

LOCAL
GOVERNMENT
COMMISSION
FOR ENGLAND

FINAL
RECOMMENDATIONS
ON THE FUTURE
ELECTORAL
ARRANGEMENTS FOR
BLYTH VALLEY IN
NORTHUMBERLAND

*Report to the Secretary of State for
the Environment*

March 1997

LOCAL GOVERNMENT COMMISSION FOR ENGLAND

This report sets out the Commission's final recommendations on the electoral arrangements for Blyth Valley in Northumberland.

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Local Government Commission for England

25 March 1997

Dear Secretary of State

On 19 March 1996 the Commission commenced a periodic electoral review of the borough of Blyth Valley under the Local Government Act 1992. It published its draft recommendations in October 1996 and undertook a nine-week period of consultation.

The Commission has now formulated its final recommendations in the light of the consultation. It has, for the most part, confirmed its draft recommendations, although it has modified the names of seven wards in the light of further evidence. This report sets out the Commission's final recommendations for changes to electoral arrangements in the area.

The Commission is therefore recommending to you that Blyth Valley should be served by 50 councillors representing 20 wards, and that some changes should be made to ward boundaries in order to improve electoral equality, having regard to the Commission's statutory criteria. It is recommended that the whole Council should continue to be elected together every four years.

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

Yours sincerely

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

PROFESSOR MALCOLM GRANT
Chairman

SUMMARY

The Commission began a review of the electoral arrangements of Blyth Valley on 19 March 1996. It published its draft recommendations for electoral arrangements on 31 October 1996, after which it undertook a nine-week period of consultation.

- This report summarises the submissions received by the Commission during consultation on its draft recommendations, and offers its final recommendations to the Secretary of State.

The Commission found that the existing electoral arrangements provide unequal representation of electors in Blyth Valley because:

- in 10 of the 18 wards, the number of electors represented by each councillor varies by more than 10 per cent from the average for the borough;
- by 2001, the number of electors per councillor is likely to vary by more than 10 per cent from the average in 12 of the 18 wards.

The Commission's final recommendations for changes to the electoral arrangements (Figure 1) are that:

- Blyth Valley Borough Council should be served by 50 councillors, compared with 47 at present;
- there should be 20 wards, rather than 18 as at present;
- the boundaries of 13 of the existing wards should be modified, while five wards should retain their existing boundaries;
- elections should continue to take place every four years with the next elections taking place in 1999.

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

- In 18 of the 20 wards the number of electors per councillor would vary by no more than 10 per cent from the borough average.
- By 2001, the number of electors per councillor would vary by no more than 10 per cent from the average in 19 wards.

All further correspondence on these recommendations and the matters discussed in this report should be addressed to the Secretary of State for the Environment, who will not make an Order implementing the Commission's recommendations before 5 May 1997.

Figure 1:
The Commission's Final Recommendations: Summary

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Constituent areas	Map reference
1	Cowpen	3	Cowpen ward; Isabella ward (part)	Map 2 and Map A2
2	Cramlington East	3	Cramlington East ward; Cramlington South East ward (part); Eastfield ward (part)	Map 2 and Map A6
3	Cramlington Eastfield with East Hartford	2	Eastfield ward (part); Hartford and West Cramlington ward (part)	Map 2 and Map A5
4	Cramlington North	3	Parkside ward (part)	Map 2 and Map A5
5	Cramlington Parkside	2	Parkside ward (part)	Map 2 and Map A5
6	Cramlington South East	3	Cramlington South East ward (part)	Map 2 and Map A6
7	Cramlington Village	3	<i>Unchanged</i>	Map 2
8	Cramlington West	2	Hartford and West Cramlington ward (part)	Map 2 and Map A5
9	Croft	3	Croft ward; Wensleydale ward (part)	Map 2 and Map A2
10	Hartley	3	<i>Unchanged</i>	Map 2
11	Holywell	2	Holywell ward (part)	Map 2 and Map A3
12	Isabella	2	Isabella ward (part)	Map 2 and Map A2
13	Kitty Brewster	2	<i>Unchanged</i>	Map 2
14	Newsham and New Delaval	3	<i>Unchanged</i>	Map 2
15	Plessey	3	Isabella ward (part); Plessey ward	Map 2 and Map A2
16	Seaton Delaval	3	Holywell ward (part); Seaton Delaval ward	Map 2 and Map A3
17	Seghill	2	<i>Unchanged</i>	Map 2
18	South Beach	2	South Beach ward (part)	Map 2 and Map A4

Figure 1 (continued):

The Commission's Final Recommendations: Summary

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Constituent areas	Map reference
19	South Newsham	2	South Beach ward (part)	Map 2 and Map A4
20	Wensleydale	2	Wensleydale ward (part)	Map 2 and Map A2

Note: There are no parishes in Blyth Valley.

1. INTRODUCTION

1 This report contains the Commission's final recommendations on the electoral arrangements for the borough of Blyth Valley in Northumberland.

2 The Commission has now reviewed all the districts in Northumberland as part of its programme of periodic electoral reviews of all principal local authority areas in England. This is the Commission's first review of the electoral arrangements for Blyth Valley. The last such review was completed by the Commission's predecessor, the Local Government Boundary Commission (LGBC), which reported to the Secretary of State in December 1986 (Report No. 527). The electoral arrangements of Northumberland County Council were last reviewed in January 1980 (Report No. 370). It is intended that a review of the County Council's electoral arrangements will follow in due course.

3 In undertaking these reviews, the Commission is required to have regard to:

- the statutory criteria contained in section 13(5) of the Local Government Act 1992:
 - (a) to reflect the identities and interests of local people; and
 - (b) to 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 The Commission has also had regard to its own *Guidance and Procedural Advice for Local Authorities and Other Interested Parties* (published in March 1996 and supplemented in September 1996). This sets out its approach to the reviews.

5 The review of Blyth Valley was in four stages (Figure 2).

6 Stage One commenced on 19 March 1996. The Commission wrote to Blyth Valley Borough Council inviting it to make proposals for its future electoral arrangements. Copies of that letter were sent to Northumberland County Council, the other borough and district councils in Northumberland, the Northumbria Police Authority, the local authority associations, the Northumberland Association of Local Councils, Members of Parliament and Members of the European Parliament with constituency interests in the borough, and the headquarters of the main political parties. The Commission also placed a notice in the local press, issued a press release and invited the Borough Council itself to publicise the review further.

7 At Stage Two the Commission considered all the representations received during Stage One and formulated its draft recommendations.

8 Stage Three began on 31 October 1996 with the publication of the Commission's report, *Draft Recommendations on the Future Electoral Arrangements for Blyth Valley in Northumberland*. Copies were sent to all those to whom the Commission wrote at the start of the review as well as to those who had written to the Commission during Stage One, inviting comments on the Commission's preliminary conclusions. Again the Commission placed a notice in the local press, issued a press release and invited the Borough Council to publicise the report more widely.

9 Finally, during Stage Four, the Commission reconsidered its draft recommendations in the light of the Stage Three consultation.

Figure 2:
Stages of the Review

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

2. CURRENT ELECTORAL ARRANGEMENTS

10 Blyth Valley is situated in the south-eastern corner of Northumberland and is one of the county's more urban districts. It is bounded to the north by the River Blyth, to the east by the North Sea and to the south by the metropolitan area of North Tyneside. The two main centres of population, Blyth and Cramlington, are connected by main roads and Cramlington is linked to Morpeth and Newcastle by rail. The borough was created in 1974 when the Municipal Borough of Blyth, Whitley Bay Metropolitan Borough and part of the Urban District of Seaton Valley were merged.

11 The current electoral arrangements in the borough provide for a total of 47 councillors representing 18 wards. There are 12 three-member wards, five two-member wards and one single-member ward (Map 1 and Figure 3). The whole Council is elected every four years, with the next elections due to take place in May 1999.

12 Based on the current electoral register (February 1996), the total electorate of the borough is 62,527, and each councillor represents an average of 1,330 electors. The Borough Council forecasts that the electorate will increase to 63,338 by the year 2001, providing an average number of electors per councillor of 1,348.

