme and met no significant opposition during their consultation. In such areas we have adopted the District Council's proposals. Similarly, the two alternative district-wide schemes also had different councillor:elector ratios to that which we are proposing. In the majority of the north, east and west of the district we found that the scheme proposed by the Huntingdon Liberal Democrats was compatible with our councillor:elector ratio and, as a result, we have been able to use their scheme as the basis for our draft recommendations in these areas. For the urban areas of the district, we found that we could base our draft recommendations on the proposals of the

District Council (for St Ives and St Neots) and on those of the North West Cambridgeshire Liberal Democrats and the Labour groups (for Huntingdon).

52 As explained earlier, differing councillor:elector ratios between the three district-wide schemes and that recommended by ourselves mean we are unable to base our recommendations for future warding patterns on any one scheme. Our draft recommendations are therefore based around a combination of the schemes, thereby ensuring that the majority of our recommendations are built on locally generated proposals, whilst having regard to local, parish and community issues. For district warding purposes, the following areas, based on existing wards, are considered in turn:

- (a) Elton, Farcet, Stilton and Yaxley wards
- (b) Bury, Ramsey, Upwood & The Raveleys and Warboys wards
- (c) Ellington, Sawtry and The Stukeleys wards
- (d) Brampton, Buckden, Kimbolton, Paxton and Staughton wards
- (e) Earith, Houghton & Wyton, Needingworth and Somersham wards
- (f) Eaton Ford, Eaton Socon, Eynesbury, Priory Park wards (St Neots), Gransden and The Offords wards
- (g) Fenstanton, Godmanchester, Hemingford Abbots, Hemingford Grey & Hilton, St Ives South and St Ives North wards
- (h) Huntingdon North and Huntingdon West wards

Details of our draft recommendations are set out in Tables 1 and 2, and illustrated on Maps 2, A2, A3 and A4 and the large map in Appendix A.

Elton, Farcet, Stilton and Yaxley wards

53 These four wards are situated in the north of the district. Elton ward is currently represented by one councillor and comprises the parishes of Alwalton, Chesterton, Elton, Haddon, Morborne, Sibson cum Stibbington and Water Newton. Farcet ward is coterminous with the parish of Farcet and returns three members. Stilton ward comprises the parishes of Denton & Caldecote, Folksworth & Washingley, Glatton, Holme and Stilton and is represented by one councillor, whilst Yaxley ward is coterminous with the parish of Yaxley and returns two councillors. The number of electors per councillor is 35 per cent below the district average (39 per cent below in 2006) in Elton ward; 39 per cent below (43 per cent below in 2006) in Farcet ward; 50 per cent above (42 per cent above in 2006) in Stilton ward and 19 per cent above (32 per cent above in 2006) in Yaxley ward.

54 During Stage One, Huntingdonshire District Council recommended combining the existing wards of Elton and Stilton in a new two-member ward, on the basis that “there are a variety of shared interests relating to the A1/M1 trunk road and the orientation of provision”. The council proposed combining the existing wards of Farcet and Yaxley to create a new three-member ward.

55 The Huntingdon Liberal Democrats proposed an alternative warding scheme, in which the parish of Folksworth & Washingley, currently in Stilton ward, would be added to the existing Elton ward to create a larger Elton ward. In addition, they proposed retaining the existing Yaxley ward and combining the parish of Farcet with a new parish ward from the parish of Ramsey in a new Farcet ward. Finally, they proposed transferring the parish of

Glatton from the existing Stilton ward into a revised Sawtry ward, to create a revised Stilton ward. The North West Cambridgeshire Liberal Democrats proposed combining the existing wards of Elton and Stilton, adding Conington parish and removing Holme parish to create a new two-member Stilton ward. The parishes of Yaxley and Farcet would then be combined to create a revised three-member Yaxley ward. Farcet parish would be placed with a new parish ward of Ramsey parish in a revised single-member Farcet ward.

56 In addition to the district-wide schemes received at Stage One, we received three representations relevant to these wards. Alwalton Parish Council stated that reducing the number of councillors in the district does not improve representation. It felt that the District Council's proposals for the wards of Elton and Stilton were "yet another failure to address the requirement by imaginative thinking". The parish council recommended that in the interests of electoral equality, the parish of Folkesworth & Ashingley should be transferred from Stilton ward into Elton ward. Farcet Parish Council and the Huntingdonshire District Labour Party both made representations to the effect that Yaxley and Farcet parishes should not be combined in a three-member ward and suggested creating new parish wards to allow the parishes to be represented by three single-member wards.

57 We have carefully considered all the representations received for this area during Stage One. We accept the Huntingdon Liberal Democrats' proposals for the Elton and Stilton wards, as we believe they provide good levels of electoral equality and a better reflection of community identity, while retaining single-member wards in the rural areas. We agree that the District Council's proposal for these wards would lead to an excessively and unnecessarily large multi-member rural ward. We note the representations from both Yaxley Parish Council and the Huntingdonshire District Labour Party regarding the District Council's proposals to combine the parishes of Yaxley and Farcet. However, in this instance we concur with the District Council's proposals for these parishes. We are reluctant to divide parishes between different district wards unless completely necessary, and in this instance we believe that combining the parishes of Farcet and Yaxley in a three-member ward is preferable to warding areas of Ramsey parish. Our draft recommendations for the area are therefore to adopt the proposals from the Huntingdon Liberal Democrats for the single-member wards of Elton and Stilton, and to adopt those of Huntingdonshire District Council for the three-member Yaxley & Farcet ward. We consider that our draft recommendations for this area would provide the best balance between achieving good electoral equality and recognising community interests and identities.

58 Under our draft recommendations, Elton ward would have a councillor:elector ratio 4 per cent below the district average (9 per cent below by 2006), Stilton ward would have a councillor:elector ratio of 3 per cent above (2 per cent below by 2006) and Yaxley & Farcet would have a ratio of 2 per cent below (5 per cent above by 2006) the district average. Our draft recommendations for these wards are illustrated on Map 2. We would welcome comments from parish councils and local residents on these proposals at Stage Three.

Bury, Ramsey, Upwood & The Raveleys and Warboys wards

59 These wards are situated in the north and north-east of the district. Bury ward (comprising the parishes of Bury and Wistow) and Upwood & The Raveleys ward (comprising the parishes of Wood Walton and Upwood & The Raveleys) are both represented by a single councillor. Under the existing arrangements, the number of electors per councillor is 26 per

cent below and 33 per cent below the district average respectively (15 per cent below and 34 per cent below by 2006). Warboys ward (comprising the parishes of Broughton, Old Hurst, Pidley cum Fenton, Warboys and Woodhurst) is currently represented by two councillors and Ramsey ward (comprising the parish of Ramsey) is currently represented by three councillors. The number of electors per councillor in these wards is 16 per cent below and 10 per cent below the district average respectively (17 per cent below and equal to the average by 2006).

60 Huntingdonshire District Council proposed retaining Ramsey district ward in its current form as a three-member ward coterminous with Ramsey parish. The council modified its original plan to combine the parishes of Bury and Ramsey because of the considerable opposition faced during its consultative period. Instead, the council proposed a single-member Bury & Upwood ward, comprising the parishes of Bury, Upwood & The Raveleys and Wood Walton. Under the District Council's scheme, Abbots Ripton parish would be transferred from the existing Upwood & The Raveleys ward into a proposed three-member Warboys & Somersham ward, comprising the parishes of Abbots Ripton, Broughton, Kings Ripton, Old Hurst, Pidley-cum-Fenton, Somersham, Warboys, Wistow and Woodhurst. The council considered the possibility of smaller district wards in this area, but concluded that "the only way in which this could be achieved would be by the warding of either or both of the parishes of Warboys and Somersham – an arrangement which it is believed would be less acceptable to local people – or by a significant variation from the average which would not represent electoral equality". The council therefore concluded that the larger three-member ward was preferable.

