

Small Polling Station Closures

Summary:	To act on the outcomes of three largescale elections held in 2019 in respect of efficiency of some smaller polling stations within the district where there are viable alternatives in terms of health and safety, cost to run the polling stations and the ability to operate in a post Covid19 world.
Options considered:	Alternative Polling Station options within the affected polling districts themselves but given the size of the ones listed within this report, no viable alternatives have are suitable. We have also considered options available to electors affected by these changes so they are able to make arrangements to conduct their vote by post.
Conclusions:	Implementation of changes will mean that we are not using premises which could have ongoing health and safety concerns or are not suitable for staff to work long hours in whilst realising efficiencies in terms of cost and number of staff required.
Recommendations:	To recommend to Council new Polling Station locations (as described in section 2.1) on a permanent arrangement and the closure of five Polling Stations, with new arrangements in neighbouring Polling Districts (as stated in section 3)
Reasons for Recommendations:	To provide electors in affected polling districts and staff with safer, more comfortable polling stations whilst reducing the cost to the public purse of running elections within North Norfolk by removing some smaller stations where there a local alternatives close by.

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)

Polling Station logbooks & Health & Safety papers completed by Polling Staff Polling Station analysis papers produced by R. Henry
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Cabinet Member(s) Cllr. Sarah Butikofer	Ward(s) affected: Coastal; Erpingham; Hickling; Poppyland; Priory
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1. Introduction

In late 2018, the Elections Team undertook a Periodic Review of Polling Stations across the North Norfolk District involving consultation with the

public and town and parish councils, with a final report being presented for endorsement by Full Council at its meeting of 27th February 2019; with the new arrangements coming into effect from 1st April 2019. The periodic review proposed a very small number of changes to the location of polling stations in the District, with changes made to the locations of just seven out of 121 venues used as polling stations.

During 2019 there were three district-wide elections – the Local Government Elections on 2nd May; the European Parliamentary Election held on 23rd May and the UK Parliamentary Election held on 12th December. This has allowed the Elections Team / polling staff to gain a clear understanding as to the suitability and value for money derived in the provision of polling places across the District.

2. Recent elections and polling station arrangements

2.1 At the various elections held in 2019, due to availability of premises and due to staff and community feedback there were five changes to the polling station venues as follows:-

- Matlaske Parish Council (GR8) expressed a preference for their community to vote at Baconsthorpe Village Hall, rather than Little Barningham Village Hall due to a lack of parking at the latter location and this request was agreed.
- The lack of availability of the polling station at Sustead (ER8) saw voters from Bessingham, Metton and Sustead vote at Hanworth Village Hall and it is believed that this arrangement worked well and could operate in this way in the future, especially with the refurbishments of Hanworth Village Hall almost being complete.
- The polling station for Tunstead (HT8) moved from the Primary School to the Community Room in the Horse and Groom Public House as the Primary School is no longer available to use following a change in its administration.
- Works to Cromer Community Centre saw voters from the Cromer Town polling district (CT1) vote at the Cromer Parish Hall
- For the UK Parliamentary Election on 12th December 2019, the Blakeney village Hall was not available and so the polling station operated from the Scout Hut building on the same site in the village.

It is proposed that we should look to permanently implement the changes made in relation to the polling arrangements for Matlaske (GR8), Sustead (ER8) and Tunstead (HT8) Polling Districts and this should form part of any consultation that follows.

2.2 Separate to the above, the staff in the Elections Team have reviewed the number of voters and costs associated with operating some smaller polling stations, as well as the condition and accessibility of some of these stations, as summarised below, and invites Cabinet to comment on whether these stations should be retained or other arrangements

made for voters to vote at nearby polling stations on the grounds of efficiency, cost and accessibility. The attached spreadsheet provides details of turnout and cost per vote at each of the three elections held in 2019 as well as figures for the 2016 Police and Crime Commissioner to inform any discussion.

- 2.3 Finally as we look to how we will be able to run elections in a post Covid19 climate we have to consider other aspects in addition to premises suitability and voter and staff safety like the amount of staff we will have available to work at elections and potentially less Polling Station voters due to increased Postal voting numbers following a proposed Absent Voting take-up campaign.