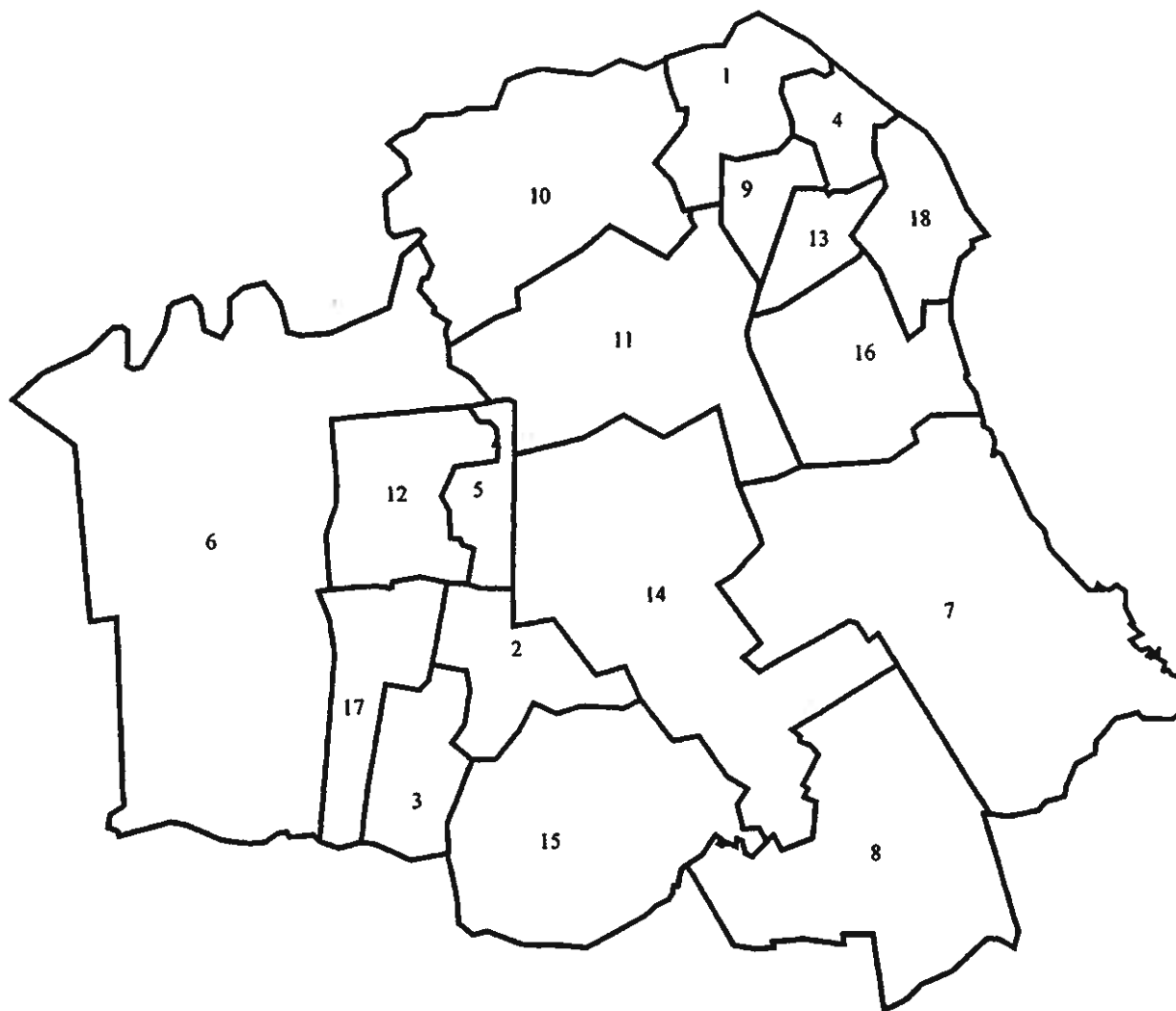
13 In order to compare levels of electoral inequality between wards, the Commission calculated the extent to which the number of electors per councillor in each ward (the councillor:elector ratio) varies from the average for the borough in percentage terms. In the text which follows this calculation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

14 Since the last electoral review by the LGBC in 1986, changes in population and electorate have not been evenly spread across the borough. As a result the number of electors per councillor varies from the average in many wards. In 10 of the 18 wards the variation is more than 10 per cent from the average, and in 3 wards more than 20 per cent.

Currently, Seghill ward has 84 per cent more electors per councillor than the average so that the councillor for this ward represents 2,443 electors compared to the average of 1,330.

15 The borough has been unparished since it was created in 1974.

Map 1:
Existing Wards in Blyth Valley



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Key to Wards

- | | |
|---------------------------------|----------------------------|
| 1 Cowpen | 10 Kitty Brewster |
| 2 Cramlington East | 11 Newsham and New Delaval |
| 3 Cramlington South East | 12 Parkside |
| 4 Croft | 13 Plessey |
| 5 Eastfield | 14 Seaton Delaval |
| 6 Hartford and West Cramlington | 15 Seghill |
| 7 Hartley | 16 South Beach |
| 8 Holywell | 17 Village |
| 9 Isabella | 18 Wensleydale |

Figure 3:
Existing Electoral Arrangements

Ward name	1996				2001 (Projected)		
	Number of councillors	Electorate	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
1 Cowpen	3	3,405	1,135	-15	3,434	1,145	-15
2 Cramlington East	3	3,360	1,120	-16	3,182	1,061	-21
3 Cramlington South East	3	4,096	1,365	3	4,191	1,397	4
4 Croft	3	3,656	1,219	-8	3,492	1,164	-14
5 Eastfield	2	2,643	1,322	-1	2,704	1,352	0
6 Hartford and West Cramlington	3	3,086	1,029	-23	3,023	1,008	-25
7 Hartley	3	4,109	1,370	3	4,021	1,340	-1
8 Holywell	2	2,938	1,469	10	2,999	1,500	11
9 Isabella	3	3,348	1,116	-16	3,231	1,077	-20
10 Kitty Brewster	2	2,345	1,173	-12	2,322	1,161	-14
11 Newsham and New Delaval	3	3,708	1,236	-7	3,740	1,247	-7
12 Parkside	3	5,404	1,801	35	6,258	2,086	55
13 Plessey	3	3,604	1,201	-10	3,525	1,175	-13
14 Seaton Delaval	2	3,068	1,534	15	3,081	1,541	14
15 Seghill	1	2,443	2,443	84	2,614	2,614	94
16 South Beach	3	4,462	1,487	12	4,814	1,605	19
17 Village	3	3,880	1,293	-3	3,812	1,271	-6
18 Wensleydale	2	2,972	1,486	12	2,895	1,448	7
Totals	47	62,527	—	—	63,338	—	—
Averages	—	—	1,330	—	—	1,348	—

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

Note: The 'variance from average' column shows by how far, in percentage terms, the number of electors per councillor varies from the average for the borough. The minus symbol (-) denotes a lower than average number of electors. For example, electors in Isabella ward are relatively over-represented by 16 per cent, while electors in Seghill ward are relatively under-represented by 84 per cent. Figures have been rounded to the nearest whole number.

3. DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS

16 During Stage One, the Commission received submissions from Blyth Valley Borough Council and Blyth Valley Conservative Association. In the light of these representations, the Commission formulated its preliminary conclusions which were set out in its report, *Draft Recommendations on the Future Electoral Arrangements for Blyth Valley in Northumberland*. The Commission proposed that Blyth Valley should be served by 50 councillors, serving 20 wards. It also proposed that:

- (a) in the urban area of Blyth, the boundaries should be modified between Isabella and Cowpen wards, between Wensleydale and Croft wards and between Isabella and Plessey wards, and that the number of councillors serving Isabella ward should be reduced from three to two;
- (b) in the Cramlington area, Parkside ward should be split to form a new North Cramlington ward with the remaining ward called Parkside. The Commission also proposed modifications to the boundaries between Eastfield ward and Cramlington East ward, between Hartford and West Cramlington ward and Eastfield ward, and between Cramlington South East ward and Cramlington East ward. The remaining Hartford and West Cramlington ward should be renamed West Cramlington;
- (c) South Beach ward should be divided into two new wards to be called South Beach North and South Beach South;
- (d) the ward of Seaton Delaval should have an additional councillor, bringing the number to three, and there should be a modification to the boundary between Seaton Delaval ward and Holywell ward;
- (e) there should be an additional councillor for Seghill ward, increasing the number from one to two;
- (f) there should be no change to the existing arrangements for the wards of Hartley, Kitty Brewster, Newsham and New Delaval and Village.

Draft Recommendation

Blyth Valley Borough Council should comprise 50 members representing 20 wards. The whole Council should be elected together every four years, as at present.

17 The Commission's proposals would have resulted in an overall improvement in electoral equality, with the number of electors per councillor in 18 of the 20 wards varying by no more than 10 per cent from the average. By 2001, the number of electors per councillor would be no more than 10 per cent from the average in 19 of the wards.

18 The Commission's draft recommendations are summarised in Appendix B.

4. RESPONSES TO CONSULTATION

19 During the consultation period on the Commission's draft recommendations report, seven submissions were received. A list of all respondents is available on request from the Commission.

Blyth Valley Borough Council

20 The Borough Council, in its Stage Three submission, supported the Commission's proposals in respect of the council size and electoral cycle of Blyth Valley borough, together with the Commission's draft recommendations for the wards of Cramlington East, Cramlington South East, Holywell, Isabella, Parkside, Plessey, Seghill and Seaton Delaval. It also supported the Commission's draft recommendations for the retention of existing arrangements in the wards of Hartley, Kitty Brewster, Newsham and New Delaval, and Village. Similarly, it expressed its support for the Commission's draft recommendation to split the current South Beach ward into South Beach North ward and South Beach South ward, but suggested alternative names of 'South Beach' and 'South Newsham' for such wards.