61 The Huntingdon Liberal Democrats proposed significant change in this area. Their proposals allowed for the parishes of Ramsey and Bury to be warded to create two new district wards, those of Ramsey & Bury and Warboys. The single-member Ramsey & Bury district ward would comprise the towns of Ramsey and Bury, whilst the more rural areas of the parishes would be transferred to the surrounding proposed wards of Farcet and Warboys. The Liberal Democrats argued that this parish warding was necessary because the towns in question do not share the same problems as the smaller rural settlements. The revised two-member Warboys ward would comprise the parishes of Warboys, Wistow and parts of Ramsey parish. The parish of Broughton would be transferred to a revised The Stukeleys ward, and the parishes of Old Hurst, Pidley and Woodhurst would be transferred to a revised Somersham ward. The group proposed adding the rural parish ward of The Stukeleys parish to the existing ward of Upwood & The Raveleys and transferring the parish of Wood Walton from this ward to a revised Sawtry ward, to create a new one-member The Stukeleys district ward.

62 The North West Cambridgeshire Liberal Democrats proposed warding the parish of Ramsey to incorporate the relatively urban areas of Ramsey and Bury in a single ward. The northern, more rural parts of the parish of Ramsey would be transferred to a revised Farcet ward, similar to the proposals of the Huntingdon Liberal Democrats. The remaining parish ward of Ramsey parish would be transferred to a revised Warboys ward, which would comprise this area and the parishes of Upwood & The Raveleys, Warboys and Wistow, as these communities are "closely related both geographically and historically" and have "similar ties".

63 As well as the district-wide proposals, we received three other representations regarding this area during Stage One. Warboys Parish Council objected to the District Council's

proposals for the ward as they felt that the “proposed ward would be too large both numerically and geographically for constituents to be represented by their elected councillors”. Ramsey Town Council affirmed its belief that the parishes of Ramsey and Bury should not be in a district ward together. Wistow Parish Council stated that it did not wish its parish to be “swallowed up and lost in a large ward” as a result of the District Council’s proposals. Furthermore, it stated that the parish of Wistow is geographically more closely aligned with the parishes of Bury and Upwood & The Raveleys.

64 We have carefully considered the proposals received during Stage One for this area. We acknowledge the opposition from Ramsey Town Council, Bury Parish Council and residents of the two parishes to the District Council’s original proposal to link Ramsey parish and Bury parish in a district ward. We agree with the District Council’s subsequent proposal to retain the existing three-member Ramsey ward and are therefore adopting this proposal. We also note the opposition from Warboys Parish Council to an excessively large ward encompassing Somersham and several other neighbouring villages, and we also note the representation from Wistow Parish Council opposing such a large ward. We acknowledge the support from Woodhurst Parish Council for remaining in the same ward as Warboys parish, however, this would entail retaining Old Hurst parish (which separates Woodhurst and Warboys parishes) in the same ward. In our opinion this would create a rural ward too large to facilitate effective and convenient local government. This option would also lead to problems of electoral equality in the remainder of the eastern area of the district. We recognise the concerns of Wistow Parish Council and its wish to be in a ward with Upwood and The Raveleys, but we are unable to achieve this because of the high levels of electoral inequality this would create. However, we note that Wistow Parish Council was concerned about being included in a large ward with Somersham parish, and we agree that a smaller rural ward would better facilitate convenient and effective local government in this area.

65 Therefore we propose a two-member Bury & Warboys ward, comprising the parishes of Bury, Warboys and Wistow, as proposed by the Huntingdon Liberal Democrats. We also accept the Huntingdon Liberal Democrats’ proposals for the Upwood & The Raveleys ward. This would comprise the parishes of Abbots Ripton, Broughton, Kings Ripton, Upwood & The Raveleys and a parish ward of The Stukeleys. We propose creating two new parish wards within The Stukeleys parish as a result of our proposals at district ward level; these parish electoral arrangements are discussed later in the chapter. This would leave the rural parish ward of The Stukeleys in the proposed Upwood & The Raveleys ward. We consider that our draft recommendations for this area would provide the best balance between achieving good electoral equality and recognising community interests and identities.

66 Under our draft recommendations, Bury & Warboys, Ramsey and Upwood & The Raveleys wards would have councillor:elector ratios of 2 per cent below, 11 per cent below and 19 per cent below the district average respectively (three per cent above, two per cent below and one per cent below respectively by 2006). Our draft proposals for these wards are illustrated on Map 2. We would welcome comments from parish councils and local residents on these proposals at Stage Three.

Ellington, Sawtry and The Stukeleys wards

67 The wards of Ellington, Sawtry and The Stukeleys are in the centre and west of the district. Ellington ward comprises the parishes of Barham & Woolley, Brington &

Molesworth, Buckworth, Easton, Ellington, Leighton, Old Weston and Spaldwick, and returns one councillor. Sawtry ward is represented by two councillors and comprises the parishes of Conington, Great Gidding, Hamerton, Little Gidding, Sawtry, Steeple Gidding and Winwick. The Stukeleys ward consists of the parishes of Alconbury, Alconbury Weston, The Stukeleys and Upton & Coppingford and is represented by one councillor. The number of electors per councillor is 15 per cent below the district average (19 per cent below in 2006) in Ellington ward; 5 per cent above (equal to the district average in 2006) in Sawtry and 33 per cent above (48 per cent above by 2006) in The Stukeleys ward.

68 At Stage One, Huntingdonshire District Council proposed significant change to the warding arrangements in the west of the district. It proposed a revised Brampton & Ellington ward, which would comprise the parishes of Barham & Woolley, Brampton, Brington & Molesworth, Easton, Ellington, Leighton and Spaldwick. It proposed enlarging Sawtry ward by transferring the parishes of Old Weston and Upton & Coppingford from Ellington ward and The Stukeleys ward respectively. Finally, the District Council proposed transferring Buckworth parish from Ellington ward to The Stukeleys ward to create a new Alconbury & The Stukeleys ward.

69 The Huntingdon Liberal Democrats proposed combining the parishes of Stow Longa and Catworth in a new ward with the parishes of the existing Ellington ward, thereby uniting all the villages along the A14 corridor. They accordingly proposed that the smaller villages to the north of this ward and to the west and south of Sawtry be united in a new Alconbury ward.

70 The North West Cambridgeshire Liberal Democrats proposed transferring the parish of Conington from the existing Sawtry ward into a revised Stilton ward, whilst transferring the parishes of Buckworth and Upton & Coppingford from the existing The Stukeleys ward into the new Sawtry ward. The group proposed that the Hinchingsbrooke area of The Stukeleys parish be warded to enable those electors to the east of the A14 to be placed in a district ward in Huntingdon. They suggested that the remainder of the parish be combined with the parish of Brampton to create a revised Brampton district ward. The group proposed that the existing Ellington ward should be combined with Catworth, Covington and Tilbrook from the existing Kimbolton ward, as well as transferring Buckworth parish into the revised Sawtry ward. This would unite the small villages in the area having “an association from their proximity to the A14”.