3. Polling Stations proposed for closure

3.1 Bale and Gunthorpe (PR1 & PR4)

Currently the parish of Gunthorpe is served by two Polling Stations either side of the A148. Gunthorpe North (PR1) uses Bale Village Hall and Gunthorpe South (PR4) uses Gunthorpe Village Institute.

Both Polling Districts have very small electorates 83 and 74 electors respectively and other than the problems which some electors might find in crossing the main A148 road which divides the two parts of the Parish, it is difficult to justify the continued operation of two polling stations to serve this community. Back in 2011, the then Returning Officer, Philip Burton, proposed closure of the Bale Polling Station with all registered voters in Gunthorpe Parish being asked to vote at the Village Institute, but in the face of local objections this proposal was not progressed. Whilst it is recognised that Gunthorpe and Bale are quite dispersed communities, voters in other parts of the District travel equal distances to access a polling station such that it is not believed that voters would be particularly disadvantaged if a decision was taken to move to operate a single polling station to serve this parish. The vast majority of people living in these communities would in any event have access to personal transport to access work, health, education and retail services, such that it remains difficult to justify operation of two polling stations for such a small community.

Our proposal would be to use one single Polling Station situated at Gunthorpe Village Institute to serve electors in the parish of Gunthorpe; which would bring the cost per elector down to the following based on the three elections in 2019:-

Local Government elections 2nd May 2019 – from £17.92 to £8.61 per vote cast

EU election – 23rd May 2019 – from £14.62 to £7.12 per vote cast

UK Parliamentary election – 12th December 2019 – from £9.79 to £4.77 per vote cast

In terms of the PCC election in 2016 the costs per vote in moving to a single polling station at Gunthorpe Village Institute would fall from £21.60 to £10.51

Polling Station analysis summary

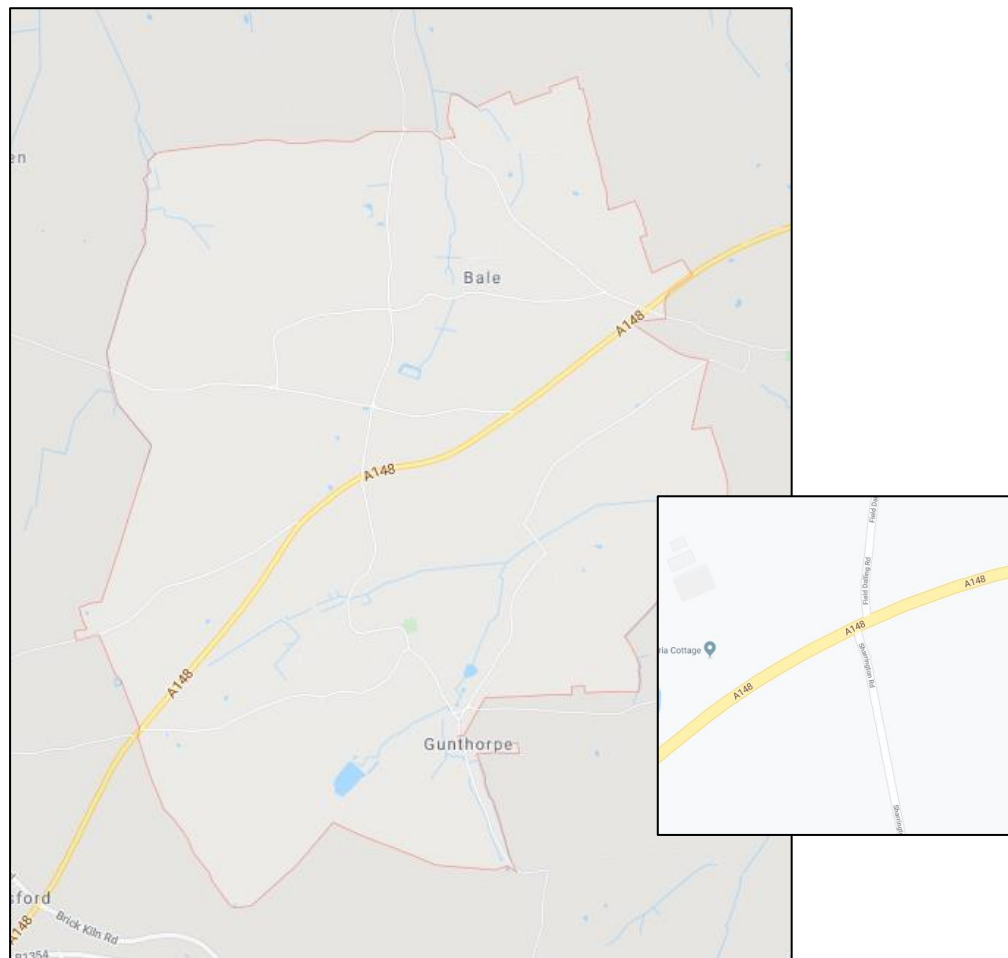
Bale Village Hall (PR1)

