

Interim Polling Place Review – Close of Consultation

Summary: This report is to highlight the responses received as part of the consultation into the current interim review.

Recommendations: **That Council supports the changes highlighted within the review and that they are implemented at future elections held.**

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)

Appendix 1 – Table of representations received during.

Cabinet Member(s) Cllr. Sarah Butikofer	Ward(s) affected Various
Contact Officer, telephone number and email: Rob Henry; x6327; robert.henry@north-norfolk.gov.uk	

1. Summary

Following approval to proceed to consultation which was received at the meeting of Full Council held on 23rd September 2020 the Electoral Services Team contacted Clerks at Parish Council's affected by the proposed closures and relevant County Councillors who had not had sight of the report previously.

A Press release was issued to Archant and was published in the Eastern Daily Press and the North Norfolk News both in print and online and it was also published on the North Norfolk District Council website and through our social media channels. The consultation closed last week on 2nd November 2020 and I have shown each of the four representations received in the table below.

Please note that the comments made by Cllr Steffan Aquarone, County Councillor for Melton Constable Division were made following an initially incorrect detail in the Archant online article where they stated that the Polling Station at Little Barningham Hall was to be closed. This was incorrect as it was only electors from the parish of Matlaske who would not use Little Barningham Village Hall but instead vote at Baconsthorpe Village Hall, as requested by Matlaske Parish Council following trials held at both alternative Polling Stations in 2019. Little Barningham Village Hall will continue to be the Polling Station for electors from Little Barningham.

This error in the article was alerted to Archant immediately and a revision was made before the article went to printed press.

2. Conclusion

There were no responses received before 2nd November 2020 in relation to the proposed closures of the Polling Stations for Gunthorpe North (PR1) at Bale Village Hall (PR1), Horsey (HI2) at Horsey Methodist Church or Ingworth (ER6) at the Ingworth Reading Room however we have received subsequent comments in respect of Horsey and Ingworth which have been included as an addition in the subsequent appendix.

Where no representations have been received in relation to the closure of the Polling Stations at Bale, the proposal to close the existing stations is to be moved forward and electors in each Polling District will subsequently be written to by the Electoral Services Team to advise them of the changes which would be in place at all forthcoming elections.

Also it remains the proposal to make permanent the previously trialled changes in respect of designated Polling Places for the parishes of Matlaske (GR8), Sustead (ER8) and Tunstead (HT8).

Sidestrand (PO1):

The response received from the Parish Clerk, states Sidestrand Parish Council propose that the polling station at The Londs in Overstrand be designated for Sidestrand, without providing a reason to support it. Given the easier access and better parking facilities and the larger and newer building which is more comfortable for staff we will propose that Trimmingham Village Hall be confirmed as the Polling Place for Sidestrand.

Morston (CO4)

The response received from the Chairman of Morston Parish Council is detailed and states why they disagree with the proposals. In response to the point made about an extra cost in respect of the 'Morston facility' at Blakeney Polling Station; In determining the costings shown in the initial report we did not include other costs such as printing of ballot papers etc as these would apply at whatever location the Poll was held at. I can confirm there would be no further costs which would be incurred due to Morston electors voting at Blakeney Village Hall.

While it would still be our proposal to implement the change in relation to Morston electors now voting at Blakeney, this decision is now put forward for your consideration.

3. Recommendations

Matlaske (GR8)

Move from **Little Barningham Village Hall** to **Baconsthorpe Village Hall**

Sustead (ER8)

Move from **Sustead Village Hall** to **Hanworth Village Hall**

Tunstead (HT8)

Move from **Tunstead Primary School** to **Horse & Groom Public House**

Bale (PR1)

Move from **Bale Village Hall** to **Gunthorpe Village Institute**

Horseley (HI2)

Move from **School Room, Horseley Methodist Church** to **Sea Palling Village Hall**

Ingworth (ER6)

Move from **Ingworth Reading Room** to **Erpingham Village Hall**

Morston (CO4)

Move from **Morston Village Hall** to **Blakeney Village Hall**

Sidestrand (PO3)

Move from **Sidestrand Reading Room** to **Trimingham Village Hall**

Once final decisions have been made, letters will be written to Parish Councils outlining the outcome of the Review and also a letter will be sent to each elector in the affected communities to advise them of the changes which will be implemented for all future elections.

A Postal Vote application form can also be sent to each elector so they have the opportunity to complete and return it should they wish to vote using this method in the future, also providing information about Proxy applications should they wish to vote by this method instead.

We will issue a notice on our website and social media channel and inform Archant so a press release can be issued advising of the outcome.

