

INTERIM POLLING REVIEW – FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS

LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS AS REQUIRED BY LAW

(Papers relied on to write the report, which do not contain exempt information and which are not published elsewhere)

none

Cabinet Member(s)
Cllr. Tim Adams

District Ward(s) affected:
Stody; Poppyland; Hoveton & Tunstead; Wells with
Holkham; North Walsham West

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1. Introduction

Following a period of consultation which ran to 31st January we received good engagement from the various parishes included in this review. We have also received some good feedback in terms of additional information which we were not previously aware of and also alternative potential locations.

We are now in position to make final recommendations for Full Council to consider with any adoptions being implemented at the forthcoming Local Council Elections on Thursday 4th May 2023.

2. Polling Stations proposed for change

2.1 Thornage All Saints Church Vestry – Thornage (STO7)

This consultation received responses of 25 in favour; 8 against and 3 neither for nor against.

Given the concerns with the accessibility and working conditions of the polling station situated at All Saints Church, we had previously consulted on a proposal to re-locating parish polling to Briningham Village Hall which was the nearest to Thornage in terms of geography, ease of travel and it was considered to be the best suitable alternative in terms of space and accessibility.

Thornage Parish Council in their response advised that Thornage Hall had offered the use of Gregories Barn for use as a Polling Station to ensure a facility is retained within the parish.

A visited was conducted on Friday 10th February and the location was evaluated in terms of suitability and accessibility, parking facilities and staff comfort.

It was agreed that Gregories Barn would provide an excellent arrangement for parish polling and the Business Support Manager advised that this would be available for use at the time of an election going forward with suitable notice.

Considering the available options we firmly recommend that Gregories Barn be adopted as the designated Polling Station for the Parish of Thornage.

2.2 Overstrand Parish Hall – Overstrand (PO2)

This consultation received responses of 264 in favour and 418 against.

There were historical concerns over access to the Parish Hall situated down The Londs passage and the perceived lack of parking arrangements for staff and disabled electors and the poor access as detailed in the initial report.

The proposal was to adopt the Belfry Centre as the designated Polling Station for the parish of Overstrand going forward and this did prove to be a popular choice amongst residents of the parish.

However, upon arranging to visit the Parish Hall in Overstrand during the consultation period, the Chairman and the Clerk were able to inform on the alternative access arrangements for parking and access to the hall for disabled voters from Harbord Road which also provides space for parking for staff.

The hall itself provides more than sufficient space to conduct polling and it benefits from great facilities including kitchen, toilet and now also has available WIFI which will prove essential given the poor cellular service in Overstrand.

Although the Belfry Centre has received great support during the consultation period we cannot overlook the number of comments that highlight the risk that the increased traffic would bring to the area around the Belfry on the Cromer Road.

This has been a useful and valid consultation given we had previously been unaware of the full accessibility options at the Parish Hall and with all things considered we are recommending that the Overstrand Parish Hall be retained as the designated polling station for the parish.

2.3 Hoveton Village Hall – Hoveton (HT4)

This consultation received responses of 353 in favour; 62 against and 12 neither for nor against.

The consultation has provided a good level of response in which there is a large majority who support the proposals for adopting the Broadland Youth and Community Centre as the designated polling station for the parish of Hoveton.

During the consultation and after it, contact has tried to be established with the Village Hall to discuss their hire charges. It had previously been indicated that the Village Hall committee would be seeking approximately £1000 to hire the village hall for the day. This would make it by some way the most expensive polling station we hire at the time of an election.

There have been some comments in those against the proposals indicating that the car park isn't as large at the Youth and Community Centre, but considering the likely numbers using it on polling day it would be more than sufficient and has more available parking than some stations elsewhere in the district which serve larger electorates.

As the proposed venue was used during the election held in 2021 where the turnout will likely be lower than what is expected this year, we propose that ahead of any permanent designation, we use the Local Elections in May 2023 as a further trial to assess suitability at a higher turnout election, whilst attempting further dialog with the Village Hall over its hire charges.

2.4 The Victoria Resident's Lounge – Holkham (WH1)

This consultation received responses of 31 in favour and 0 against.

The consultation responses showed an overwhelming agreement that The Ancient House should be adopted for Parish Polling going forward. Indeed it was mentioned that it had been used as a polling station at some time in the past.

Our recommendation remains that we evaluate the use of The Ancient House on its ongoing suitability as a polling station at the Local Elections held on Thursday 4th May 2023 and providing it is successful it will receive official designation at the next whole review of the district polling places.

2.5 Designated Polling Place for North Walsham North polling district (NWW2)

This consultation received responses of 42 in favour; 1 against and 4 neither for nor against.

The responses received to the consultation provided conclusive agreement that St Benets Hall within the St Nicholas Church complex would provide a suitable polling arrangement for the North Walsham North polling district.

Having been used already during the May 2021 Norfolk County Council and Norfolk Police and Crime Commissioner Elections it is recommended that this location be designated as the polling station for the ward going forward.

3. Conclusion

Over the five different consultations there has been a great level of response from elected members, Parish Councillors and from within the communities themselves. The consultations themselves were all valid and based on the knowledge held at the time.

Where new information has been provided or suitable alternatives have been put forward, visits have been carried out by the Electoral Services team and changes to original proposals have been made and all are recommended for members of Full Council to decide upon.

4. Recommendation

In summary of the above comments for each of the five consultations which were ran with this review the final recommendations are as follows:

Thornage (STO7)

To recommend that Gregories Barn, Thornage Hall is designated the Polling Place and Polling Station for the civil parish of Thornage (STO7) replacing the existing arrangement at Thornage All Saints Church with immediate effect.

Overstrand (PO2)

To recommend that Overstrand Parish Hall is retained as the designated Polling Station for the civil parish of Overstrand (PO2).

Hoveton (HT4)

To recommend that The Broadland Youth and Community Centre is used on a trial basis as the Polling Place and Polling Station for the civil parish of Hoveton (HT4) at the forthcoming Local Elections in May with an evaluation taking place after the election.

Holkham (WH1)

To recommend that The Ancient House is used for parish polling for the civil parish of Holkham (WH1) at the Local Elections being held on Thursday 4th May 2023. Following an evaluation we will look to formally re-designating the polling station to The Ancient House at the next full review of the district arrangements.

North Walsham North (NWW2)

To recommend that St Benets Hall be designated as the Polling Place and Polling Station for the North ward of the civil parish of North Walsham with immediate effect.

5. Implications and Risks

It is considered that these recommendations carry minimal risks in terms of accessibility to polling for the parishes concerned.

6. Financial Implications and Risks

None as such, however it is always the aim to strive for the best value for money where possible and this is evident in section 2.3 of this report.

7. Sustainability

There are no sustainability issues relating to this report

8. Equality and Diversity

Legislation requires all polling stations to be accessible for all people wishing to exercise the right to cast their vote in person. The District Council gives this issue detailed consideration in the planning and conduct of elections in the District. Regular reviewing of the buildings we use indicates a commitment in continuous improvement and giving the best experience for our electors when they visit their polling station.

9. Section 17 Crime and Disorder considerations

There are no considerations required in relation to this.