

NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL



15 November 2023

Our Ref Council/23 November 2023
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To: The Chair and Members of North Hertfordshire District Council

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN OF A

MEETING OF THE COUNCIL

to be held in the

**COUNCIL CHAMBER, DISTRICT COUNCIL OFFICES, GERNON
ROAD, LETCHWORTH**

on

THURSDAY, 23RD NOVEMBER, 2023

at

7.30 PM

Yours sincerely,

Jeanette Thompson
Service Director – Legal and Community

****MEMBERS PLEASE ENSURE THAT YOU DOWNLOAD ALL AGENDAS AND REPORTS VIA THE MOD.GOV APPLICATION ON YOUR TABLET BEFORE ATTENDING THE MEETING****

Agenda

Part I

Item		Page
1.	APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE	
2.	MINUTES - 28 SEPTEMBER 2023 To take as read and approve as a true record the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on the 28 September 2023.	5 - 14
3.	NOTIFICATION OF OTHER BUSINESS Members should notify the Chair of other business which they wish to be discussed at the end of either Part I or Part II business set out in the agenda. They must state the circumstances which they consider justify the business being considered as a matter of urgency. The Chair will decide whether any item(s) raised will be considered.	
4.	CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS <u>Climate Emergency</u> The Council has declared a climate emergency and is committed to achieving a target of zero carbon emissions by 2030 and helping local people and businesses to reduce their own carbon emissions. A Cabinet Panel on the Environment has been established to engage with local people on matters relating to the climate emergency and advise the council on how to achieve these climate change objectives. A Climate Change Implementation group of councillors and council officers meets regularly to produce plans and monitor progress. Actions taken or currently underway include switching to green energy, incentives for low emission taxis, expanding tree planting and working to cut food waste. In addition the council is a member of the Hertfordshire Climate Change and Sustainability Partnership, working with other councils across Hertfordshire to reduce the county's carbon emissions and climate impact. The Council's dedicated webpage on Climate Change includes details of the council's climate change strategy, the work of the Cabinet Panel on the Environment and a monthly briefing on progress.	

Declarations of Interest

Members are reminded that any declarations of interest in respect of any business set out in the agenda, should be declared as either a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest or Declarable Interest and are required to notify the Chair of the nature of any interest declared at the commencement of the relevant item on the agenda. Members declaring a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest must withdraw from the meeting for the duration of the item. Members declaring a Declarable Interest, wishing to exercise a 'Councillor Speaking Right', must declare this at the same time as the interest, move to the public area before speaking to the item and then must leave the room before the debate and vote.

5. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

To receive petitions, comments and questions from the public.

6. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS

15 - 16

To consider any questions submitted by Members of the Council, in accordance with Standing Order 4.8.11 (b).

7. NOTICE OF MOTIONS

To consider any motions, due notice of which have been given in accordance with Standing Order 4.8.12.

8. ITEMS REFERRED FROM OTHER COMMITTEES

To consider any items referred from other Committees. Any items referred to this meeting will be published as a supplementary document.

9. REVIEW OF POLLING DISTRICTS, POLLING PLACES AND POLLING STATIONS

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REPORT OF THE DEMOCRATIC SERVICES MANAGER/(ACTING) RETURNING OFFICER/ELECTORAL REGISTRATION OFFICER

To outline and report on the outcome of the Review of Polling Districts, Polling Places and Polling Stations consultation, following a review and to designate the Polling Districts and Polling Places.

10. CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT REPORT

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REPORT OF: THE SERVICE DIRECTOR LEGAL AND COMMUNITY & MONITORING OFFICER

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Further to the report in July 2023, this report covers proposed changes to section 8 Planning Control Committee's Terms of Reference.

11. MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY 2024-29

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REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR – RESOURCES

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To consider the Medium Term Financial Strategy 2024-29.

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| 12. | USE OF URGENCY IN RELATION TO CALL-IN FOR DECISION ON
BUSINESS RATE POOLING
REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR – RESOURCES | 153 -
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To notify Council that the urgency provisions in relation to call-in were applied to a delegated decision made by the Service Director: Resources (in consultation with the Executive Member for Finance and IT) in relation to Business Rate Pooling on 9 October 2023.

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| 13. | ELECTORAL SERVICES - SCALE OF FEES 2024/25
REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR – RESOURCES | 155 -
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To agree the Scale of Fees for electoral events held during 2024/25.

Public Document Pack Agenda Item 2

NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES

Meeting of the Council held in the Council Chamber, District Council Offices, Gernon Road,
Letchworth
on Thursday, 28th September, 2023 at 7.30 pm

PRESENT: Councillors: Daniel Allen (Chair), Chris Lucas (Vice-Chair), Ian Albert, Amy Allen, Matt Barnes, Clare Billing, Ruth Brown, Val Bryant, Adam Compton, Mick Debenham, Elizabeth Dennis, Chris Hinchliff, Terry Hone, Keith Hoskins, Steve Jarvis, David Levett, Ian Mantle, Daniel Marsh, Nigel Mason, Bryony May, Ian Moody, Gerald Morris, Ralph Muncer, Michael Muir, Lisa Nash, Sean Nolan, Louise Peace, Sean Prendergast, Claire Strong, Mandi Tandi, Richard Thake, Tamsin Thomas, Tom Tyson, Phil Weeder, Alistair Willoughby, Dave Winstanley and Daniel Wright-Mason

IN ATTENDANCE: Ian Couper (Service Director - Resources), Jo Doggett (Service Director - Housing & Environmental Health), Anthony Roche (Managing Director), Jeanette Thompson (Service Director - Legal and Community), James Lovegrove (Committee, Member and Scrutiny Manager), Callum Reeve (Democratic Services Apprentice), Melanie Stimpson (Democratic Services Manager) and Sjanel Wickenden (Committee, Member and Scrutiny Officer)

ALSO PRESENT: At the commencement of the meeting there were 4 members of the public.

226 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Audio recording – 1 minute 45 seconds

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Simon Bloxham, Dominic Griffiths, Tom Plater, Sam Collins, Terry Tyler, Juan Cowell, David Barnard, Raj Bhakar and James Denselow.

An apology for absence was received on behalf of Councillor Cathy Brownjohn who might arrive late to the meeting.

227 MINUTES - 13 JULY 2023

Audio Recording – 2 minute 17 seconds

Councillor Daniel Allen, as Chair, proposed and Councillor Elizabeth Dennis seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Committee held on 13 July 2023 be approved as a true record of the proceedings and be signed by the Chair.

228 NOTIFICATION OF OTHER BUSINESS

Audio recording – 3 minutes

There was no other business notified.

229 CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

Audio recording – 3 minute 7 seconds

- (1) The Chair advised that, in accordance with Council Policy, the meeting would be audio recorded.
- (2) Members were reminded that this Council had declared a Climate Emergency. This was a serious decision and meant that, as this was an emergency, all of us, officers and Members had that in mind as we carried out our various roles and tasks for the benefit of our District.
- (3) The Chair drew attention to the item on the agenda front pages regarding Declarations of Interest and reminded Members that, in line with the Code of Conduct, any Declarations of Interest needed to be declared immediately prior to the item in question.
- (4) The Chair advised that the normal procedure rules in respect of debate and times to speak applied.
- (5) The Chair advised that 4.8.23(a) of the Constitution did not apply to this meeting. A comfort break would be held at an appropriate time, should proceedings continue at length.
- (6) The Chair advised that a referral from the Cabinet meeting on 19 September regarding the Financial System Budget, which was circulated as supplementary document, would be considered alongside Agenda Item 8.
- (7) The Chair advised that a Polling District Review would commence on Monday 2 October, with a Members Briefing scheduled on Monday 16 October. The final report would be presented to Council on 23 November 2023 for determination.
- (8) The Chair reminded the Committee about the upcoming Chair's Civic Event and Awards 2024, being held on Friday 1 March 2024.
- (9) The Chair held a minute's silence in memory of former District Councillor Geoff Woods and Members paid tribute.
- (10) The Chair congratulated Councillor Tom Plater on the birth of his daughter.

230 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Audio recording – 10 minute 29 seconds

The Chair advised that he had invited Ms Laura Hyde, Chief Executive Officer at Resolve, to make a presentation to Council as one of his chosen charities for the Civic Year. Ms Hyde thanked the Chair for the opportunity and provided a presentation for Members, which included that:

- The primary aim of Resolve was to help service users, move to a manageable and positive lifestyle where they could contribute and enhance their community.
- They ran a free substance misuse service with sites in Letchworth and Welwyn.
- They provided high quality, abstinence based, drug and alcohol treatment, with an end goal of total abstinence.
- They assessed the needs of the client and provided day services including group and individual therapy.

- They offered 1 to 1 counselling which had been proven to help addiction particularly to alcohol.
- They were due to commence an evening support group after feedback from clients, so support could be offered to those with daytime employment.
- They also provided support for the families and carers of their clients.
- Ideally each client would attend two 90 minutes sessions a week, and a monthly catch up with their key worker.
- Initially clients had a 16-week programme that could be repeated. However repeated reattendances were discussed and assessed.
- They provided confidential, professional counsellors.
- They supported loved ones and clients with their physical health and mental health needs, leading to their clients being self-reliant.
- Their biggest advocates were their clients who lives they had turned around.
- Last year 122 clients used the Letchworth based service.
- This year they had an average of 40 clients per month and received about 13 referrals monthly.
- Last year the cost of the Letchworth service was £165K, mainly due to salaries and clinical supervision.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Adam Compton
- Councillor Val Bryant

In response to questions Ms Hyde stated that:

- There was a lack of support within the Royston area, The Living Room provided some cover for this area.
- When a referral come through for a client from Royston or the Southern Rural area they endeavoured to help, but were often hindered by transport issues.
- Public transport was limited within these areas, clients had to rely on family and friends, although Letchworth train station was very close to the Resolve office.
- Further information on the number of clients and their transport issues for the Royston and Southern Rural areas could be provided outside of this meeting.
- Across the two sites the majority of referrals came from the Stevenage area.
- Royston clients may have access to Cambridge or Hertford sites.
- The clients and staff desired to break all stereotypes, but recovery was tough.

The Chair thanked Ms Hyde for her presentation.

231 QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS

Audio recording – 28 minute 52 seconds

In accordance with Standing Order 4.8.11, two questions had been submitted by the required deadline set out in the Constitution.

(A) Council Responsibility to House Asylum Seeker Granted Leave to Stay.

Councillor David Levett to Councillor Sean Prendergast (Executive Member for Housing and Environmental Health).

"Given the significant number of asylum seekers being accommodated in North Hertfordshire by the Home Office what plans does the Council have to house any of the families should they be granted leave to stay and it becomes the responsibility of North Hertfordshire District Council to find homes for them?"

Councillor Sean Prendergast gave a response as follows:

"I do think that it's perhaps a question that Councillor Levett should be asking the government. Almost every Local Authority will be in this situation which begs the question, what is the government long term strategy to house people, furthermore do we know how long the government is going to take to process asylum claims, the answer is we don't. There is a huge backlog of applications that will inevitably be putting increasing pressure on Local Authorities, quite frankly the whole situation is completely unacceptable. What this also highlights is that need to build more affordable social housing which has been another significant failure of this Government. However, we are where we are and this Council does have a plan to try and manage the situation, a report was provided to Cabinet last week that provides an answer to Councillor Levett's question, however I am more than happy to summarise this for Members tonight. This administration has a strong track record of supporting refugees, we have successfully housed 70 refugees in direct response to Government resettlement schemes over recent years. This includes refugees from places such as Syria and Afghanistan. Although asylum seekers are ineligible for Local Authority Housing services if they're successful with their applications they will be granted refugee status by the Home Office. The Home Office is currently using two hotels in this District with a total of around 250 occupants. Our local registered providers have been very supportive of refugee resettlements to date and the Local Authority Housing fund will provide more affordable housing to help with these demands. However, it is anticipated that there will be much more focus on the option on using the privately rental sector for resettlement of refugees going forward. In view of this a new fixed term member of staff has been recruited based on the Council's housing team in order to manage resettlement activities as part of the Council's wider housing role, in an attempt to try and minimize the numbers that may come homeless. It is worth noting that around 12 months ago the Home Office asked Hertfordshire to assist with the placement of 801 asylum seekers by December 2023 with North Herts allocation being 97, we are seeking further clarity from the Home Office on this extra demand bearing in mind the relatively recent procurement of 12 hotels in Hertfordshire accommodating approximately 1800 asylum seekers. While this Council is trying to be proactive in managing this situation, already high housing demands are almost certainly going to increase, therefore all Local Authorities will be reliant on Government funding to manage the situation effectively, a situation that I must add was creative by this government. Councils deserve better, but more importantly so do asylum seekers, we must not forget these are people that have come from war torn countries who need support and assistance and although the Government continues to fail these people we will be here, to offer support."

Councillor David Levett asked a supplementary question, as follows:

"A report in the Daily Express on Monday September 25, there was an article that said the Home Office must now consult Councils legally to ask the number of people they can accommodate, have we been asked that question yet and what would the answer be?"

Councillor Prendergast responded:

"I have not seen that article but bearing in mind it's in the Daily Express I will probably take that with a pinch of salt, but I don't know the answer to that question Councillor, but I can find out for you and come back to you."

(B) Council Financial Relationship with Birmingham City Council.

Councillor Ralph Muncer to Councillor Ian Albert (Executive Member for Finance and IT):

"To ask the Executive Member for Finance and IT whether North Hertfordshire District Council has a financial relationship with Birmingham City Council, and if so, to provide detail as to the nature of this relationship?"

Councillor Ian Albert gave a response as follows:

“I can confirm that North Hertfordshire District Council does not have a financial relationship with Birmingham City Council.”

In response to a supplementary question proposed by Councillor Muncer, having sought advice from the Monitoring Officer the Chair advised Councillor Muncer that as his supplementary question did not relate to the original question, that it would not be accepted.

232 NOTICE OF MOTIONS

Audio recording – 36 Minute 1 second

There was one motion submitted in accordance with Standing Order 4.8.12.

Council of Sanctuary

Councillor Alistair Willoughby proposed the submitted amended motion as follows:

“North Herts is proud of its diversity and history of welcoming people from across the world to the District.

There is a tradition at the heart of North Herts’ communities, those of faith and of none, of working together to welcome, host, feed, clothe and support people seeking sanctuary here.

North Herts is enhanced by the contribution of those from a diverse range of backgrounds.

Over the last few years, the council has, with the support of residents, partners and community groups, co-ordinated the resettlement of refugees and supported asylum seekers. This has included:

- Supporting the resettlement of 55 individuals through the Syrian Vulnerable Persons
- Resettlement Scheme
- Hosting 289 Ukrainian refugees escaping war (including 106 children)
- Resettling 15 refugees through the Afghanistan Citizens Resettlement Scheme
- Committing to playing our part in tackling modern slavery and trafficking.

We are committed to continuing to work with partners, schools, and the voluntary, community and faith sector to create a welcoming and secure borough for those seeking sanctuary.

The District Council of Sanctuary is awarded by City of Sanctuary to institutions that are welcoming to those fleeing violence and persecution in their own countries, and protecting the rights of all migrants, asylum-seekers and refugees.

Council believes that:

- Standing up for those facing persecution, and welcoming refugees, asylum seekers and migrants is a moral responsibility that enriches our district and country.
- North Herts must continue to support its migrant communities and that the journey to become a District Council of Sanctuary will solidify this commitment.
- Refugee & asylum seekers are much more likely to be subject to both criminal and sexual exploitation as well as modern day slavery.
- We owe a moral duty towards children, and vulnerable and trafficked adults in our District, and this should extend, where possible, to refugees and migrants.

This Council commits to continuing its work:

- Embedding our organisational principles of equality and inclusion at the heart of our work with refugees and asylum seekers when supporting them in our community and engaging with district council services
- Challenging anti-migrant sentiment wherever we find it and championing the rights and dignity of refugees and asylum seekers.
- Finding opportunities across the Council and the District to celebrate our migrant communities, tell their stories, and promote their voices.
- Developing the Council's formal approach to how we engage with, listen to and support those seeking sanctuary, including the development of a Refugee strategy and accompanying action Plan.
- Working with local community, health, and education partners, including those with lived Experience. This will include working with these partners to shape North Herts' District of Sanctuary ambition and strategy.

That the Council resolves to:

1. Launch the journey to become an awarded District Council of Sanctuary by joining City of Sanctuary's local authority network.
2. Embody and commit to the City of Sanctuary 'Charter' values of Inclusive, Openness, Participation, Inspire, and Integrity in all we do.

In addition to taking local action, we will call on the Government to:

1. Guarantee the safety of all children.
2. Create a proper plan for resettlement."

Councillor Sean Prendergast seconded the amended motion.

The following Members took part in the debate:

- Councillor David Levett
- Councillor Gerald Morris
- Councillor Tamsin Thomas
- Councillor Ralph Muncer

Councillor Alistair Willoughby summarised that the motion:

- Was not a party political motion, it was about helping people who were fleeing their homes due to conflict.
- This motion would say to refugees that the Council, was here for them, they can make a home here and be part of our community.
- This motion was about working with an organisation and network of people who cared about people.
- This motion set out a vision and the journey, to help make the lives of many people better, showing that the Council cared and wanted to help people.

Councillor Daniel Allen requested a recorded vote on this item.

Having been proposed and seconded and, following a vote, the result was as follows:

YES	:	32
ABSTAIN	:	5
NO	:	0
TOTAL	:	37

The individual results were as follows:

Cllr Daniel Allen	YES
Cllr Adam Compton	YES
Cllr Alistair Willoughby	YES
Cllr Amy Allen	YES
Cllr Bryony May	YES
Cllr Chris Hinchliff	YES
Cllr Chris Lucas	YES
Cllr Claire Strong	YES
Cllr Clare Billing	YES
Cllr Daniel Marsh	YES
Cllr Daniel Wright-Mason	YES
Cllr Dave Winstanley	YES
Cllr David Levett	YES
Cllr Elizabeth Dennis	YES
Cllr Gerald Morris	ABSTAIN
Cllr Ian Albert	YES
Cllr Ian Mantle	YES
Cllr Ian Moody	YES
Cllr Keith Hoskins	YES
Cllr Lisa Nash	YES
Cllr Louise Peace	YES
Cllr Mandi Tandi	ABSTAIN
Cllr Matt Barnes	YES
Cllr Michael Muir	YES
Cllr Mick Debenham	YES
Cllr Nigel Mason	YES
Cllr Philip Weeder	YES
Cllr Ralph Muncer	ABSTAIN
Cllr Richard Thake	ABSTAIN
Cllr Ruth Brown	YES
Cllr Sean Nolan	YES
Cllr Sean Prendergast	YES
Cllr Steve Jarvis	YES
Cllr Tamsin Thomas	YES
Cllr Terry Hone	ABSTAIN
Cllr Tom Tyson	YES
Cllr Val Bryant	YES

As such it was:

RESOLVED: That the motion was carried.