21 However, the Council opposed the Commission's draft recommendation for a modification to the boundary between the district wards of Wensleydale and Croft, and to the transfer of East Hartford, in the existing ward of Hartford and West Cramlington, to Eastfield ward. It expressed its opposition to the latter proposal on the grounds of community identity, with East Hartford being an ex-mining village like its neighbour Nelson Village, while the area comprising Eastfield ward does not share such ties principally due to it having been developed more recently. The Council expressed its concern that the Commission's recommendation would break community links between the areas of East Hartford, Nelson Village and Beaconhill which are currently in the same Hartford and West Cramlington ward.

Blyth Valley Borough Council Labour Group

22 The Labour Group supported the Commission's draft recommendations in respect of the council size, together with its proposals for the wards of Cramlington East, Cramlington South East, Hartley, Holywell, Kitty Brewster, Newsham and New Delaval, Parkside, Seaton Delaval, Seghill and Village.

23 However, the Group expressed a preference for no change to the wards of Cowpen, Isabella and Plessey albeit conceding that to place community identity above electoral equality would result in electoral imbalances. The Group also preferred no change to the wards of Wensleydale and Croft.

24 The Labour Group agreed with the Commission's proposal to split the ward of South Beach, following the boundaries proposed in its draft recommendations. It did, however, suggest that the proposed ward for South Beach North ward should be renamed 'South Beach' and that the proposed South Beach South ward should be renamed 'South Newsham'.

25 With regard to Hartford and West Cramlington ward and Eastfield ward, the Group supported the Commission's proposal to transfer the area south of Oakley Drive, currently in Eastfield ward, into Cramlington East ward. However, it opposed the proposal to transfer the area of East Hartford from Hartford and West Cramlington ward into Eastfield ward on the grounds that East Hartford and the nearby areas of Nelson Village and Beaconhill share community interests and to separate them would break such ties.

Blyth Valley Constituency Labour Party

26 The Constituency Labour Party supported the Commission's proposals in respect of council size, and the recommendations for the wards of Cramlington East, Cramlington South East, Holywell, Parkside, Seaton Delaval, Seghill and South Beach. It also supported the Commission's proposals to retain the existing arrangements for the wards of Hartley, Kitty Brewster, Newsham and New Delaval and Village.

27 The Constituency Labour Party suggested that the wards of Eastfield, Parkside and Village should all be prefixed by the name 'Cramlington', arguing that this would be in accordance with the geographical location of the wards (all three being in the Cramlington area of Blyth) and make them consistent with other wards in the area. It also suggested alternative names of 'South Beach' and 'South Newsham' for the proposed wards of South Beach North and South Beach South.

28 It opposed the Commission's draft recommendations for the wards of Cowpen, Croft, Isabella, Plessey and Wensleydale, preferring no change to their electoral arrangements. The Constituency Labour Party also opposed the Commission's draft recommendation that the area of East Hartford be transferred from Hartford and West Cramlington ward into Eastfield ward, and suggested that the area should instead be transferred into the current North Cramlington ward. It considered that if the Commission were to adopt this proposal, the current electoral imbalance in Hartford and West Cramlington ward would be redressed.

Blyth Valley Conservative Association

29 The Association generally supported the Commission's draft recommendations. However, it suggested the alternative name of 'Horton' for the Commission's proposed new North Cramlington ward.

Cramlington West Branch Labour Party

30 The Branch Labour Party supported all but one of the Commission's draft recommendations: it opposed the proposal that the East Hartford area of Hartford and West Cramlington ward be transferred into Eastfield ward. It expressed concern over the lack of a shared community identity between Eastfield and East Hartford, in contrast to that which it perceived currently existed between East Hartford, Nelson Village and Beaconhill within the current Hartford and West Cramlington ward.

Nelson Village Community Association

31 The Association expressed concern over the Commission's draft recommendation that the area of East Hartford, currently in Hartford and West Cramlington ward, be transferred into Eastfield ward. It considered that to combine the areas would be against the interests of residents on the grounds that there are no established ties that exist between the areas. It proposed no change to the current arrangements in that part of the borough.

Other Representations

32 The Commission also received a submission from a member of the public who also expressed opposition to the Commission's proposal for the area of East Hartford, again on community identity grounds.

5. ANALYSIS AND FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS

33 As indicated previously, the Commission's prime objective in considering the most appropriate electoral arrangements for Blyth Valley borough was to achieve electoral equality, having regard to the statutory criteria and to Schedule 11 to the Local Government Act 1972, which refers to the ratio of electors to councillors being "as nearly as may be, the same in every ward of the district or borough".

34 However, the Commission's function is not merely arithmetical, for three reasons. First, its recommendations are not intended to be based solely on existing electorate figures, but also on assumptions as to changes in the number and distribution of local government electors likely to take place within the five years following the commencement of the review. Second, it must have regard to the desirability of fixing identifiable boundaries, and to maintaining local ties which might otherwise be broken. Third, the Commission has had to consider the desirability of servicing effective and convenient local government, and reflecting the interests and identities of local communities.

35 It is therefore impractical to design an electoral scheme which provides for exactly the same number of electors per councillor in every ward of an authority. There must be a degree of flexibility. In conducting its electoral reviews, the Commission's predecessor, the LGBC, considered that variations from the average number of electors per councillor for an authority as a whole should be kept to the absolute minimum: a variation of up to plus or minus 10 per cent in a particular ward may be regarded as being "acceptable", but variations in excess of plus or minus 20 per cent were generally accepted only in very exceptional circumstances.

36 The Commission's view is that the LGBC's approach to this issue had merit insofar as it combined a clearly defined tolerance threshold with the degree of flexibility necessary to achieve reasonable levels of electoral equality across a local authority's area. Accordingly, the Commission has decided to adopt this approach for the purposes of its reviews.

37 In its March 1996 *Guidance*, the Commission expressed the view that "proposals for changes in electoral arrangements should therefore be based on variations in each ward of no more than plus or minus 10 per cent from the average councillor:elector ratio for the authority, having regard to five-year forecasts of changes in electorates. Imbalances in excess of plus or minus 20 per cent may be acceptable, but only in highly exceptional circumstances, and ... will have to be justified in full". However, as the Commission emphasised in its September 1996 supplement to its *Guidance*: "While the Commission accepts that absolute equality of representation is likely to be unattainable, it considers that, if electoral imbalances are to be kept to the minimum, such equality should be the starting point in any electoral review".

Electorate Projections

38 The Borough Council submitted electorate forecasts for the year 2001, projecting an increase in the electorate of 811 over the five-year period from 1996, from 62,527 to 63,338. The Council estimated rates and locations of housing development with regard to structure and local plans, and the expected rate of building over the five-year period. Reasonable estimates have been made of the changes in electorate that will arise. The Commission accepts that this is an inexact science and, having given consideration to projected electorates, is content that they represent the best estimates that can reasonably be made at this time.

Council Size

39 The Commission concluded in its March 1996 *Guidance* that it would normally expect the number of councillors serving a borough council to be in the range of 30-60.

40 Blyth Valley Borough Council is at present served by 47 councillors. The Council proposed an increase in council size to 48 during Stage One of the review. In its draft recommendations the Commission considered the size and distribution of the electorate, the geography and other characteristics of the area, together with the representations received. The Commission concluded that the statutory criteria and the achievement of electoral equality would best be served by a council size of 50 members. The Commission received support for this council size from the Borough Council, Blyth Valley Constituency Labour Party and Blyth Valley Borough Council Labour Group. During Stage Three, it has received no evidence to persuade it to move away from its view.

Electoral Arrangements

41 Having considered all representations received during both Stage One and Stage Three of the review, the Commission has further considered its draft recommendations. The following areas are considered in turn:

- (a) Blyth - the wards of Cowpen, Croft, Isabella, Plessey and Wensleydale;
- (b) Cramlington - the wards of Cramlington East, Cramlington South East, Eastfield, Hartford and West Cramlington, Parkside and Village;
- (c) South Beach ward;
- (d) Hartley, Kitty Brewster and Newsham and New Delaval wards;
- (e) Holywell and Seaton Delaval wards;
- (f) Seghill ward.

Blyth

42 The Commission adopted as its draft recommendation the Borough Council's proposals in respect of the town of Blyth, which involved modifying the boundaries of the existing wards of Cowpen, Isabella and Plessey while reducing the number of councillors serving Isabella ward from three to two. However, the Commission also recommended a modification to the boundary between Wensleydale and Croft wards, as detailed in Map A2 at Appendix A. These recommendations would achieve a good level of electoral equality, with the number of electors per councillor in each of the wards of Cowpen, Croft, Isabella, Plessey and Wensleydale varying from the

borough average by less than 10 per cent in both 1996 and by 2001.

43 During Stage Three, the Borough Council supported those parts of the Commission's draft recommendations which had been based on its own original submission. However, it opposed the Commission's proposals for a boundary modification between the wards of Wensleydale and Croft.