71 All three district-wide submissions proposed the creation of a new parish ward of the Hinchingsbrooke area of The Stukeleys parish, inside the boundary of the A14 and earmarked for significant development, which would be added to a district ward with electors of Huntingdon town.

72 We received six representations from parish councils and residents in the area. Councillor Mugglestone opposed the District Council’s proposals to create a ward incorporating the large village of Brampton and the smaller villages along the A14 trunk road, stating that “there will be a concentration of population in Brampton parish, with 72 per cent of the electors living there.... political parties will presumably choose candidates from Brampton, not from the other six smaller villages along the A14 trunk road, at the expense of those living in the other villages”. Councillor Mugglestone proposed a new Ellington & Spaldwick district ward, comprising the parishes of Barham & Woolley, Brington & Molesworth, Bythorn & Keystone, Catworth, Easton, Ellington, Grafham, Leighton Bromswold, Spaldwick and Stow

Longa, as these villages along the A14 had “common interests”. The councillor proposed the retention of the existing Alconbury & The Stukeleys and Sawtry wards.

73 Ellington Parish Council opposed the District Council’s proposals and stated that the proposals would “split this ward and on a fairly arbitrary basis linking individual villages to larger villages ... as far as Ellington is concerned our interests with 480 electors will be lost with those of Brampton with 3680 electors”. A resident of Molesworth echoed these sentiments, fearing that “if the proposal goes through these rural villages will have less access to their district councillor(s)”. Two residents of Brington argued that “to link Sawtry with Old Weston, ten miles away and with winding country lanes between them is to misunderstand the relationship between the communities” and that the small villages along the A14 should not be linked with any of the three larger villages in the area, of Alconbury, Brampton and Sawtry. We received opposition to the District Council’s proposals to include Old Weston parish in the same district ward as Sawtry parish from a resident in Old Weston, who stated that the village of Old Weston “had little or nothing in common with the population of Sawtry”. Sawtry Parish Council objected to the District Council’s proposals for two extra parishes to be incorporated in the ward. Leighton Bromswold Parish Council objected to being incorporated in a ward with either Sawtry parish or Brampton parish. The parish council’s proposal was to remain in the Ellington ward, as the group of villages along the A14 are “essentially one community working and interacting together”.

74 We have carefully considered the representations received regarding these wards at Stage One. We cannot adopt the District Council’s proposals for these areas in their entirety as our different councillor:elector ratio would lead to an unacceptable level of electoral inequality. We also note the opposition to the extension of Sawtry ward to include Old Weston parish, and agree that this would create too large a rural ward. We are therefore adopting the ward patterns proposed by the Huntingdon Liberal Democrats for this area, as we consider that they provide the best balance between electoral equality and our statutory criteria. We agree with Councillor Mugglestone that the smaller villages along the A14 should not be in a district ward with larger villages such as Brampton, Buckden or Sawtry. We are therefore recommending a single-member Ellington ward comprising the parishes of Barham & Woolley, Brington & Molesworth, Buckworth, Bythorn & Keystone, Catworth, Covington, Easton, Ellington, Hamerton, Leighton, Old Weston, Spaldwick and Stow Longa. For reasons of electoral equality we cannot retain Covington in the new Ellington ward and as a result recommend transferring this parish into the new Kimbolton & Staughton district ward. We propose adopting the Huntingdon Liberal Democrats’ proposals for a new Alconbury & The Giddings ward, namely a single-member ward containing the parishes of Alconbury, Alconbury Weston, Great Gidding, Little Gidding, Steeple Gidding, Upton & Coppingford and Winwick. Finally, we recommend a new two-member ward comprising the larger parishes of Conington, Glatton, Sawtry and Wood Walton, as proposed by the Huntingdon Liberal Democrats. We consider that our draft recommendations for this area would provide the best balance between achieving good electoral equality and recognising community interests and identities.

75 Under our draft recommendations, the wards of Alconbury & The Giddings, Ellington and Sawtry would have councillor:elector ratios of 2 per cent below, 6 per cent above and 3 per cent above the district average respectively (5 per cent below, 2 per cent above and 3 per cent below respectively by 2006). Our draft proposals for these wards are illustrated on Map 2. We would welcome comments from parish councils and local residents on these proposals at Stage Three.

Brampton, Buckden, Kimbolton, Paxton and Staughton wards

76 These wards are situated in the east and south east of the district. Brampton ward (comprising the parish of Brampton) is represented by two councillors. Under the existing arrangements, the number of electors per councillor in this ward is 16 per cent below the district average (20 per cent below by 2006). Buckden ward (comprising the parish of Buckden), Kimbolton ward (comprising the parishes of Catworth, Covington, Kimbolton, Stow Longa and Tilbrook) and Paxton ward (comprising the parishes of Diddington, Little Paxton and Southoe & Midloe) are each represented by a single councillor and have councillor:elector ratios of 8 per cent below, 22 per cent below and 30 per cent above the district average respectively (9 per cent below, 26 per cent below and 22 per cent above by 2006).

77 At Stage One the District Council proposed creating a new Brampton & Ellington ward, as described previously, comprising the parishes of Barham & Woolley, Brampton, Brington & Molesworth, Easton, Ellington, Leighton and Spaldwick. This was proposed “following representations from parish councils and local political parties”. The parishes of Buckden and Grafham would be combined to create a new single-member Buckden & Grafham ward. The council first considered a three-member Buckden, Brampton & The Offords ward, however this was rejected because of “the desire to maintain single councillor representation” and to “recognise the distinctive communities of interest in this rural area”. In the remainder of the area, the District Council proposed a new Staughton & The Offords ward, which would “combine a number of communities which have a focus towards St Neots”. The ward would comprise the parishes of Diddington, Hail Weston, Great Staughton, Offord Cluny, Offord Darcy and Southoe & Midloe. The council proposed adding the parishes of Bythorn & Keystone and Perry to the existing Kimbolton ward to create a revised single-member Kimbolton district ward. Finally, the council proposed a single-member Little Paxton ward, coterminous with the parish of Little Paxton.

78 The Huntingdon Liberal Democrats considered that the position of Brampton parish is “anomalous”. They proposed a revised two-member Brampton ward comprising the parishes of Brampton and Grafham. However, the group acknowledged that Grafham “looks, more naturally, to Perry” and “were Grafham not required to augment Brampton this would enable it to be associated more properly with Perry and Southoe & Midloe” parishes. They proposed a revised single-member Kimbolton ward, comprising the parishes of Covington, Great Staughton, Hail Weston, Kimbolton and Tilbrook. The parishes of Catworth and Stow Longa would be transferred from the existing Kimbolton district ward into a revised Ellington ward. The Kimbolton ward would have the highest level of electoral inequality in the Huntingdon Liberal Democrats’ proposals, however the group believed that to avoid this by transferring Covington parish into Ellington would “dilute the concept of linking the parishes along major roads”. The group opposed the District Council’s proposals for Paxton ward. The Huntingdon Liberal Democrats proposed that the parish of Perry should be removed from the existing Staughton ward and Southoe & Midloe parish be removed from the existing Paxton ward to create a new Gransden ward, as discussed later. Little Paxton parish would become a single-member district ward, as detailed previously.