233 FINANCIAL SYSTEM BUDGET

Audio recording – 53 minutes 10 seconds

Councillor Ian Albert, Executive Member for Finance and IT, presented the report 'Financial Systems Budget' and advised that:

- This was a request to approve a £200K budget to purchase an IT System that would be cost effective and allow the Council to have an accurate financial system, which was especially important given the reported overspend at Hertfordshire County Council this week.
- A tender exercise had taken place to identify the best value option.

- The new system would provide efficiency improvements and would improve the production of our accounts.
- This report had been approved by Cabinet and now required Full Council approval.
- The new system would produce cost savings that would recover the revenue costs and revenue impact of the purchase.
- This was an off the shelf package with some customisations.
- Once purchased, work would commence with Officers and Members to ensure that the benefits were achieved.
- The report highlighted the alternative options explored, including extending the current contract.
- The new system included Cloud based technology.

Councillor Elizabeth Dennis, Leader of the Council presented the referral from Cabinet of the 'Financial Systems Budget' and advised that Cabinet had considered this item and fully supported the expenditure.

Councillor Terry Hone raised a point of clarification that the overspend at the County Council referred to expected revenue and not capital expenditure, as was suggested by Councillor Albert.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Ralph Muncer
- Councillor Adam Compton

In response to questions, Councillor Ian Albert stated that:

- The efficiency savings would be achieved over the 10-year lifetime of the system.
- The request to review financial data on the existing systems for errors ahead of budget setting was noted.
- Any service improvements that occurred during implementation could be noted.

Councillor Ian Albert proposed and Councillor Elizabeth Dennis seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That Council approved a capital budget allocation in 2023/24 of £200k for the initial work to develop and implement the new finance software system.

REASON FOR DECISION: A new finance system was expected to lead to more efficient processes and a better customer experience. A new finance system would incur up-front installation and development costs. These costs can be charged to capital but require a capital budget. Additions to the capital programme above £50k required approval by Full Council.

234 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

Audio Recording – 59 minutes 49 seconds

Councillor Daniel Allen, as Chair proposed and Councillor Terry Hone seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That under Section 100A of the Local Government Act 1972, the Press and Public be excluded from the meeting on the grounds that the following report will involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the said Act (as amended).

N.B Councillor Amy Allen left the Chamber at 20:32.

235 SETTLE PENSION AGREEMENT - PART 2

N.B. This item was considered in restricted session and therefore no recording is available.

RESOLVED: That Council agreed to a new Admission Agreement between Hertfordshire County Council (as the Hertfordshire Pension Fund administer), Settle Group and North Hertfordshire District Council to allow settle to achieve a partial exit from the Local Government Pension Fund. The terms of that new Admission Agreement would be in line with what is set out in paragraph 8, including the recommended actions outlined in 8.6.1 to 8.6.3 of the Part 2 report.

REASON FOR DECISION: Settle had requested that the Council consider the proposal that it has made. Settle felt that it was in their best financial interests and it was possible that it could allow greater capacity for Settle to invest in housing, which could be in North Herts.

236 SETTLE PENSION AGREEMENT - PART 1

N.B Councillor Lisa Nash left the Chamber at 20:58 and returned at 21:02.

N.B Councillor Amy Allen returned to the Chamber at 20:59

Audio Recording – 1 hour 29 minutes 47 seconds

The Service Director – Resources presented the item 'New Pension Admission Agreement for Settle Group - Part 1' and stated that following the Part 2 discussion, Council had adopted the Part 2 agreement in line with paragraph 8 of the report.

Councillor Ian Albert proposed and Councillor Elizabeth Dennis seconded and, following a vote, it was

RESOLVED: That Council agreed to a new Admission Agreement between Hertfordshire County Council (as the Hertfordshire Pension Fund administer), Settle Group and North Hertfordshire District Council to allow settle to achieve a partial exit from the Local Government Pension Fund. The terms of that new Admission Agreement would be in line with what is set out in paragraph 8 including the recommended actions outlined in 8.6.1 to 8.6.3 of the Part 2 report.

REASON FOR DECISION: Settle had requested that the Council consider the proposal that it has made. Settle felt that it was in their best financial interests and it was possible that it could allow greater capacity for Settle to invest in housing, which could be in North Herts.

The meeting closed at 9.02 pm

Chair

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COUNCIL 23 NOVEMBER 2023

PUBLIC DOCUMENT

TITLE OF REPORT: QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS

In accordance with Standing Order 4.8.11(b), at the time of publication one question was submitted by a Member within the deadline set out in the Council's Constitution.

Any further questions received within the deadline will be published as supplementary documents.

(A) Health and Care Services in Royston

Councillor Matt Barnes to Councillor Elizabeth Dennis (Leader of the Council):

"Following the Health and Care Act last year, NHS health and care services in Royston and surrounding villages have fallen under the remit of the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Integrated Care System.

Please could the Leader update Members on the nature of any communications which have taken place between Council representatives and the Integrated Care Board – or the Integrated Care Partnership – since July 2022, on behalf of the residents of Royston?"

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**COUNCIL
23 NOVEMBER 2023**

PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT

TITLE OF REPORT: REVIEW OF POLLING DISTRICTS, POLLING PLACES AND POLLING STATIONS

REPORT OF: Democratic Services Manager/(Acting) Returning Officer/Electoral Registration Officer

EXECUTIVE MEMBER: Review of Polling Districts, Polling Places and Polling Stations – Non-Executive function
(Electoral Services: Community & Partnerships)

COUNCIL PRIORITY: PEOPLE FIRST / SUSTAINABILITY / A BRIGHTER FUTURE TOGETHER

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 To outline and report on the outcome of the Review of Polling Districts, Polling Places and Polling Stations consultation, following a review required by the Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1. That Council designates the Polling Districts and Polling Places as per the Returning Officer's Proposals attached as Appendix A to the submitted report, effective as of 1 December 2023.

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1. The Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013 introduced a change to the timing of compulsory reviews of UK Parliamentary Polling Districts and Polling Places. The next compulsory review is required to commence and conclude between 1 October 2023 and 31 January 2025 (inclusive).
- 3.2 However, as the Local Government Boundary Commission for England has implemented new district ward boundary arrangements for elections in May 2024, the Polling Districts, Polling Places and Polling Stations need to reflect these new boundaries in the Register of Electors published annually on 1 December.

4. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 4.1 The Review of Polling Districts, Polling Places and Polling Stations is a statutory requirement, so no alternative has been considered.

- 4.2 However, when designating each polling district and polling place, alternative options have been considered where available. In each case, the options are outlined in Appendix A.

5. CONSULTATION WITH RELEVANT MEMBERS AND EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS

- 5.1 When conducting the review, the Council must:

- Consult the (Acting) Returning Officer for every parliamentary constituency which is wholly or partly in North Hertfordshire; and
- Seek representations from electors and other interested persons and bodies including elected representatives and such persons that have a particular expertise in relation to access to premises or facilities for persons who have different forms of disability.

- 5.2 The Notice of Review was published on 2 October 2023 on the Council's website and at the District Council Offices, as well as being distributed to each parish for display and included within the Members' Information Services (MIS). Publication of the Notice of Review formally commenced the consultation period which concluded on 30 October 2023.

- 5.3 The consultation gave respondents the opportunity to make representations on the Returning Officer's draft proposals for the arrangement of polling districts, polling places and polling stations. In total 187 consultation responses were received via the online survey.

- 5.4 A Briefing Note was circulated via MIS, the Council's Communications Team publicised the Review via a Press Release and social media channels and emails were circulated to contacts including the Council's Citizens Panel, MPs and other elected members and disability groups in the North Herts area.

- 5.5 A Briefing Note was produced and circulated to all Members to assist with any constituent queries.

- 5.6 A Member Briefing was held on 16 October 2023 to discuss the proposals and alternatives. Subsequently there were additional meetings and ward specific discussions with Members. The presentation was circulated to all Members following the Briefing. Prior to the commencement of the formal consultation, Members were canvassed for their opinion regarding existing polling places.

- 5.7 Whilst formulating proposals, consideration was given to the evaluation forms that Polling Station Inspectors complete for each polling station as well as the most recent post-election staff survey that included questions on the quality and accessibility of the polling stations.

- 5.8 The representations received during the consultation are summarised in Appendix B.

- 5.9 The Acting Returning Officer for the Stevenage constituency was invited to make comments on the proposals and the response received is included at Appendix C.

6. FORWARD PLAN

- 6.1 This report does not contain a recommendation on a key Executive decision and has therefore not been referred to in the Forward Plan.

7. BACKGROUND

- 7.1. The Council must conduct a review of Parliamentary Polling Districts, Polling Places and Polling Stations every 5 years. The statutory review period for the current review is between 1 October 2023 and 31 January 2025.
- 7.2 The Boundary Commission for England (BCE) recently concluded a review of parliamentary constituency boundaries, with the new boundaries set to be in place at the next UK Parliamentary General Election (UKPGE). The Review must therefore account for the new parliamentary constituency boundaries, as well as the existing constituencies, in the event of a Parliamentary By-Election before the next UK Parliamentary General Election, which would be on the existing parliamentary boundary arrangements.
- 7.3 Although this review is technically concerned with Polling Districts, Polling Places and Polling Stations for Parliamentary Elections, in practice, the Council needs to designate Polling Districts which are compatible with local government elections so that the Electoral Register can be structured in a way that enables all election types to be delivered.
- 7.4 The Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) has recently implemented new district ward boundary arrangements for North Herts Council, to take effect from the elections in May 2024.
- 7.5 As a result, the review must account for the boundary changes at both parliamentary and local elections and must be concluded in time for the publication of the revised Register of Electors on 1 December 2023, so that North Hertfordshire has agreed and functioning polling districts and polling places ready to be used at the scheduled local elections in May 2024, as well as the next UK Parliamentary General Election which must take place by January 2025.
- 7.6 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.

8. RELEVANT CONSIDERATIONS

- 8.1 A Polling District can only be in one parish / ward / division / constituency (i.e. an electoral boundary line cannot cross through a polling district).
- 8.2 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.
- 8.3 Polling places should be within the relevant Polling District unless special circumstances make it desirable to designate an area outside the district (for example, if no polling place can be identified in the district). Where this is the case, it has been noted in the Returning Officer comments in Appendix A.
- 8.4 The Polling Places proposed have been based on an assessment of the available options and the accessibility of the respective venues.
- 8.5 As per paragraphs 7.2 - 7.4, the BCE and the LGBCE have recently completed electoral reviews of parliamentary constituency boundaries and the district ward boundaries of North Hertfordshire respectively. Their recommendations are to take effect from the next UK Parliamentary General Election in the case of parliamentary constituencies and from the scheduled May 2024 elections for district ward boundaries.
- 8.6 As part of the LGBCE boundary review, there were also changes to the boundaries of Royston Town Council and Bygrave Parish Council, which again take effect from their next scheduled elections – May 2026 for Royston Town Council and May 2027 for Bygrave Parish Council – and have been reflected in the proposals. In the case of Royston, the existing Town Council boundaries have also been accounted for in the event of a by-election before May 2026.
- 8.7 Appendix A sets out the proposals for each Polling District on a ward-by-ward basis, in each case detailing any comments from the Returning Officer on the proposals, as well as a summary of the consultation responses received and alternative options that were considered.
- 8.8 To be able to produce copies of the Register of Electors on the existing ward boundaries prior to the May 2024 elections (as well as the new boundaries), 7 Polling Districts have been temporarily split along the boundary lines of the old district wards and will be merged following the 2024 elections once they are no longer required. The 7 (temporarily 14) Polling Districts affected are as follows and have been marked with the suffix A or B:
 - H-HBE-5A & H-HBE-5B will be merged into H-HBE-5
 - N-LNR-1A & N-LNR-1B will be merged into N-LNR-1
 - N-LNR-2A & N-LNR-2B will be merged into N-LNR-2
 - N-LNR-3A & N-LNR-3B will be merged into N-LNR-3
 - N-LSE-1A & N-LSE-1B will be merged into N-LSE-1
 - N-LSE-2A & N-LSE-2B will be merged into N-LSE-2
 - N-LWI-1A & N-LWI-1B will be merged into N-LWI-1

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1. 4.4.1 (q) of the Functions of the Full Council states that Council must *'agree proposals for the compulsory polling districts, polling places and polling stations reviews, district boundaries, electoral wards and the number of District Councillors'*.
- 9.2. Sections 18A – 18E and Schedule A1 of the Representation of the People Act 1983 provides the statutory requirements of the polling review.
- 9.3. The Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013 introduced a change to the timing of compulsory reviews of UK Parliamentary polling districts and polling places.
- 9.4. The Review is compulsory and must be concluded by 31 January 2025.
- 9.5. Although statutorily the Council has until 31 January 2025 to conclude the Review, a decision to designate the Polling Districts and Polling Places is required forthwith, to take account of the district ward boundary review by the Local Government Boundary Commission for England, resulting in changes to Ward boundaries and the numbers of councillors per ward in North Herts, changes to the parliamentary constituency boundaries and the uncertainty of when the next General election will be. As a result, changes need to be reflected in the Register of Electors published on the 1 December in preparation of the forthcoming elections on the new boundaries.
- 9.6. Subsequent compulsory reviews must commence and conclude within the period of 16 months on 1 October every fifth year (i.e. the next review must commence on 1 October 2028).

10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1. The Electoral Commission recommends ratios when allocating electors and staff to Polling Stations and as the population of the district, and consequently the number of electors increase as new residential developments proceed, will mean new polling stations may be required and therefore have ongoing cost implications.
- 10.2. The anticipated costs of the various elections are taken into account during the annual budget setting process.
- 10.3. For contested Town/Parish/County Council elections the costs are recharged to the respective authority (unless a year when a District Council election or any other election is held in which case the costs are proportioned between the respective Councils). The introduction of an uncontested Town/Parish fee is part of a separate report 'Electoral Services – Scales of Fees 2024/25'.
- 10.4. For national polls the government issues a Fees and Charges schedule which identifies for each authority a "maximum recoverable amount" and subsequently claims are made to the Cabinet Office for reimbursement of the fees incurred i.e. Parliamentary/Police and Crime Commissioner elections. Claims can take a long time to determine and the Council does not always receive the full amount submitted. As in paragraph 10.3, the cost of national polls is shared if other elections are combined.

- 10.5 Following the polling district review and as a result of the district ward boundary review and the number of electors, the Council will require 80 polling stations for an all out election. The last time that elections were held district wide in 2021, 82 stations were required, meaning the Returning Officer will need to recruit less polling station staff (2 Presiding Officers and 4 Poll Clerks less) equating to a saving of £1,588 excluding any venue hire charges or other associated costs.
- 10.6 The district elections in 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 and therefore less than the overall costs in 2023 when the district elections were standalone.

11. RISK IMPLICATIONS

- 11.1. The Council needs to ensure it complies with statutory requirements. If the Council opted to not designate the Polling Districts and Polling Places at this meeting, would result in the need to re-publish the Register of Electors again in February, which aside from the significant cost implications, would have severe repercussions on the Electoral Services Team regarding preparations for the forthcoming elections. This is in addition to the extra burdens already being placed on the Team due to the changes imposed via the Elections Act 2022.
- 11.1. Following conclusion of the review, certain persons have a right to make representations to the Electoral Commission. If, on receipt of such representations, the Electoral Commission finds that the Council did not:
- Meet the reasonable requirements of the electors in the constituency, or
 - Take sufficient account of the accessibility for disabled persons of a polling station within a designated polling place.

The Electoral Commission may direct the Council to make any alteration to the polling place as deemed necessary, and if the alterations are not enacted within 2 months, the Electoral Commission may make the alterations themselves.

- 11.3 The requirement to undertake the review, including the associated consultation, provides the Council with the opportunity to assess the suitability of polling arrangements, to ensure that facilities provided are accessible to all and do not present any barriers to people's participation in elections.
- 11.4 Between compulsory reviews, all polling places and polling stations are evaluated as to their sustainability at each election.

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. As part of the review the Council must:

- 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 The consultation clearly sets out the rationale for the locations of the polling places/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. However, as a Polling Place must be an area within the district (unless special circumstances make it desirable to designate an area wholly or partly outside the district) a local provider will usually be used to deliver this.