44 The Commission received three other submissions on this issue during Stage Three of the review, from Blyth Valley Constituency Labour Party, Blyth Valley Borough Council Labour Group and Blyth Valley Conservative Association. Blyth Valley Constituency Labour Party expressed its preference that there be should no change to the existing electoral arrangements of any of the five Blyth (town) borough wards. Blyth Valley Borough Council Labour Group supported the Commission's proposals for modifications to the boundaries between Isabella and Cowpen wards, and between Isabella and Plessey wards. However, despite its support, the Group expressed reservations over the proposed boundary modification between Isabella and Plessey wards, and expressed the view that there should be no change to the boundary between Croft and Wensleydale wards.

45 Blyth Valley Conservative Association supported the Commission's proposals for the electoral arrangements of Blyth (town).

46 The Commission has carefully considered all views expressed during Stage Three on its proposals for the Blyth (town) wards. It would be unwilling to recommend the retention of the existing arrangements for Blyth because of the high level of electoral inequality that would result: it is projected that there would be variations of between 8 per cent and 20 per cent over the five wards by the year 2001. It has also noted the views expressed to maintain the present boundary between Croft and Wensleydale wards. However, the modification to the boundary would result in Wensleydale ward having a variance from the borough average of 8 per cent and Croft ward having a variance of 5 per cent. It has therefore concluded that its draft recommendations still provide the arrangements that would achieve electoral equality, having regard to the statutory criteria. The Commission has therefore decided to confirm its draft recommendations as final.

Cramlington

- 47 The Cramlington area currently returns 17 councillors and comprises the wards of Cramlington East, Cramlington South East, Eastfield, Hartford and West Cramlington, Parkside and Village. It is located in the south-west of the borough. Each of these wards return three members to the borough council, except Eastfield which returns two. The wards of Cramlington East and Hartford and West Cramlington are presently over-represented by 16 per cent and 23 per cent respectively, while Parkside ward is presently under represented by 35 per cent, projected to be 55 per cent by 2001. The other Cramlington wards all have an electoral variance within 10 per cent of the borough average number of electors per councillor.
- 48 The Commission, as part of its draft recommendations, proposed considerable change in Cramlington as a result of which the area as a whole would be represented by 18 councillors. It proposed that the existing Parkside ward be split to form a new North Cramlington ward, being served by three councillors, with the remainder of the ward retaining the name Parkside and being served by two councillors. The Commission also proposed that the East Hartford area of the current Hartford and West Cramlington ward should be transferred to Eastfield ward and that, as a consequence, West Cramlington's representation be reduced from three to two members. This transfer of the East Hartford area also led the Commission to propose changing the name of the Hartford and West Cramlington ward to West Cramlington, and consequently that Eastfield ward should be renamed Eastfield and East Hartford. The Commission also proposed modifications to the boundaries between Cramlington East ward and Cramlington South East ward, between Cramlington East ward and Eastfield ward, and that there should be no change to Village ward.
- 49 On the basis of the 1996 electoral register, these draft recommendations would provide all the wards of Cramlington with electoral variances within 10 per cent of the borough average, with the exception of North Cramlington ward which would be 26 per cent below the average. By 2001, however, it was projected that the number of electors per councillor in all seven wards in the area would be within 10 per cent of the average.
- 50 The modified boundary between Cramlington East ward and Cramlington South East ward would involve the transfer of 336 electors in Carlcroft Place, Cobden Road, Crookham Way and part of Cateran Way, currently in Cramlington South East ward, into Cramlington East ward. The boundary modification between Eastfield ward and Cramlington East ward would transfer the electors on the southern side of Oakley Drive, currently in Eastfield ward, into Cramlington East ward.
- 51 Blyth Valley Constituency Labour Party supported the Commission's boundary proposals for the wards of Cramlington South East and Parkside. Additionally, the Constituency Party proposed that the wards of Village, Parkside and Eastfield should be prefixed with the word 'Cramlington' to reflect their geographical location and be akin to other wards in the area. Blyth Valley Borough Council Labour Group supported the Commission's other proposals for Cramlington, including the splitting of Parkside ward but with the exception of its proposals for the East Hartford area of the existing Hartford and West Cramlington ward. Blyth Valley Conservative Association supported the Commission's proposals for Cramlington although it suggested that the name of the Commission's proposed new North Cramlington ward should be changed to 'Horton'.
- 52 During Stage Three, the Commission received a number of comments regarding Cramlington, particularly in relation to its proposal that East Hartford be transferred from the existing ward of Hartford and West Cramlington to Eastfield ward. The Borough Council opposed the proposal as did both Blyth Valley Borough Council Labour Group and Blyth Valley Constituency Labour Party, the latter suggesting that the area could alternatively be transferred into the Commission's proposed new North Cramlington ward. Cramlington West Constituency Labour Party, the Nelson Village Community Association and one member of the public also objected to the proposal to move the East Hartford area into Eastfield ward.
- 53 The six respondents opposing the Commission's draft recommendation for the East Hartford area argued against the proposal on community identity grounds. They each contended that to merge East Hartford with the present Eastfield ward would not combine areas of a similar character or identity. In its draft recommendations, the Commission acknowledged that the proposed ward would comprise communities with different traditions and interests.
- 54 While the Commission recognises the concerns expressed, should the area of East Hartford be

retained in its existing ward of Hartford and West Cramlington, the resulting electoral variances for both that ward and Eastfield ward would worsen considerably. On 1996 figures, Eastfield and East Hartford ward would have an electoral variance of 8 per cent above the borough average under the Commission's recommendations, worsening to 10 per cent below should the area of East Hartford be retained in its existing ward. West Cramlington ward would have an electoral variance which worsens from 6 per cent below the borough average to 23 per cent below if East Hartford were retained in that ward. On electoral equality grounds, therefore, the Commission is not persuaded to recommend the retention of the existing arrangements for this area.

55 The Commission had considered the community of interest between East Hartford and Eastfield ward in the formulation of its draft recommendations. It has now carefully re-considered its proposals for the area in the light of the representations received during Stage Three. It recognises that community ties between East Hartford and Eastfield may be limited but considers that the current Hartford and West Cramlington ward is also less than conducive to maintaining community links, given that it is bisected by a major road. The proposal for East Hartford to be transferred into the Commission's proposed North Cramlington ward, as suggested by the Blyth Valley Constituency Labour Party, would result in similar electoral equality to that proposed for the area in the Commission's draft recommendations but would combine areas that may not share similar community interests. The proposal for the area to be retained in its existing ward, as suggested by the Blyth Valley Borough Council Labour Group, would result in the wards having a higher degree of electoral inequality than is desirable and would be considerably worse than that proposed by the Commission as part of its draft recommendations, as detailed above.

56 The Commission acknowledges that the arguments in respect of East Hartford are finely balanced but has concluded that its draft recommendations for the electoral arrangements of Cramlington would best meet the need for electoral equality, having regard to the statutory criteria. However, the Commission proposes that, for clarity in the area and recognition of their location in the borough, the names of five of the Cramlington wards should change, as proposed by Blyth Valley Constituency Labour Party, from: Eastfield and East Hartford to 'Cramlington

Eastfield with East Hartford', North Cramlington to 'Cramlington North', Parkside to 'Cramlington Parkside', Village to 'Cramlington Village' and West Cramlington to 'Cramlington West'. The Commission recommends as final all boundary modifications for the Cramlington area, as proposed in its draft recommendations. However, the names of five of the Cramlington wards should be amended to include the name Cramlington, as detailed above (see Maps A5 and A6 at Appendix A).

South Beach

57 Taking into account the fact that the area has been earmarked for development, the Commission recommended that the existing South Beach ward be split to form two new wards, in order to provide for electoral equality in the area once the development is complete. It proposed that the new wards should be called South Beach North and South Beach South. The Commission's proposals would provide a good level of electoral equality in South Beach North ward, with the number of electors per councillor varying from the borough average by 8 per cent in 1996 and 7 per cent by 2001. South Beach South ward, however, would be over-represented, with a variance of 30 per cent in 1996 improving to 17 per cent by 2001. Given the improvement in electoral equality and that development is likely to continue beyond the year 2001, this level of inequality was considered unavoidable in the short term. The boundary proposed to divide the two wards is illustrated in Map A4 at Appendix A.

58 The draft recommendation was supported by the Borough Council, Blyth Valley Constituency Labour Party, Blyth Valley Borough Council Labour Group and Blyth Valley Conservative Association. However, the Borough Council, Blyth Valley Constituency Labour Party and Blyth Valley Borough Council Labour Group all proposed alternative names for the two new wards. Each proposed that South Beach North ward should be called 'South Beach' and South Beach South ward should be called 'South Newsham'.

59 Having received broad support for its proposals for the South Beach area, the Commission has decided to confirm its draft recommendations for these two new wards as final, subject to modifying their names from South Beach North to South Beach, and from South Beach South to South Newsham.