Election	District 2/5/19	European 23/5/19	Parliamentary 12/12/19
Electors	87	87	86
Absent Voters	5	5	3
Polling Station Electors	82	82	83
Votes Cast	41	46	69
Turnout	50%	56%	83%
Staff and Hall Hire cost	£650.00	£650.00	£650.00
Cost Per Elector	£15.85	£14.13	£9.42

Gunthorpe Village Institute (PR4)

Election	District 2/5/19	European 23/5/19	Parliamentary 12/12/19
Electors	99	99	98
Absent Voters	18	18	20
Polling Station Electors	81	81	78
Votes Cast	31	41	61
Turnout	38%	51%	78%
Staff and Hall Hire cost	£620	£620.00	£620.00
Cost Per Elector	£20.00	£15.12	£10.16

There have been no issues raised from either Polling Stations by the Presiding Officer nor the Polling Station Inspector regarding the suitability of either premises to serve as Polling Stations – the issue here is whether such a small community / electorate really needs two polling stations with all of the additional costs and issues that raises – staffing, printing of marked ballot papers, additional costs of checking, paperwork etc.



3.2 Horsey (HI2)

Currently this Polling District uses the School Room at Horsey Methodist Church on All Saints Lane. There are currently 49 eligible electors who can vote inside the Polling Station; this being the smallest electorate in the District. The cost of the village hall to hire is £80 and is staffed by one Presiding Officer and one Poll Clerk which in total costs £500 including training fees and expenses. From previous feedback it has been advised that exterior lighting is poor and there no suitable access for disabled voters as there is no ramp and the door is not wide enough to accommodate a wheelchair. Furthermore it has been reported there was no first aid kit in the building.

This is our most remote Polling Station to the far East of the district and the only viable alternative is to move the polling arrangements for Horsey to Sea Palling Village Hall on Waxham Road which is 3.8 miles away and some 8 minutes if travelling by car. Arguably the distance for voters to travel to Sea Palling might be an issue in terms of people's ability to exercise their franchise, but this could be addressed through promoting postal voting arrangements as at the present time the cost of operating this polling station relative to the number of electors voting in person at this location is very high. At the recent Parliamentary election, comment was made by two voters that they were surprised given the small

population of the parish that a polling station was still provided in the village.

If voters at Horsey were to have voted at the Sea Palling polling station in recent elections the cost per voter would have reduced considerably as detailed below:

Local Government elections 2nd May 2019 – from £29.00 to £4.39 per vote cast

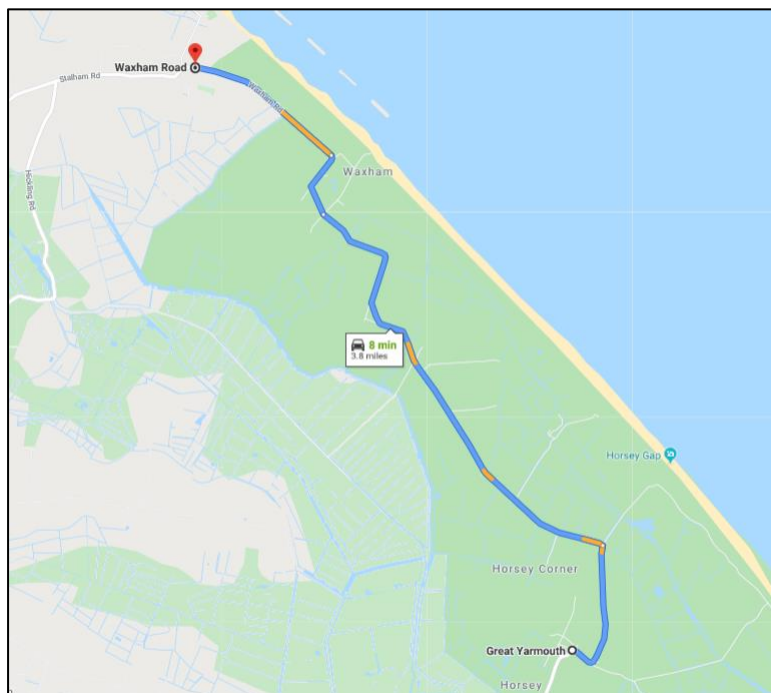
EU election – 23rd May 2019 – from £30.53 to £4.24 per vote cast

UK Parliamentary election – 12th December 2019 – from £10.51 to £2.16 per vote cast

In terms of the PCC election in 2016, the costs per vote if voters from Horsey had voted at the Sea Palling polling station would have fallen from £30.53 to £7.65

Polling Station analysis summary

Election	District 2/5/19	European 23/5/19	Parliamentary 12/12/19
Electors	52	52	57
Absent Voters	8	10	8
Polling Station Electors	44	42	49
Votes Cast	20	19	36
Turnout	45%	45%	73%
Staff and Hall Hire cost	£580.00	£580	£580
Cost Per Elector	£29.00	£30.53	£16.11



3.3 Ingworth (ER6)

Currently voters in the Ingworth Polling District use the Reading Room on The Street in Ingworth as their polling station. There are currently 72 eligible electors who can vote inside the Polling Station. The cost of the village hall to hire is £80 and is staffed by one Presiding Officer and one Poll Clerk which in total costs £500 including training fees and expenses. This is not a good building to use as a Polling Station. Recent feedback has reported that there is no adequate parking, the approach to the entrance is obstructed and there is no ramp available for assisting people with mobility issues in getting into the polling station. The door is not wide enough for a wheelchair user to enter and indeed inside there is not enough room for one to move around. Also it has been reported the tables and chairs are not adequate and that the station is unclean. There are no toilets in the building (which is a single room) so a portable one needs to be provided for staff at an extra cost. This is situated outside down the end of a track so in darkness it is far from ideal. The kitchen facilities are not suitable, with no hot water and the fire safety doors are not easily opened. Considering the hours Polling Staff are required to work at the Polling Station consideration must be given to their comfort and wellbeing. Finally there have also been flooding issues at this Polling Station during periods of heavy rainfall including at the Referendum in 2016.



If voters of Ingworth were to have voted at the Erpingham polling station in recent elections the cost per voter would have reduced considerably as detailed below:

- **Local Government elections 2nd May 2019** – from £12.34 to £3.54 per vote cast
- **EU election – 23rd May 2019** – from £14.50 to £3.86 per vote cast
- **UK Parliamentary election – 12th December 2019** – from £9.21 to £2.31 per vote cast

In terms of the PCC election in 2016, the costs per vote if voters from Ingworth had voted at the Erpingham polling station would have fallen from £20.00 to £7.14

Polling Station analysis summary

Election	District 2/5/19	European 23/5/19	Parliamentary 12/12/19
Electors	77	77	85
Absent Voters	6	6	8
Polling Station Electors	71	71	77
Votes Cast	47	40	63
Turnout	66%	56%	82%
Staff and Hall Hire cost	£580.00	£580	£580
Cost Per Elector	£12.34	£14.50	£9.21

Given the lack of alternatives within Ingworth it is our proposal to close this Polling Station given its inadequacy and assign Erpingham Village Hall as the Polling Station. This is located 2 miles and 5 minutes away by car and would provide the closest and best Polling arrangements for the electors of Ingworth.