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 election 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. APPENDICES

- 16.1 Appendix A – Review of Polling Districts, Places and Stations 2023 – Returning Officer Proposals
- 16.2 Appendix B 1 – Online Survey Responses
Appendix B 2 – Other Responses
- 16.3 Appendix C – Response from Acting Returning Officer for Stevenage Constituency

17. CONTACT OFFICERS

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18. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 18.1 When conducting the review, North Herts Council used the guidance and resources published by the Electoral Commission:

[Reviews of polling districts, polling places and polling stations | Electoral Commission](#)
- 18.2 Council's Website 'Polling District Review' page:

[Polling District Review | North Herts Council \(north-herts.gov.uk\)](#)



www.north-herts.gov.uk

North Hertfordshire District Council

Review of Polling Districts, Places and Stations 2023

Proposals

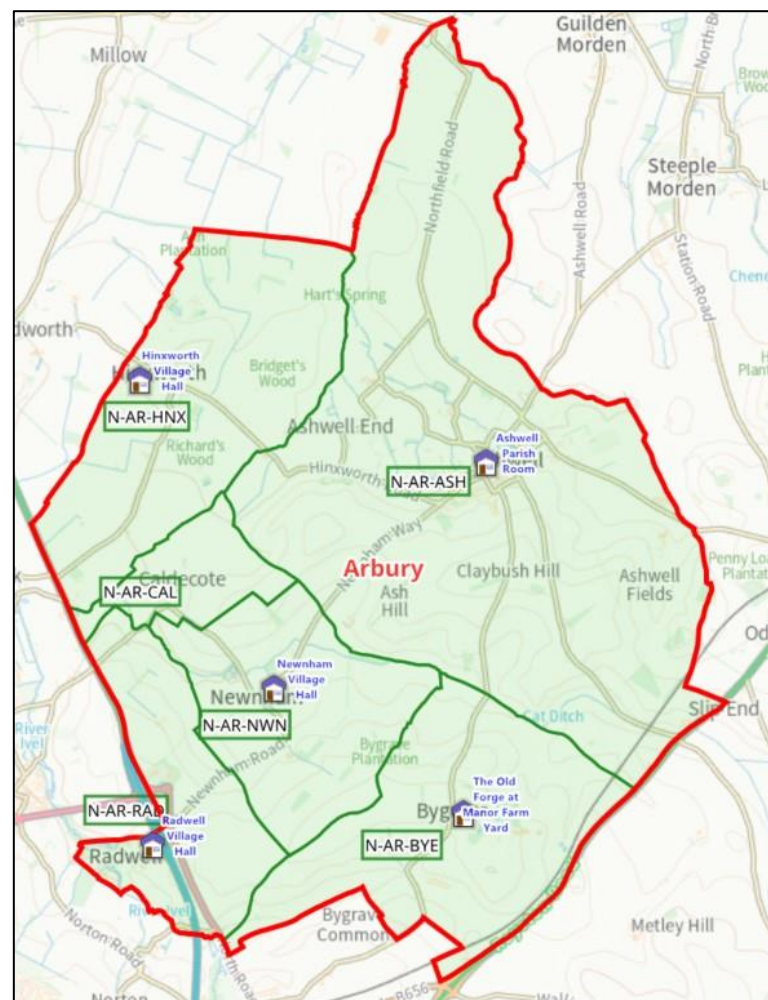
Explanatory notes:

- Under the terms of the Representation of the Peoples Act (1983), North Herts Council is required to divide its area into parliamentary polling districts and to designate a polling place and polling station for each.
 - The following definitions may be helpful when reading this report:
 - o 'Polling Districts' are geographical electoral areas into which wards and constituencies may be sub-divided.
 - o 'Polling Places' are the areas designated by the council where electors for a particular polling district go to vote in person.
 - o 'Polling Stations' are the issuing desks or room within the building or area designated as the polling place.
 - The Boundary Commission has recently concluded a review of parliamentary constituency boundaries, with the new boundaries set to be in place and used at the next UK Parliamentary General Election (UKPGE). The proposals in this review must therefore account for these new parliamentary constituency boundaries, as well as the old (existing) constituencies, because of the possibility of a parliamentary by-election occurring before the next UK Parliamentary General Election, which would need to take place based on the existing parliamentary boundary arrangements.
- The Electoral Administration Act (2006), as amended, introduced a duty for all local authorities in Great Britain to review their polling districts and polling places every 5 years, with the next compulsory review required between 1 October 2023 and 31 January 2025.
- Although this compulsory review is technically concerned with polling districts for parliamentary elections, in practice, the council will need to set polling districts which are also compatible for local government elections so that the register can be structured in a way that enables all election types to be delivered.
 - The Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) has also recently completed an electoral review of North Hertfordshire, with recommendations for changes to district and parish wards to take effect from May 2024.
 - As a result, the review must account for the boundary changes at both parliamentary and local elections, so that North Hertfordshire has agreed and functioning polling districts and places ready to be used at the scheduled local elections in May 2024, as well as the next UK Parliamentary General Election which must take place by January 2025.
 - The review must therefore be concluded in time for the revised register of electors, incorporating the changes agreed as a result, to be published on 1 December 2023.

- As part of this polling district review, we are proposing that each of the new polling districts will be given a new name (code) which is more rationalised. At present, polling districts have been named with 3 or 4 letter codes in alphabetical order (i.e., AAA, AAB, etc). By contrast, the new names will comprise 4-7 letters according to the electoral areas that the polling district belongs to, with the first letter corresponding to its parliamentary constituency, followed by letters indicating its district ward and, where applicable, the final letters representing the parish. For instance, the polling district incorporating the parish of Ashwell, which is in the North East Hertfordshire constituency and Arbury ward, would be represented as N-AR-ASH.

Proposed Polling Scheme by District ward

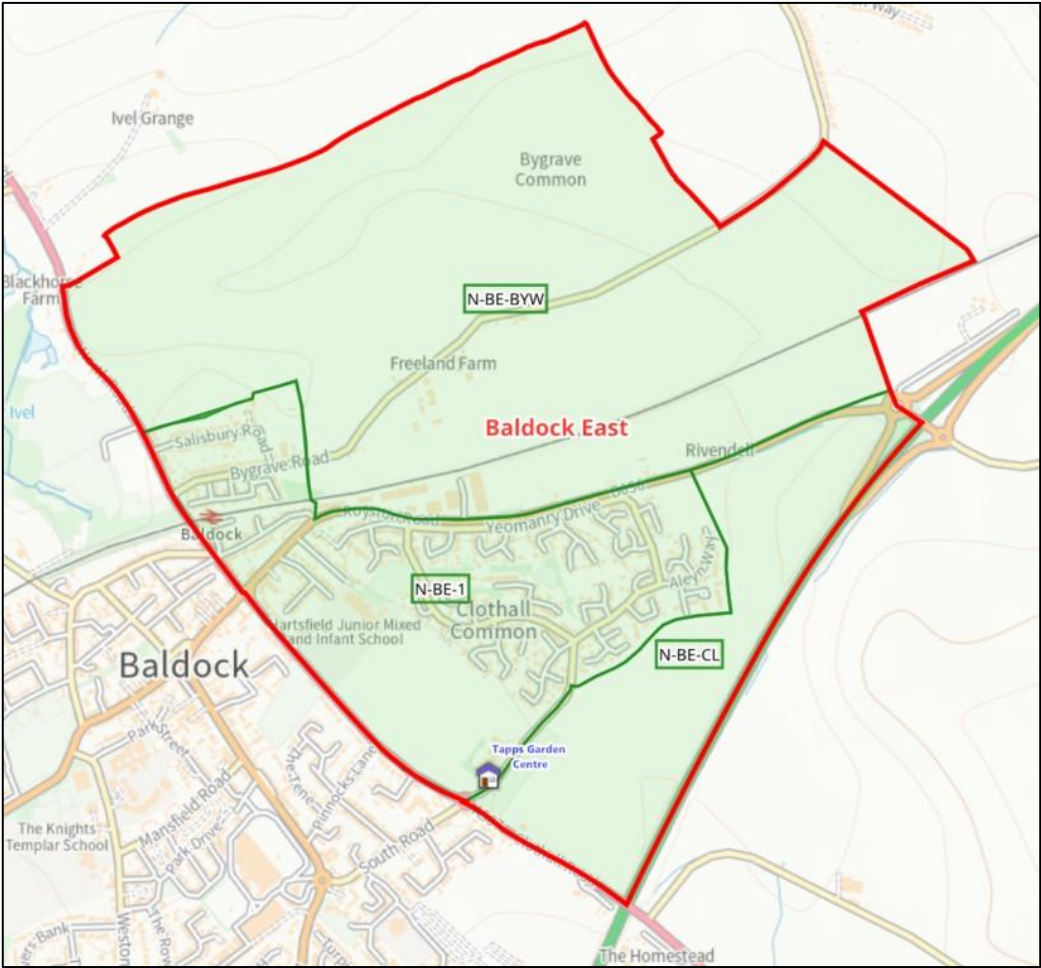
Arbury ward



Polling District	2023 Electorate	Proposed Polling Place	Returning Officer comments	Summary of consultation responses and, if applicable, alternative facilities considered
N-AR-ASH Ashwell	1593	Ashwell Parish Room, Swan Street, SG7 5NY		Consultation responses all in favour of Ashwell Parish Room remaining as the polling place for Ashwell
N-AR-BYE Bygrave (East)	204	The Old Forge, Manor Farm, Church Lane, SG7 5EE	Bygrave parish was divided in the new district ward boundaries, creating parish wards, hence the creation of this new polling district.	Consultation responses from members of the public all in favour of The Old Forge remaining as the polling place
N-AR-HNX Hinxworth	250	Hinxworth Village Hall, Francis Road, SG7 5HL		
N-AR-CAL Caldecote	13	Newnham Village Hall, Ashwell Road, SG7 5JX	Polling Place outside Polling District	Caldecote & Newnham Parish Council favoured retaining Newnham Village Hall as polling place
N-AR-NWN Newnham	70	Newnham Village Hall, Ashwell Road, SG7 5JX		
N-AR-RAD Radwell	114	Radwell Village Hall, Radwell Lane, SG7 5EW		Consultation responses from members of the public in favour of Radwell Village Hall remaining as the polling place

Proposed Polling Scheme by District ward

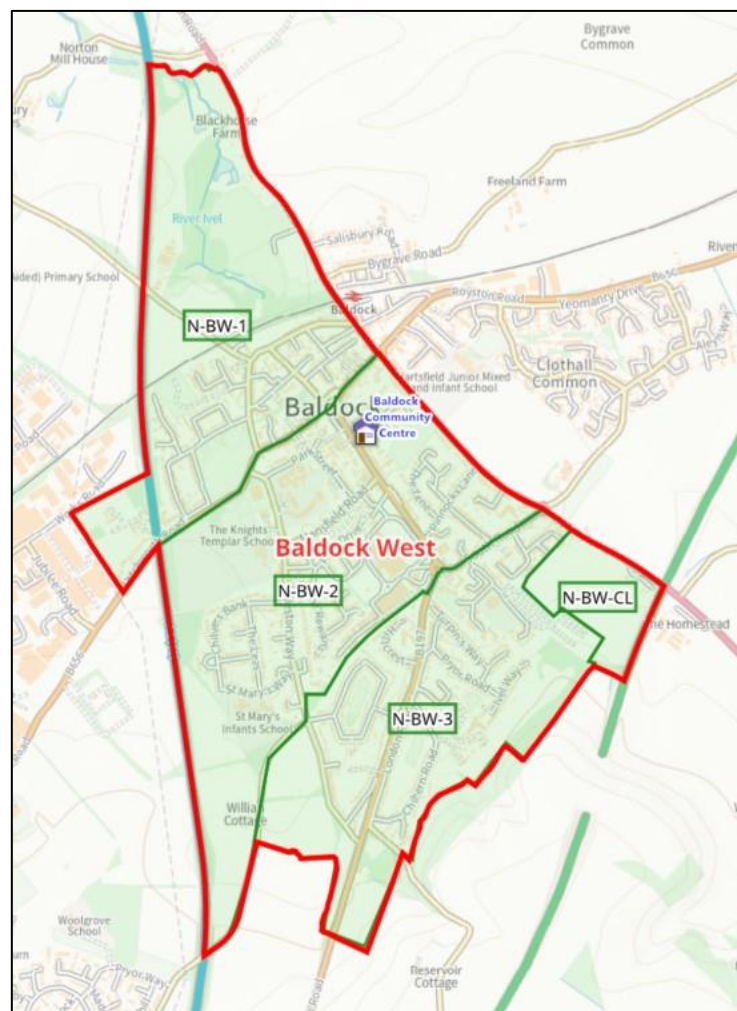
Baldock East ward



Polling District	2023 Electorate	Proposed Polling Place	Returning Officer comments	Summary of consultation responses and, if applicable, alternative facilities considered
N-BE-1 Baldock East 1	1329	Tapps Garden Centre, Wallington Road, SG7 6RS		<p>Consultation responses from members of the public in favour of retaining Tapps Garden Centre as polling place.</p> <p>Tapps Garden Centre has also undergone recent extension to further improve facilities available.</p>
N-BE-CL Baldock East (Clothall)	0	Tapps Garden Centre, Wallington Road, SG7 6RS	<p>Clothall parish was divided in the new district ward boundaries, hence the creation of this new polling district.</p> <p>Polling Place outside Polling District</p>	
N-BE-BYW Baldock East (Bygrave West)	15	Tapps Garden Centre, Wallington Road, SG7 6RS	<p>Bygrave parish was divided in the new district ward boundaries, creating parish wards, hence the creation of this new polling district.</p> <p>Polling Place outside Polling District</p>	<p>Small section of Clothall Parish (which polled at Weston Village Hall) but is now part of Baldock East ward and will therefore poll there.</p>

Proposed Polling Scheme by District ward

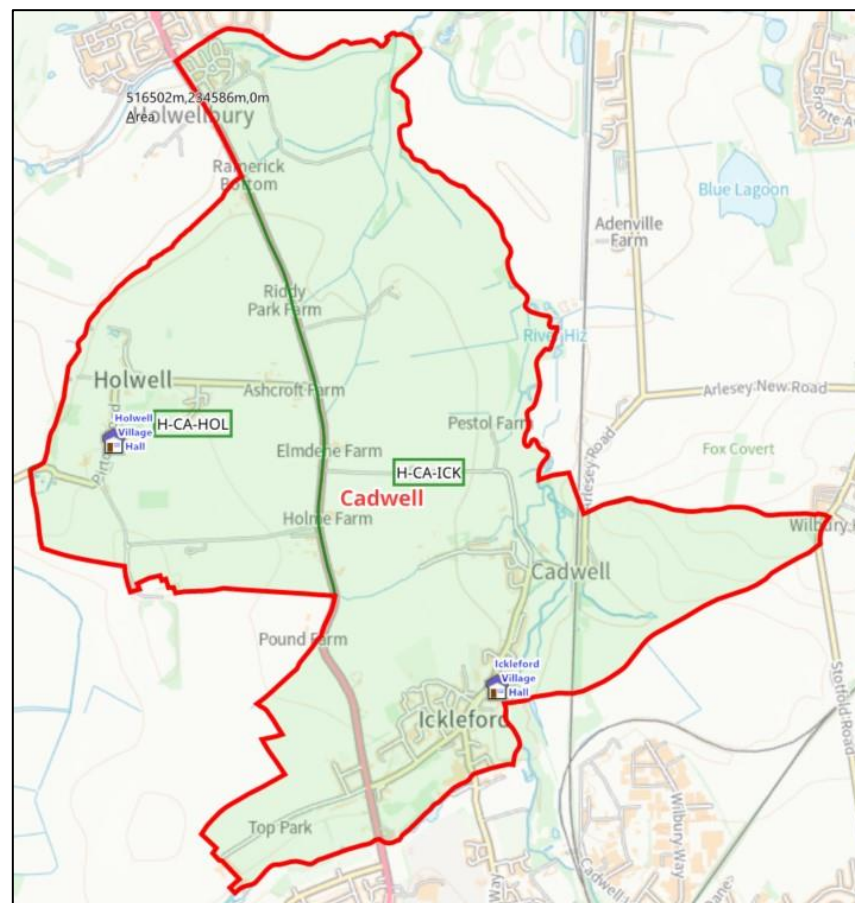
Baldock West ward



Polling District	2023 Electorate	Proposed Polling Place	Returning Officer comments	Summary of consultation responses and, if applicable, alternative facilities considered
N-BW-1 Baldock West 1	1194	Baldock Community Centre, Simpson Drive, SG7 6DH	Polling Place outside Polling District	All consultation feedback received for Baldock Community Centre was in favour of the polling place arrangements remaining unchanged.
N-BW-2 Baldock West 2	2359	Baldock Community Centre, Simpson Drive, SG7 6DH	The previous polling district had a very large electorate size, so it has been divided to give better sized polling districts and stations.	It was originally proposed to local ward councillors that we could investigate other locations if it was felt that having 3 polling stations at one polling place was excessive; however, they agreed with the consultation responses from members of the public that the current arrangements were suitable to continue.
N-BW-3 Baldock West 3	2139	Baldock Community Centre, Simpson Drive, SG7 6DH	The previous polling district had a very large electorate size, so it has been divided to give better sized polling districts and stations. Polling Place outside Polling District	
N-BW-CL Baldock West (Clothall)	3	Baldock Community Centre, Simpson Drive, SG7 6DH	Clothall parish was divided in the new district ward boundaries, hence the creation of this new polling district. Polling Place outside Polling District	Separate rooms are currently used for each of the stations here to help manage this: The Large Hall, Small Hall and Youth Wing. Small section of Clothall Parish (which polled at Weston Village Hall) but is now part of Baldock West ward and will therefore poll there.