79 The North West Cambridgeshire Liberal Democrats proposed placing the rural parish ward of The Stukeleys parish with the parish of Brampton in a revised Brampton district

ward. The group proposed combining the parishes of Buckden, Diddington, Grafham, Offord Cluny, Offord Darcy, Perry and South & Midloe in a revised two-member Buckden ward. They proposed a revised Kimbolton ward, comprising the parishes of Great Staughton, Hail Weston, Kimbolton and Stow Longa. The group proposed combining the parishes of Great Paxton, Little Paxton, Toseland and Yelling with the existing Gransden ward to create a new Gransden ward, as detailed later.

80 We received five other representations for this area during Stage One. Councillor Mugglestone stated that “it is nonsensical to include Perry” in a revised Kimbolton ward, and proposed “a Kimbolton and Staughton ward, including Perry (but not Catworth or Stow Longa – which would be included in the new Ellington ward)”. Brampton Parish Council wished to retain the existing ward arrangements. Buckden Parish Council stated that they would prefer to remain in the existing Buckden ward, however the council accepted that this might not be possible and acknowledged the parish has links with Brampton, Diddington and Southoe & Midloe. Catworth Parish Council wished to remain in the current Kimbolton ward. Southoe & Midloe Parish Council objected to the District Council’s proposed “annexation of Southoe & Midloe [parish] to The Offords” and suggested that “an association with Diddington would appear sensible and with Hail Weston and Great Staughton plausible”.

81 We have carefully considered all representations received for these wards. We acknowledge that the parishes of Brampton and Buckden wish to retain the status quo, however, electoral inequality in these areas is such that this is not acceptable. We believe that to link the parishes south along the A1 would give a better sense of community identity than to combine the larger villages of Brampton and Buckden with the significantly smaller ones along the A14 to the west. We accept the views of Buckden Parish Council that the village is linked with those of Grafham, Diddington and Southoe & Midloe. We acknowledge the representations objecting to the creation of a ward straddling the significant boundaries of the River Great Ouse and the railway line and concur with this line of argument. We agree that the villages on either side of these natural boundaries have little sense of community identity with each other. We therefore cannot accept the proposals of any of the three groups who submitted district-wide schemes, all of whom suggested breaching these natural boundaries in some form.

82 As we are recommending that Little Paxton parish should form a single-member district ward, we must encompass Hail Weston in a ward with the villages along the A1. This is in the interests of electoral equality, and we acknowledge that the situation is not ideal as Hail Weston has a more direct communication link with the proposed ward of Kimbolton & Staughton. However, to place Hail Weston in this ward could only be achieved by removing the parish of Perry, something we are reluctant to do, as we believe the parishes of Perry and Great Staughton have strong community links. We are of the opinion that the village of Hail Weston looks more to St Neots for its services than to Great Staughton, and we note the opinion of Southoe & Midloe Parish Council that an association with the village of Hail Weston is “plausible”. We would particularly welcome views on this issue at Stage Three. We therefore propose a three-member Brampton & Buckden ward, comprising the parishes of Brampton, Buckden, Diddington, Grafham, Hail Weston and Southoe & Midloe. We consider that our draft recommendations for this area would provide the best balance between achieving good electoral equality and recognising community interests and identities.

83 Under our draft recommendations, Brampton & Buckden ward would have a councillor:elector ratio 4 per cent above the district average (equal to the district average by 2006) and Little Paxton ward would have a ratio of 10 per cent above the district average (2 per cent above by 2006). Our draft recommendations for these wards are illustrated on Map 2. We would welcome comments from parish councils and local residents on these proposals at Stage Three.

Earith, Houghton & Wyton, Needingworth and Somersham wards

84 These wards are situated in the east of the district and are each represented by a single councillor except for Earith ward, which is represented by two councillors. The wards of Houghton & Wyton and Somersham are coterminous with the parishes of the same names, Needingworth ward is coterminous with Holywell-cum-Needingworth parish and Earith ward comprise the parishes of Bluntisham, Colne and Earith. Under the existing arrangements, the number of electors per councillor in both Earith and Houghton & Wyton wards is 24 per cent below the district average initially (28 per cent below and 8 per cent below by 2006). Needingworth and Somersham wards have councillor:elector ratios of 11 per cent below and 29 per cent above the district average respectively (15 per cent below and 22 per cent above the district average by 2006).

85 At Stage One, the District Council proposed combining the existing wards of Earith and Needingworth to create a new two-member Needingworth & Earith ward. After having consulted on a proposal to include Woodhurst parish in this ward, it decided against this option, following opposition from Woodhurst Parish Council. The District Council proposed a new three-member Warboys & Somersham ward, comprising the parishes of Abbots Ripton, Broughton, Kings Ripton, Old Hurst, Pidley-cum-Fenton, Somersham, Warboys, Wistow and Woodhurst, as discussed previously. The Council also proposed that Houghton & Wyton parish should be placed in a single-member ward with Hemingford Abbots parish to form a Hemingford Abbots & Hilton ward.

86 The Huntingdon Liberal Democrats proposed a revised Somersham ward comprising the parishes of Colne, Old Hurst, Pidley-cum-Fenton, Somersham, Woodhurst and a parish ward of Houghton & Wyton. This parish ward would comprise the area including the former airbase at Wyton, keeping it separate from the villages of Houghton and Wyton and would be necessary for reasons of electoral equality. The group proposed a new two-member Needingworth ward, comprising the parishes of Needingworth, Earith, Colne and Bluntisham.

87 At Stage One, the North West Cambridgeshire Liberal Democrats proposed combining the existing Needingworth and Earith wards in a new two-member Needingworth ward, and suggested combining the “large village of Somersham with smaller neighbours” in a revised two-member Somersham ward, comprising the parishes of Broughton, Colne, Old Hurst, Pidley-cum-Fenton, Woodhurst and Somersham.

88 As well as the district-wide submissions, we received two other representations pertinent to this area at Stage One. Councillor Mugglestone proposed combining Houghton & Wyton parish with Abbots Ripton and Kings Ripton parishes in a single-member Houghton & Riptons district ward, acknowledging, however, that this was not “ideal”. Earith Parish Council stated its support for the District Council’s proposals.

89 We have carefully considered the representations received during Stage One for this area. We propose adopting the Huntingdon Liberal Democrats' scheme for the revised Somersham ward. We agree that the District Council's proposal for a large three-member Warboys & Somersham ward is unacceptable to local communities and will adversely affect their interests. In the parish of Houghton & Wyton it has been necessary to create two new parish wards and include the area covering Houghton & Wyton village in a new The Hemingfords ward, in order to maintain an acceptable level of electoral variance in this ward. In doing this, we have drawn upon the proposal of the Huntingdon Liberal Democrats. We agree that within the parish of Houghton & Wyton there are two distinct and different settlements, which can be placed in separate wards without adversely affecting community identity. We propose creating a parish ward boundary along the B1090 from St Ives to the junction with the A141, then south to meet the district ward boundary with Huntingdon. This clearly identifies the more established historical village of Houghton & Wyton with the similar villages of The Hemingfords, and enables the former Wyton airbase to be included in the proposed Somersham ward. We recognise that the only road link between the village of Houghton & Wyton and those of the Hemingfords is through the town of St Ives, however, this arrangement is necessary for reasons of electoral equality. We therefore recommend a new two-member Somersham ward, comprising the parishes of Old Hurst, Pidley-cum-Fenton, Somersham, Woodhurst and the new Airfield parish ward of Houghton & Wyton. We are also accepting the proposals of the Huntingdon Liberal Democrats for the ward of Earith. The west boundary of this ward is constrained by the town of St Ives, and this dictates the ward pattern in the area. We recognise that Earith Parish Council supported the District Council's proposals, however, due to the significant difference in the councillor:elector ratios on which the schemes are based, we cannot adopt such a proposal. Although we accept that the village of Colne shares a sense of community identity with Earith and Bluntisham, it is not possible to place these parishes in the same district ward, for reasons of electoral equality. We therefore recommend a two-member Earith ward, comprising the parishes of Bluntisham, Earith and Holywell-cum-Needlingworth. We consider that our draft recommendations for this area would provide the best balance between achieving good electoral equality and recognising community interests and identities.

