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## Summary

The Local Government Boundary Commission for England is an independent body that conducts electoral reviews of local authority areas. The broad purpose of an electoral review is to decide on the appropriate electoral arrangements – the number of councillors, and the names, number and boundaries of wards or divisions – for a specific local authority. We are conducting an electoral review of South Oxfordshire to provide improved levels of electoral equality across the authority.

The review aims to ensure that the number of voters represented by each councillor is approximately the same. The Commission commenced the review in March 2012.

This review was conducted in four stages:

<b>Stage starts</b>	<b>Description</b>
27 March 2012	Consultation on council size
20 June 2012	Invitation to submit proposals for warding arrangements to LGBCE
29 August 2012	LGBCE's analysis and formulation of draft recommendations
13 November 2012	Publication of draft recommendations and consultation on them
8 January 2013	Analysis of submissions received and formulation of final recommendations

## Draft recommendations

We proposed a council size of 36 members, comprising a pattern of eight single-member, eight two-member and four three-member wards. The recommendations were broadly based on a combination of South Oxfordshire District Council's submission and submissions received from parish councils and local residents, amended to reflect our statutory criteria. Our draft recommendations for South Oxfordshire sought to reflect the evidence of community identities received while ensuring good electoral equality and providing for effective and convenient local government.

## Submissions received

During Stage Three, the Commission received 54 submissions, including comments covering the majority of the district from South Oxfordshire District Council ('the Council'). We also received four submissions from local councillors, 27 from parish councils in addition to a petition from Cuxham with Easington Parish Meeting, one from a local organisation and 20 from members of the public. All submissions can be viewed on our website: [www.lgbce.org.uk](http://www.lgbce.org.uk)

# Analysis and final recommendations

## Electorate figures

South Oxfordshire District Council submitted electorate forecasts for 2018, a period five years on from the scheduled publication of our final recommendations in 2013. These forecasts projected an increase in the electorate of approximately 5.2% over this period, with large-scale growth in Didcot, the largest town in the district. We are content that the forecasts are the most accurate available at this time and have used these figures as the basis of our final recommendations.

## General analysis

Throughout the review process, the primary consideration has been to achieve good electoral equality, while seeking to reflect community identities and securing effective and convenient local government. Having considered the submissions received during consultation on our draft recommendations, we have sought to reflect community identities and improve the levels of electoral fairness. Our final recommendations take account of submissions received during consultation on our draft recommendations. As a result, we have proposed amendments to ward boundaries in Chalgrove, Didcot, Wallingford and Wheatley.

Our final recommendations for South Oxfordshire are that the Council should have 36 members, with 10 single-member wards, seven two-member wards and four three-member wards. One of the wards would have an electoral variance of greater than 10% by 2018.

## What happens next?

We have now completed our review of electoral arrangements for South Oxfordshire District Council. An Order – the legal document which brings into force our recommendations – will be laid in Parliament and will be implemented subject to Parliamentary scrutiny. The draft Order will provide for new electoral arrangements which will come into force at the next elections for South Oxfordshire District Council, in 2015.

We are grateful to all those organisations and individuals who have contributed to the review through expressing their views and advice. The full report is available to download at [www.lgbce.org.uk](http://www.lgbce.org.uk)

**You can also view our final recommendations for South Oxfordshire District Council on our interactive maps at [consultation.lgbce.org.uk](http://consultation.lgbce.org.uk)**

# 1 Introduction

1 The Local Government Boundary Commission for England is an independent body which conducts electoral reviews of local authority areas. This electoral review is being conducted following our decision to review South Oxfordshire District Council's electoral arrangements to ensure that the number of voters represented by each councillor is approximately the same across the authority.

2 The submission received from South Oxfordshire District Council during the initial stage of consultation of this review informed our *Draft recommendations on the new electoral arrangements for South Oxfordshire District Council*, which were published on 13 November 2012. We then undertook a further period of consultation which ended on 7 January 2012.

## What is an electoral review?

3 The main aim of an electoral review is to try to ensure 'electoral equality', which means that all councillors in a single authority represent approximately the same number of electors. Our objective is to make recommendations that will improve electoral equality, while also trying to reflect communities in the area and provide for effective and convenient local government.

4 Our three main considerations – equalising the number of electors each councillor represents; reflecting community identity; and providing for effective and convenient local government – are set out in legislation<sup>1</sup> and our task is to strike the best balance between them when making our recommendations. Our powers, as well as the guidance we have provided for electoral reviews and further information on the review process, can be found on our website at [www.lgbce.org.uk](http://www.lgbce.org.uk)

## Why are we conducting a review in South Oxfordshire?

5 We decided to conduct this review because South Oxfordshire District Council requested a review of its electoral arrangements.

## How will our recommendations affect you?

6 Our recommendations will determine how many councillors will serve on the council. They will also determine which electoral ward you vote in, which other communities are in that ward and, in some instances, which parish ward you vote in. Your electoral ward name may change, as may the names of parish wards in the area. If you live in a parish, the name or boundaries of that parish will not change.

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<sup>1</sup> Schedule 2 to the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009.

## What is the Local Government Boundary Commission for England?

7 The Local Government Boundary Commission for England is an independent body set up by Parliament under the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009.