Proposed Polling Scheme by District ward

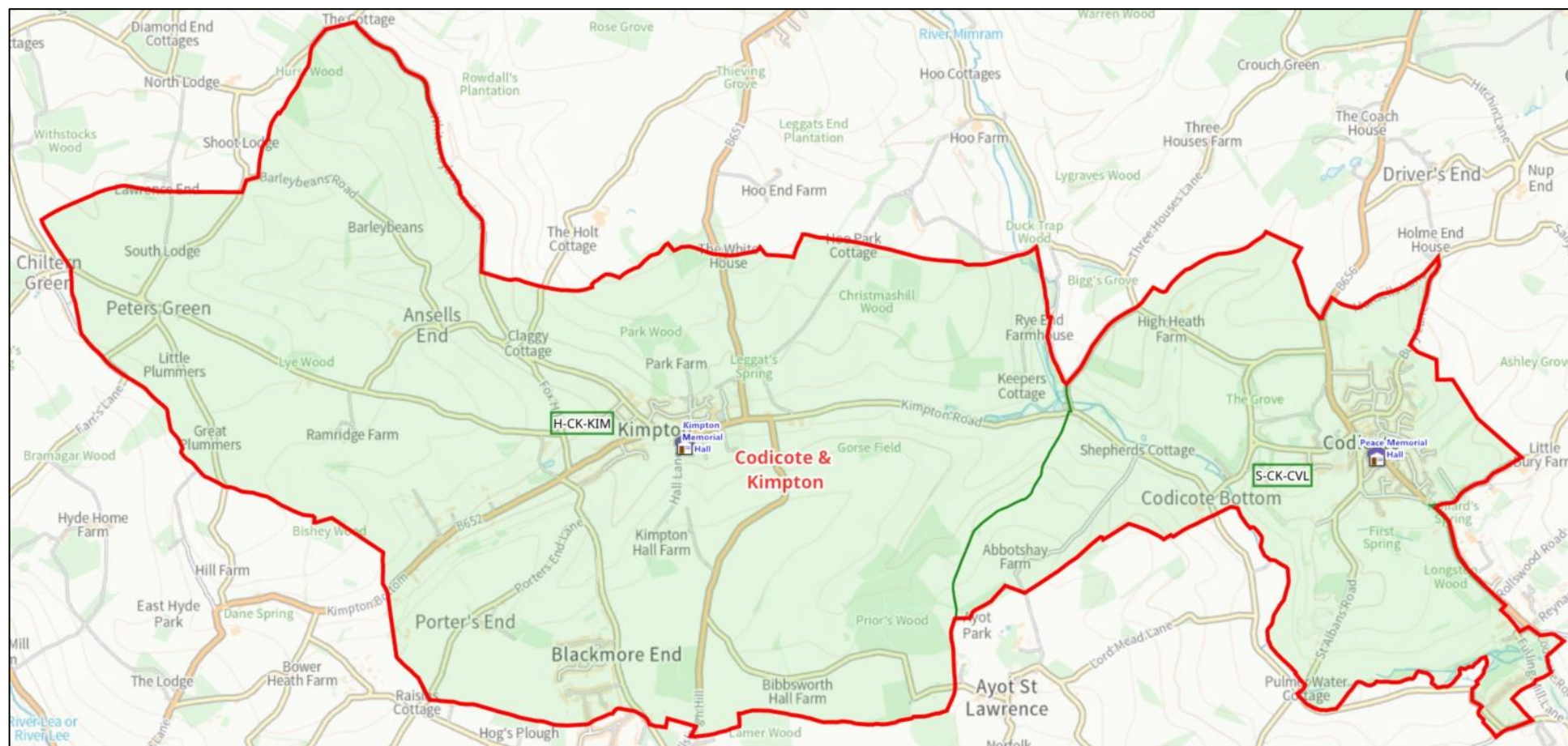
Cadwell ward



Polling District	2023 Electorate	Proposed Polling Place	Returning Officer comments	Summary of consultation responses and, if applicable, alternative facilities considered
H-CA-HOL Holwell	183	Holwell Village Hall, Pirton Road, SG5 3SS		
H-CA-ICK Ickleford	1024	Ickleford Village Hall, 82 Arlesey Road, SG5 3TG	Electorate of 189 in new build area to the north.	<p>Consultation response received from member of public in support of Ickleford Village Hall remaining as polling place, pointing out benefits to the accessibility of the building.</p> <p>The District Ward Councillor raised a concern that there is a small section of new build properties in the north of the parish for whom Ickleford Village Hall was a further distance compared to the majority of the parish.</p> <p>It was originally proposed whether that section would be better served by polling at Holwell Village Hall, but feedback suggested this was no closer than the existing arrangements, and an alternative venue which was more suitable could not be identified without looking outside of the district (Ickleford shares a border with Central Bedfordshire district). Therefore, with the available options, remaining at Ickleford Village Hall ensures that voters are familiar (as it is their existing station) and that they remain with the rest of the parish of Ickleford.</p>

Proposed Polling Scheme by District ward

Codicote & Kimpton ward

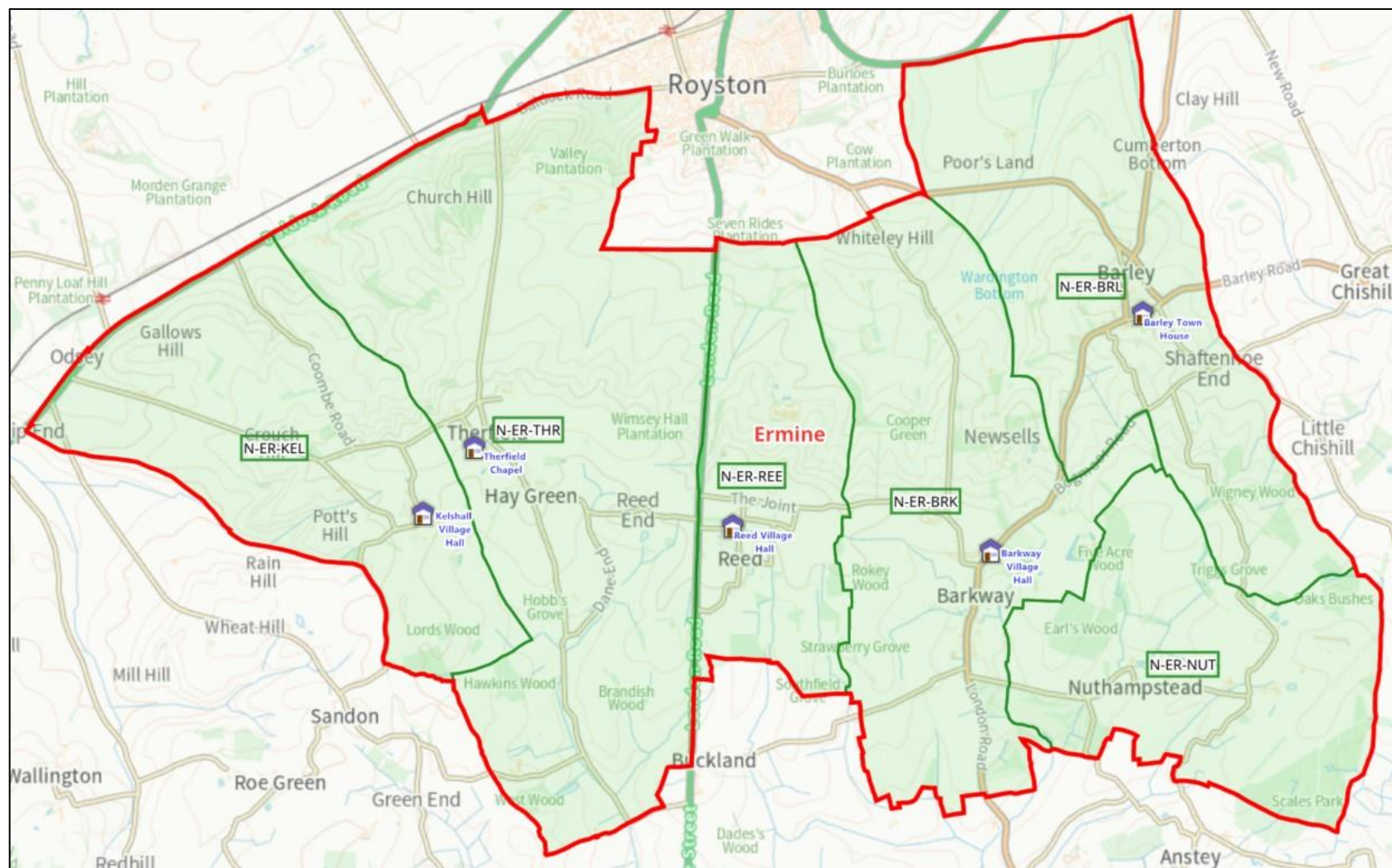


APPENDIX A

Polling District	2023 Electorate	Proposed Polling Place	Returning Officer comments	Summary of consultation responses and, if applicable, alternative facilities considered
S-CK-CVL Codicote (Village)	1267	Peace Memorial Hall, High Street, SG4 8XE	Codicote (Village) remains unchanged, although this was previously a double station with Codicote (East) which has now been moved. This will therefore be a single station at Peace Memorial Hall.	Consultation responses from members of the public in favour of retaining the Peace Memorial Hall as polling place for Codicote (Village), pointing out its accessibility and location.
H-CK-KIM Kimpton	939	Kimpton Memorial Hall, Hall Lane, SG4 8RD		<p>Consultation response from member of the public in favour of retaining Kimpton Memorial Hall due to its easy level access and car parking (including disabled spaces)</p> <p>Kimpton Parish Council also supports retaining Kimpton Memorial Hall as polling place.</p>

Proposed Polling Scheme by District ward

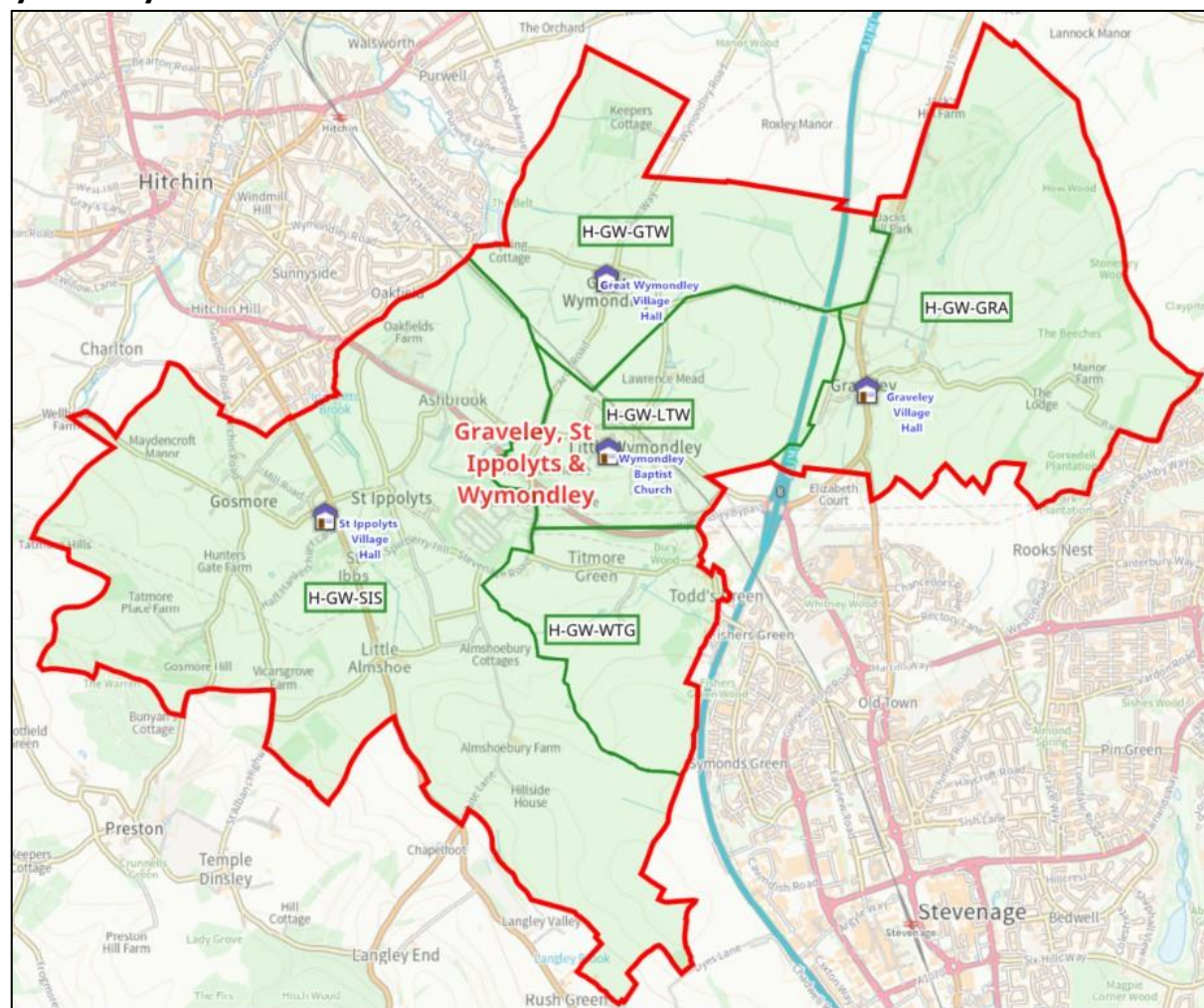
Ermine ward



Polling District	2023 Electorate	Proposed Polling Place	Returning Officer comments	Summary of consultation responses and, if applicable, alternative facilities considered
N-ER-BRK Barkway	680	Barkway Village Hall, Cambridge Road, SG8 8BS		Consultation response from member of the public in support of retaining polling place at Barkway Village Hall.
N-ER-NUT Nuthampstead	108	Barkway Village Hall, Cambridge Road, SG8 8BS	Polling Place outside Polling District	The District Ward Councillor had proposed that Nuthampstead has a pub and a museum which could be considered as potential venues; However, the parish electorate is small, electors are used to polling at Barkway Village Hall and no other negative consultation responses have been received to suggest Nuthampstead should be moved away from Barkway Village Hall.
N-ER-THR Therfield	440	Therfield Chapel, Wellhead, SG8 9PZ		
N-ER-BRL Barley	536	Barley Town House, Church End, SG8 8JW		Consultation response from member of the public in support of retaining polling place at Barley Town House, highlighting its location in the centre of the parish and its good accessibility and parking facilities.
N-ER-KEL Kelshall	123	Kelshall Village Hall, Village Green, SG8 9SE		Consultation response from member of the public in support of retaining polling place at Kelshall Village Hall.
N-ER-REE Reed	267	Reed Village Hall, Blacksmiths Lane, SG8 8AX		Consultation response from member of the public in support of retaining polling place at Reed Village Hall.

Proposed Polling Scheme by District ward

Graveley, St Ippolyts & Wymondley ward

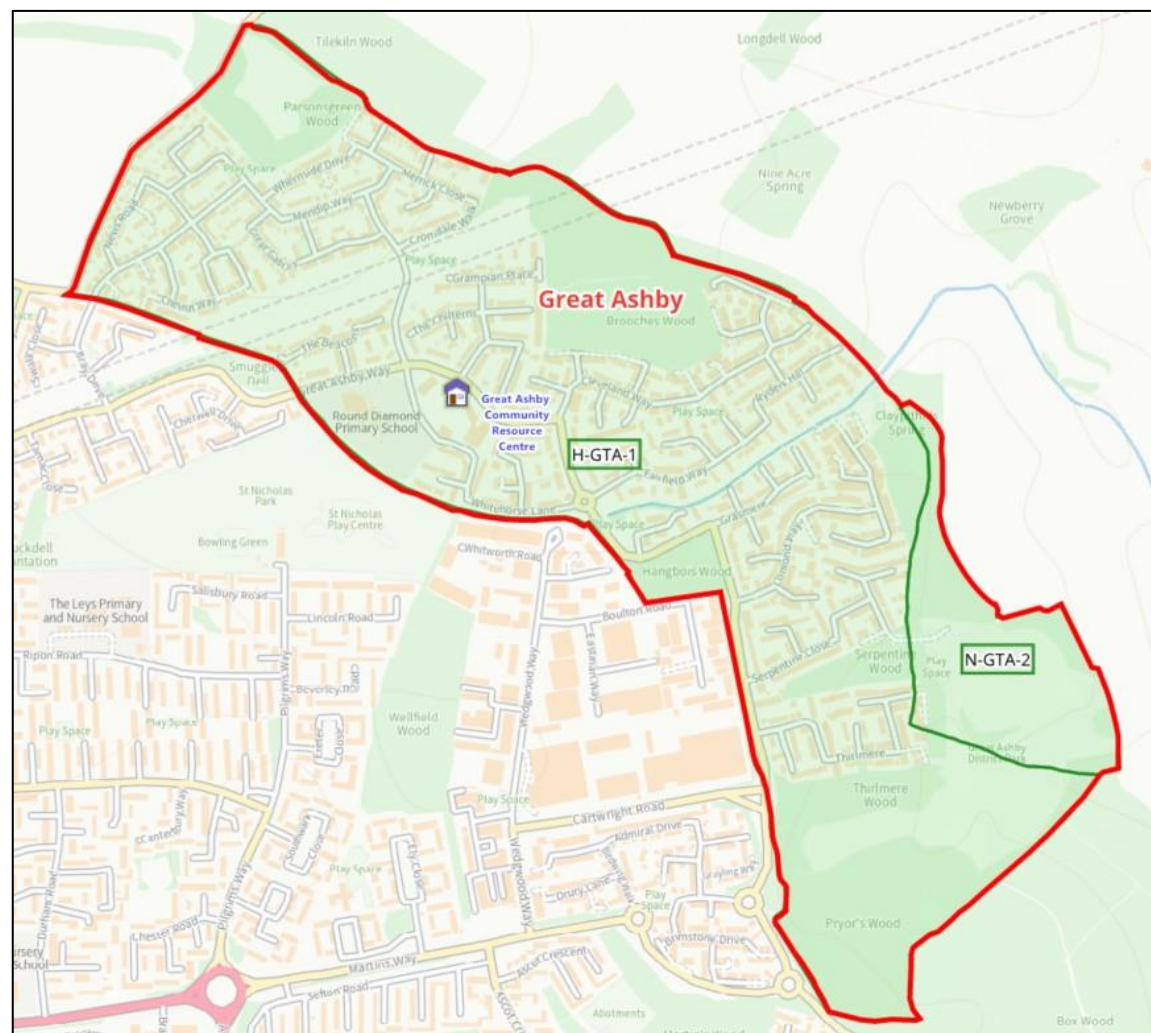


APPENDIX A

Polling District	2023 Electorate	Proposed Polling Place	Returning Officer comments	Summary of consultation responses and, if applicable, alternative facilities considered
H-GW-GTW Wymondley (Great Wymondley)	128	Great Wymondley Village Hall, Great Wymondley, SG4 7ET		Consultation responses from members of the public in support of retaining Great Wymondley Village Hall as polling place, highlighting its central location and accessibility for electors with disability.
H-GW-LTW Wymondley (Little Wymondley)	638	Wymondley Baptist Church, Stevenage Road, SG4 7JA		Consultation responses from members of the public in support of retaining polling place at Wymondley Baptist Church
H-GW-WTG Wymondley (Todds Green)	115	Wymondley Baptist Church, Stevenage Road, SG4 7JA	Polling Place outside Polling District	
H-GW-GRA Graveley	345	Graveley Village Hall, High Street, SG4 7LB		Consultation responses from members of the public in support of retaining the polling place at Graveley Village Hall, highlighting the location and disabled access of the venue.
H-GW-SIS St Ippolyts (South)	858	St Ippolyts Parish Hall, Waterdell Lane, SG4 7RB		