90 Under our draft recommendations, Earith and Somersham wards will have councillor:elector ratios of 4 per cent above and three per cent above the district average respectively (one per cent below and seven per cent above respectively by 2006). Our draft recommendations for these wards are illustrated on Map 2. We would welcome comments from parish councils and local residents on these proposals at Stage Three.

Eaton Ford, Eaton Socon, Eynesbury, Priory Park wards (St Neots), Gransden and The Offords wards

91 The wards of Eaton Ford, Eaton Socon and Priory Park are each represented by two councillors and have councillor:elector ratios of 7 per cent below, 26 per cent above, and 5 per cent below the district average, respectively (12 per cent below, 18 per cent above, and 10 per cent below by 2006, respectively). Eynesbury ward is represented by three councillors and has a councillor:elector ratio of 7 per cent below the district average (11 per cent below by 2006). These four wards together cover the area of St Neots Town Council. The single-member The Offords ward (comprising the parishes of Great Paxton, Offord Darcy, Offord Cluny, Toseland and Yelling) has a councillor:elector ratio 4 per cent below the district average (10 per cent below by 2006) and Gransden ward (comprising the parishes of

Abbotsley, Eynesbury Hardwicke, Great Gransden, St Neots Rural, Tetworth and Waresley) is represented by one councillor and has a councillor:elector ratio 3 per cent below the district average (74 per cent above by 2006).

92 At Stage One, Huntingdonshire District Council proposed four two-member and one single-member ward for the town of St Neots. It proposed transferring the existing Town parish ward of Eynesbury Hardwicke parish into a revised Eynesbury district ward. The Council proposed altering the existing boundary between Eaton Ford and Eaton Socon wards to run down Duloe Brook. It proposed creating a new single-member St Neots Town ward, comprising those electors, currently in Eynesbury ward, to the north of Hen Brook and in Priory Park ward to the south of the High Street and Cambridge Street. The Council proposed warding St Neots Rural parish to include electors currently in Gransden ward in a revised Priory Park ward. It stated that the area immediately to the east of Priory Park ward, bounded by the railway line, Cambridge Road and Priory Hill, has been earmarked for significant residential development, and that the electors in this new development should be included in a district ward with electors of St Neots town, with whom they will share common interests and identities. The remainder of Gransden ward, the parishes of Abbotsley, Great Gransden, Tetworth, Waresley and the remaining parish wards of Eynesbury Hardwicke and St Neots Rural parishes, would be combined with the parishes of Great Paxton, Toseland and Yelling to create a new single-member Gransden ward. Finally, the Council proposed a new Staughton & The Offords ward for the villages which “have a focus towards St Neots”. This new two-member ward would comprise the parishes of Diddington, Great Staughton, Hail Weston, Offord Cluny, Offord Darcy and Southoe & Midloe.

93 The Huntingdon Liberal Democrats proposed that the town of St Neots be allocated 10 councillors. It supported the District Council’s proposals that the Town parish ward of Eynesbury Hardwicke parish be transferred into Eynesbury district ward, which covers part of St Neots town. It also supported the proposal to create a new parish ward in St Neots Rural parish, as outlined earlier. However, the group did not submit any further detailed warding arrangements for the town. They proposed a revised Gransden ward, comprising the existing ward (minus the parish wards detailed above) and the parishes of Great Paxton, Offord Cluny, Offord Darcy, Perry, Southoe & Midloe, Toseland and Yelling in a two-member ward.

94 The North West Cambridgeshire Liberal Democrats proposed five two-member wards in the town of St Neots. This would be achieved by “adjustments to the existing wards and the creation of a new central ward”. The group “proposed the transfer of parts of Eynesbury Hardwicke and St Neots Rural parishes”, currently in Gransden ward, into the town of St Neots for district warding purposes. The group also proposed a new Paxton ward, comprising the remainder of the existing Gransden ward and the parishes of Little Paxton, Great Paxton, Toseland and Yelling. This ward would return two councillors.

95 We received four other representations during Stage One. St Neots Town Council stated that its recommendations “are broadly in accord with the proposals formulated by the District Council”, but that it was concerned over the parish warding arrangements for the parishes of Eynesbury Hardwicke and St Neots Rural, as they would “cause further public confusion and further jeopardise the proposals to alter parish boundaries”. The Town Council also suggested that the District Council’s proposed new Central ward should be renamed “St Neots Town ward”. Yelling Parish Council objected to being placed in a ward with any parishes of the existing Gransden ward, “none of which have anything in common with Yelling Parish”.

Offord Darcy and Offord Cluny Parish Councils objected to the District Council's proposal to include their parishes in a district ward with the parishes of Brampton, Buckden, Southoe & Midloe, Diddington and Great Staughton. They stated that The Offords were separated from these parishes by the significant boundary of the River Great Ouse, A1 and the railway line. Both Offord Cluny and Offord Darcy Parish Councils proposed that the current warding arrangements be retained.

96 We have carefully considered all the representations received during Stage One concerning this area. We agree with the proposals to include the Town parish ward of Eynesbury Hardwicke parish in a district ward with electors of St Neots town, as this area is clearly identifiable with the town and not with the largely rural parish of Eynesbury Hardwicke. The parish ward boundary would run along the railway line to the east of the St Neots Eynesbury district ward. In the town of St Neots, we propose basing our recommendations on the District Council's submission for the two two-member wards to the west of the Great Ouse. We agree that Duloe Brook provides a strong boundary between Eaton Ford and Eaton Socon wards. To the east of the River Great Ouse, we have made an amendment to the existing ward boundary. The boundary would run down Hen Brook, then north around the cemetery to meet the current ward boundary. This amendment clearly separates the commercial area of the Market Square from the more residential area south of Hen Brook, and improves electoral equality. We acknowledge that there is a substantial area in St Neots Rural parish which has been earmarked for significant residential development, to the east of St Neots town. However, at this stage we cannot recommend creating a parish ward for this area to enable it to be in the same district ward as part of the urban area of St Neots, as there are currently not sufficient electors in the area to justify the creation of a parish ward. We are reluctant to move the whole of St Neots Rural parish into a district ward with part of St Neots town, as we consider such a proposal would not facilitate effective and convenient local government for those electors currently in the St Neots Rural parish. Transferring this parish into a ward with electors of St Neots town for district warding purposes would also result in unacceptably high levels of electoral inequality in the proposed Gransden & The Offords ward to the east of St Neots town, and would make travelling from Gransden to The Offords almost impossible without passing through a St Neots town district ward. In the Gransden area we accept that, for reasons of electoral equality, all parishes from Great Gransden in the south to Offord Cluny in the north must be included the same ward, as proposed by the Huntingdon Liberal Democrats. However, as outlined earlier in the chapter, we recognise the opposition to the breaching of the significant boundary that is the River Great Ouse and the railway line and, as such, are restricting this ward to the area to the east of these boundaries. We therefore recommend a new two-member Gransden & The Offords ward, comprising the parishes of Abbotsley, Great Gransden, Great Paxton, Offord Cluny, Offord Darcy, Tetworth, Toseland, Waresley, Yelling and the rural parish ward of Eynesbury Hardwicke. We consider that our draft recommendations for this area would provide the best balance between achieving good electoral equality and recognising community interests and identities.