Members of the Commission are:

Max Caller CBE (Chair)  
Professor Colin Mellors (Deputy Chair)  
Dr Peter Knight CBE DL  
Sir Tony Redmond  
Dr Colin Sinclair CBE  
Professor Paul Wiles CB

Chief Executive: Alan Cogbill  
Director of Reviews: Archie Gall

## 2 Analysis and final recommendations

8 We have now finalised our recommendations for the electoral arrangements for South Oxfordshire.

9 As described earlier, our prime aim when recommending new electoral arrangements for South Oxfordshire District Council is to achieve a level of electoral fairness – that is, each elector’s vote being worth the same as another’s. In doing so we must have regard to the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009<sup>2</sup> with the need to:

- secure effective and convenient local government
- provide for equality of representation
- reflect the identities and interests of local communities, in particular
  - the desirability of arriving at boundaries that are easily identifiable
  - the desirability of fixing boundaries so as not to break any local ties

10 Legislation also requires that our recommendations are not based solely on the existing number of electors in an area, but reflect estimated changes in the number and distribution of electors likely to take place over a five-year period from the end of the review. We must also try to recommend strong, clearly identifiable boundaries for the wards we put forward.

11 The achievement of absolute electoral fairness is unlikely to be attainable and there must be a degree of flexibility. However, our approach is to keep variances in the number of electors each councillor represents to a minimum. In all our reviews we therefore recommend strongly that, in formulating proposals for us to consider, local authorities and other interested parties should also try to keep variances to a minimum, making adjustments to reflect relevant factors such as community identity and interests. We aim to recommend a scheme which provides improved electoral fairness over a five-year period.

12 Our recommendations cannot affect the external boundaries of South Oxfordshire District Council or the external boundaries or names of parish or town councils, or result in changes to postcodes. Nor is there any evidence that our recommendations will have an adverse effect on local taxes, house prices, or car and house insurance premiums. Our proposals do not take account of parliamentary constituency boundaries and we are not, therefore, able to take into account any representations which are based on these issues.

### Submissions received

13 Prior to, and during, the initial stages of the review, we visited South Oxfordshire District Council (‘the Council’) and met with members and officers. We are grateful to all concerned for their co-operation and assistance. We received 26 submissions during the council size consultation, 24 submissions prior to the formulation of draft recommendations, and 54 submissions during our consultation on draft recommendations. All submissions may be inspected at both our offices by appointment and those of the Council. All representations received can also be viewed on our website at [www.lgbce.org.uk](http://www.lgbce.org.uk)

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<sup>2</sup> Schedule 2 to the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009.

14 We take the evidence received during consultation very seriously and the submissions were carefully considered before we formulated our final recommendations. Officers from the Commission have been assisted by officers at South Oxfordshire District Council who have provided relevant information throughout the review.

## Electorate figures

15 As part of this review, the Council submitted electorate forecasts for the year 2018, projecting an increase in the electorate of approximately 5.2% over the six-year period from 2012–18.

16 While this is a relatively large increase in electorate, we are satisfied that the largest developments – predominantly in the Didcot area – are correctly projected to add a large number of electors to the district by 2018. Outside of specific development and urban areas, change in the electorate is static within the six-year period.

17 Having considered the information provided by the Council, we are content to use their figures as the basis of our final recommendations.

## Council size

18 The Council currently elects 48 councillors from 29 district wards, comprising 11 single-member wards, 17 two-member wards and one three-member ward. During preliminary discussions on council size, the Council proposed a council size of 36, a reduction of 12 from the existing council size.

19 In support of its proposal for 36 councillors, the Council provided extensive evidence, arguing that council business is often conducted without involving the majority of councillors. It also stated that a council size of 36 would ensure all councillors had a role in governance, while allowing for a system of substitutions and reserves to provide resilience.

20 During our consultation on council size, respondents were split between supporting the Council's proposals and supporting the status quo. Views varied over whether a reduction would have any detrimental effect on the representative role of councillors, and the resilience of the Council. However, we considered that the Council had adequately addressed these concerns in its submission. We invited the Council and other interested parties to submit proposals for warding arrangements based on a council size of 36.

## Electoral fairness

21 Electoral fairness, in the sense of each elector in a local authority having a vote of equal weight when it comes to the election of councillors, is a fundamental democratic principle. It is expected that our recommendations should provide for electoral fairness whilst ensuring that we reflect communities in the area, and provide for effective and convenient local government.

22 In seeking to achieve electoral fairness, we calculate the average number of electors per councillor. The district average is calculated by dividing the total

electorate of the district (103,259 in 2012 and 108,643 by 2018) by the total number of councillors representing them on the council – 36 under our final recommendations. Therefore, the average number of electors per councillor under our final recommendations is 2,868 in 2012 and 3,018 in 2018.

23 Under our final recommendations, one of our proposed 21 wards will have an electoral variance of greater than 10% from the average for the district by 2018. We are therefore satisfied that we have achieved good levels of electoral equality for South Oxfordshire.

## General analysis

24 We received 54 submissions during the consultation on our draft recommendations.

25 In the north of the district, we received objections to the creation of a two-member Wheatley ward incorporating the rural parishes to the north of Wheatley. We also received submissions suggesting alternative arrangements for parishes in our proposed Haseley Brook ward.

26 In the west of the district, we received submissions objecting to our proposed Didcot South ward incorporating the parishes of East and West Hagbourne. We also received representations concerning the boundary between our proposed Cholsey and Wallingford wards.

