

REPORT TO ENGAGEMENT P.D.G.

REPORT OF: *ELECTIONS & DEMOCRATIC SERVICES TEAM LEADER*

REPORT NO: LDS053

DATE: 1st FEBRUARY 2012

TITLE:	<i>Review of Polling Districts and Polling Places</i>	
KEY DECISION OR POLICY FRAMEWORK PROPOSAL:	Statutory requirement	
PORTFOLIO HOLDER: NAME AND DESIGNATION:	Councillor Paul Carpenter - Engagement and Corporate Services Portfolio Holder	
CONTACT OFFICER:	Julie Edwards, Elections and Democratic Services Team Leader j.edwards@southkesteven.gov.uk	
INITIAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT: Equality and Diversity	See paragraph 7	Full impact assessment Required: N/A
FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT:	This report is publicly available via the Your Council and Democracy link on the Council's website: www.southkesteven.gov.uk	
BACKGROUND PAPERS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Notice of Review of Polling Districts and Polling Places • Review of Polling Districts and Polling Places guidance (Electoral Commission circular EC19(2010)) • Acting Returning Officer's proposals • Submissions to consultation received 	

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the Engagement Policy Development Group consider the draft proposals of polling districts and polling places as detailed in the **Appendix** attached to this report.

2. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 2.1 Under the Representation of the People Act 1983, the Council has a duty to divide the District into polling districts and to designate a polling place for each of these districts. The Electoral Administration Act 2006 requires the Council to carry out a review of these polling districts and polling places every four years as a minimum. The Council last completed a review in 2008 and therefore, in line with the statutory timeframe, it is required to undertake a further periodic review.
- 2.2 The final proposals will be submitted to full Council for approval on either 26th April or 3rd May 2012 (the next annual meeting of the Council) (date to be confirmed).

3. DETAILS OF REPORT

Background

- 3.1 A review of polling districts and polling places is required to be conducted in accordance with the guidance provided by the Electoral Commission. That guidance has been followed in respect of :
- a) Publication of a Notice of the Review
 - b) Consultation;
 - c) Consideration of the Returning Officer's submission
- 3.2 Polling Districts are, in effect, sub divisions of electoral wards. Each parish or parish ward is automatically a polling district in its own right but then that area can be broken down into further polling districts dependent on the size of the parish and the number and location of the electors.
- 3.3 When designating polling districts the local authority must seek to ensure that all the electors in the area have reasonable facilities for voting as are practical in the circumstances. Responsibility for determining polling district boundaries lies with the Council itself.
- 3.4 The Council must designate a polling place for every polling district. In determining where polling places should be located the Council must seek to ensure that all the electors have such reasonable facilities for voting as are practical in the circumstances and that, so far as is reasonable and practical, polling places are assessable to all electors, including those who are disabled.
- 3.5 Public notice of the start of the review was given on 19th September 2011. The closing date for submission of comments was 14th October 2011.

Consultation Process

- 3.6 The review process required the Council to consult on the existing polling districts, polling places and polling stations. This exercise sought representations from people or organisations who had particular expertise in relation to access to premises or facilities for persons who have different forms of disability. The consultation also included all District Councillors, all Parish/Town councils and the local political parties.
- 3.7 In addition, polling station inspectors employed at the Referendum and local elections held in May 2011 were asked to complete a questionnaire regarding the accessibility of each of the current polling places.

Issues raised during the Consultation Process

- 3.8 Various responses to the consultation were received, these are summarised in the schedule set out at **Appendix 1**. Each of the responses has been evaluated to determine if changes are necessary as part of the review process and these evaluations are set out below.
- 3.9 Elections service officers have visited all the venues listed below to view the current sites and consider alternative sites.

4. OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

Where comments have been received as part of the review or where the Returning Officer is aware of issues at a particular polling place, various options have been considered in each case. These are detailed below.

4.1 Bourne East Ward and Bourne West Ward –

- **Bourne Town Council** - In this response Bourne Town Council requests that all polling stations in Bourne are given consideration stating that they feel that more polling stations are needed in Bourne, especially in view of development in Elsea Park and surrounding areas. The Elsea Park development falls within both the East and West Wards. There are more than 1000 houses in the southern sector of the town. Meadow Close could be used as it complies with DDA. The Town Council feel that some electors have to travel quite a distance to their allocated station and that some stations have excessive numbers of electors.
- **Elsea Park Community Trust**
This response advises that the Community Centre at Elsea Park will be completed early in 2012 and that this building could be utilised as a polling station to serve the large number of residents in this new development area.