Hartley, Kitty Brewster and Newsham and New Delaval

60 In its draft recommendations report, the Commission proposed retaining the existing arrangements for the three wards of Hartley, Kitty Brewster and Newsham and New Delaval. These wards currently have electoral variances from the borough average of 3 per cent, 12 per cent and 7 per cent, respectively. However, as a consequence of the Commission's draft recommendations for an overall increase in council size, all three wards would have electoral variances that would not exceed 10 per cent from the borough average (Hartley 10 per cent in 1996 and 6 per cent by 2001, Kitty Brewster 6 per cent in 1996 and 8 per cent by 2001, Newsham and New Delaval 1 per cent in 1996 and 2 per cent by 2001).

61 During Stage Three, the Commission received support for its proposals from the Borough Council, Blyth Valley Constituency Labour Party, Blyth Valley Borough Council Labour Group and Blyth Valley Conservative Association. No other submissions were received. The Commission has therefore decided to confirm its draft recommendations for all three wards as final.

Holywell and Seaton Delaval

62 The Commission proposed that the number of councillors serving Seaton Delaval ward should be increased from two to three, and that the boundary between Holywell ward and Seaton Delaval ward should be modified. The electoral variances that these arrangements would provide are 3 per cent in 1996 and 1 per cent by 2001 for Holywell ward and 5 per cent in 1996 and 6 per cent in 2001 for Seaton Delaval ward. The re-aligned boundary would run in a south-easterly direction along Elsdon Avenue from the existing ward boundary, then south along Tillmouth Avenue, then westwards along Denham Drive until it rejoined the existing ward boundary.

63 During Stage Three of the review, the Borough Council supported the Commission's proposals as did Blyth Valley Constituency Labour Party, Blyth Valley Borough Council Labour Group and Blyth Valley Conservative Association. No other submissions were received. The Commission has therefore decided to confirm its draft recommendation for these wards as final.

Seghill

64 The number of electors per councillor in Seghill ward currently exceeds the borough average by 84 per cent. In its draft recommendations report, the Commission proposed that Seghill ward should be represented by an additional councillor, taking the total serving the ward to two, as proposed to the Commission during Stage One of the review by both the Borough Council and Blyth Valley Conservative Association. The number of electors per councillor in the ward, with an additional councillor, would vary from the borough average by only 2 per cent in 1996 and by 3 per cent by 2001.

65 During Stage Three, the Commission received support for its draft recommendations from the Borough Council, Blyth Valley Labour Group, Blyth Valley Constituency Labour Party and Blyth Valley Conservative Association. The Commission has therefore decided to confirm its draft recommendation for Seghill ward as final.

Electoral Cycle

66 In its draft recommendations report, the Commission proposed that the present system of whole-council elections be retained. At Stage Three, the Borough Council supported this proposal, as did the Blyth Valley Constituency Labour Party, Blyth Valley Borough Council Labour Group and Blyth Valley Conservative Association. No other representations were received. The Commission has therefore decided to confirm its draft recommendation as final.

Conclusions

67 Having considered all the evidence and representations received on its draft recommendations for Blyth Valley, the Commission has concluded that there should be no change to its draft proposals for an increase in council size from 47 to 50; that there should be 20 wards rather than 18 as at present; that elections should remain on a whole-council basis; and that the boundaries of 13 of the existing wards should be modified. Figure 4 shows the impact of the Commission's final recommendations on electoral equality, comparing them with the current arrangements, as based on 1996 electorate figures and with projected electorates for the year 2001.

Figure 4:
Comparison of Current and Recommended Arrangements

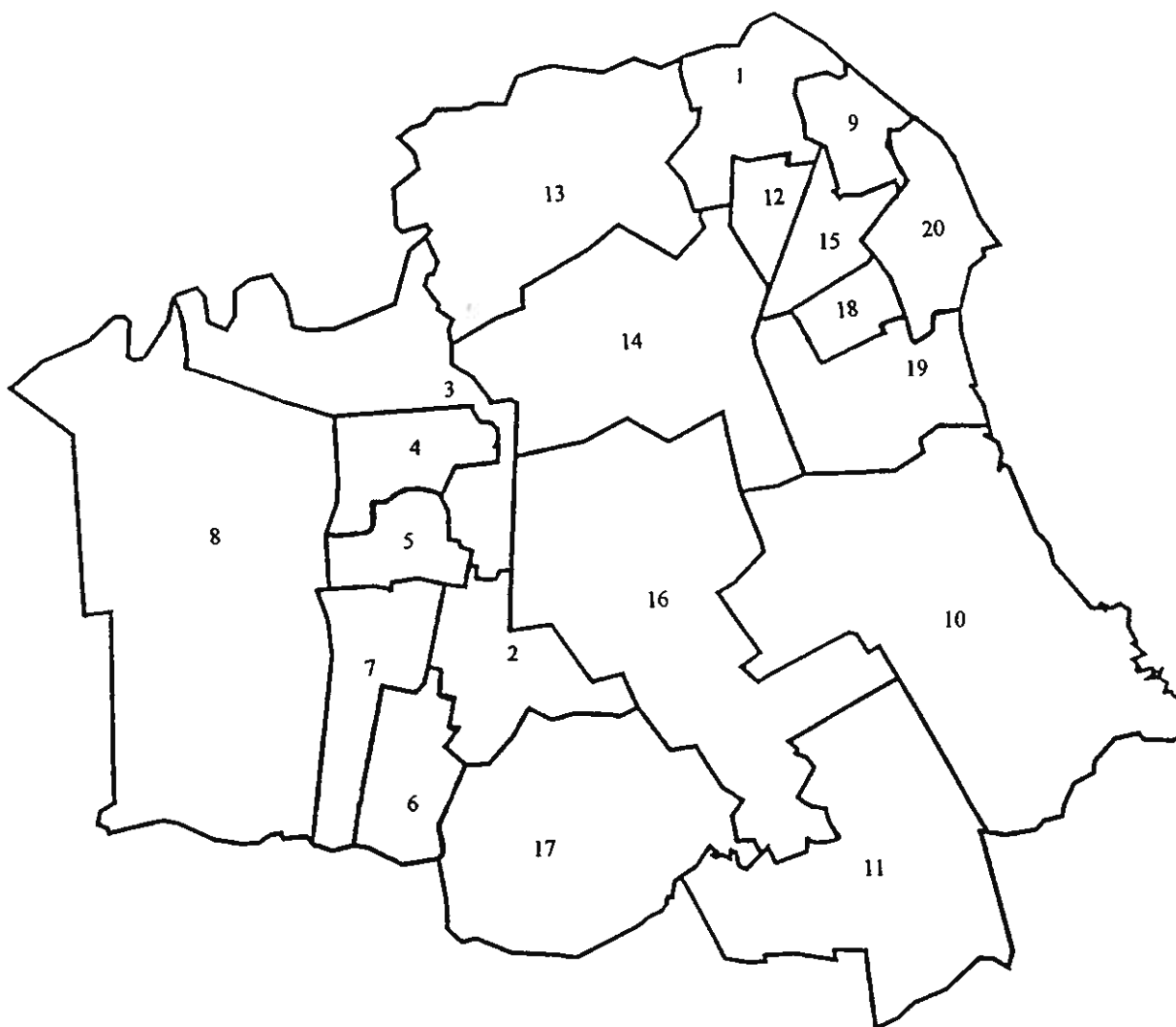
	1996 electorate		2001 projected electorate	
	Current arrangements	Final recommendations	Current arrangements	Final recommendations
Number of councillors	47	50	47	50
Number of wards	18	20	18	20
Average number of electors per councillor	1,330	1,251	1,348	1,267
Number of wards with a variance more than 10 per cent from the average	10	2	12	1
Number of wards with a variance more than 20 per cent from the average	3	2	4	0

68 As Figure 4 shows, the Commission's recommendations would result in a reduction from 10 to two in the number of wards where the number of electors per councillor varies by more than 10 per cent from the average, with a further reduction to one by 2001. Under these proposals, the average number of electors per councillor would fall from 1,330 to 1,251. The Commission concludes that its recommendations would best meet the need for electoral equality, having regard to the statutory criteria, and therefore confirms its draft recommendations, with the exception of the names for five of the wards in Cramlington and also the two new wards in the South Beach area.

Final Recommendation

Blyth Valley should comprise 50 councillors serving 20 wards, as detailed and named in Figures 1 and 5, Map 2 and Appendix A. The whole Council should continue to be elected every four years.