3.4 Morston (CO4)

Currently voters in the Morston Polling District use the Village Hall on Quay Lane as their polling station. There are currently 61 eligible electors who can vote inside the Polling Station. The cost of the village hall to hire is £75 and is staffed by one Presiding Officer and one Poll Clerk which in total costs £500 including training fees and expenses. There have been no issues raised in the log books or feedback forms from the three elections held in 2019. However access to the Polling Station is down Quay Lane which is not the widest and is used often by vehicles towing boats or marine craft. Furthermore there is not a great deal of space to park and the area is also the access for a small static caravan park.





If voters of Morston were to have voted at the Blakeney polling station in recent elections the cost per voter would have reduced considerably as detailed below:

Local Government elections 2nd May 2019 – from £22.12 to £2.58 per vote cast

EU election – 23rd May 2019 – from £23.96 to £2.76 per vote cast

UK Parliamentary election – 12th December 2019 – from £15.97 to £1.43 per vote cast (please note polling station for this election was Blakeney Scout Hut rather than the village hall, the hire costs for which were a little cheaper than Blakeney Village Hall)

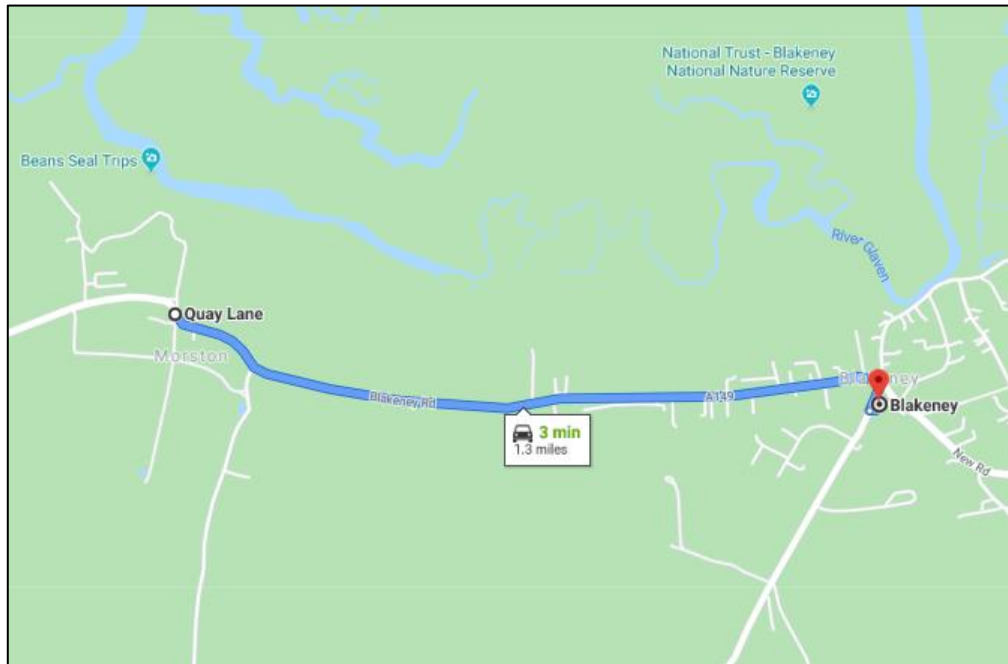
In terms of the PCC election in 2016, the costs per vote if voters from Morston had voted at the Blakeney polling station would have fallen from £33.82 to £4.52

Polling Station analysis summary

Election	District 2/5/19	European 23/5/19	Parliamentary 12/12/19
Electors	68	68	68
Absent Voters	12	12	12
Polling Station Electors	56	56	56
Votes Cast	26	24	36
Turnout	46%	43%	64%
Staff and Hall Hire cost	£575.00	£575	£575
Cost Per Elector	£22.12	£23.96	£15.97

We would propose closing this polling station and for the electors within the Morston Polling District to use the Polling Station situated at Blakeney Village Hall. This is approximately 1.3 miles and 3 minutes by car from the centre of Morston. Blakeney Village Hall has great car parking facilities and it is assumed that most residents would visit Blakeney for some of their provisions or be passing through on Polling Day if they are

travelling from Morston. Finally the route from Morston to Blakeney is served by the regular Coasthopper bus service.