27 In the south-east of the district, we received objections to our proposed two-member Sonning Common ward incorporating the parishes of Shiplake, Harpsden, Binfield Heath and Eye & Dunsden. We also received submissions concerning our proposed Woodcote & Rotherfield and Watlington wards.

28 Our final recommendations would result in 36 councillors representing 10 single-member, seven two-member and four three-member wards. A summary of our proposed electoral arrangements is set out in Table A1 (on pages 22–3) and on the map accompanying this report.

## Electoral arrangements

29 This section of the report details the submissions received, our consideration of them, and our final recommendations for each area of South Oxfordshire. The following areas are considered in turn:

- North (pages 7–10 )
- West (pages 10–15)
- South-East (pages 15–17)

### North

30 The draft recommendations were for two single-member wards, two two-member wards and one three-member ward.

31 Our draft recommendations for the northern area of the district were based on the Council's scheme, with modifications to better reflect our statutory criteria. We departed from the Council scheme in Thame, in order to reflect local wishes for a three-member ward; in Chinnor, in order to ensure that a community was not divided between wards; and in Wheatley, in order to minimise issues of internal access within wards.

### **Wheatley and Forest Hill**

32 During the consultation on our draft recommendations, we received four submissions relating to our proposed Wheatley ward, all from parish councils in the area. We also received comments from the Council on this area.

33 All submissions received relating to Wheatley and Forest Hill objected to a two-member ward. Wheatley, Holton, Forest Hill with Shotover and Tiddington-with-Albury parish councils echoed the Council's objections, arguing that the more urban community of Wheatley was distinct from the rural parishes to the north, with few community links and different community priorities. The parishes proposed two single-member wards: one for the parish of Wheatley and one for the remaining parishes to the north of Wheatley.

34 The Council proposed a slight modification to their initial submission for two single-member wards, arguing that the boundary between a Wheatley ward and a Forest Hill & Holton ward containing northern parishes should run along the parish boundary, rather than the A40.

35 In our draft recommendations we had proposed a two-member Wheatley ward in order to minimise issues regarding internal access within a ward. The Council's original proposal was for a single-member Forest Hill & Holton ward. This would have required travelling via both Haseley Brook ward and a single-member Wheatley ward in order to travel between the parishes of Waterstock and Tiddington-with-Albury, and the remainder of the ward. Our draft recommendations reduced the access issues to only a short distance through Haseley Brook ward to travel across the ward.

36 The Council's revised proposal (made in response to our draft recommendations) improved the access issues for a Forest Hill & Holton ward by using the parish boundary between Wheatley and Holton. While access within a single-member Forest Hill & Holton ward would still be through Haseley Brook ward, the boundary between Wheatley and Forest Hill & Holton would now run along Old London Road. The Council's revised proposal provided for a more easily identifiable boundary and would not result in a new parish ward in Holton parish. As the Council's proposal supported the evidence received in relation to community identity, we are adopting its proposals for two single-member wards.

37 Our final recommendations for the Wheatley and Forest Hill area are therefore for a single-member Wheatley ward, comprising the whole of Wheatley parish, and a single-member Forest Hill & Holton ward, comprising the parishes of Beckley & Stowood, Elsfield, Forest Hill with Shotover, Holton, Stanton St John, Tiddington-with-Albury, Waterperry with Thornley, Waterstock and Woodeaton. These wards would have 7% more and 3% fewer electors per councillor than the district average by 2018, respectively.

## **Haseley Brook**

38 During the consultation on our draft recommendations, we received three submissions relating to our proposed Haseley Brook ward, all from parish councils in the area. The Council did not comment on this area. Our draft recommendations were based on the Council's initial proposal.

39 Lewknor and Little Milton parish councils both objected to the inclusion of Lewknor in Haseley Brook, with Little Milton also suggesting that Adwell and Wheatfield be moved into a neighbouring ward. Stadhampton Parish Council argued that it looked more to the village of Chalgrove, to the south of the proposed ward.

40 We investigated the possibility of including Lewknor with the neighbouring Chinnor or Watlington wards. Lewknor Parish Council indicated their strongest preference was to be in a ward with Aston Rowant, which under our draft recommendations is included in a two-member Chinnor ward. However, this would create a Chinnor ward with 11% more electors per councillor than the district average. Furthermore, it would leave the remainder of the Haseley Brook ward with 14% fewer electors per councillor than the district average.

41 Little Milton Parish Council suggested Lewknor could be included in our proposed Watlington ward, with Tiddington-with-Albury moved into Haseley Brook ward to improve electoral equality. However, this would create a Watlington ward with 18% more electors per councillor than the district average, and a Forest Hill & Holton ward with 21% fewer electors per councillor than the district average.

42 We investigated including Stadhampton in the proposed Chalgrove ward. However, this would leave Haseley Brook ward with 17% fewer electors per councillor than the district average.

43 Therefore, although we recognise there is some desire locally for Lewknor parish to be included in a different ward, we consider that retaining a single-member Haseley Brook ward is the only way to avoid unacceptable electoral imbalances in this and neighbouring areas.

44 We also received a suggestion from Little Milton Parish Council to rename Haseley Brook ward as The Miltons & The Haseleys. However, we consider the Council's original assertion that Haseley Brook represents a geographical feature running across the ward is a more persuasive argument.

45 Therefore, in order to provide good electoral equality, we are confirming our draft recommendations as final for Haseley Brook. This ward would have 3% more electors per councillor than the district average by 2018.