Map 2:
The Commission's Final Recommendations for Blyth Valley



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Key to Wards

1	Cowpen	11	Holywell
2	Cramlington East	12	Isabella
3	Cramlington Eastfield with East Hartford	13	Kitty Brewster
4	Cramlington North	14	Newsham and New Delaval
5	Cramlington Parkside	15	Plessey
6	Cramlington South East	16	Seaton Delaval
7	Cramlington Village	17	Seghill
8	Cramlington West	18	South Beach
9	Croft	19	South Newsham
10	Hartley	20	Wensleydale

Figure 5:
The Commission's Final Recommendations for Blyth Valley

Ward name	1996				2001 (Projected)		
	Number of councillors	Electorate	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
1 Cowpen	3	3,645	1,215	-3	3,680	1,227	-3
2 Cramlington East	3	4,106	1,369	9	3,928	1,309	3
3 Cramlington Eastfield with East Hartford	2	2,692	1,346	8	2,753	1,377	9
4 Cramlington North	3	2,766	922	-26	3,522	1,174	-7
5 Cramlington Parkside	2	2,638	1,319	5	2,736	1,368	8
6 Cramlington South East	3	3,760	1,253	0	3,855	1,285	1
7 Cramlington Village	3	3,880	1,293	3	3,812	1,271	0
8 Cramlington West	2	2,627	1,314	5	2,564	1,282	1
9 Croft	3	3,927	1,309	5	3,763	1,254	-1
10 Hartley	3	4,109	1,370	10	4,021	1,340	6
11 Holywell	2	2,435	1,218	-3	2,496	1,248	-1
12 Isabella	2	2,658	1,329	6	2,535	1,268	0
13 Kitty Brewster	2	2,345	1,173	-6	2,322	1,161	-8
14 Newsham and New Delaval	3	3,708	1,236	-1	3,740	1,247	-2
15 Plessey	3	4,054	1,351	8	3,975	1,325	5
16 Seaton Delaval	3	3,571	1,190	-5	3,584	1,195	-6
17 Seghill	2	2,443	1,222	-2	2,614	1,307	3
18 South Beach	2	2,705	1,353	8	2,705	1,353	7
19 South Newsham	2	1,757	879	-30	2,109	1,055	-17
20 Wensleydale	2	2,701	1,351	8	2,624	1,312	4
Totals	50	62,527	—	—	63,338	—	—
Averages	—	—	1,251	—	—	1,267	—

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

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

6. NEXT STEPS

69 Having completed its review of electoral arrangements in Blyth Valley and submitted its final recommendations to the Secretary of State, the Commission has fulfilled its statutory role under the Local Government Act 1992.

70 It now falls to the Secretary of State to decide whether to give effect to the Commission's recommendations, with or without modification, and to implement them by means of an Order. Such an Order will not be made earlier than six weeks from the date that the Commission's recommendations are submitted to the Secretary of State.

71 All further correspondence concerning the Commission's recommendations and the matters discussed in this report should be addressed to the Secretary of State at the following address:

The Secretary of State for the Environment
Local Government Review
Department of the Environment
Eland House
Bressenden Place
London SW1E 5DU

APPENDIX A

Final Recommendations for Blyth Valley: Detailed Mapping

The following maps illustrate the Commission's proposed ward boundaries for Blyth Valley borough.

Map A1 illustrates in outline form the Commission's proposed boundary changes within the Blyth Valley area. This map also acts as a locational reference for the proposed ward boundary changes set out in Map A2 to A6.

Map A2 illustrates the proposed boundary changes between the wards of Isabella and Cowpen, between Isabella and Plessey and between Wensleydale and Croft wards in Blyth.

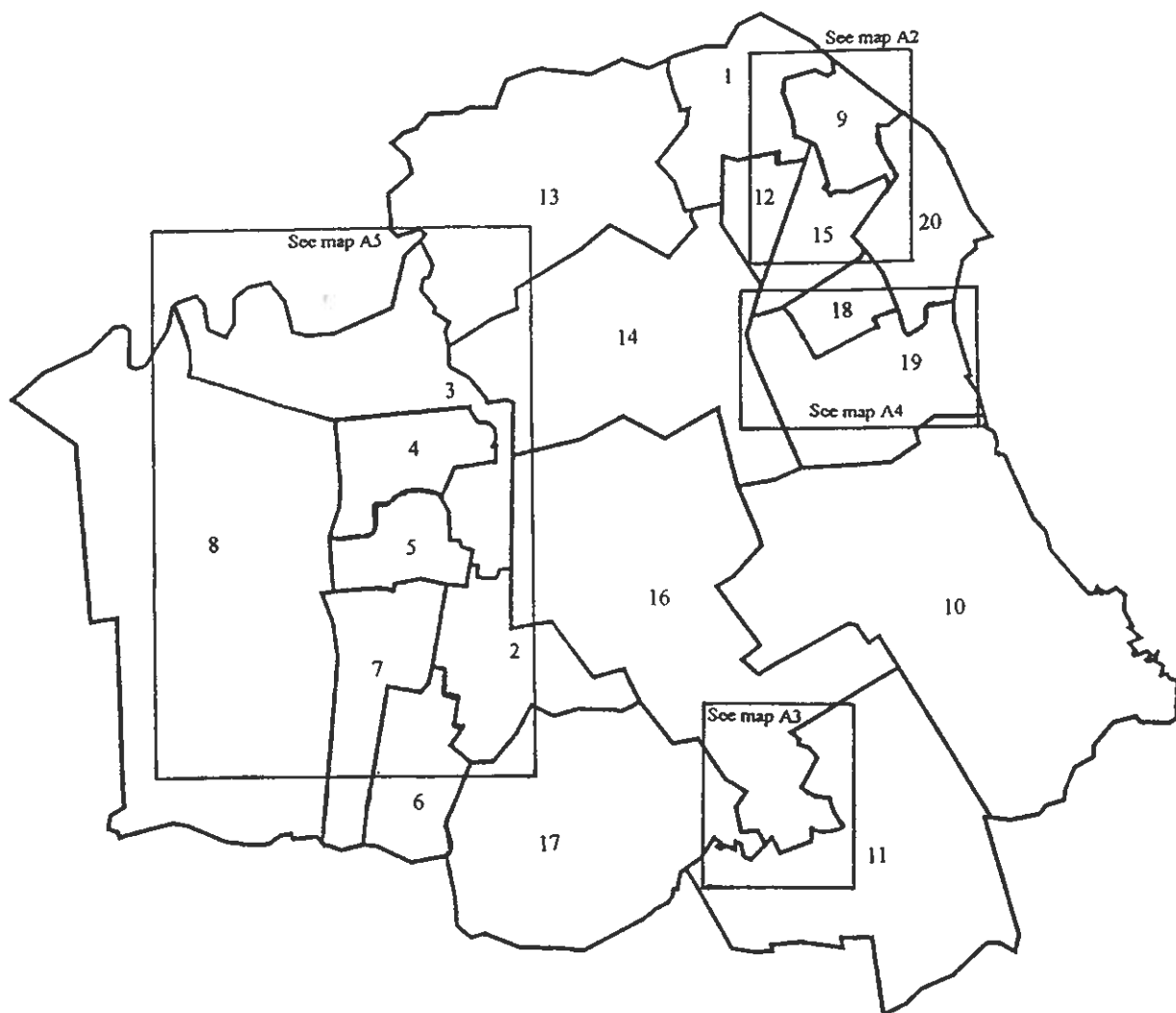
Map A3 illustrates the proposed boundary change between the existing wards of Seaton Delaval and Holywell.

Map A4 illustrates the proposed boundary between South Beach ward and South Newsham ward.

Map A5 illustrates the proposed boundaries in Cramlington. The map also acts as a locational reference for the proposed boundary changes between Cramlington Eastfield with East Hartford and Cramlington East wards; and between Cramlington East ward and Cramlington South East ward, as illustrated in Map A6 of this Appendix.

Map A6 illustrates the proposed boundaries between Cramlington Eastfield with East Hartford and Cramlington East wards; and between Cramlington East ward and Cramlington South East ward.