Proposed Polling Scheme by District ward

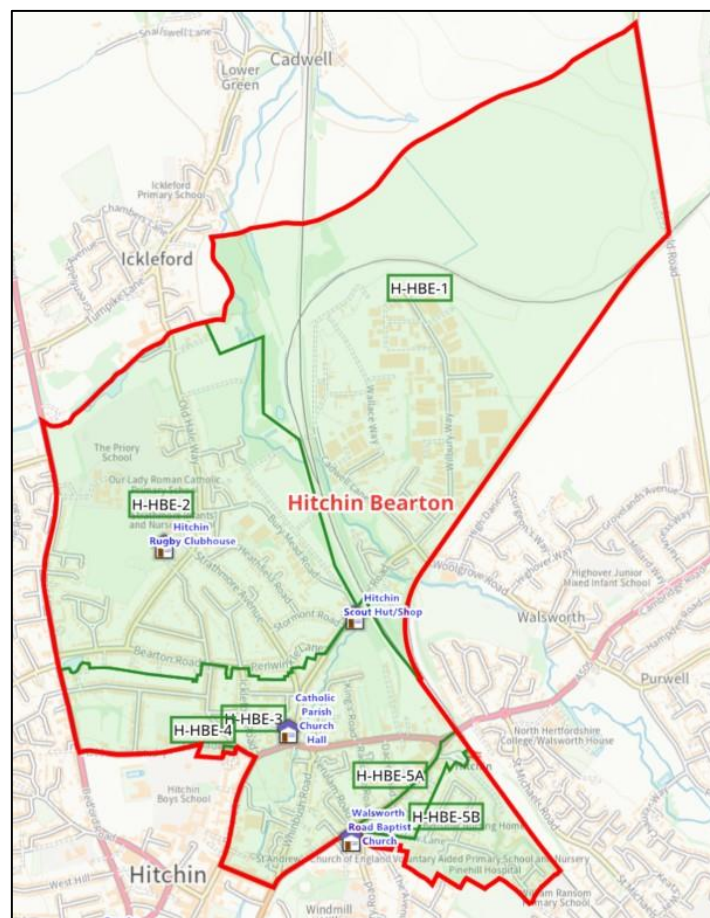
Great Ashby ward



Polling District	2023 Electorate	Proposed Polling Place	Returning Officer comments	Summary of consultation responses and, if applicable, alternative facilities considered
H-GTA-1 Great Ashby 1	3935	Great Ashby Community Centre, Whitehorse Lane, Great Ashby Way, SG1 6NH		Consultation responses from members of the public in favour of retaining the polling place at Great Ashby Community Centre due to its location
N-GTA-2 Great Ashby 2	12	Great Ashby Community Centre, Whitehorse Lane, Great Ashby Way, SG1 6NH	Small double station at UK Parliamentary elections. Polling Place outside Polling District	

Proposed Polling Scheme by District ward

Hitchin Bearton ward



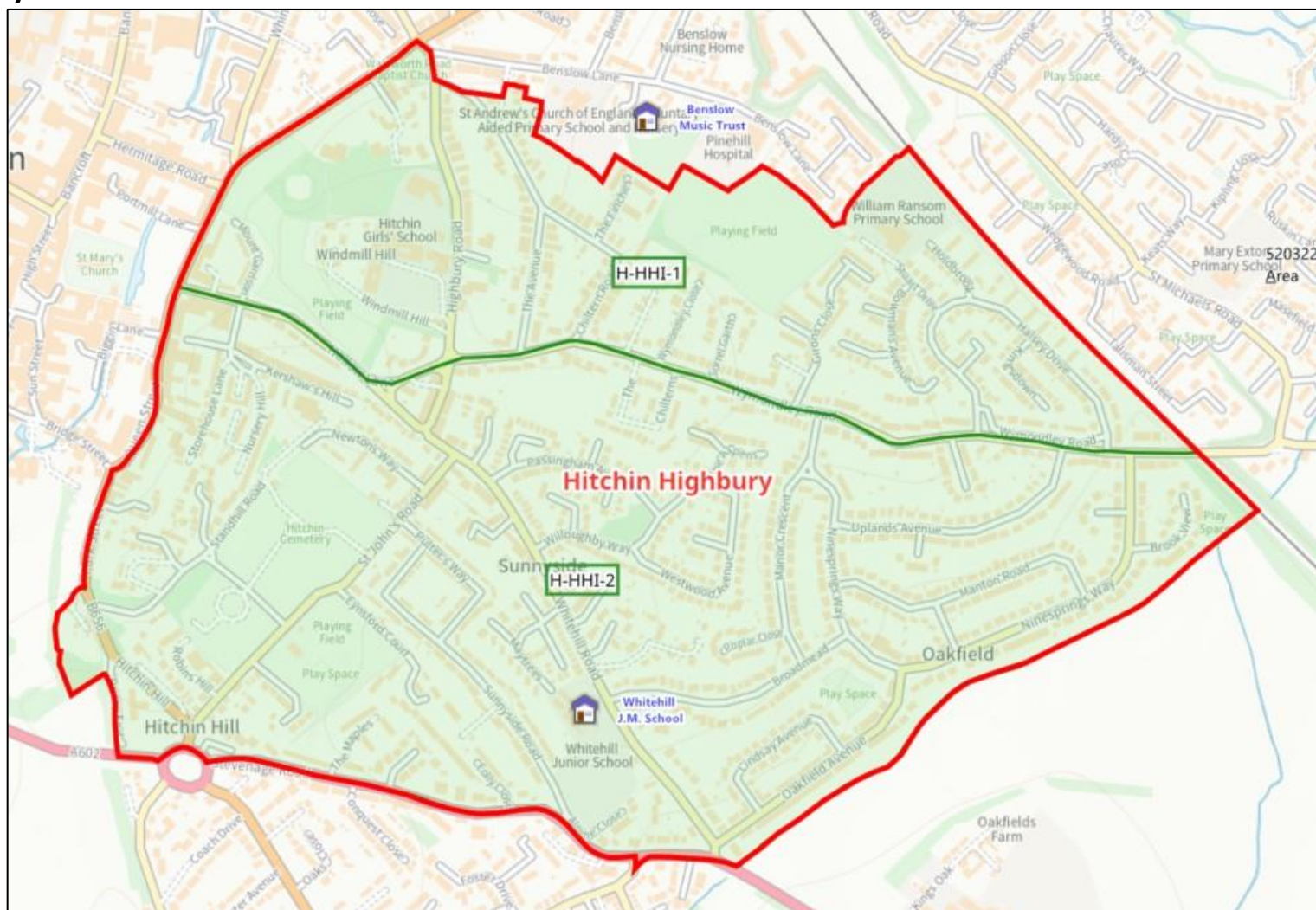
APPENDIX A

Polling District	2023 Electorate	Proposed Polling Place	Returning Officer comments	Summary of consultation responses and, if applicable, alternative facilities considered
H-HBE-1 Hitchin Bearton 1	723	Hitchin Scout Hut/Shop, 105 Grove Road, SG5 1SQ	Polling Place outside Polling District	<p>A local bowls club, drama school and Sikh Temple were approached but were unavailable.</p> <p>This area previously polled at Walsworth Community Centre, although this scenario created a double polling station across district wards as the venue already has a polling place in Hitchin Walsworth ward.</p> <p>A site visit was undertaken at Hitchin Scout Shop to assess its suitability. The inside of the building was found to be suitable, and the venue is in close walking distance from the properties allocated to vote there. The approach to the building is a grass area rather than a hardstanding path, so appropriate mitigations will be put in place to help with access to the building on polling day.</p>
H-HBE-2 Hitchin Bearton 2	2398	Hitchin Rugby Clubhouse, King Georges Recreation Ground, Old Hale Way, SG5 1XL		Consultation responses from members of the public generally in favour of retaining the polling place at Hitchin Rugby Club, although one respondent argued that it was a long distance for them compared to other stations (NB the address in question is very close to the boundary line)
H-HBE-3 Hitchin Bearton 3	2896	Catholic Parish Church Hall, Nightingale Road, SG5 1QS	Has a large electorate but 500+ postal voters on the register so decided not to split.	Consultation response from member of the public in support of polling place remaining at Catholic Parish Church Hall. One respondent raised a concern about disabled access, which will be addressed.
H-HBE-4 Hitchin Bearton 4	12	Walsworth Road Baptist Church, Walsworth Road, SG4 9SP	<p>New District ward boundary differs slightly to county division along Bunyan Road, hence this small polling district.</p> <p>Polling Place outside Polling District</p>	<p>We had originally considered the Bowling Green at Bancroft recreation ground; however District Ward Councillors in the area raised concerns with external lighting and anti-social behaviour in the area. Additionally, Hitchin Hack Space was suggested but ruled out as the venue was considered too small.</p> <p>Site visit undertaken at Walsworth Road Baptist Church and this has suitable facilities.</p>
H-HBE-5a Hitchin Bearton 5	324	Walsworth Road Baptist Church, Walsworth Road, SG4 9SP	<p>New District ward boundary means this has extended slightly to include part of the old BEA polling district.</p> <p>Temporarily split into A & B because of old district ward boundary.</p> <p>Polling Place outside Polling District</p>	

H-HBE-5b	330	Walsworth Road Baptist Church, Walsworth Road, SG4 9SP	New District ward boundary means this has extended slightly to include part of the old BEA polling district. Temporarily split into A & B because of old district ward boundary. Polling Place outside Polling District	

Proposed Polling Scheme by District ward

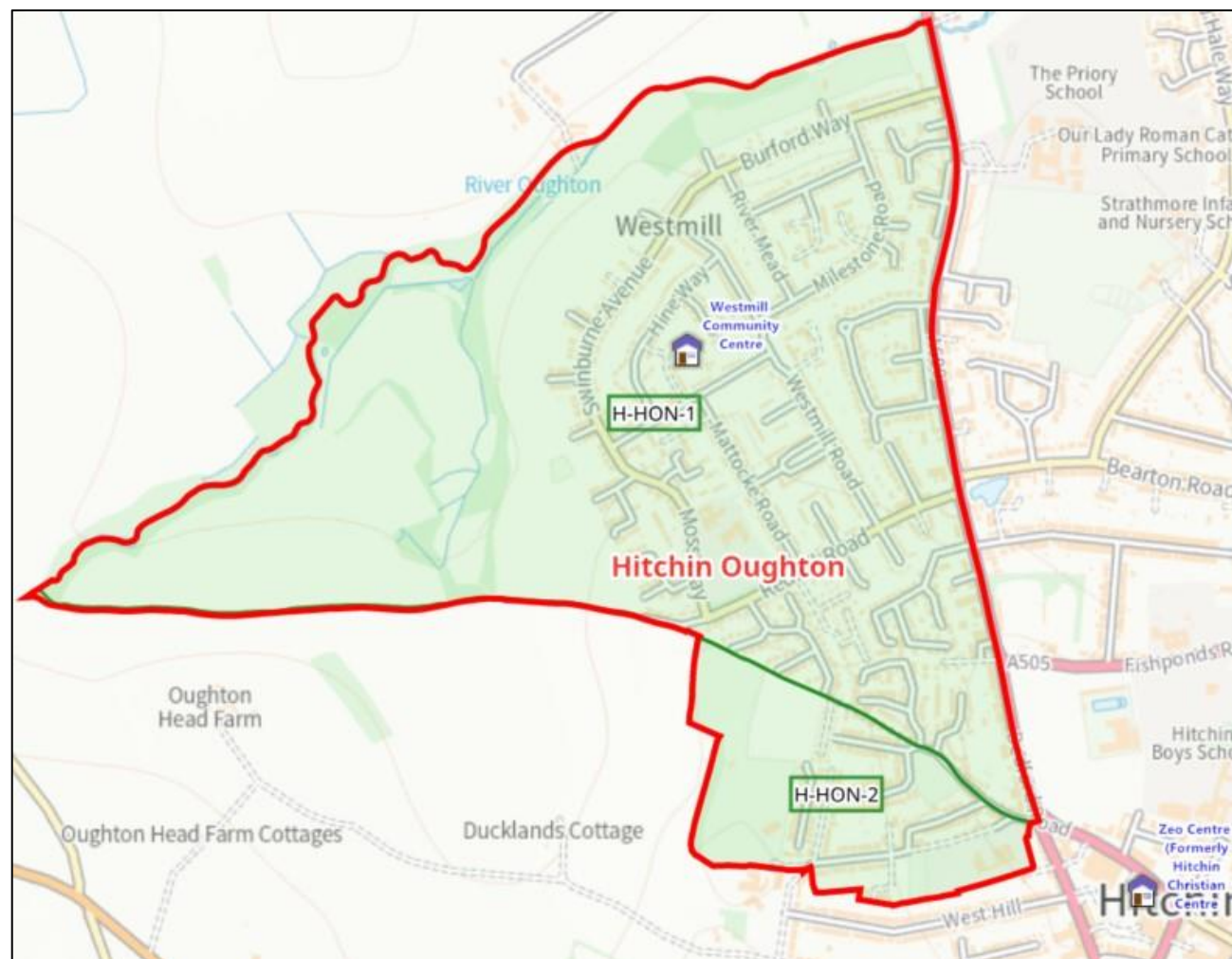
Hitchin Highbury ward



Polling District	2023 Electorate	Proposed Polling Place	Returning Officer comments	Summary of consultation responses and, if applicable, alternative facilities considered
H-HHI-1 Hitchin Highbury 1	1333	Benslow Music Trust- Waldeck Block, Benslow Lane, SG4 9RB	Polling Place outside Polling District	Consultation responses from members of the public overwhelmingly in favour of retaining the polling place at Benslow.
H-HHI-2 Hitchin Highbury 2	3450	Whitehill J.M. School, Whitehill Road, SG4 9HT		<p>Consultation responses from members of the public raised some concerns with the use of Whitehill School.</p> <p>One respondent indicated that they felt the walk to Whitehill was too far, whilst others voiced concern about the closure of the school to accommodate elections. However, no specific alternative venues in the area were put forward other than suggestions to use churches, pubs, town halls and leisure centres.</p> <p>No suitable alternative venues could be identified in the polling district area, hence the decision to remain at Whitehill school. Of the available buildings in this polling district, St Johns Community Centre is already used for a neighbouring ward and the Chapel at Hitchin Cemetery, which was used at a recent by-election, was discounted due to the lack of external lighting and suitable facilities.</p> <p>This polling district is a largely residential area with very few other community buildings which could be used as polling stations.</p>

Proposed Polling Scheme by District ward

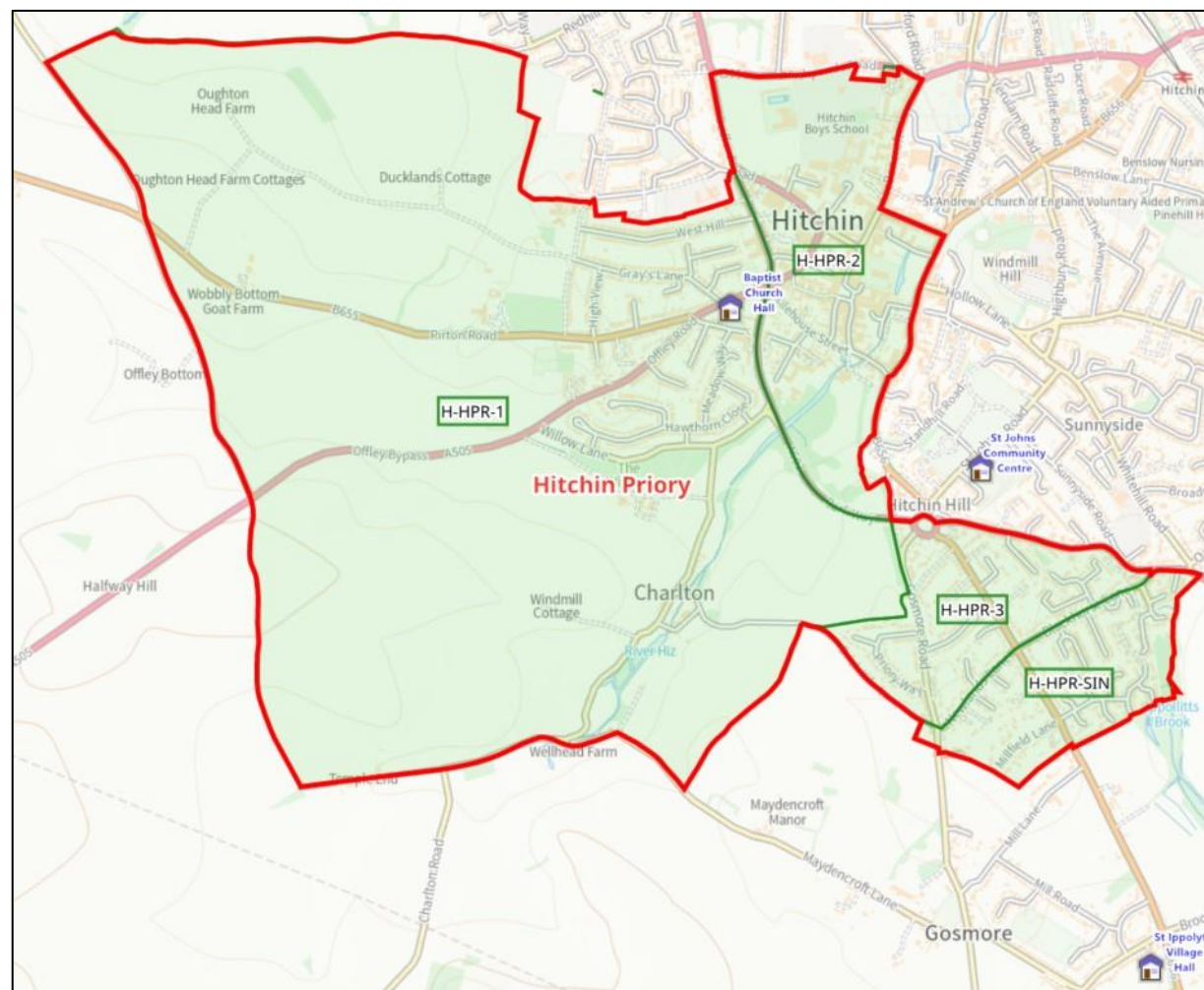
Hitchin Oughton ward



APPENDIX A

Polling District	2023 Electorate	Proposed Polling Place	Returning Officer comments	Summary of consultation responses and, if applicable, alternative facilities considered
H-HON-1 Hitchin Oughton 1	3620	Westmill Community Centre, Rear of John Barker Place, SG5 2PG		Consultation responses from members of the public generally in favour of retaining the polling place at Westmill Community Centre.
H-HON-2 Hitchin Oughton 2	468	Zeo Centre, Bedford Road, SG5 1HF	This is a new polling district created by the new District ward boundary. Polling Place outside Polling District	District Ward Councillor had raised possibility of using a local Cricket Club or local school, both of which are inside the polling district. However, in both cases, these were unfortunately unavailable due to concerns about safeguarding. Hitchin Swimming Centre was also explored, although this was ruled out as it does not have appropriate facilities. Zeo Centre and Christchurch, which are both in close proximity, were then considered. After undertaking a site visit, it was felt that Zeo Centre had the better facilities and so has been proposed as polling place.