## **Chinnor**

46 During our consultation on draft recommendations, we received one submission from a local resident concerning Chinnor. We also received comments from the Council regarding this area.

47 The Council restated its case for two single-member wards for Chinnor. Its proposed Chinnor North ward would cover the northern half of Chinnor parish, with the parishes of Sydenham and Towersey. The proposed Chinnor South ward would cover the southern half of Chinnor parish, with the parishes of Aston Rowant and Crowell.

48 The Council highlighted the possibility of Chinnor's size causing it to dominate local issues for a councillor in a two-member ward. The Council asserted that it had received feedback from local parish councils to that effect. However, during the course of consultation, we did not receive any further submissions relating to ward boundaries in Chinnor. Although the Council suggested that local parish councils were wary of a two-member Chinnor ward, there was no corroborating evidence of this.

49 It is not unusual for us to receive comments that, in a mixed urban/rural ward, the interests of the urban area will be dominant. Such a mixed pattern of wards exists across England and there is no evidence to support the contention that the interests of one part of a ward is better reflected by elected representatives than another.

50 We received a submission from a local resident suggesting Sydenham as an alternative ward name for Chinnor, as it is nearer the geographical centre of the ward. However, as Chinnor is the largest settlement, we did not consider it to be a persuasive argument.

51 As we have not received evidence that two single-member Chinnor wards would provide for a better warding arrangement, we are confirming our draft recommendations as final. Our two-member Chinnor ward would have 3% more electors per councillor than the district average by 2018.

### **Thame and Garsington & Horspath**

52 During the consultation on our draft recommendations, we did not receive any submissions relating to our proposed Thame and Garsington & Horspath wards. As these wards provide for good electoral equality and were based on submissions received during earlier consultation, we are confirming as final our draft recommendations for this area.

53 Overall, our final recommendations for the northern part of the district are for single-member Forest Hill & Holton, Garsington & Horspath, Haseley Brook and Wheatley wards, a two-member Chinnor ward, and a three-member Thame ward. These wards are projected to have 3% fewer, 5% fewer, 3% more, 7% more, 3% more and 3% more electors per councillor than the district average by 2018, respectively.

54 These proposals can be seen on the large map accompanying this report.

## **West**

55 The draft recommendations for the western part of the district were for three single-member wards, four two-member wards and two three-member wards.

56 Our draft recommendations in this area were based on the Council's scheme, with modifications to better reflect our statutory criteria. We departed from the Council's scheme in Didcot to ensure reasonable electoral equality, and to provide wards with internal access. We also made small changes to the Council's proposed warding arrangements in Benson, and in the Cholsey and Wallingford area.

## **Didcot**

57 During the consultation on our draft recommendations, we received nine submissions concerning our proposed Didcot wards. We also received comments from the Council for this area.

58 The Council proposed an amendment to the boundary between our proposed Didcot West and Didcot South wards in order to improve electoral equality. This would involve placing the area around the Orchard Centre in Didcot South ward. We are content to adopt this modification to our draft recommendations.

59 The Council also argued that East and West Hagbourne ('the Hagbournes') should be included in a ward with parishes to their east, to which they had closer links. The Council noted that the Hagbournes would be better served by a councillor dealing with other rural issues, rather than also representing Didcot.

60 Both East and West Hagbourne parish councils, as well as Didcot Town Council and four local residents, supported the Council's argument concerning the Hagbournes. West Hagbourne Parish Council expressed its fear that as a small rural community it would become swamped by a larger urban area, and its interests would not be represented. East Hagbourne Parish Council echoed this, and suggested that it would be separated from parishes to the east with which it identifies.

61 In our draft recommendations we included the Hagbournes in a Didcot ward for two reasons: to improve electoral equality and to ensure internal ward access. The Council's proposed amendment to the boundary between Didcot West and Didcot South means that without the Hagbournes, these two wards would have 10% fewer and 8% fewer electors per councillor than the district average by 2018.

62 With regard to the issue of internal access, we note the strength of arguments from parish councils in this area, particularly West Hagbourne Parish Council. It argued that the damage to convenient and effective local government caused by including the relatively rural Hagbournes with the more urban Didcot was greater than that caused by a lack of internal ward access.

63 In terms of community links, one local resident highlighted links between Church of England organisations in similarly spaced rural villages. The Council noted the different priorities between Didcot and the Hagbournes. They argued that the deprivation and regeneration issues Didcot faced are distinct from the priorities of the rural, historic Hagbournes. West Hagbourne Parish Council argued that local residents regularly looked and travelled to villages in the east, particularly South Moreton.

64 We are persuaded that the Hagbournes share little community identity with Didcot, and instead look to the rural parishes to the east. Although the road access between these areas leaves the district for around a mile, we consider that the evidence provided supports such a warding pattern.

65 In order to better reflect community identity, we have decided to move away from our draft recommendations to adopt the proposals made by the Council and supported locally. Our three-member Didcot North East and Didcot South wards, and two-member Didcot West ward, will have 2% more, 7% fewer and 12% fewer electors per councillor than the district average by 2018.

## **Cholsey and Wallingford**

66 During the consultation on our draft recommendations, we received five submissions concerning our proposed Cholsey and Wallingford wards, in addition to the submissions relating to the Hagbournes, and the comments from the Council.