Map A1:
The Commission's Final Recommendations for Blyth Valley: Key Map



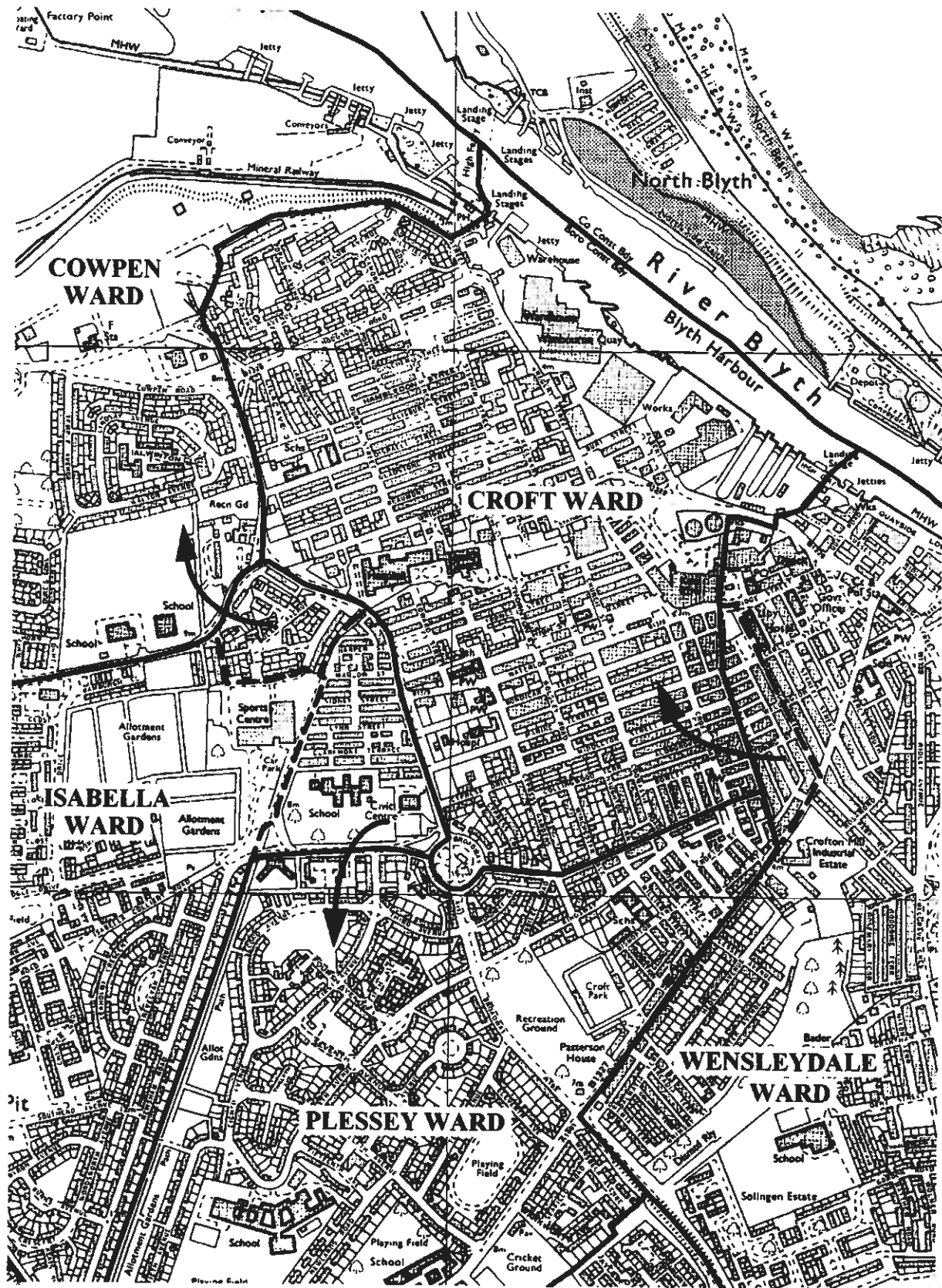
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Key to Wards

- | | | | |
|----|--|----|-------------------------|
| 1 | Cowpen | 11 | Holywell |
| 2 | Cramlington East | 12 | Isabella |
| 3 | Cramlington Eastfield with East Hartford | 13 | Kitty Brewster |
| 4 | Cramlington North | 14 | Newsham and New Delaval |
| 5 | Cramlington Parkside | 15 | Plessey |
| 6 | Cramlington South East | 16 | Seaton Delaval |
| 7 | Cramlington Village | 17 | Seghill |
| 8 | Cramlington West | 18 | South Beach |
| 9 | Croft | 19 | South Newsham |
| 10 | Hartley | 20 | Wensleydale |

Map A2:

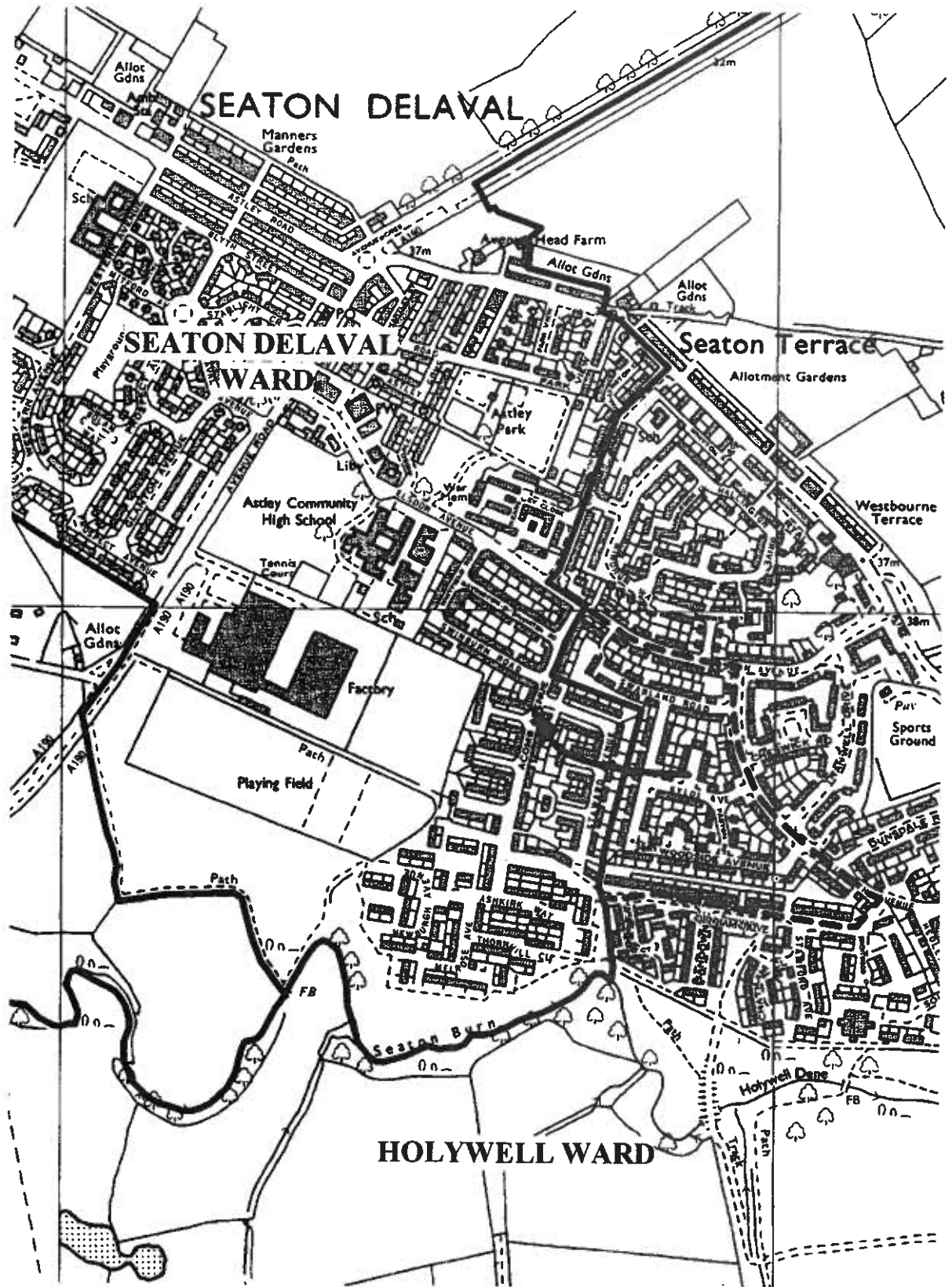
Proposed Boundary Changes between Isabella and Cowpen Wards, between Isabella and Plessey Wards and between Wensleydale and Croft Wards in Blyth



KEY	
EXISTING WARD BOUNDARY	—————
PROPOSED WARD BOUNDARY	- - - - -

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Map A3:
 Proposed Boundary Changes between Seaton Delaval and Holywell Wards