97 Under our draft recommendations, the wards of St Neots Eaton Ford, St Neots Eaton Socon, St Neots Eynesbury and St Neots Priory Park would have councillor:elector ratios of 19 per cent above, 4 per cent below, 2 per cent below and 2 per cent below the district average respectively (8 per cent above, 2 per cent above, 1 per cent below and 8 per cent below by 2006, respectively). Gransden & The Offords ward would have a councillor:elector ratio 21 per cent below the district average (1 per cent above by 2006). Our draft proposals for these

wards are illustrated on Maps 2, A2, A3 and A4. We would welcome comments from parish councils and local residents on these proposals at Stage Three.

Fenstanton, Godmanchester, Hemingford Abbots & Hilton, Hemingford Grey, St Ives North and St Ives South wards

98 The wards of Fenstanton, Hemingford Abbots & Hilton and Hemingford Grey are situated in the west of the district and are currently each represented by one councillor. These three wards are each coterminous with the parishes of the same names. Their councillor:elector ratios are 2 per cent above, 41 per cent below and 5 per cent below the district average (6 per cent above, 44 per cent below and 12 per cent below by 2006). Godmanchester ward is also coterminous with the parish of the same name, returns one district councillor and has a councillor:elector ratio 3 per cent above the district average (4 per cent above by 2006). The district wards of St Ives North and St Ives South together cover the area of St Ives Town Council, each are represented by two councillors and have councillor:elector ratios 57 per cent above and 22 per cent above the district average respectively (47 per cent above and 19 per cent above the district average by 2006, respectively).

99 The District Council proposed retaining both the existing Fenstanton and Godmanchester wards as single-member district wards. The Council proposed creating a parish ward in Hemingford Grey parish consisting of the development south of the boundary between St Ives South and Hemingford Grey parish, which would enable this area to be included in a proposed St Ives South district ward. The remaining parish ward of Hemingford Grey parish would be combined with Hilton parish to create a new Hemingford Grey & Hilton ward, returning one councillor. The Council also proposed a new single-member Houghton & Hemingford Abbots district ward, comprising the parishes of Houghton & Wyton and Hemingford Abbots. In the town of St Ives, the council proposed two two-member wards and a single-member ward to “represent the growth in the town since the electoral arrangements were last reviewed”.

100 The Huntingdon Liberal Democrats also proposed retaining the existing Godmanchester ward. They proposed transferring electors from Fenstanton ward into St Ives South ward by creating a parish ward for the area immediately south of St Ives. The group claim “these electors are physically separate from Fenstanton and look to St Ives for the majority of their services. Their postal address is officially St Ives”. They proposed six new single-member district wards in the town of St Ives, namely Central, East, North East, North West, South East and South West. They stated “realistic wards can be created in St Ives without serious damage to electoral equality”.

101 The North West Cambridgeshire Liberal Democrats felt that in Godmanchester “the strength of the community means that no change is necessary here”. The group proposed creating a parish ward in Fenstanton for the area immediately to the south of St Ives. The electors in this parish ward would be included in a district ward with electors from St Ives town. The remainder of Fenstanton parish would form a single-member Fenstanton ward. The group proposed combining the parishes of Hemingford Abbots, Hemingford Grey, Hilton and a parish ward of Houghton & Wyton in a new two-member Hemingfords ward. In the town of St Ives, the group suggested three wards: North, South and West, each returning two members. They also proposed including the area around the former airforce base in Houghton & Wyton parish in the West ward of St Ives.

102 We received two additional representations during Stage One. The Huntingdonshire District Labour Party opposed the District Council's plans to move the electors from the parish of Hemingford Grey into St Ives for district warding purposes, and suggested transferring them into the parish of Fenstanton. Hemingford Grey Parish Council opposed the District Council's proposals, and stated that it is "desirable to retain one councillor per ward and to have villages grouped together which are similar in character and adjacent to each other".

103 We have carefully considered all the representations received during Stage One. We acknowledge and accept the proposal from the District Council and the two Liberal Democrat groups to retain the existing two-member Godmanchester ward and propose adopting this as part of our draft recommendations. We accept that the electors in the development south of the town of St Ives in the parishes of Hemingford Grey and Fenstanton look naturally to St Ives for their services. We would like to recommend creating parish wards in both parishes to incorporate all of this area in St Ives for district warding purposes, however, this would result in unacceptable levels of electoral inequality in all three wards in this area and, as such, we are not recommending this. We therefore accept the District Council's proposals to create a parish ward in Hemingford Grey parish only to transfer those electors into a district ward with electors from St Ives town. As a result of not being able to transfer electors from Fenstanton parish, we recommend retaining Fenstanton district ward in its current form. We note Hemingford Grey Parish Council's opposition to the District Council's proposals for the Hemingfords and Hilton parishes, and cannot adopt the District Council's proposals for this area due to the high levels of electoral inequality which would result. We therefore propose adopting the proposals of the Huntingdon Liberal Democrats for a two-member The Hemingfords ward, comprising a parish ward of Houghton & Wyton and the parishes of Hemingford Abbots, Hemingford Grey and Hilton. In St Ives town, we intend basing our draft recommendations on those proposed by the District Council. However, we are proposing modifications to the ward boundaries to improve electoral equality. We therefore recommend that St Ives has three wards, two-member St Ives East and St Ives South wards and a single-member St Ives West ward. We consider that our draft recommendations for this area would provide the best balance between electoral equality and recognising community interests and identities.

104 Under our draft recommendations, Fenstanton ward and Godmanchester ward would return one and two councillors respectively and have councillor:elector ratios of 1 per cent above and 2 per cent above the district average respectively (4 per cent above and 2 per cent above by 2006, respectively). The Hemingfords ward, comprising a parish ward of Houghton & Wyton parish and the parishes of Hemingford Abbots, Hemingford Grey and Hilton would have a councillor:elector ratio 1 per cent below the district average (6 per cent below the district average by 2006). In the town of St Ives, St Ives East, St Ives South and St Ives West would return two, two and one councillor respectively and would have councillor:elector ratios 7 per cent, 16 per cent and 8 per cent above the district average respectively (6 per cent, 6 per cent and 5 per cent above by 2006, respectively). Our draft proposals for these wards are illustrated on Maps 2, A2, A3 and A4. We would welcome comments from parish councils and local residents on these proposals at Stage Three.

Huntingdon North and Huntingdon West wards

105 The parish of Huntingdon is situated in the centre of the district and currently comprises two wards. Huntingdon North and Huntingdon West wards are each represented by three members. Under the existing arrangements, the number of electors per councillor is 8 per cent above and 7 per cent above the district average respectively (8 per cent above and 5 per cent above by 2006).

106 At Stage One the District Council proposed two three-member wards for the town of Huntingdon. The Council consulted on a scheme which proposed three two-member wards, however, this scheme was rejected by the District Council as “the Town Council considered that such an arrangement would be divisive in the town”. The District Council accordingly accepted the Town Council’s views and proposed the retention of two three-member wards. As detailed previously, the Council proposed creating a parish ward for the Hinchbrooke area of The Stukeleys parish, in order to ensure the electors within this area are represented with electors of Huntingdon town for district ward purposes. The Council justified this by stating “The Stukeleys parish and Huntingdon Town Council have indicated their support for the proposed warding arrangement”.