67 As mentioned in paragraphs 58–64, we have decided to adopt the Council's proposal to include the Hagbournes in a ward with parishes to their east. In addition to this, the Council reiterated its earlier proposal for two single-member wards. It argued that including the Hagbournes with the parishes to their east removed any issues with electoral equality. Submissions from Brightwell-cum-Sotwell and Cholsey parish councils supported the Council's position, with Brightwell-cum-Sotwell noting the difference in size between the larger parish of Cholsey and other neighbouring parishes.

68 We disagree with the Council's assertion that electoral inequality would cease to be a concern in its two proposed single-member wards. A single-member Brightwell ward including, as in the Council's proposals, the parishes of Aston Tirrold, Aston Upthorpe, Brightwell-cum-Sotwell, East Hagbourne, North Moreton, South Moreton and West Hagbourne would have 12% more electors per councillor than the district average.

69 We do not consider that the level of community evidence supporting two single-member wards is sufficiently strong to justify such a significant level of electoral inequality. We also note, with regard to Brightwell-cum-Sotwell Parish Council's concerns about being included in a ward with a parish of Cholsey's size, that the parishes in the Council's proposed Brightwell ward comprise a larger electorate than those in its proposed Cholsey ward. We therefore propose a two-member ward in this area, with a variance of 9% more electors per councillor than the district average

70 We also received submissions relating to the proposed boundary between Cholsey and Wallingford, in the Winterbrook area. Our draft recommendations for this area proposed to include the Winterbrook area, which borders Wallingford but is part of Cholsey parish, in a ward with Cholsey. This was based on the submission from Cholsey Parish Council which identified community ties between the two areas.

71 During this stage of consultation, we received another submission from Cholsey Parish Council supporting this arrangement. However, we also received submissions from Wallingford Parish Council and two local residents, arguing that Winterbrook is a part of Wallingford. The proposal to include Winterbrook with Wallingford was supported by the Council.

72 The Council noted that the Wallingford bypass, to the south of Winterbrook, provided a strong boundary between the two communities. The submissions from Wallingford Town Council and local residents argued that residents of Winterbrook look towards Wallingford for their services and have community ties such as schools, shops, sport and entertainment. Cholsey Parish Council disagreed, stating that residents wished to be part of Cholsey, rather than Wallingford.

73 We consider that the evidence provided by the Council, Wallingford Town Council and two local residents strongly indicated that Winterbrook is part of the Wallingford community. Although Cholsey Parish Council argued that Winterbrook residents look to Cholsey, we note the two submissions received from local residents stated that Winterbrook looks instead to Wallingford. In order to reflect community

identities, we therefore propose to include the Winterbrook area in a two-member Wallingford ward.

74 Both the Council and Wallingford Town Council also suggested the western boundary of our Wallingford ward be amended to run along the length of the bypass, in order to accommodate future developments that may straddle the parish boundary. However, this would create a unviable parish ward in neighbouring Brightwell-cum-Sotwell parish, which would contain no electors in 2018. Therefore, we confirm from our draft recommendations that the western boundary of Wallingford ward should run along the parish boundary.

75 Our final recommendations in this area are for two-member Cholsey and Wallingford wards, which would have 9% more and 6% more electors per councillor than the district average by 2018.

### **Benson and Chalgrove**

76 During our consultation on draft recommendations, we received five submissions concerning our proposed Benson and Chalgrove wards. We also received comments from the Council regarding ward names.

77 We received submissions concerning our proposed Chalgrove ward from Cuxham with Easington Parish Meeting, Watlington Parish Council, Ewelme Parish Council, Berrick Salome Parish Council, and a local resident.

78 Cuxham with Easington Parish Meeting provided a submission, including a petition with 70 signatures, objecting to our draft recommendation to the parish in Chalgrove ward. It highlighted close community links with Watlington, including shops, primary and secondary schools, libraries, and doctors surgeries. It also noted the close geographical link between the two places. This was corroborated by Watlington Parish Council, which also focused on the shared development plans between the two parishes.

79 In our draft recommendations, we included Cuxham with Easington in Chalgrove ward to maintain internal access within the ward. We had received limited evidence of community identities at the time. However, we consider the evidence received during this stage of consultation highlighting community ties between Watlington and Cuxham with Easington to be persuasive. Placing Cuxham with Easington in a ward with Chalgrove would be splitting it from the community with which it has closest ties – Watlington. Although this means that Chalgrove ward will not have internal access, we consider maintaining strong community ties to be a stronger argument in this instance.

80 We received submissions from Berrick Salome Parish Council, as well as a local resident, proposing that the parish looks more to Benson than Chalgrove. The local resident noted that they used facilities such as shops in Benson. Similarly, Berrick Salome Parish Council argued that local residents travel to Benson more than Chalgrove.

81 We explored the possibility of placing Berrick Salome in a ward with Benson, and the knock-on effects to electoral equality. However, this would create a Chalgrove ward with 18% fewer electors per councillor than the district average. In this instance, we do not consider that the evidence relating to community identities justifies the creation of a ward with such a high level of electoral inequality.

82 Therefore, we are slightly amending our draft recommendations for Chalgrove for it to be a single-member ward comprising the parishes of Berrick Salome, Brightwell Baldwin, Chalgrove and Newington, and not include Cuxham with Easington.