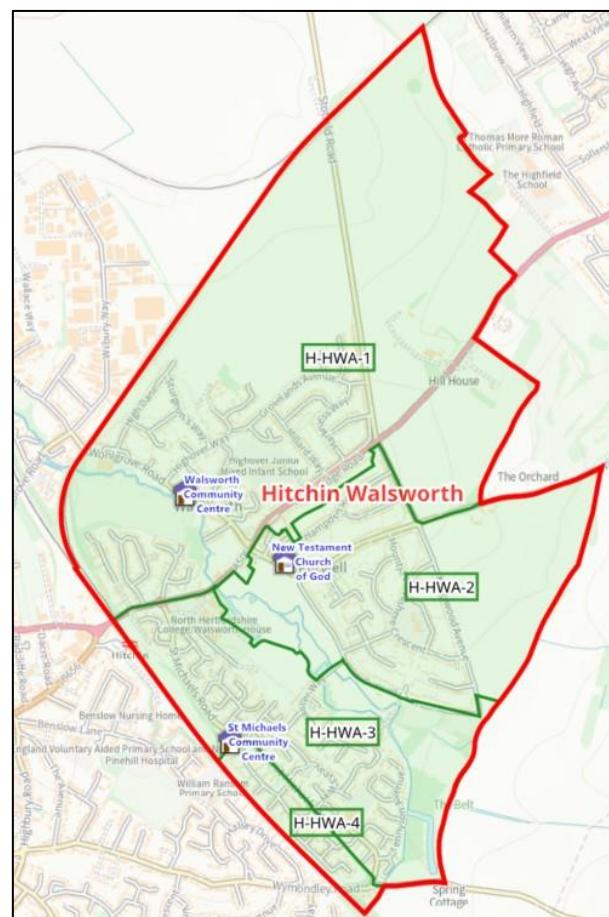
Hitchin Priory ward



Polling District	2023 Electorate	Proposed Polling Place	Returning Officer comments	Summary of consultation responses and, if applicable, alternative facilities considered
H-HPR-1 Hitchin Priory 1	1650	Baptist Church Hall, Upper Tilehouse Street, SG5 2EE	This polling district has lost a small section of the north-eastern corner compared to the previous BCA polling district, due to the new District ward boundaries.	Consultation responses received from members of the public in favour of retaining polling place at Baptist Church Hall.
H-HPR-2 Hitchin Priory 2	1156	Baptist Church Hall, Upper Tilehouse Street, SG5 2EE	Previously voted at Zeo Centre but new boundaries mean this can be combined with station for BCA(01). Polling Place outside Polling District	
H-HPR-3 Hitchin Priory 3	901	St Johns Community Centre, St Johns Road, SG4 9JP	Polling Place outside Polling District	Consultation responses received from members of the public in favour of retaining polling place at St Johns Community Centre
H-HPR-SIN Hitchin Priory (St Ippolyts – North)	730	St Ippolyts Parish Hall, Waterdell Lane, SG4 7RB	St Ippolyts parish is split by the district ward boundary and this section is in Hitchin Priory ward. Polling Place outside Polling District	Due to being in Hitchin Priory ward, it was originally proposed that this polling district could poll at St Johns Community Centre. District Ward Members were consulted and were generally in agreement. However, consultation responses from members of the public and St Ippolyts Parish Council were strongly against this, raising concerns that moving to St Johns would involve a journey across busy roads and roundabouts which weren't accessible on foot. As such, we have reverted to each half of St Ippolyts remaining at St Ippolyts Parish Hall.

Proposed Polling Scheme by District ward

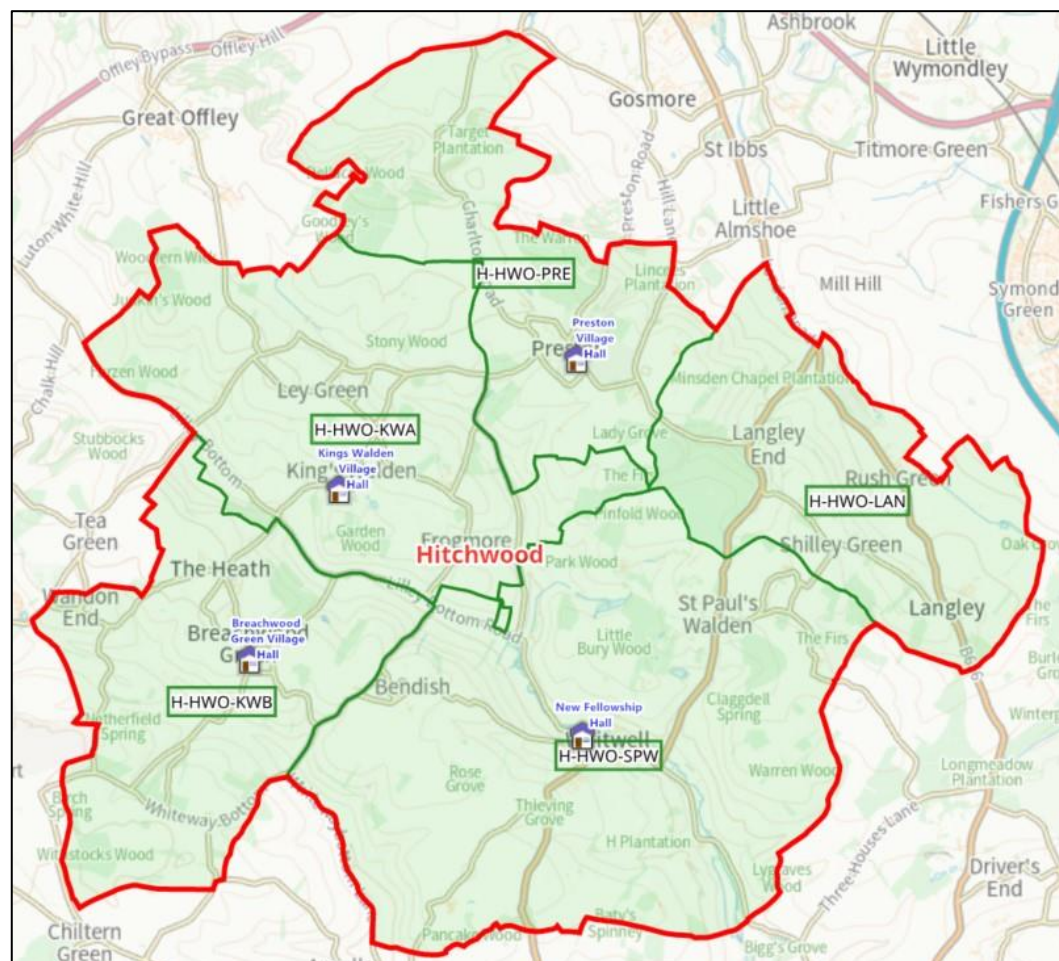
Hitchin Walsworth ward



Polling District	2023 Electorate	Proposed Polling Place	Returning Officer comments	Summary of consultation responses and, if applicable, alternative facilities considered
H-HWA-1 Hitchin Walsworth 1	2479	Walsworth Community Centre, 88 Woolgrove Road, SG4 0AU		Consultation responses from members of the public in favour of retaining the polling place at Walsworth Community Centre.
H-HWA-2 Hitchin Walsworth 2	1918	New Testament Church of God, Hampden Road / Willian Road, SG4 0LN		Consultation responses from members of the public in favour of retaining the polling place at New Testament Church of God, with respondents highlighting the location which is easily accessible on foot.
H-HWA-3 Hitchin Walsworth 3	1349	St Michaels Community Centre, St Michaels Road, SG4 0QY	Boundary moved slightly north to follow Purwell Road – Chaucer Way estate now in H-HWA-3	Consultation responses from members of the public in favour of retaining the polling place at St Michaels Community Centre.
H-HWA-4 Hitchin Walsworth 4	455	St Michaels Community Centre, St Michaels Road, SG4 0QY	Polling Place outside Polling District	District Ward Councillors consulted were in favour of moving Chaucer Way area into H-HWA-3 polling district.

Proposed Polling Scheme by District ward

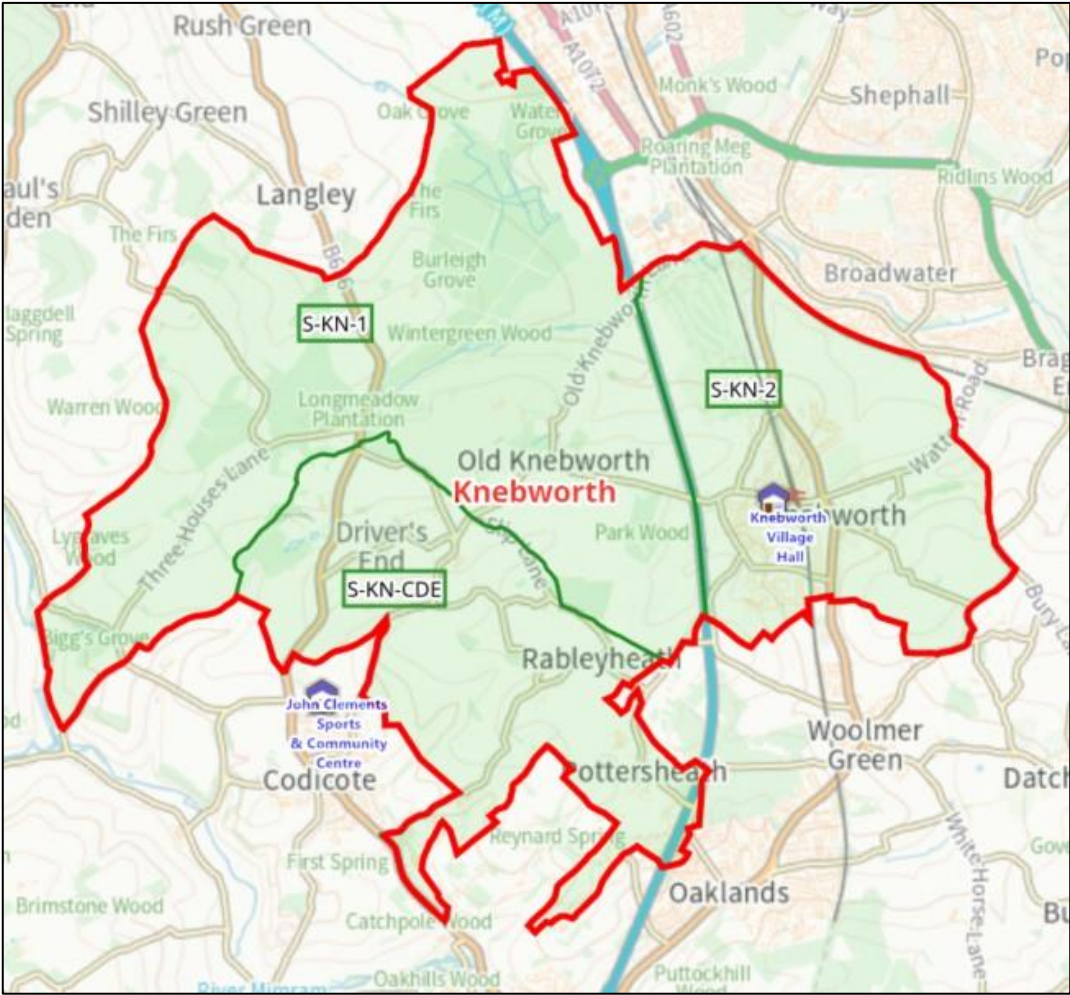
Hitchwood ward



Polling District	2023 Electorate	Proposed Polling Place	Returning Officer comments	Summary of consultation responses and, if applicable, alternative facilities considered
H-HWO-KWA Kings Walden (Kings Walden)	178	Kings Walden Village Hall, Church Road, SG4 8JX		
H-HWO-KWB Kings Walden (Breachwood Green)	608	Breachwood Green Village Hall, Chapel Road, SG4 8NX		Consultation responses from members of the public in favour of retaining the polling place at Breachwood Green Village Hall.
H-HWO-LAN Langley	154	New Fellowship Hall, Bendish lane, SG4 8HX	Polling Place outside Polling District	Former polling place at Wytch End is no longer available. No alternative venues could be identified within the parish of Langley itself, so the possibility of merging with the polling station in the neighbouring parish of St Pauls Walden was explored. Consultation response from the District Ward Councillor in support of this proposal.
H-HWO-SPW St Pauls Walden	1061	New Fellowship Hall, Bendish lane, SG4 8HX		Consultation response from member of the public in favour of retaining the polling place at New Fellowship Hall.
H-HWO-PRE Preston	320	Preston Village Hall, School Lane, SG4 7UE		Consultation response from member of the public in favour of retaining the polling place at Preston Village Hall, citing its central location and ease of access.

Proposed Polling Scheme by District ward

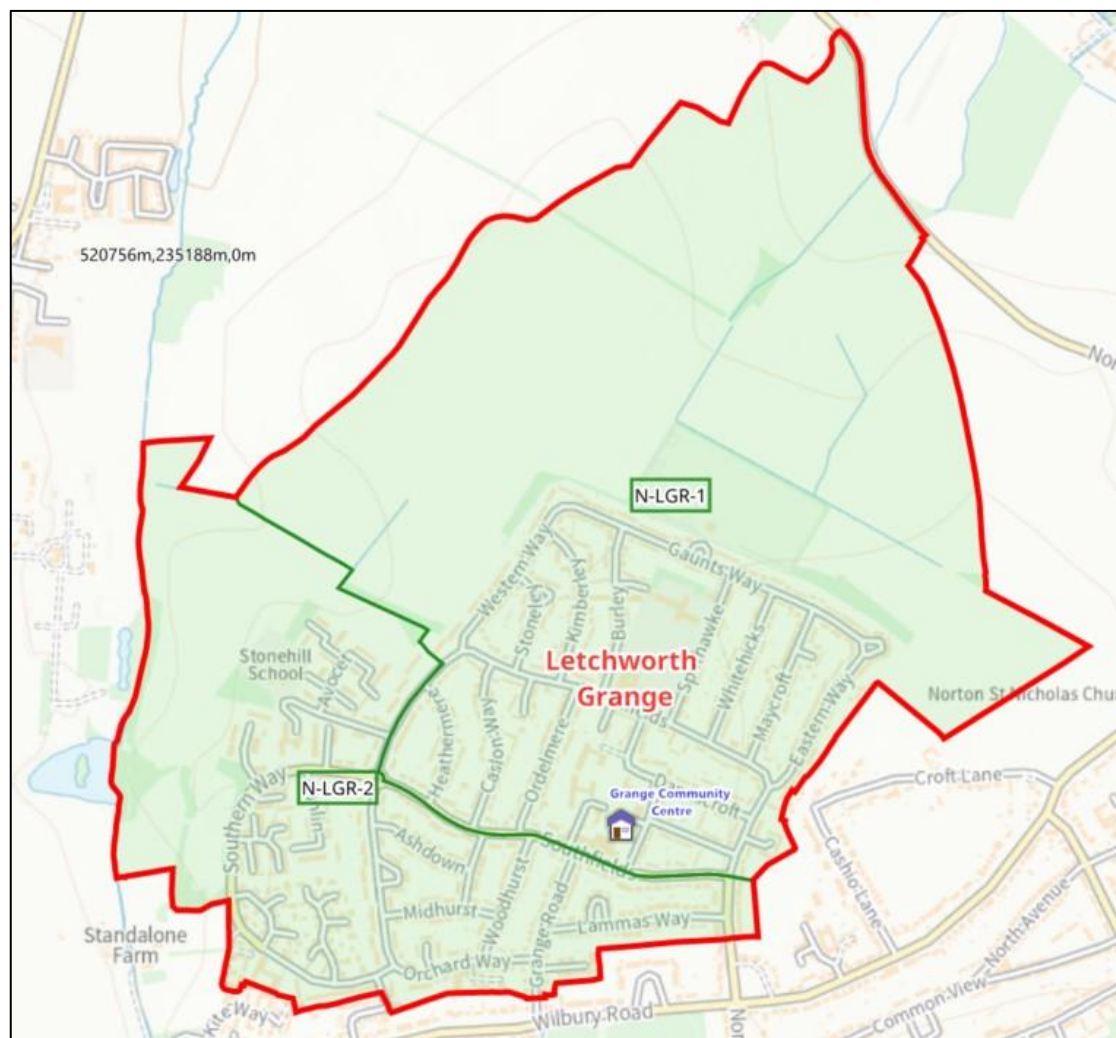
Knebworth ward



Polling District	2023 Electorate	Proposed Polling Place	Returning Officer comments	Summary of consultation responses and, if applicable, alternative facilities considered
S-KN-CDE Codicote (East)	624	John Clements Sports and Community Centre, Bury Lane, Codicote, SG4 8XY	Polling Place outside of Polling District	<p>Consultation response received from member of the public highlighting that the former station at Peace Memorial Hall, which was a double station for both halves of Codicote, was a distance for electors in Codicote (East) and that we should consider finding an alternative closer to this half of the parish.</p> <p>In addition, Codicote being split across district wards added further weight to this idea.</p> <p>One consultation response (from the other half of Codicote) did object to this proposal based on cost. However, it was felt that the case for having its own polling station was a strong one.</p> <p>We were unable to locate a venue in Codicote (East) itself, but John Clements Sports Centre and St Giles Church, which are closer to the eastern half of the parish, were considered.</p> <p>After undertaking a site visit and liaising with local District Ward Councillors, John Clements Sports Centre was deemed the best option for Codicote (East). NB – the remainder of Codicote parish will retain its polling place at the Peace Memorial Hall, which will now be a single station.</p>
S-KN-1 Knebworth 1	282	Knebworth Village Hall, Park Lane, SG3 6PD	Polling Place outside Polling District	<p>Knebworth Parish Council and consultation responses received from members of the public in favour of retaining polling place at Knebworth Village Hall, highlighting its central location and car parking facilities</p>
S-KN-2 Knebworth 2	3207	Knebworth Village Hall, Park Lane, SG3 6PD		