107 The Huntingdon Liberal Democrats proposed the same parish warding arrangements in the Hinchbrooke area of The Stukeleys parish as they agreed that the “population looked entirely to Huntingdon for all local services”. However, they opposed the District Council’s proposals for the town of Huntingdon and proposed alternative warding arrangements. The group proposed a two-member ward and five single-member wards, whose boundaries are “easily identifiable on the ground and can be reasonably considered to represent local communities”. Their proposed wards would be named Central, East, Hartford, North, Stukeley Meadows and South West.

108 The North West Cambridgeshire Liberal Democrats agreed with the District Council’s proposals for the Hinchbrooke area of The Stukeleys parish. They proposed three two-member wards and a single-member ward in the town of Huntingdon, to be named Hartford, Market, Meadows and Sapley wards.

109 We received 11 other representations regarding this area during Stage One. Huntingdon Town Council proposed two district wards, following the same boundaries as those put forward by Huntingdonshire District Council, and emphasised that the “Town Council had liaised very closely with Huntingdonshire District Council”. The Town Council put forward three parish wards for the town outlined later in the chapter. The Huntingdonshire District Labour Party was originally “in broad agreement with the District Council’s [consultative] proposals for the Town of Huntingdon” (which were based on three wards in the town of Huntingdon), and therefore the group proposed an additional ward for Huntingdon town. It stated that the Central ward should “cover the Oxmoor estate... as its problems are sufficient to occupy any councillor elected to represent it”. The group agreed that the Hinchbrooke area of The Stukeleys parish should fall within Huntingdon town for district warding purposes. The Huntingdon Constituency Labour Party were in agreement with the Huntingdonshire District Labour Party in supporting the District Council’s original plan for three wards in Huntingdon. It stressed that “Huntingdon should have three wards” and that “Huntingdon’s wards should not be larger than two-member”.

110 Councillor Lomax found the size of the West ward in the District Council's submission "alarming" and asked that "careful consideration be given to the size of this ward". We received five other representations from residents echoing Councillor Lomax's concerns over the size of the District Council's proposed West ward. The chairman of the Oxmoor Community Action Group stated his concern over the possibility that Oxmoor will "become fragmented by any changes". During Stage One, we also received a petition signed by 66 residents of the Oxmoor area, objecting to the District Council's proposals. Huntingdon Constituency Conservative Association stated that Huntingdon's ward names should be "readily identifiable within their communities".

111 We have carefully considered all the representations regarding these areas received by us during Stage One. We note the opposition to the Town and District Councils' proposals for two large three-member wards, from residents and councillors in the area. In particular, we recognise the representations from residents in the Oxmoor area, who oppose the District Council's proposals to split the Oxmoor area between two wards. We believe this area to have a strong sense of community identity and, therefore, we are not adopting the District Council's proposals for this area. As mentioned earlier in the chapter, we accept the proposals to create a parish ward for the Hinchingsbrooke area of The Stukeleys parish, which would enable this area to be included in a district ward with Huntingdon town. We believe the wards proposed by the two Labour groups and the North West Cambridgeshire Liberal Democrats best represent the differing communities within the town of Huntingdon, and we are basing our recommendations on these proposals. We are therefore recommending a two-member Huntingdon North Ward, comprising the distinct communities of Oxmoor and Sapley, a two-member Huntingdon East ward, comprising the Hartford and Newtown areas in the east of the town and a three-member Huntingdon West ward, comprising the commercial centre and the newer residential and proposed residential areas of Stukeley Meadows and Hinchingsbrooke.

112 Under our draft arrangements, Huntingdon East, Huntingdon North and Huntingdon West wards would have councillor:elector ratios of 2 per cent, 6 per cent and 8 per cent below the district average respectively (7 per cent, 6 per cent and 5 per cent below the district average by 2006, respectively). Our draft recommendations for these wards are illustrated on the large map in Appendix A. We would welcome comments on these proposals at Stage Three, particularly on ward names.

Electoral Cycle

113 We received three responses regarding the District Council's electoral cycle. The District Council itself stated that "elections should continue to take place by thirds". Both the Huntingdon Liberal Democrats and the North West Cambridgeshire Liberal Democrats agreed with retaining the cycle of elections by thirds. We note that there appears to be a local consensus for the retention of the existing electoral cycle. We therefore recommend that the current pattern of elections by thirds is retained.

Conclusions

114 Having considered all the evidence and submissions received during the first stage of the review, we propose that:

- there should be a reduction in council size from 53 to 52;

- there should be 28 wards;
- the boundaries of 31 of the existing wards should be modified, resulting in a net reduction of six, and three wards should retain their existing boundaries;
- elections should continue to be held by thirds.

115 Our draft recommendations would involve modifying all but three of the existing wards in Huntingdonshire district, as summarised below:

- we propose adopting the District Council’s proposals for the wards of Little Paxton and Yaxley & Farcet;
- we propose adopting the proposals of the Huntingdon Liberal Democrats for the wards of Alconbury & The Giddings, Earith, Elton, Sawtry, Somersham, Stilton, The Hemingfords, and Upwood & The Raveleys;
- we are proposing our own warding arrangements for the wards of Brampton & Buckden, Bury & Warboys, Ellington, Gransden & The Offords, Huntingdon East, Huntingdon North, Huntingdon West, Kimbolton & Staughton, St Ives East, St Ives South, St Ives West, St Neots Eaton Ford, St Neots Eaton Socon, St Neots Eynesbury and St Neots Priory Park;
- there should be no change to the wards of Fenstanton, Godmanchester and Ramsey.

116 Table 5 shows how our draft recommendations will affect electoral equality, comparing them with the current arrangements (based on 2001 electorate figures) and with forecast electorates for the year 2006.

Table 5: Comparison of Current and Recommended Electoral Arrangements

	2001 electorate		2006 forecast electorate	
	Current arrangements	Draft recommendations	Current arrangements	Draft recommendations
Number of councillors	53	52	53	52
Number of wards	34	28	34	28
Average number of electors per councillor	2,192	2,234	2,311	2,356
Number of wards with a variance more than 10 per cent from the average	20	6	23	0
Number of wards with a variance more than 20 per cent from the average	15	1	13	0

117 As shown in Table 5, our draft recommendations for Huntingdonshire District Council would result in a reduction in the number of wards with an electoral variance of more than 10 per cent from 23 to six. By 2006 no wards are forecast to have an electoral variance of more than 10 per cent.

Draft Recommendation
Huntingdonshire District Council should comprise 52 councillors serving 28 wards, as detailed and named in Tables 1 and 2, and illustrated on Maps 2, A2, A3, A4 in Appendix A, including the large map inside the back cover. The Council should continue to hold elections by thirds.

Parish and Town Council Electoral Arrangements

118 When reviewing electoral arrangements, we are required to comply as far as possible with the rules set out in Schedule 11 to the 1972 Act. The Schedule states that if a parish is to be divided between different district wards it must also be divided into parish wards, so that each parish ward lies wholly within a single ward of the district. Accordingly, we propose consequential warding arrangements for the parishes of Eynesbury Hardwicke, Hemingford Grey, Houghton & Wyton, Huntingdon, St Ives, St Neots and The Stukeleys to reflect the proposed district wards.

