

RECORD OF DECISION MADE UNDER DELEGATED AUTHORITY

PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT

Any interest to declare/ or conflict and any dispensation granted [N/A]

SERVICE DIRECTORATE: LEGAL AND COMMUNITY

- 1. DECISION TAKEN**
That the polling station for Little Wymondley and Todds Green (formerly at Wymondley Baptist Church) has been combined with the polling station for Great Wymondley at Great Wymondley Village Hall.
- 2. DECISION TAKER**
Steve Cobb, Acting Service Director – Legal and Community, in consultation with the Returning Officer, relevant ward Councillors and Group Leaders.
- 3. DATE DECISION TAKEN:**
8 March 2024

4. REASON FOR DECISION

4.1 Wymondley Baptist Church was designated via the Polling Districts and Polling Places Review by Council at the meeting on 23 November 2023 (as the polling station for Little Wymondley and Todds Green). The Electoral Services Team have since become advised that the building is no longer available for hire and an alternative polling station is therefore required to be identified urgently given the forthcoming District Council and Police and Crime Commissioner elections in May 2024.

5. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

5.1 The following alternative options were considered and commentary including reasons why they were not a suitable are listed below:

Wymondley JMI School	<p>This has previously been used as a polling station and the school would accommodate a polling station, provided certain safeguarding measures were put in place, essentially providing additional members of staff to act as security to prevent pupils from being able to leave the premises or members of the public being able to access parts of the school building that they were not authorised to do so.</p> <p>As the main school hall would be used as the polling station, a member of staff would need to be positioned to act as security at the main reception door to manage people entering the building and to direct them to the main hall. Entering via the main entrance does pose accessibility issues as there are some large steps to access the main hall.</p> <p>Due to the access issues an alternative entrance to the main hall was considered. However, that access opened to a path in the school playground. Although there are less steps to negotiate, which could be resolved via a temporary ramp, the fact that access is directly in the school</p>
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	<p>playground creates wider safeguarding and security issues when children are using the playground.</p> <p>This venue has therefore been discounted, given the complications of having to provide additional equipment and staff to resolve the issues mentioned. In addition, from a staff welfare point it is less than ideal to expect a member of polling station staff to be permanently stationed outside in potentially inclement weather and temperatures.</p>
St Marys Church	The church is in the parish, near to the Baptist Church. Following a site visit, although the room itself is suitable as a polling station, there is concern regarding the facilities available for staff. The toilet is a porta loo, there is no running water or heating facilities, and outside lighting may be an issue when dark.
Wymondley Tennis Club	The Tennis Club advised that the facilities are very small.
Little Wymondley Playing Field	The Parish Council indicated that the football facilities consisted of changing rooms, a kitchen and showers.
Needham House	Unavailable for hire.
Plume of Feathers pub	Following a site visit the proposed room is a temporary structure outside in the pub garden, rather than the actual main building itself. It was therefore felt that this would not be appropriate as a polling station as it lacked the facilities required, particularly if the election was in the colder months.
Portacabin	Renting a portacabin creates the same issues as mentioned regarding St Marys Church in terms of facilities for staff. Land to site the portacabin, along with permission would need to be sought. The hire costs of a portacabin, along with the required generator and portaloo is significant and are not an easy solution.

- 5.2 **Combine with Great Wymondley at Great Wymondley Village Hall** – to combine the polling stations for all three wards of Wymondley Parish (Great Wymondley, Little Wymondley and Todds Green) at the existing polling station at Great Wymondley Village Hall has been decided as the best option for the following reasons:

The building is already being used as a suitable polling station, has level access and a large hall which could accommodate the additional electors. The electorate for all Wymondley is 700 which isn't particularly large.

From an administrative sense it is the easiest solution, as there is already an existing booking and staffing arrangements in place.

6. **CONSULTATION (INCLUDING THE EFFECT ON STAKEHOLDERS, PARTNERS AND THE PUBLIC)**

- 6.1 The Electoral Services Manager contacted the local County Councillor (Councillor Richard Thake), District Ward Councillors (Councillors Dominic Griffiths and Terry Tyler) and Parish Councillors for Wymondley Parish Council to explain the situation and for any suggested alternatives.
- 6.2 Having investigated the various alternatives, the Electoral Services Manager has informed those listed in 6.1 of the findings and of the new polling station.

6.3 The Electoral Services Manager also emailed the Group Leaders to explain the situation, various alternatives considered and of the new polling station.

7. FORWARD PLAN

7.1 This decision is not a key Executive decision and has therefore not been referred to in the Forward Plan.

8. BACKGROUND/ RELEVANT CONSIDERATIONS

8.1 The Council must conduct a review of Parliamentary Polling Districts, Polling Places and Polling Stations every 5 years. The most recent statutory review commenced on 1 October 2023 and concluded on 23 November, when Full Council designated the Polling Districts and Polling Places (Minute No. 245 refers).

8.2 Within this review Wymondley Baptist Church was designated by Full Council as the polling station for Little Wymondley and Todds Green.

8.3 The Electoral Services Team has since been advised that the Baptist Church is no longer available to hire and therefore an alternative urgently required to be identified.

8.4 Although polling districts for local government elections are not defined in legislation, in practice they are the same as those set for parliamentary elections.

8.5 A Polling District can only be in one parish / ward / division / constituency (i.e. an electoral boundary line cannot cross through a polling district).

8.6 Each Polling District is allocated with a polling place and a polling station which the electors within the given polling district visit to vote at election time.