83 In the Benson area, Ewelme Parish Council supported our draft recommendations for a two-member Benson ward incorporating the parishes of Benson, Crowmarsh, Ewelme and Warborough. The Council proposed renaming the ward 'Benson & Crowmarsh', as it now covered the large village of Crowmarsh Gifford. We consider this name would better reflect the identity of the ward.

84 Our final recommendations in this area are for a single-member Chalgrove ward, and a two-member Benson & Crowmarsh ward. These wards will have 9% fewer, and a number equal to the district average electors per councillor by 2018.

### **Berinsfield and Sandford & the Wittenhams**

85 During the consultation on our draft recommendations, we received one submission referring to each of our proposed Berinsfield and Sandford & the Wittenhams wards.

86 We received a submission from Berinsfield Parish Council expressing a preference to include the village of Burcot in our proposed Berinsfield ward. However, Burcot is a part of neighbouring Clifton Hampden parish, and we did not consider that there was sufficient evidence provided of community ties to justify splitting the parish of Clifton Hampden.

87 A local resident argued that the existing Sandford-on-Thames ward, comprising the parishes of Clifton Hampden, Culham, Nuneham Courtenay and Sandford-on-Thames, was a large enough district ward already. She also argued that a larger ward would adversely affect residents' ability to gain councillor support for issues.

88 We investigated the possibility of retaining the existing Sandford-on-Thames ward. However, this ward would have 33% fewer electors per councillor than the district average by 2018. We do not consider there has been sufficient evidence of community identity to justify such a proposal, nor do we consider that the geographical size of our proposed Sandford & the Wittenhams ward would adversely affect councillor representation compared with elsewhere in the district. It is also worth noting our proposed Sandford & the Wittenhams ward received no comment from any parish council in the area.

89 We are therefore confirming as final our draft recommendations for single-member Berinsfield and Sandford & the Wittenhams wards, which will have 4% fewer and 2% more electors per councillor than the district average by 2018.

90 Overall, our final recommendations for the western part of South Oxfordshire are for single-member Berinsfield, Chalgrove and Sandford & the Wittenhams wards, two-member Benson & Crowmarsh, Cholsey, Didcot West and Wallingford wards, and three-member Didcot North East and Didcot South wards. These wards are projected to have 4% fewer, 9% fewer, 2% more, equal to, 9% more, 12% fewer, 6% more, 2% more and 7% fewer electors per councillor than the district average by 2018, respectively.

91 These proposals can be seen on the large map accompanying this report.

## South East

92 The draft recommendations for the south-eastern part of the district were for three single-member wards, two two-member wards and one three-member ward.

93 Our draft recommendations were partly based on the Council's scheme, with significant amendments in the centre of this area in order to take account of strong community evidence received during the first stage of consultation.

### **Woodcote & Rotherfield and Sonning Common**

94 During the consultation on our draft recommendations, we received six submissions relating to our proposed Woodcote & Rotherfield ward, from the parish councils of Bix & Assendon, Highmoor, Nuffield, Rotherfield Peppard and Woodcote, as well as a submission from Councillor Quinton (Woodcote ward).

95 Reiterating representations made during the previous consultation, Bix & Assendon, Highmoor and Nuffield parish councils all expressed support for our Woodcote & Rotherfield ward.

96 Woodcote Parish Council stated that it considered that the proposed ward was too large, an opinion shared by Councillor Quinton. Woodcote Parish Council stated it would prefer to be a single-member ward on its own, or alternatively included with Goring, and argued that it had little affinity with the parishes with which it was placed under our draft recommendations. However, to include Woodcote with our proposed Goring ward would have significant knock-on effects on electoral equality for both Woodcote & Rotherfield ward and for neighbouring wards. Rotherfield Peppard Parish Council also objected to our draft recommendations and expressed their support for the Council's proposals. As our Woodcote & Rotherfield ward has received support from a number of parishes, we are not persuaded that there is sufficient community evidence to move away from our draft recommendations in this area.

97 In Sonning Common, we received 13 submissions relating to our draft recommendations. These included submissions from the parish councils of Binfield Heath, Eye & Dunsden, Shiplake and Sonning Common, and from Councillor Harrison (Sonning Common ward). We also received seven submissions from local residents. All the respondents objected to our two-member Sonning Common ward, combining the parishes of Binfield Heath, Eye & Dunsden, Harpsden, and Shiplake with Sonning Common. They argued that there are no ties between the villages and Sonning Common, and that residents of the villages look to Henley for their services. There was also concern from residents in Sonning Common that they could end up with two members elected from Shiplake representing them, and similar concern from residents in Shiplake that they could end up with two members elected from Sonning Common representing them.

98 Sonning Common Parish Council expressed a desire to be in a single-member ward with no other parishes or, as an alternative, with Rotherfield Peppard parish, arguing that there was a difference in character between Sonning Common and Shiplake. A single-member Sonning Common ward comprising only Sonning Common parish would have 2% more electors per councillor than the district average

by 2018. However, it would leave the remaining Shiplake area with 16% fewer electors per councillor than the district average by 2018. We do not consider that the community evidence is strong enough to justify such a high level of electoral inequality.