KEY	
EXISTING WARD BOUNDARY	—————
PROPOSED WARD BOUNDARY	- - - - -

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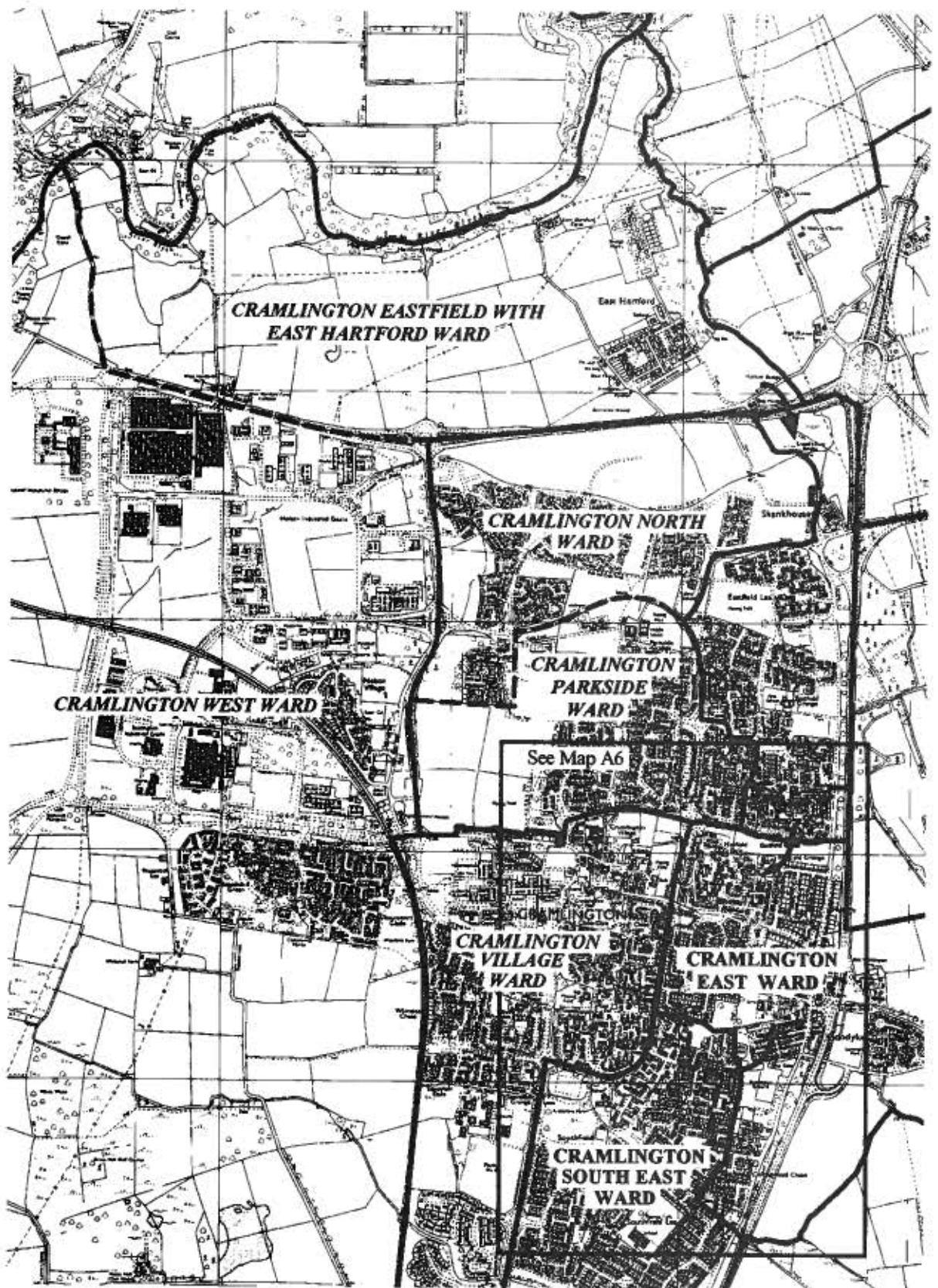
Map A4:

The Proposed Boundary between South Beach Ward and South Newsham Ward



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Map A5:
Proposed Ward Boundaries in Cramlington

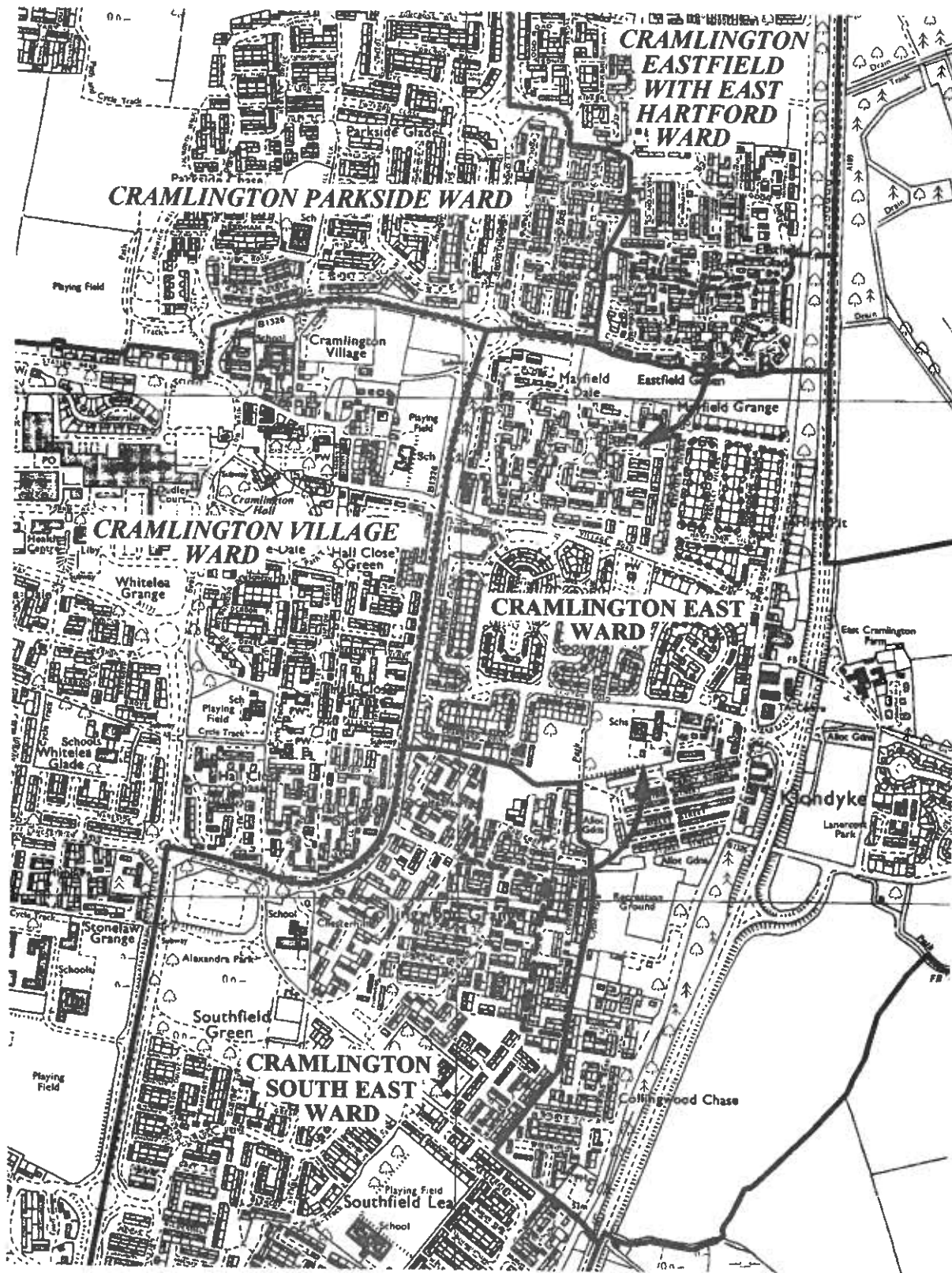


KEY	
EXISTING WARD BOUNDARY	—————
PROPOSED WARD BOUNDARY	- - - - -
PROPOSED WARD NAME	CRAMLINGTON WEST WARD

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Map A6:

Proposed Boundary between Cramlington Eastfield with East Hartford and Cramlington East Wards; and between Cramlington East and Cramlington South East Wards



KEY	
EXISTING WARD BOUNDARY	—————
PROPOSED WARD BOUNDARY	- - - - -
PROPOSED WARD NAME	CRAMLINGTON VILLAGE WARD

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APPENDIX B

The Commission's Draft Recommendations for Blyth Valley

Figure B1:

The Commission's Draft Recommendations: Constituent Areas

Ward name	Constituent areas
1 Cowpen	Cowpen; Isabella (part)
2 Cramlington East	Cramlington East; Cramlington South East(part); Eastfield (part)
3 Cramlington South East	Cramlington South East (part)
4 Croft	Croft; Wensleydale (part)
5 Eastfield and East Hartford	Eastfield (part); Hartford and West Cramlington (part)
6 Hartley	<i>Unchanged</i>
7 Holywell	Holywell (part)
8 Isabella	Isabella (part)
9 Kitty Brewster	<i>Unchanged</i>
10 Newsham and New Delaval	<i>Unchanged</i>
11 North Cramlington	Parkside (part)
12 Parkside	Parkside (part)
13 Plessey	Isabella (part); Plessey
14 Seaton Delaval	Holywell (part); Seaton Delaval
15 Seghill	<i>Unchanged</i>
16 South Beach North	South Beach (part)
17 South Beach South	South Beach (part)
18 Village	<i>Unchanged</i>
19 Wensleydale	Wensleydale (part)
20 West Cramlington	Hartford and West Cramlington (part)

Figure B2:
The Commission's Draft Recommendations for Blyth Valley

Ward name	1996				2001 (Projected)		
	Number of councillors	Electorate	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
1 Cowpen	3	3,645	1,215	-3	3,680	1,227	-3
2 Cramlington East	3	4,106	1,369	9	3,928	1,309	3
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20 West Cramlington	2	2,627	1,314	5	2,564	1,282	1
Totals	50	62,527	—	—	63,338	—	—
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