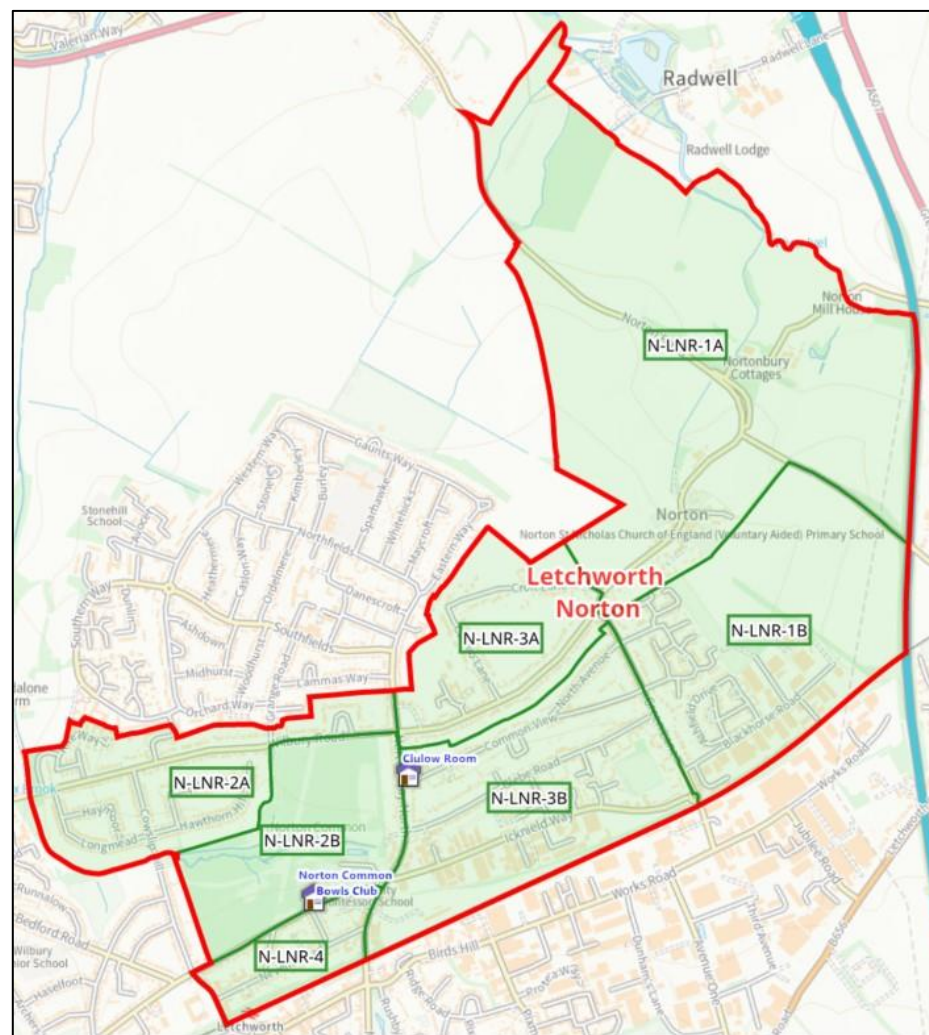
Proposed Polling Scheme by District ward

Letchworth Grange ward



Polling District	2023 Electorate	Proposed Polling Place	Returning Officer comments	Summary of consultation responses and, if applicable, alternative facilities considered
N-LGR-1 Letchworth Grange 1	2060	Grange Community Centre, Middlfields, SG6 4NG	The previous CAB polling district has been amended to follow the new District ward boundary and then split in 2 because of large electorate size.	Consultation responses from members of the public in favour of retaining polling place at Grange Community Centre
N-LGR-2 Letchworth Grange 2	2044	Grange Community Centre, Middlfields, SG6 4NG		

Letchworth Norton ward

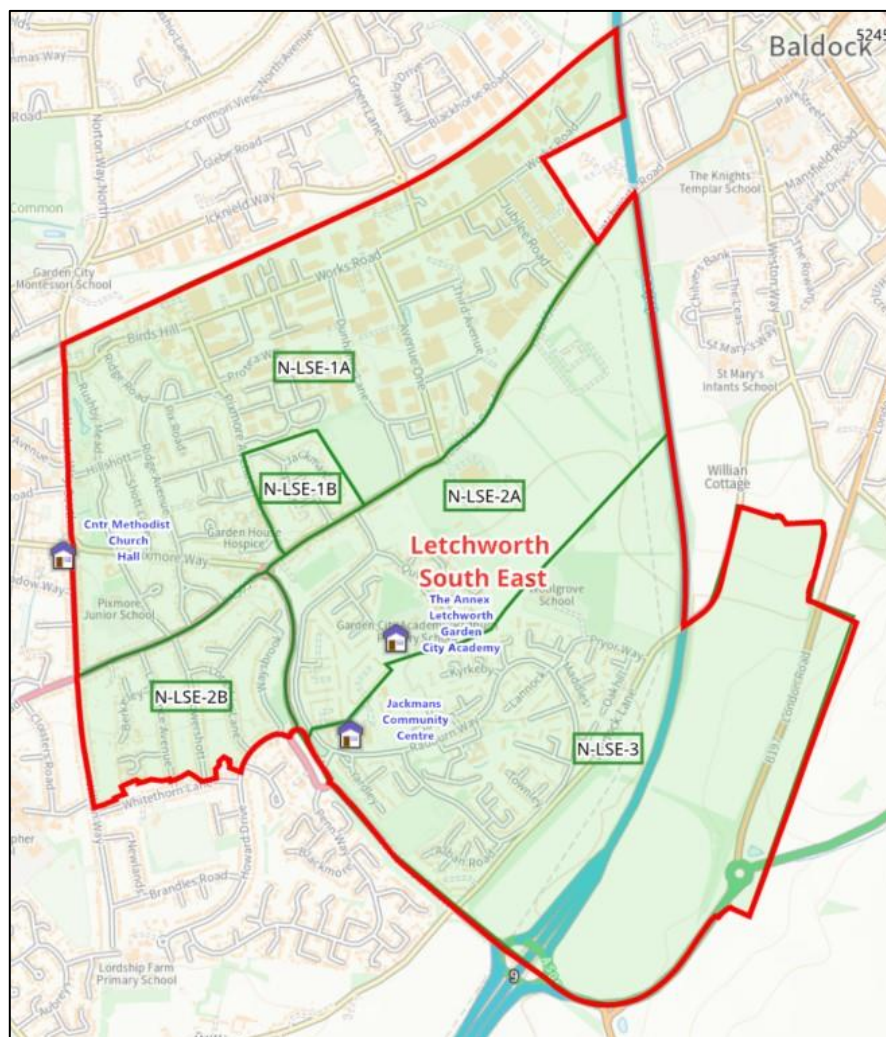


Polling District	2023 Electorate	Proposed Polling Place	Returning Officer comments	Summary of consultation responses and, if applicable, alternative facilities considered
N-LNR-1a Letchworth Norton 1a	142	Clulow Room, St George's Hall, Common View, SG6 1DA	Polling district boundary has been amended to make more logical shape. Temporarily split A & B because of old district wards. Polling Place outside Polling District.	
N-LNR-1b Letchworth Norton 1b	744	Clulow Room, St George's Hall, Common View, SG6 1DA	Polling district boundary has been amended to make more logical shape. Temporarily split A & B because of old district wards. Polling Place outside Polling District.	Consultation responses from members of the public in favour of retaining the polling place at Clulow Rooms
N-LNR-2a Letchworth Norton 2a	839	Clulow Room, St George's Hall, Common View, SG6 1DA	Polling district boundary has been amended to make more logical shape and taken on part of former CBA along Norton Way. Temporarily split A & B because of old district wards. Polling Place outside Polling District	
N-LNR-2b Letchworth Norton 2b	68	Clulow Room, St George's Hall, Common View, SG6 1DA	Polling district boundary has been amended to make more logical shape and taken on part of former CBA along Norton Way. Temporarily split A & B because of old district wards. Polling Place outside Polling District	
N-LNR-3a Letchworth Norton 3a	431	Clulow Room, St George's Hall, Common View, SG6 1DA	Reduced in size slightly – L-NR-2a has been expanded compared to previous CAC polling district. Temporarily split A & B because of old district wards. Polling Place outside Polling District	

N-LNR-3b Letchworth Norton 3b	1355	Clulow Room, St George's Hall, Common View, SG6 1DA	Reduced in size slightly – CAC has been expanded. Temporarily split A & B because of old district wards	
N-LNR-4 Letchworth Norton 4	261	Norton Common Bowls Club, Icknield Way, SG6 4UF	Separate polling district and station because of county division boundary.	Site Visit undertaken for Council owned site at Norton Common Bowls Club confirmed that this has suitable facilities, including car parking and disabled access.

Proposed Polling Scheme by District ward

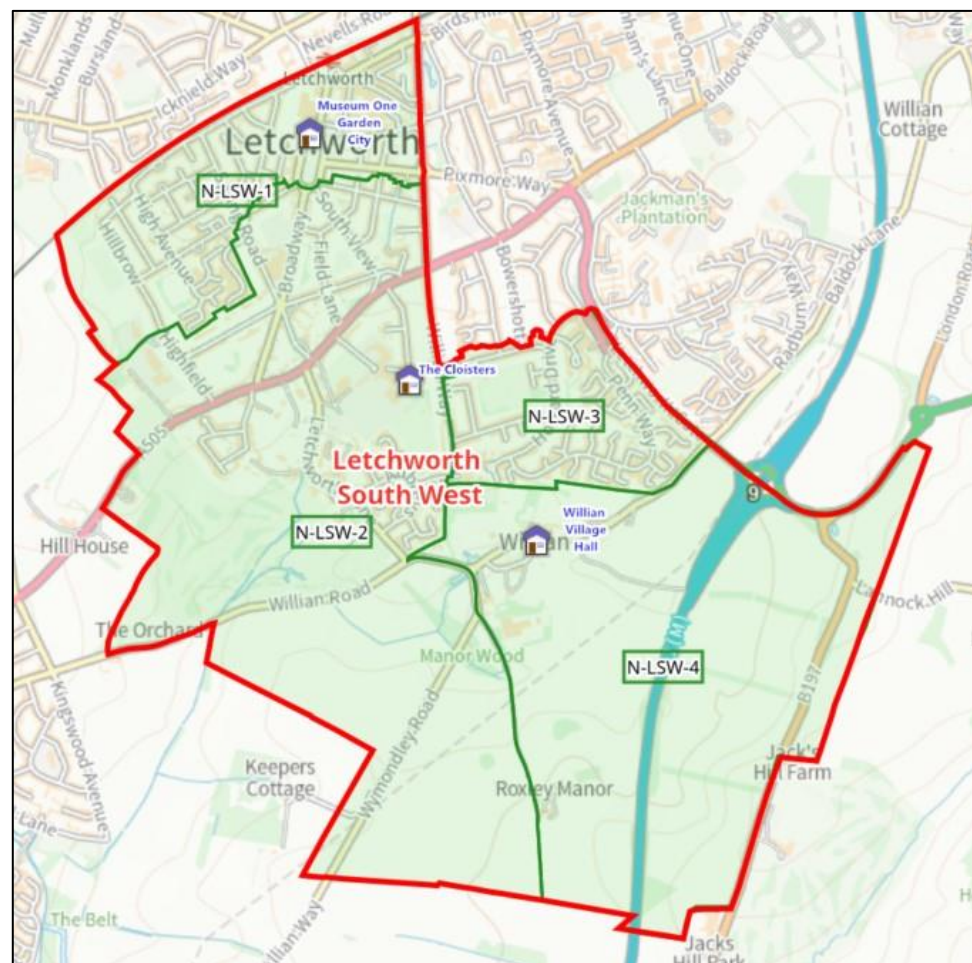
Letchworth South East ward



Polling District	2023 Electorate	Proposed Polling Place	Returning Officer comments	Summary of consultation responses and, if applicable, alternative facilities considered
N-LSE-1a Letchworth South East 1a	2222	Central Methodist Church Hall, Norton Way South, SG6 3TR	The previous CBB and CCF polling districts are now in the same electoral area at each level and will be merged post May 2024 elections	Consultation responses from members of the public in favour of retaining the polling place at Central Methodist Church Hall
N-LSE-1b Letchworth South East 1b	421	Central Methodist Church Hall, Norton Way South, SG6 3TR	The previous CBB and CCF polling districts are now in the same electoral area at each level and will be merged post May 2024 elections Polling Place outside Polling District	
N-LSE-2a Letchworth South East 2a	987	The Annex at Garden City Academy, Garden City Academy, OFF Radburn Way, SG6 2JZ	Temporarily split A & B because of old district wards	
N-LSE-2b Letchworth South East 2b	830	The Annex at Garden City Academy, Garden City Academy, OFF Radburn Way, SG6 2JZ	Temporarily split A & B because of old district wards Polling Place outside Polling District	Consultation responses from members of the public in favour of retaining the polling place at The Annex. One respondent raised concern about the size of the room used there, but no alternative venues were suggested.
N-LSE-3 Letchworth South East 3	2014	Jackmans Community Centre (Old Library), Ivel Court, SG6 2NL		It was originally considered to explore a church which is located more centrally within this polling district. However, District Ward Councillors indicated that Jackmans Community Centre was a widely known/recognised location for this area and benefited from voter familiarity, so the decision was taken to maintain this polling place.

Proposed Polling Scheme by District ward

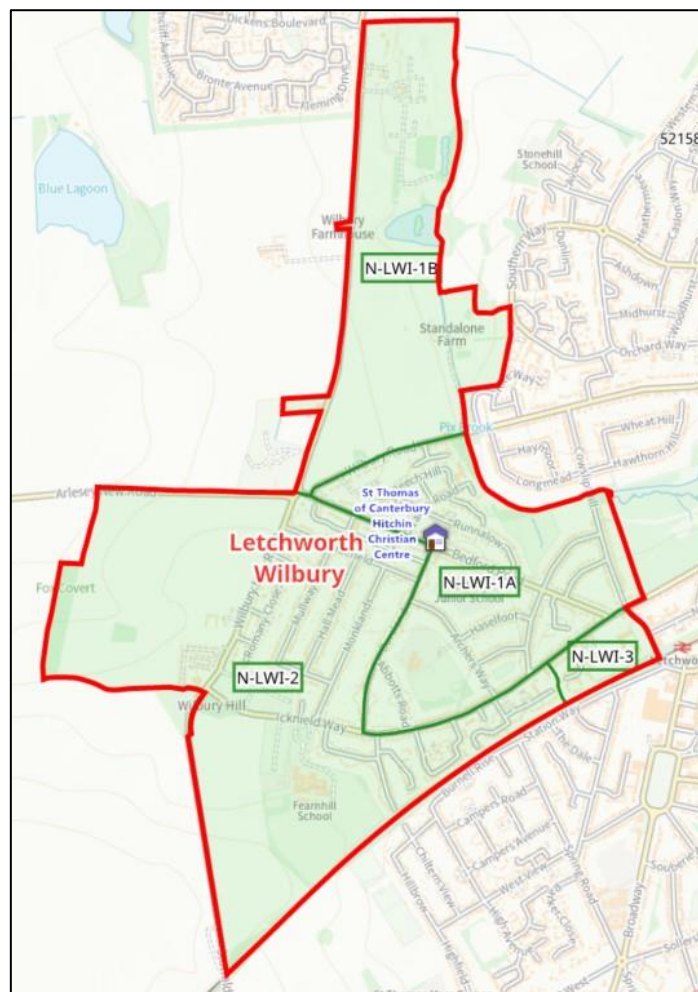
Letchworth South West ward



Polling District	2023 Electorate	Proposed Polling Place	Returning Officer comments	Summary of consultation responses and, if applicable, alternative facilities considered
N-LSW-1 Letchworth South West 1	2584	Museum at One Garden City, One Garden City, Broadway, SG6 3BF		<p>Consultation responses from members of the public generally in favour of retaining the polling place at the Museum at One Garden City, raising its close walking distance and accessibility.</p> <p>One respondent raised concern with corridor access and signage, but this will now be a single station instead a double station as at the elections in May 2023, removing the need for additional rooms to be accessed through corridors.</p> <p>Other options explored for this area included the District Council Offices, but this was ruled out as it is in use for other election functions on polling day, and Brotherhood Hall which was ruled out as it does not have suitable facilities for staff.</p>
N-LSW-2 Letchworth South West 2	2131	The Cloisters, Barrington Road, SG6 3TH		<p>Consultation responses from District Ward Councillor and members of the public generally in favour of retaining the polling place at The Cloisters.</p> <p>One respondent proposed that this polling place should be moved to Lordship Farm School, as it was for elections in 2019; however, other respondents indicated that school closures should not be considered to accommodate polling stations. Wherever possible, alternatives to school polling stations have been explored to avoid disruption for pupils.</p>
N-LSW-3 Letchworth South West 3	1707	The Cloisters, Barrington Road, SG6 3TH	Polling Place outside Polling District	
N-LSW-4 Letchworth South West 4	162	Willian Village Hall, Willian, SG6 2AP		<p>It was originally proposed that, due to the small electorate size and the fact that it is in the same electoral area at all levels, the polling station for N-LSW-4 could be merged with N-LSW-2 & N-LSW-3 at The Cloisters.</p> <p>However, local District Ward Councillors raised concerns about this proposal, highlighting that Willian was a distance away from the Cloisters and not easily accessible on foot.</p> <p>It was therefore concluded to retain the polling place arrangements at Willian Village Hall.</p>