Proposal

It is proposed that the following changes are made to the polling arrangements for the Bourne East Ward :

- **That Polling District EC1 is split to create two separate polling districts with approximately 1400 electors allocated to the current polling station of the Darby & Joan Hall and approximately 1600 electors are allocated to The Centre at Elsea Park;**
- **That the polling station previously allocated to Bourne Abbey C of E Primary School on Abbey Road is relocated to the Communal Room, Meadow Close. This change is proposed as a result of accessibility and parking issues experienced at the 2010 and 2011 elections at the Bourne Abbey School.**

It is proposed that no change is made to the polling arrangements for the part of the Elsea Park development falling within the Bourne West Ward at the present time due to the small number of electors currently registered in this area. There are currently less than 100 electors registered in the West Ward part of the Elsea Park development and it is felt that the allocation of an additional polling station to this small number of voters is not appropriate at present. This will however be kept under review as the number of properties in this area are built and occupied.

4.2 Earlesfield Ward, Grantham

The polling station allocated to the SA1 polling district in the Earlesfield Ward is currently the Church of the Epiphany, The Grove, Grantham. This church is currently closed and an alternative venue needs to be found to accommodate the two polling stations required for this polling district.

Recommendation :

It is proposed that the polling place be relocated to the South Kesteven Table Tennis Centre, off Trent Road, Grantham. This venue has been used in previous years as the polling station for this area and will accommodate the two polling stations required for this polling district.

Any suggestions of other alternative venues in this area would be welcomed.

4.3 Isaac Newton Ward – Colsterworth and Gunby & Stainby

Two responses were received in relation to the Colsterworth polling station which is located at the Colsterworth Primary School. These responses from the Colsterworth and District Parish Council and the Governing Body of Colsterworth Primary School expressed concern regarding the continued use of the school and the disruption caused to the operation of the school on polling day. The Village Hall has been highlighted as an alternative premises to the primary school.

The Colsterworth Primary School serves as the polling station for the Parishes of Colsterworth and Gunby and Stainby.

In view of the issues highlighted consideration has been given to alternative options – these are identified below:

Option 1 – Change the polling place to the Village Hall

- The village hall is situated outside of the Colsterworth village centre a substantial distance away from the majority of electors. The village hall does have excellent car parking facilities however the pedestrian access from the Colsterworth village is via a long path which is steep in places and does not provide good access for disabled or elderly voters. The access is not as good as at present with the use of the primary school. Furthermore consideration has also been given to the forthcoming Police Commissioner election to be held in November and the implications for pedestrian access at that time of the year.

Option 2 – Retain the Colsterworth Primary School as the polling place

- The Colsterworth Primary School is situated in a central location in Colsterworth village and has on-street parking facilities. Therefore it serves the electorate well as the polling place for this area.

Recommendation – No change

It is recommended to continue to use the Colsterworth Primary School as the polling place for the Colsterworth and Gunby/Stainby polling districts.

Other options considered during the review:

- Methodist Church – this venue would be an ideal polling station as it is situated in the centre of Colsterworth village next to the school however the building is used extensively and is unfortunately not available for polling station use.
- Youth Centre – this venue is again not available for polling station use due to it's use as a nursery and childcare provision.
- The St John the Baptist Church – it is felt that the Church is not suitable for use as a polling station

4.4 Isaac Newton Ward – Stoke Rochford and Easton

The St Andrew & St Mary's Church, Village Street, Stoke Rochford serves as the polling station for both Stoke Rochford and Easton parishes. Although the Church is situated in a good location there are a number of issues with this polling place including uneven external pathways and dark approach to the

building. Heating and lighting is poor making it inhospitable for the polling staff and the electors.

Furthermore consideration has also been given to the forthcoming Police Commissioner elections to be held in November and the implications for pedestrian access at that time of the year with longer periods of darkness.

In view of the issues highlighted consideration has been given to alternative options – these are identified below:

Option 1 – Relocate the polling place to the Stoke Rochford Estate Office, Home Farm, Stoke Rochford.