8.7 Polling places should usually be within the relevant Polling District unless special circumstances make it desirable to designate an area outside that district (for example, if no polling place can be identified in the district). In this scenario, the polling place for the polling district of Little Wymondley (H-GW-LTW) and Todds Green (H-GW-WTG) will be moved into the neighbouring polling district of Great Wymondley (H-GW-GTW).

8.8 The Polling Place proposed has been based on an assessment of the available options and the accessibility of the respective venues.

8.9 For the purposes of clarification, the definitions of a polling district, polling place and polling station are:

Polling District – a geographical area created by sub-dividing an electoral area. All wards within North Hertfordshire are divided into polling districts, which form the basis upon which the register of electors is produced. Unless there are special circumstances, each parish must be in a separate polling district.

Polling Place - the designated areas where electors for a particular polling district go to vote in person (i.e the place in which a polling station is located). In the absence of any legal definition, this can be regarded as widely as a polling district or as narrowly as the building in which a polling station is located.

Polling Station - the actual area where the process of voting takes place, e.g. a room within a community centre.

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1. 14.6.9 (b) (viii) B of the Council Constitution sets out the Service Director delegation powers. Within this the delegated authority for '*subject to compulsory reviews reserved to Full Council*) vary polling districts and polling stations' falls to the Service Director in consultation with the Returning Officer, relevant ward Councillors and Group Leaders.
- 9.2. The Service Director Legal and Community has authorised the Decision Taker (Licensing and Community Safety Manager) to undertake the delegations as per 14.6.2 of the Council Constitution and do so as per section 14.6.2(c) of the Council Constitution (for the period 18 – 22 March 2024).
- 9.3. Rule 25 of the Local Elections (Principal Area) Rules 2006, regarding the issue of official Poll Cards states:

'(1) The Returning Officer must as soon as practicable after the publication of the notice of the election send to electors and their proxies an official poll card.

(2) An elector's official poll card must be sent or delivered to his qualifying address, and a proxy's to his address as shown in the list of proxies.

(3) The official poll card must be in the appropriate form in the Appendix, or a form to the like effect, and must set out—

(a) the name of the council and of the electoral division or ward to which councillors are to be elected;

(b) the elector's name, qualifying address and number on the register;

*(c) the date and hours of the poll and **the situation of the elector's polling station;***

(d) such other information as the returning officer thinks appropriate,

and different information may be provided in pursuance of sub-paragraph (d) to different electors or descriptions of elector.

10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1. Whilst this decision is not being taken for financial reasons, combining the two polling stations will mean one less Presiding Officer and Poll Clerk is required to be appointed, generating a saving of circa £600 (based on the Electoral Services Scale of Fees as of 1 April 2024) excluding any venue hire charges or other associated costs.
- 10.2. The district elections in May 2024 will be combined with the Police and Crime Commissioner elections, therefore the costs will be shared between the two election types and the cost attributable to the district will be half of the amount.

11. RISK IMPLICATIONS

- 11.1 On 2 May 2024 there are currently scheduled District Council elections for the entire district as well as Police and Crime Commissioner elections. At some point this year there is also likely to be a UK Parliamentary election.
- 11.2 Therefore a decision on where the electors that previously voted at Wymondley Baptist Church (Little Wymondley and Todds Green) was urgently required prior to the poll card data being sent to the printers (on 15 March). Poll cards include the details of the polling station for the respective electors.

- 11.3 Individuals may challenge the result of an election if they believe it was not administered properly via an election petition (which must usually be made within 21 days of the day the election was held).
- 11.4 As per paragraph 9.3 it is a legal requirement to issue a Poll Card and for it to contain the situation of the electors polling station.

12. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 12.1 In line with the Public Sector Equality Duty, public bodies must, in the exercise of their functions, give due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation, to advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between those who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- 12.2 Whilst identifying an alternative polling station, the principles when undertaking a compulsory review of UK Parliamentary Polling Districts and Polling Places have been followed, being:
- Seek to ensure that all electors in a constituency in the local authority area have such reasonable facilities for voting as are practicable in the circumstances.
 - Seek to ensure that so far as is reasonable and practicable every polling place is accessible to electors who are disabled.
- 12.3 Paragraph 5 sets out the rationale for the alternative polling stations with clear consideration of accessibility.

13. SOCIAL VALUE IMPLICATIONS

- 13.1 The Social Value Act and “go local” requirements do not apply to this report.

14. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

- 14.1. There are no known Environmental impacts or requirements that apply to this report.

15. HUMAN RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 15.1 Staffing an election can be highly resource intensive. Dependent on the type of election requirements differ, for instance, a By-election or Neighbourhood Plan Referendum requires less resource than the forthcoming District elections or a Parliamentary election. However, in terms of this report, other than officer time required to consult and collate/review proposals and research alternative locations, there are no human resource implications.

16. BACKGROUND PAPERS


- 16.1 [Agenda for Council on Thursday, 23rd November, 2023, 7.30 pm | North Herts Council \(north-herts.gov.uk\)](https://www.north-herts.gov.uk/agenda-for-council-on-thursday-23rd-november-2023-7-30-pm)

17. APPENDICES

- 17.1 None.

NOTIFICATION DATE

21 March 2024

Signature of Decision Taker 

Please Note: that *unless urgency provisions apply* EXECUTIVE decisions cannot be implemented until 5 clear working days have elapsed after the decision has been taken to allow for scrutiny call-in.

Call-in does not apply to NON-EXECUTIVE DECISIONS