119 The parish of Eynesbury Hardwicke is currently served by nine councillors and is divided into two parish wards, those of Spinney and Town, although we are aware that there is not wide local recognition of this warding arrangement. We propose retaining the existing arrangements for the parish of Eynesbury Hardwicke to facilitate our warding arrangements at district level. The boundary of the parish wards will reflect the district ward boundaries.

Draft Recommendation
Eynesbury Hardwicke Parish Council should comprise nine councillors, as at present, representing two wards: Spinney parish ward (returning three councillors) and Town parish ward (returning six). The parish ward boundaries should reflect the proposed district ward boundaries in the area, as illustrated and named on Map A4 in Appendix A.

120 The parish of Hemingford Grey is currently served by 13 councillors and is not warded. We are proposing two new parish wards, Armes Corner and Hemingford Grey, to reflect our proposed district ward boundaries. We propose that Armes Corner parish ward be represented by a single councillor and Hemingford Grey parish ward be represented by 12 councillors.

Draft Recommendation

Hemingford Grey Parish Council should comprise 13 councillors, as at present, representing two wards: Armes Corner parish ward (returning a single councillor) and Hemingford Grey parish ward (returning 12 councillors). The boundary between the two parish wards should reflect the proposed district ward boundary, as illustrated and named on the large map inserted at the back of the report.

121 The parish of Houghton & Wyton is currently served by 13 councillors and is not warded. We propose creating two new parish wards, Airfield and Houghton & Wyton, to reflect district ward boundaries. We propose that Airfield parish ward be represented by four councillors and Houghton & Wyton parish ward be represented by nine councillors.

Draft Recommendation

Houghton & Wyton Parish Council should comprise 13 councillors, as at present, representing two wards: Airfield parish ward (returning four councillors) and Houghton & Wyton parish ward (returning nine councillors). The boundary between the two parish wards should reflect the proposed district ward boundary, as illustrated and named on the large map inserted at the back of the report.

122 The parish of Huntingdon is currently served by 16 councillors representing three parish wards: North (returning eight councillors), West No. 1 (returning five councillors) and West No. 2 (returning three councillors). We propose modifying the boundaries between the three parish wards to reflect the district ward boundaries. The revised wards will be named Huntingdon North parish ward, Huntingdon East parish ward and Huntingdon West parish ward.

Draft Recommendation

Huntingdon Parish Council should comprise 16 councillors, as at present, representing three wards: Huntingdon East, Huntingdon North and Huntingdon West (returning eight, four and four councillors respectively). The boundaries between the three parish wards should reflect the proposed district ward boundary, as illustrated and named on the large map inserted at the back of the report.

123 The parish of St Ives is currently served by 16 councillors and is divided into two parish wards, North and South, each of which returns eight parish councillors. We propose creating a third parish ward and modifying the boundaries between the two existing parish wards, in order to reflect the district ward boundaries. The new parish ward names will be St Ives East parish ward, St Ives South parish ward and St Ives West parish ward.

Draft Recommendation

St Ives Parish Council should comprise 16 parish councillors, representing three wards: St Ives East (returning six councillors), St Ives North (returning six councillors) and St Ives West (returning four councillors). The boundaries between the three parish wards should reflect the proposed district ward boundary, as illustrated and named on the large map inserted at the back of the report.

124 The parish of St Neots is currently served by 18 councillors and is divided into four parish wards, Eaton Ford, Eaton Socon, Eynesbury and Priory Park (returning three, five, six and four councillors respectively). We propose modifying the boundaries between the existing parish wards, in order to reflect the district ward boundaries. The new parish ward names will be St Neots Eaton Ford, St Neots Eaton Socon, St Neots Eynesbury and St Neots Priory Park.

Draft Recommendation

St Neots Parish Council should comprise 18 parish councillors, representing four wards: St Neots Eaton Ford (returning four councillors), St Neots Eaton Socon (returning four councillors), St Neots Eynesbury (returning six councillors) and St Neots Priory Park (returning four councillors). The boundaries between the four parish wards should reflect the proposed district ward boundary, as illustrated and named on Maps A2, A3 and A4 in Appendix A.

125 The parish of The Stukeleys is currently served by 13 councillors and is currently unwarded. We propose creating two new parish wards, Great Stukeley and Hinchingsbrooke, to reflect district ward boundaries. Following correspondence with The Stukeleys Parish Council during Stage Two, and with the understanding that Huntingdonshire District Council will be reviewing the parish boundary between Huntingdon and The Stukeleys parishes following the completion of this periodic electoral review we are proposing an increase in the number of councillors serving on The Stukeleys Parish Council from 13 to 16. We are proposing a new Great Stukeleys parish ward (returning 13 councillors) and a new Hinchingsbrooke parish ward (returning three councillors).

Draft Recommendation

The Stukeleys Parish Council should comprise 16 parish councillors, representing two wards: Great Stukeley parish ward and Hinchingsbrooke parish ward (returning 13 councillors and three councillors respectively). The boundaries between the two parish wards should reflect the proposed district ward boundary, as illustrated and named on the large map inserted at the back of this report.

126 We would particularly welcome comments regarding our parish council recommendations from parish councils and local residents at Stage Three.

127 We are not proposing any change to the electoral cycle of parish and town councils in the district.

Draft 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: Draft Recommendations for Huntingdonshire

5 WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

128 There will now be a consultation period, during which everyone is invited to comment on the draft recommendations on future electoral arrangements for Huntingdonshire contained in this report. We will take fully into account all submissions received by 28 January 2002. Any received *after* this date may not be taken into account. All responses may be inspected at our offices and those of the District Council. A list of respondents will be available from us on request after the end of the consultation period.

129 Express your views by writing directly to us:

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

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

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

APPENDIX A

Draft Recommendations for Huntingdonshire: Detailed Mapping

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

Map A1 illustrates, in outline form, the proposed ward boundaries within the district and indicates the areas which are shown in more detail on Maps A2, A3 and A4 and the large map at the back of this report.

Map A2 illustrates the proposed district ward and parish ward boundary between St Neots Eaton Ford and St Neots Eaton Socon.

Map A3 illustrates the proposed district ward and parish ward boundary between St Neots Eynesbury and St Neots Priory Park.

Map A4 illustrates the proposed district ward boundary between St Neots Eynesbury and Gransden & The Offords ward, and the existing parish warding arrangements for the parish of Eynesbury Hardwicke.

The **large map** inserted at the back of this report illustrates the existing and proposed warding arrangements for the towns of Huntingdon and St Ives, and the parish warding arrangements for the parish of Houghton & Wyton.

Map A1: Draft Recommendations for Huntingdonshire: Key Map

Map A2: Proposed District Ward and Parish Ward Boundary Between St Neots Eaton Ford and St Neots Eaton Socon

Map A3: Proposed District Ward and Parish Ward Boundary Between St Neots Eynesbury and St Neots Priory Park

Map A4: Proposed District Ward Boundary Between St Neots Eynesbury Ward and Gransden & The Offords Ward

Appendix B

Code of Practice on Written Consultation

The Cabinet Office's November 2000 *Code of Practice on Written Consultation*, www.cabinet-office.gov.uk/servicefirst/index/consultation.htm, requires all Government Departments and Agencies to adhere to certain criteria, set out below, on the conduct of public consultations. Non-Departmental Public Bodies, such as the Local Government Commission for England, are encouraged to follow the Code.

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

Table B1: LGCE compliance with Code criteria

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