- The Stoke Rochford Estate Office is located within the Stoke Rochford polling district but is a substantial distance away from the centre along a private road. It is situated one mile from the current polling station at the St Andrew & St Mary's Church.
- The building does have good access with a level entrance and has a large car park.
- It is however felt that the location of this premise is too remote and would not be accessible to some voters, particularly voters in the Easton parish.
- Furthermore consideration has also been given to the forthcoming Police Commissioner election to be held in November and the implications of accessibility at that time of the year.

Option 2 – Relocate the polling place to The Meeting Venue, A1 North, Stoke Rochford Services

- The Meeting Venue offers excellent facilities with a choice of meeting rooms available and excellent car parking facilities.
- The premises are accessed directly from the A1 North and there is a footpath from Stoke Rochford village leading to these premises.
- This option would however involve electors from the Easton parish having to cross the A1, however this is already the case at the current polling place located at the Stoke Rochford Church.

Option 3 – Retain the St Andrew and St Mary's Church as the polling place for the Stoke Rochford and Easton parishes.

- The Church has potential access issues with uneven external pathways and limited external lighting. These issues will be even more prominent at the Police Commissioners elections due to be held in November 2012.
- The building is very cold and uncomfortable for the polling staff and as there are no toilet facilities at the Church a portaloo is required to be hired.

Recommendation – Option 2

It is recommended to replace the St Andrew & St Mary's Church with The Meeting Room Venue, A1 North, Stoke Rochford Services as the polling place for the Stoke Rochford and Easton polling districts.

4.5 Lincrest Ward – Ropsley and Braceby

A petition received in 2010 from 54 electors within the Lincrest Ward advised that the use of the Ropsley Church of England Primary School was not satisfactory as it currently requires the closure of the school on polling day which is detrimental to the education of the children. In addition the school itself would prefer an alternative venue be used as the polling station.

In view of the issues highlighted consideration has been given to alternative options – these are identified below:

Option 1 – Change the polling place to the Ropsley Village Hall

- The village hall is located towards the edge of the Ropsley village but is within easy walking distance for the majority of voters. The village hall offers good access and has a large car park. However the village hall has two regular bookings on Thursdays which would need to be cancelled if the venue were to be used as a polling station. The Village Hall Committee is meeting on 23rd January 2012 and will be discussing the potential use as a polling station –the outcome of this meeting will be reported orally to the Engagement PDG meeting.

Option 2 – If the Village Hall is not being made available

- Election officers will investigate the suitability of alternative suggested venues at the Fox's Brush Public House and the Green Man Public House.

Option 3 – Retain Ropsley C of E Primary School as the polling station

- Ropsley Primary School has served as a polling station for many years
- The (Acting) Returning Officer to contact the school to ascertain whether there is a way of using the facility without the headteacher taking the decision to close the school.

Recommendation – Option 1

It is recommended to replace Ropsley C of E Primary School with Ropsley Village Hall as the polling station given the issues regarding using the school and the village hall's suitability as an alternative venue. This recommendation is subject to agreement from the Ropsley Village Hall Committee to have exclusive use on polling days.

4.6 St Wulfram's Ward, Grantham

Two responses were received from the ward councillors, both suggesting a third polling station be created for this ward. The responses highlighted that the polling station situated in Manners Street is ideal for those living near to the area who are mostly elderly but is some distance for residents to travel who live in the vicinity of St Wulfram's Church. One response suggested locating an additional polling station at the National School, which has been used previously as a polling station.

The current arrangements for this ward are:

Polling District	Polling Place	No. of voters in person (excluding postal voters)
UA1	Cliffedale Primary School, Northcliffe Road, Grantham	1616
UB1	Communal Room, Manners Street, Grantham	984

The issues raised appear to relate to the polling district UB1 which currently votes at the Manners Street Communal Room. This polling place should clearly be retained as it is convenient to those voters living at the north of the polling district, many of whom are elderly. The number of voters allocated to this polling district is not sufficiently high to justify the provision of an additional polling station.

Consideration has been given to revising the boundary between the two polling districts but it is felt that the current boundary is an obvious division of the ward around the grounds of the hospital.

The options available are set out below:

Option 1 – No change

- Retain the current polling district boundaries and polling places for UA1 and UB1 as detailed above.

Option 2 – Divide polling district UB1 into two polling districts with two polling places

- Create an additional polling district to enable two polling stations to be utilised in this area – at the Manners Street Communal Room and the National School.

Recommendation – Option 1 – No change

It is recommended that the UB1 be retained as one polling district with the Manners Street Communal Room being retained as the polling place.