Consultee	Date Received	Station Relating To	Comments
<p>Cllr Steffan Aquarone (Melton Constable Division County Councillor)</p>	<p>12 October 2020</p>	<p>General Comment</p>	<p>To whom it may concern,</p> <p>I am contacting you in light of the recent proposals to close small, rural polling stations including that in Little Barningham. I am the County Councillor for Melton Constable and as Little Barningham falls within my division. I am deeply concerned by this news.</p> <p>Although I fully appreciate the concerns around the costs involved with hiring and staffing these smaller stations, I feel extremely strongly that there must be another way to rectify this issue that still provides a space for local residents to access their right to vote within a walking distance of their homes.</p> <p>Many residents of these rural communities are elderly and may have difficulties with safely travelling to a larger destination to provide their vote. By removing smaller polling stations, such as Little Barningham, you face not only disenfranchising rural voters but also damaging a key aspect of community life in these villages.</p> <p>Surely in a time of such turbulence, we should be looking to transform the way people vote if we want to save costs, not alienating those already facing difficulties in accessing so many services.</p> <p>I trust this is of some use.</p>
<p>Helen Chadwick (Clerk, Sidestrand Parish Council)</p>	<p>26th October 2020</p>	<p>Sidestrand</p>	<p>Dear Mr Henry,</p> <p>With reference to the proposal to close the polling station at</p>

			<p>Sidestrand, the Council, although disappointed, understand the necessity of this.</p> <p>However, the Council feels that travelling to Overstrand would be preferable to the residents of Sidestrand than Trimmingham.</p>
<p>John Burdell (Chairman, Morston Parish Council)</p>	<p>27th October 2020</p>	<p>Morston</p>	<p>Dear Peter,</p> <p>Having circulated Rob Henry's letter to members and taking note of their views, I now summarise our comments in response to the Returning Officer's proposal for Morston Polling District (C03).</p> <p>We disagree with the thinking behind the statement that "there are efficiency and economic reasons as to why this venue is considered unsuitable".</p> <p>I will respond to each assertion in turn :-</p> <p>EFFICIENCY.</p> <p>We give booking priority to use of the hall as a Polling Station. It is therefore reliably available for the purpose.</p> <p>The letter states that there has been no feedback from staff working at the Polling Station to suggest it is unsuitable. We would expect that it has ample facilities for a comfortable working environment and are open to suggestions for improvements.</p> <p>Many Morston residents have no reason to be going to Blakeney on a daily basis or indeed leaving their home village.</p> <p>Reference to Quay Lane being "not the widest and used by</p>

		<p>vehicles towing boats" and to Blakeney Village Hall having great car parking facilities make little sense. There is no more hindrance to driving a car to Morston Village Hall than there is to reaching the top end of the one at Blakeney Village Hall - where one normally has to go as the car park is usually very full. The relevant difference is that one can park near the door at Morston as against a typical walk of more than 100yds, each way on a difficult gravel surface, at Blakeney. This is very relevant to anyone less agile and ignores the fact that many, more agile residents walk to Morston Village Hall to do their voting. Reference to using the Coasthopper bus service as part of a Polling Routine ignores the likelihood of the process taking about 2hours, with much of it spent standing waiting.</p> <p>Finally the suggestion of arranging to make Postal Voting the norm for future elections. There are valid reasons for Postal Votes, where there is no alternative. It is not democratically acceptable to remove a perfectly usable Polling Station and justify it by Postal Voting being available. Turning up, in person at one's Local Polling Station, marking the Ballot Paper and putting it in the Ballot Box still seems a cornerstone of Our Democratic Process.</p> <p>ECONOMIC REASONS Rob's letter and supporting papers clearly detail the cost of Polling at Morston and we understand why it may seem an easy prize in a quest for cost savings. It is not entirely clear what extra cost would be</p>
--	--	---

			<p>involved by having a dedicated "Morston Facility" attached to the Blakeney Polling Station, which we would expect to be provided. At first sight the cost per head, per election, does seem high but in reality only reflects the high cost of local government. We charge £75 for the use of the hall but have no clear memory of how that figure was arrived at. It could be argued that we should provide it without charge - as a clear benefit to our parishioners and while we would be happy to do that, we can have no influence on the main cost.</p> <p>We understand that Morston's small size impacts on any cost per capita assessments, having recently made a contribution to the cost of bringing Fibre Broadband to the village that may otherwise have been unavailable to our residents. We would expect the cost of satisfactorily providing the Normal Democratic Polling System to be covered by paying our taxes.</p> <p>CONCLUSION Suggestions that Morston does not warrant it's own Polling Station have come up before and been successfully resisted. The reason to resist them now is no less relevant and we ask the Returning Officer to take note of our rejection of his current suggestion.</p> <p>Best regards,</p>
Cllr. Marie Strong (Wells Division County Councillor)	29 th October 2020	Morston	Trying to remember how long it is since we fought this fight before – and won.

Further Comments:

Cllr. John Toye (Erpingham Ward District Councillor)	10 th November 2020	Ingworth	Hi Rob, In Relation to the Ingworth closure It might be useful to note that Banningham/Colby village hall is also available as an alternative as well as Erpingham
Cllr. Harry Blathwayt (Hickling Ward District Councillor)	10 th November 2020	Horsey	Dear Robert, Thanks for contacting me. I did not attend the Parish council Meeting at Horsey when this was discussed however I understand from the Chairman that when discussing the price of democracy against the value of democracy Horsey Parish Council came down unanimously on the value side of the argument. The demographic of the Horsy electorate is such that in the interests of voter turnout the Horsy Polling Station should be retained. I am sure you will shortly hear directly from the Parish Council with their formal objection.
Robin Buxton (Chairman, Horsey Parish Council)	10 th November 2020	Horsey	I confirm as chairman of Horsey Parish Council that at our last parish meeting we discussed the polling station issue and unanimously voted to object to the closure of the Horsey polling station. I informed Councillor Blathwayt but did not realise we also had to inform you hence this email. Yours sincerely