99 In order for a single-member Shiplake ward to have a reasonable level of electoral equality, it would be necessary to include neighbouring areas. The closest areas geographically are the southern part of Henley-on-Thames and the parish of Rotherfield Greys. Regarding Henley-on-Thames, we have not received any submissions that would justify dividing Henley-on-Thames between district wards, and therefore are not inclined to consider that as an option. The other possibility would be to include Rotherfield Greys with Shiplake. This would improve electoral variance in a single-member Shiplake ward to -7%. However, during our first stage of consultation we received a submission from Rotherfield Greys Parish Council. This stated that they identified closely with Rotherfield Peppard, Highmoor, Stoke Row and Checkendon, with particularly close ties to Rotherfield Peppard. Rotherfield Peppard and Highmoor parish councils also identified links with Rotherfield Greys. Despite the Council highlighting that not all parishes with Rotherfield Greys had identified links cited similar links in return, we consider that placing Rotherfield Greys in a ward with parishes to the south would break many existing community ties.

100 In this area the decision is between whether to include in a ward two communities that do not seem to associate with one another, or to split other communities from those with which they have close ties. In this instance, we are persuaded that community identity would be more effectively maintained by not splitting Rotherfield Greys parish from those communities with which it has ties. Although Sonning Common and Shiplake will be in the same ward, we consider that it is preferable to unite two disparate communities than to split one community.

101 We are therefore confirming as final our draft recommendations in this area. This will create two two-member Sonning Common and Woodcote & Rotherfield wards, which will have 7% fewer and 6% more electors per councillor than the district average by 2018.

### **Watlington**

102 As discussed in paragraphs 78–79, we are amending our proposed Watlington ward in order to include the parish of Cuxham with Easington. We received no other submissions relating to this area, and are thus confirming as final our draft recommendations subject to the change described above. Our single-member Watlington ward will therefore have an equal number of electors per councillor to the district average by 2018.

### **Henley-on-Thames, Goring and Kidmore End & Whitchurch**

103 We received no submissions relating to Henley-on-Thames, Goring, Kidmore End & Whitchurch, and are therefore confirming our draft recommendations in these areas as final.

104 Overall, our final recommendations in the south-eastern part of the district are for single-member Goring, Kidmore End & Whitchurch and Watlington wards, two-member Sonning Common and Woodcote & Rotherfield wards, and a three-member Henley-on-Thames ward. These wards are projected to have 1% more, 6% fewer, equal to, 7% fewer, 6% more and 3% more electors per councillor than the district average by 2018.

105 These proposals can be seen on the large map accompanying this report.

## Conclusions

106 Table 1 shows the impact of our final recommendations on electoral equality, based on 2012 and 2018 electorate figures.

**Table 1: Summary of electoral arrangements**

	Final recommendations	
	2012	2018
Number of councillors	36	36
Number of wards	21	21
Average number of electors per councillor	2,868	3,018
Number of wards with a variance more than 10% from the average	6	1
Number of wards with a variance more than 20% from the average	1	0

### **Final recommendation**

South Oxfordshire District Council should comprise 36 councillors serving 21 wards, as detailed and named in Table A1 and illustrated on the large map accompanying this report.

## Parish electoral arrangements

107 As part of an electoral review, we are required to have regard to the statutory criteria set out in Schedule 2 to the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009 (the 2009 Act). The Schedule provides that if a parish is to be divided between divisions or wards it must also be divided into parish wards, so that each parish ward lies wholly within a single division or ward. We cannot recommend changes to the external boundaries of parishes as part of an electoral review.

108 Under the 2009 Act we only have the power to make such changes as a direct consequence of our recommendations for principal authority division arrangements. However, the respective principal authority (the district or borough council in the area) has powers under the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 to conduct community governance reviews to effect changes to parish electoral arrangements.

109 As a result of our proposed electoral ward boundaries and having regard to the statutory criteria set out in Schedule 2 to the 2009 Act, we propose revised parish electoral arrangements for Didcot parish.

### **Final recommendation**

Didcot Town Council should return 21 parish councillors, as at present, representing six wards: All Saints (returning five members), Ladygrove (returning seven members), Millbrook (returning one member), Northbourne (returning four members),

Orchard (returning one member) and Park (returning three members). The proposed parish ward boundaries are illustrated and named on Map 1.

### 3 What happens next?

110 We have now completed our review of electoral arrangements for South Oxfordshire District Council. A draft Order – the legal document which brings into force our recommendations – will be laid in Parliament. The draft Order will provide for new electoral arrangements which will come into force at the next elections for South Oxfordshire District Council in 2015.

#### Equalities

111 This report has been screened for impact on equalities, with due regard being given to the general equalities duties as set out in section 149 of the Equality Act 2010. As no potential negative impacts were identified, a full equality impact analysis is not required.

## 4 Mapping

### Final recommendations for South Oxfordshire

112 The following map illustrates our proposed ward boundaries for South Oxfordshire District Council:

- **Sheet 1, Map 1** illustrates in outline form the proposed wards for South Oxfordshire District Council.