However the issue may be re-considered following any feedback received from the Police Commissioners elections to be held in November 2012.

4.7 Truesdale Ward

Comments have been received from Baston Parish Council requesting that the polling station be returned to The Barn, Main Street, Baston. Members of the Parish Council feel that the Barn is a village facility and should be used instead of closing the school on polling day. The Parish Council state that parents have raised concern to parish councillors regarding strangers accessing the building if it remained open on polling day.

In view of the issues highlighted consideration has been given to alternative options – these are identified below:

Option 1 – Change the polling place to The Barn, Main Street, Baston

- The Barn was previously used as the polling station for the Baston area until 2010 when it was relocated to the school.
- The Barn does have a ramped disabled entrance however its long drive is not of a smooth surface and the walkway around the building is uneven with potential trip hazards, both of which could pose difficulties for electors in wheelchairs.
- The Barn does have good car parking facilities
- The access is not as good at The Barn as at the primary school.
Furthermore consideration has also been given to the forthcoming Police Commissioner election to be held in November and the implications for pedestrian access at that time of the year with longer periods of darkness.

Option 2 – Retain the Baston Primary School as the polling place

- The Baston Primary School is situated in a good location within the village, has no access issues with good footways and level entrance and has adequate parking facilities. Therefore it serves the electorate well as the polling place for this area.
- The (Acting) Returning Officer contact the school to ascertain whether there is a way of using the facility without the headteacher taking the decision to close the school.

Recommendation – No change

It is recommended to retain the Baston Primary School as a polling place for the Baston polling district and that contact be made with the headteacher to explore whether the school can remain open on polling day.

4.8 Peascliffe Ward

Comments were received from Great Gonerby Parish Council suggesting the Memorial Hall, Marratts Lane as an alternative venue to the St Sebastian Primary School.

In view of the issues highlighted consideration has been given to alternative options – these are identified below:

Option 1 – Change the polling place to The Memorial Hall, Marratts Lane, Great Gonerby:

- The Memorial Hall has a gravel approach to the building which could cause problems for electors in wheelchairs.
- Plans are in place for the building of a new hall to replace the existing Memorial Hall and it would therefore be disruptive to the electorate to be relocated to the Memorial Hall and then have to return to the School whilst the new hall is completed.

Option 2 – Retain the St Sebastian Primary School as the polling place

- The St Sebastian Primary School is situated in a good location within the village and has adequate parking facilities. Therefore it serves the electorate well as the polling place for this area.
- No comments have been received regarding the use of this school as a polling station.

Proposal – No change

It is recommended to continue to use the St Sebastian Primary School as a polling place for the Great Gonerby polling district. This arrangement to be reviewed again when the new hall is completed.

- 4.9 The draft proposals outlined in this report together with the polling arrangements for all polling districts within the district are detailed on the Schedule of Polling Places attached at **Appendix 2**.

5. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 The designation of any additional polling places will have financial implications in relation to the hire of premises and polling staff costs on election day. The proposals identify one additional polling station, which at the time of an election in the appropriate ward would have an estimated additional cost of £500. Any additional costs would only fall to the District Council at the time of any District Council election or by-election.

6. RISK AND MITIGATION

6.1 None arising from this report.

7. ISSUES ARISING FROM EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

7.1 There are no direct diversity implications arising from this report however it is essential that the determination of polling districts and places is consistent with the principle of ensuring fair and equitable access to democratic processes. Due regard must be given to accessibility of polling stations which has been built into the process of this review.

8. CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS

8.1 None arising from this report.

9. COMMENTS OF FINANCIAL SERVICES

9.1 The proposals, if implemented, will result in relatively minor financial implications in relation to additional hire and staffing costs at the time of District elections. There would be no immediate budget implications except in the event of a District by-election.

10. COMMENTS OF LEGAL AND DEMOCRATIC SERVICES

10.1 This review of polling districts and polling places is a legal requirement under section 18 of the Representation of the People Act 1983 (as amended by the Electoral Administration Act 2006) and associated regulations, the Review of Polling Districts and Polling Places (Parliamentary Elections) Regulations 2006.

11. COMMENTS OF OTHER RELEVANT SERVICES

None

12. APPENDICES:

- **Appendix 1 – Summary of Representations Received**
- **Appendix 2 – Schedule of Draft Proposals for Polling Districts and Polling Places**