3.5 Sidestrand (PO3)

Currently voters in the Sidestrand Polling District use the Reading Rooms on Cromer Road as their polling station. There are currently 66 eligible electors who can vote inside the Polling Station. The cost of the village hall to hire is £160 and is staffed by one Presiding Officer and one Poll Clerk which in total costs £500 including training fees and expenses. There have been no issues identified by the Presiding Officers or the Polling Station Inspectors about the building itself although it has been noted that the parking for the polling station is in a field across the Cromer Road and that there is no footpath along the area from the Reading Room.



If voters of Sidestrand were to have voted at the Trimingham polling station in recent elections the cost per voter would have reduced considerably as detailed below:

Local Government elections 2nd May 2019 – from £28.70 to £4.57 per vote cast

EU election – 23rd May 2019 – from £33.00 to £4.60 per vote cast

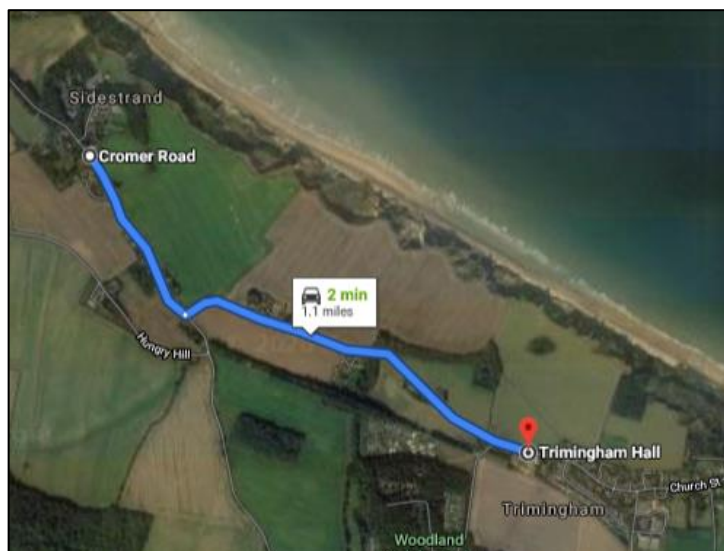
UK Parliamentary election – 12th December 2019 – from £12.69 to £2.50 per vote cast

In terms of the PCC election in 2016, the costs per vote if voters from Sidestrand had voted at the Trimingham polling station would have fallen from £55.00 to £10.37

Polling Station analysis summary

Election	District 2/5/19	European 23/5/19	Parliamentary 12/12/19
Electors	76	76	68
Absent Voters	14	13	12
Polling Station Electors	62	63	56
Votes Cast	23	20	36
Turnout	37%	32%	64%
Staff and Hall Hire cost	£660.00	£660	£575
Cost Per Elector	£28.70	£33.00	£15.97

We would propose closing this polling station and for the electors within the Sidestrand Polling District to use the Polling Station situated at the new Trimingham Village Hall. This is approximately 1.1 miles and 2 minutes by car from the main residential area of Sidestrand and only 0.8 miles from the current polling station at the Reading Room, Sidestrand. Trimingham Village Hall is a new building and has great parking facilities and has great access for all voters. The route along Cromer Road from Sidestrand to Trimingham is also served by the regular Coasthopper bus service.



4. Conclusion

This report concludes that it is necessary following the three large elections held within the district in 2019 that these changes to polling arrangements for the aforementioned Polling Districts is required in order to improve health and safety measures within Polling Stations, reducing the cost to the taxpayer of running elections and decreasing the amount of staff required to fill election roles within the district which will be more of a challenge than ever in a post Covid19 world.

5. Implications and Risks

The implications of this are that some electors will have to travel further to cast their vote. All will be offered the opportunity to apply for an Absent Vote if they do not wish to visit their new polling station.

6. Financial Implications and Risks

There are no financial implications or risks connected to 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.