**You can also view our final recommendations for South Oxfordshire District Council on our interactive maps at [consultation.lgbce.org.uk](https://consultation.lgbce.org.uk)**

## Appendix A

**Table A1: Final recommendations for South Oxfordshire District Council**

	<b>Ward name</b>	<b>Number of councillors</b>	<b>Electorate (2012)</b>	<b>Number of electors per councillor</b>	<b>Variance from average %</b>	<b>Electorate (2018)</b>	<b>Number of electors per councillor</b>	<b>Variance from average %</b>
1	Benson & Crowmarsh	2	5,759	2,880	0%	6,063	3,031	0%
2	Berinsfield	1	2,911	2,911	1%	2,891	2,891	-4%
3	Chalgrove	1	2,771	2,771	-3%	2,739	2,739	-9%
4	Chinnor	2	6,033	3,017	5%	6,195	3,098	3%
5	Cholsey	2	6,408	3,204	12%	6,576	3,288	9%
6	Didcot North East	3	7,515	2,505	-13%	9,267	3,089	2%
7	Didcot South	3	7,593	2,531	-12%	8,455	2,818	-7%
8	Didcot West	2	3,535	1,768	-38%	5,309	2,655	-12%
9	Forest Hill & Holton	1	2,949	2,949	3%	2,924	2,924	-3%
10	Garsington & Horspath	1	2,899	2,899	1%	2,862	2,862	-5%
11	Goring	1	3,074	3,074	7%	3,059	3,059	1%
12	Haseley Brook	1	3,148	3,148	10%	3,118	3,118	3%

**Table A1 (cont.): Final recommendations for South Oxfordshire District Council**

	<b>Ward name</b>	<b>Number of councillors</b>	<b>Electorate (2012)</b>	<b>Number of electors per councillor</b>	<b>Variance from average %</b>	<b>Electorate (2018)</b>	<b>Number of electors per councillor</b>	<b>Variance from average %</b>
13	Henley-on-Thames	3	9,195	3,065	7%	9,315	3,105	3%
14	Kidmore End & Whitchurch	1	2,893	2,893	1%	2,838	2,838	-6%
15	Sandford & the Wittenhams	1	3,127	3,127	9%	3,084	3,084	2%
16	Sonning Common	2	5,666	2,833	-1%	5,606	2,803	-7%
17	Thame	3	9,063	3,021	5%	9,301	3,100	3%
18	Wallingford	2	6,045	3,023	5%	6,394	3,197	6%
19	Watlington	1	3,065	3,065	7%	3,021	3,021	0%
20	Wheatley	1	3,209	3,209	12%	3,222	3,222	7%
21	Woodcote & Rotherfield	2	6,401	3,201	12%	6,403	3,202	6%
	<b>Totals</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>103,259</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>108,643</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>
	<b>Averages</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>2,868</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>3,018</b>	<b>-</b>

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

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

# Appendix B

## Glossary and abbreviations

AONB (Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty)	A landscape whose distinctive character and natural beauty are so outstanding that it is in the nation's interest to safeguard it
Boundary Committee	The Boundary Committee for England was a committee of the Electoral Commission, responsible for undertaking electoral reviews
Constituent areas	The geographical areas that make up any one ward, expressed in parishes or existing wards, or parts of either
Council size	The number of councillors elected to serve a council
Electoral Change Order (or Order)	A legal document which implements changes to the electoral arrangements of a local authority
Division	A specific area of a county, defined for electoral, administrative and representational purposes. Eligible electors can vote in whichever ward they are registered for the candidate or candidates they wish to represent them on the county council
Electoral Commission	An independent body that was set up by the UK Parliament. Its aim is integrity and public confidence in the democratic process. It regulates party and election finance and sets standards for well-run elections
Electoral fairness	When one elector's vote is worth the same as another's
Electoral imbalance	Where there is a difference between the number of electors represented by a councillor and the average for the local authority

Electorate	People in the authority who are registered to vote in elections. For the purposes of this report, we refer specifically to the electorate for local government elections
Multi-member ward or division	A ward or division represented by more than one councillor and usually not more than three councillors
National Park	The 13 National Parks in England and Wales were designated under the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act of 1949 and can be found at <a href="http://www.nationalparks.gov.uk">www.nationalparks.gov.uk</a>
Number of electors per councillor	The total number of electors in a local authority divided by the number of councillors
Over-represented	Where there are fewer electors per councillor in a ward or division than the average
Parish	A specific and defined area of land within a single local authority enclosed within a parish boundary. There are over 10,000 parishes in England, which provide the first tier of representation to their local residents
Parish council	A body elected by electors in the parish which serves and represents the area defined by the parish boundaries. See also 'Town Council'
Parish (or Town) Council electoral arrangements	The total number of councillors on any one parish or town council; the number, names and boundaries of parish wards; and the number of councillors for each ward
Parish ward	A particular area of a parish, defined for electoral, administrative and representational purposes. Eligible electors vote in whichever parish ward they live for candidate or candidates they wish to represent them on the parish council

PER (or periodic electoral review)	A review of the electoral arrangements of all local authorities in England, undertaken periodically. The last programme of PERs was undertaken between 1996 and 2004 by the Boundary Committee for England and its predecessor, the now-defunct Local Government Commission for England
Political management arrangements	The Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 enabled local authorities in England to modernise their decision making process. Councils could choose from two broad categories; a directly elected mayor and cabinet or a cabinet with a leader
Town Council	A parish council which has been given ceremonial 'town' status. More information on achieving such status can be found at <a href="http://www.nalc.gov.uk">www.nalc.gov.uk</a>
Under-represented	Where there are more electors per councillor in a ward or division than the average
Variance (or electoral variance)	How far the number of electors per councillor in a ward or division varies in percentage terms from the average
Ward	A specific area of a district or borough, defined for electoral, administrative and representational purposes. Eligible electors can vote in whichever ward they are registered for the candidate or candidates they wish to represent them on the district or borough council