Proposed Polling Scheme by District ward

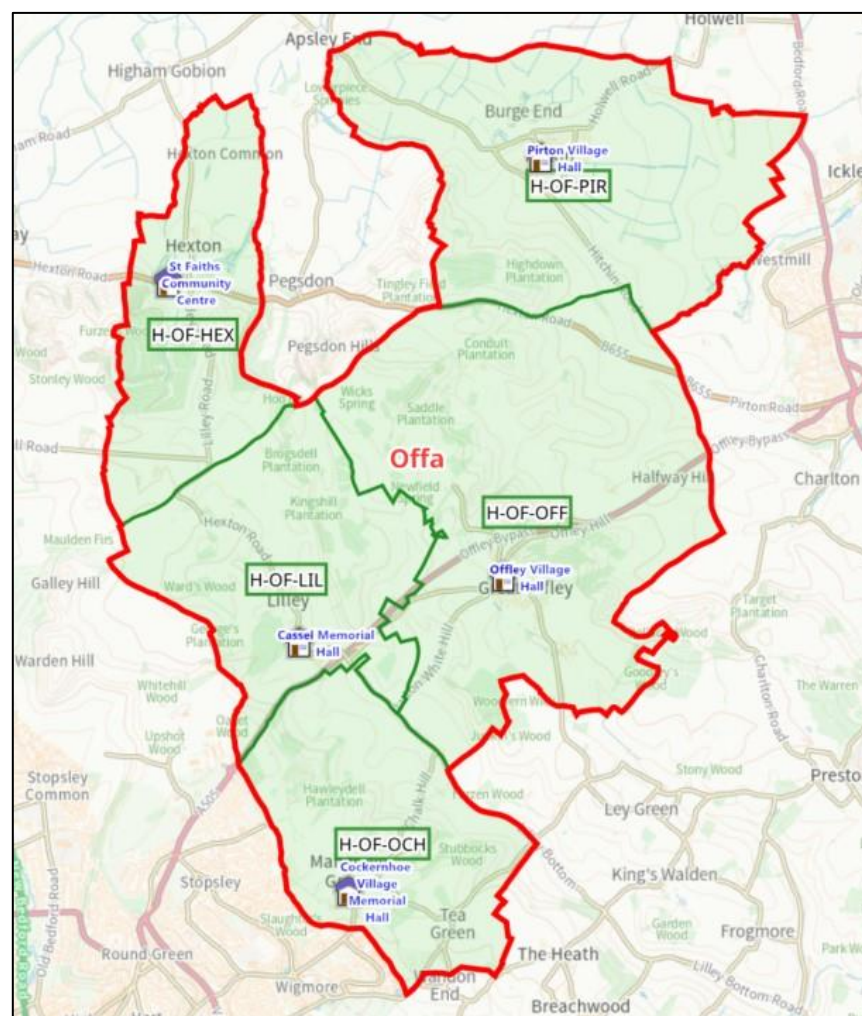
Letchworth Wilbury ward



Polling District	2023 Electorate	Proposed Polling Place	Returning Officer comments	Summary of consultation responses and, if applicable, alternative facilities considered
N-LWI-1a Letchworth Wilbury 1a	1773	St Thomas of Canterbury, Bedford Road, SG6 4DU	Gains part of the previous CAA polling district and then split in 2 because of large electorate. Temporarily split A & B due to old district wards.	<p>Consultation responses from members of the public in favour of retaining the polling place at St Thomas of Canterbury.</p> <p>One respondent raised that although it was ideally placed for voters walking to the station, it can be difficult to park at the venue.</p> <p>Possibility of a separate station for N-LWI-3, which is in a separate county division, was explored and a site visit was undertaken at local scout hut. However, due to concerns about disabled access and a lack of parking this was ruled out and the proposal is to remain with St Thomas.</p>
N-LWI-1b Letchworth Wilbury 1b	13	St Thomas of Canterbury, Bedford Road, SG6 4DU	Gains part of the previous CAA polling district and then split in 2 because of large electorate. Temporarily split A & B due to old district wards. Polling Place outside Polling District	
N-LWI-2 Letchworth Wilbury 2	2165	St Thomas of Canterbury, Bedford Road, SG6 4DU	Polling Place outside Polling District	
N-LWI-3 Letchworth Wilbury 3	150	St Thomas of Canterbury, Bedford Road, SG6 4DU	Double station for county elections	

Proposed Polling Scheme by District ward

Offa ward

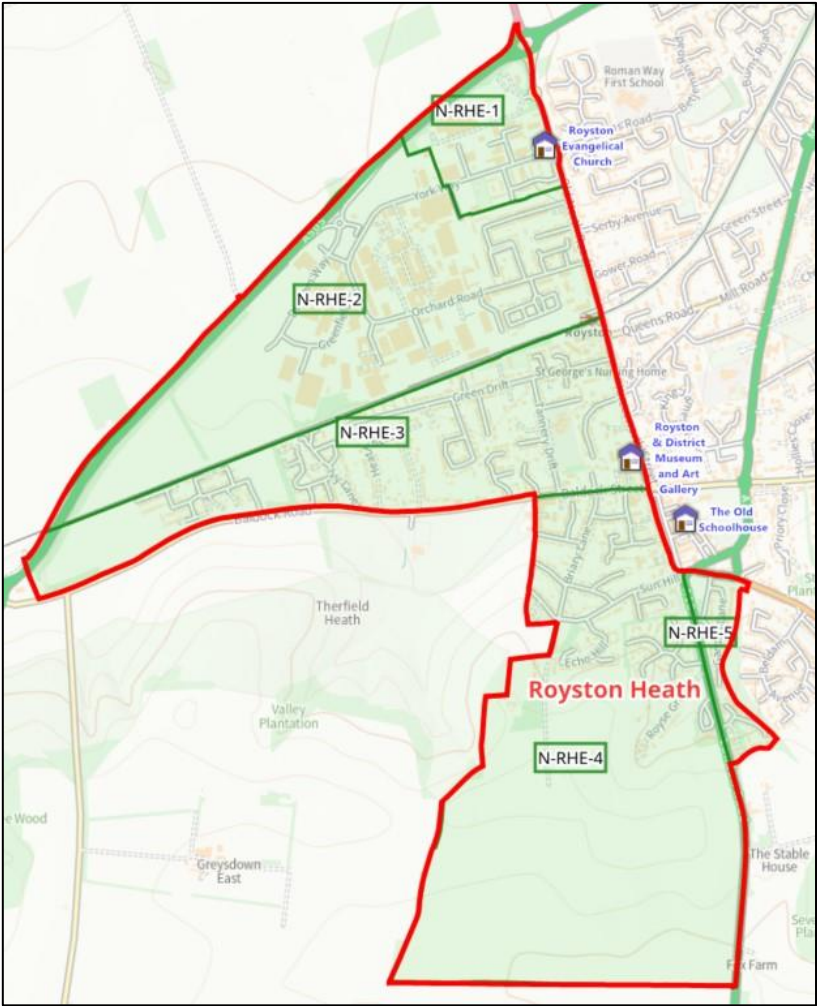


APPENDIX A

Polling District	2023 Electorate	Proposed Polling Place	Returning Officer comments	Summary of consultation responses and, if applicable, alternative facilities considered
H-OF-HEX Hexton	87	St Faiths Community Centre, Barton Road, SG5 3JL		<p>Consultation response from member of the public in favour of retaining the polling place at St Faiths, highlighting its convenient location and parking facilities for disabled voters.</p> <p>Consideration was initially given to merging the station for Hexton with Lilley since it has a small electorate and is in the same district ward and county division.</p> <p>However, the local District Ward Councillor raised concerns and stated that St Faiths Community Centre should be retained as polling place. Therefore, this proposed merge was decided against.</p>
H-OF-LIL Lilley	304	Cassel Memorial Hall, West Street, LU2 8LN		Consultation responses from members of the public in favour of retaining the polling place at Cassel Memorial Hall
H-OF-OFF Offley (Offley)	849	Offley Village Hall, Luton Road, SG5 3DG		
H-OF-OCH Offley (Cockernhoe)	385	Cockernhoe Memorial Hall, Mangrove Road, LU2 8QD		
H-OF-PIR Pirton	1215	Pirton Village Hall, High Street, SG5 3PS		Consultation responses from members of the public in favour of retaining the polling place at Pirton Village Hall, with respondents highlighting its central location, good disabled access including the availability of a ramp, although one other respondent did indicate that the side access door was often used which was less accessible and that we could procure a ramp to assist with this entrance.

Proposed Polling Scheme by District ward

Royston Heath ward

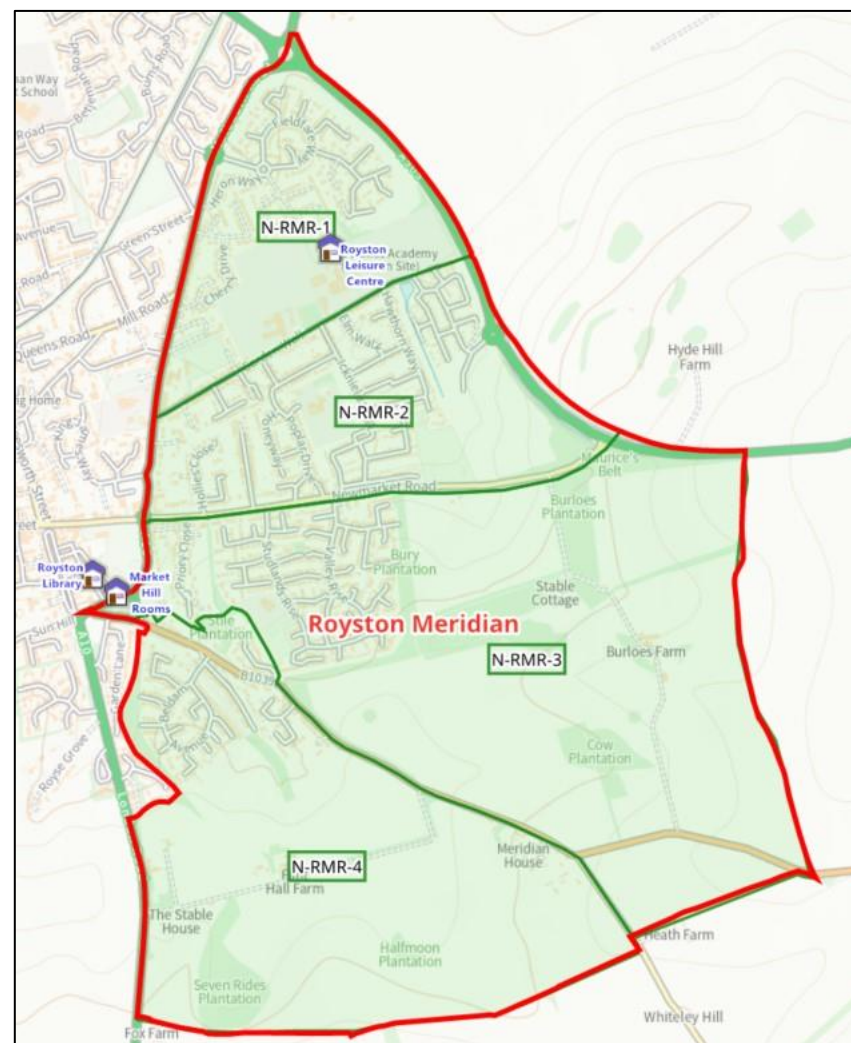


Polling District	2023 Electorate	Proposed Polling Place	Returning Officer comments	Summary of consultation responses and, if applicable, alternative facilities considered
N-RHE-1 Royston Heath 1	143	Royston Evangelical Church, York Way, Royston, SG8 5HJ	This is a new polling district created by the new district ward boundaries. It was previously in Royston Meridian ward and therefore polled at Coombes Community Centre with the rest of the ward.	Having divided the previous polling district along the railway line, it felt natural that N-RHE-1 and N-RHE-2 should be identified a polling station which was north of the railway for voters to access. A local nursery was approached. However, was unavailable. Royston Evangelical Church was identified as being within the N-RHE-1 polling district and after a site visit was undertaken, its facilities were found to be suitable. It will require a double station at County and Town council elections.
N-RHE-2 Royston Heath 2	713	Royston Evangelical Church, York Way, Royston, SG8 5HJ	Former DBA polling district has been divided in half along railway line as this is a hard geographical boundary. Polling Place outside Polling District	
N-RHE-3 Royston Heath 3	1382	Royston & District Museum and Art Gallery, 5 Lower King Street, SG8 5AL	Former DBA polling district divided in half along railway line as this is a hard geographical boundary. The southern boundary of this polling district moved up to follow Baldock Road as this is a more logical boundary. Properties south of Baldock Road have therefore been moved to be part of N-RHE-4.	Consultation responses received from members of the public and District Ward Councillors generally in favour of retaining the polling place at Royston Museum for N-RHE-3. N-RHE-4 previously polled at Market Hill Rooms, but this is a polling place in the Meridian Ward, so it has been combined at the Museum, which is in Royston Heath ward. One respondent raised concern that parking was limited at the venue and proposed the local golf club or Tannery Drift School as alternatives. Unfortunately, neither of these sites were available as options. The Town Hall was also suggested, but this is already the venue for a polling station in a neighbouring ward.
N-RHE-4 Royston Heath 4	1281	Royston & District Museum and Art Gallery, 5 Lower King Street, SG8 5AL	Polling Place outside Polling District	
N-RHE-5 Royston Heath 5	201	The Old Schoolhouse, 4 Market Hill, SG8 9JL	This polling district previously polled at Market Hill Rooms. However, the new District ward boundary follows Garden Lane, creating a new small polling district.	Potential venues inside the polling district itself were unable to be identified. However, a few options were investigated nearby.

			<p>Polling Place outside Polling District</p>	<p>A local pub was considered but was known to only have upstairs facilities, which aren't easily accessible for disabled voters. A nearby hospital was also approached, but no response was provided so therefore assumed unavailable.</p> <p>The Old Schoolhouse was identified as a nearby venue with suitable facilities after a suggestion put forward by a District Ward Councillor. A site visit confirmed this as a suitable venue.</p>
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Proposed Polling Scheme by District ward

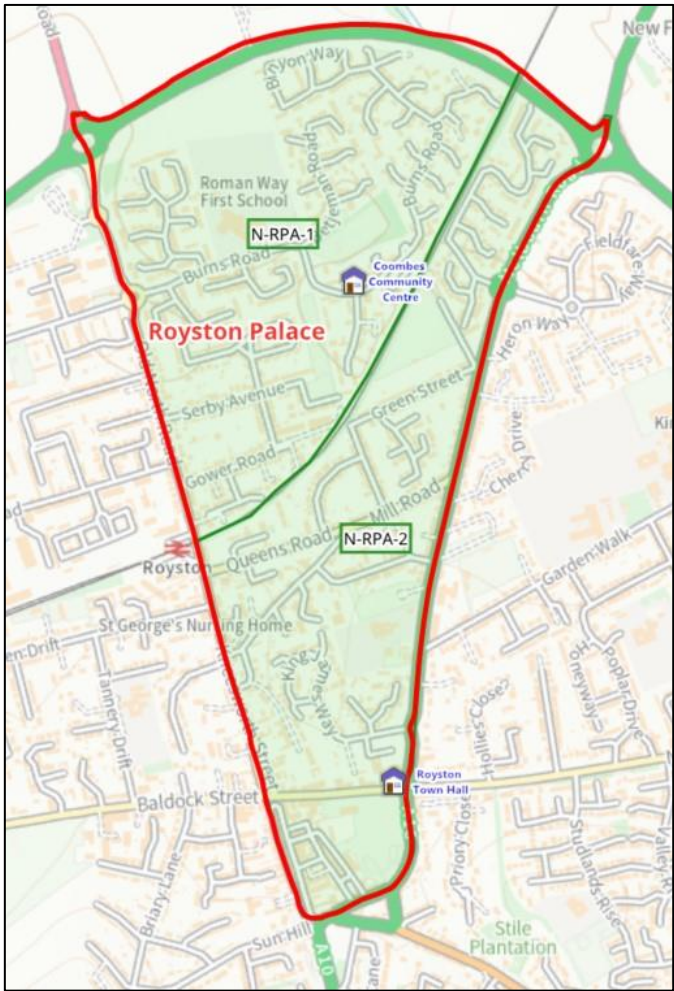
Royston Meridian ward



Polling District	2023 Electorate	Proposed Polling Place	Returning Officer comments	Summary of consultation responses and, if applicable, alternative facilities considered
N-RMR-1 Royston Meridian 1	1191	Royston Leisure Centre, Woodcock Road, SG8 7XT	Previous DAA polling district had a large electorate so has been split in half along Garden Walk	Consultation responses from members of the public and District Ward Councillors in favour of retaining the polling place at Royston Leisure Centre. One respondent raised concern that it was not easily accessible on foot from their address and proposed moving the station to a local school. However, other respondents were strongly against the proposal to use schools and the Returning Officer has avoided this wherever possible to minimise disruption to pupils.
N-RMR-2 Royston Meridian 2	1721	Royston Leisure Centre, Woodcock Road, SG8 7XT	Polling Place outside Polling District	
N-RMR-3 Royston Meridian 3	1365	Royston Library, Market Hill, SG8 9JN		This polling district previously polled at Studlands Rise school, which was initially proposed to remain unchanged. However, after discussions with the school, their circumstances had changed and the arrangement which previously allowed us to use it as a polling station whilst the school remained open for pupils was no longer considered viable due to safeguarding concerns. Consultation responses from members of the public strongly expressed that school closures shouldn't be utilised to facilitate elections, and wherever possible, the Returning Officer has tried to avoid this disruption to students. Alternative options were therefore explored. An alternative within the polling district itself couldn't be identified. However, the Library is situated in the Town Centre which is a short distance from the polling district. A site visit was undertaken to confirm that the facilities are satisfactory, and District Ward Councillors were informed who expressed support for the proposal.
N-RMR-4 Royston Meridian 4	934	Market Hill Rooms, Fish Hill, SG8 9JL	New District boundary means this loses a small section along Garden Lane compared to previous DBB polling district Polling Place outside Polling District	Consultation responses from members of the public in favour of retaining the polling place at Market Hill Rooms

Proposed Polling Scheme by District ward

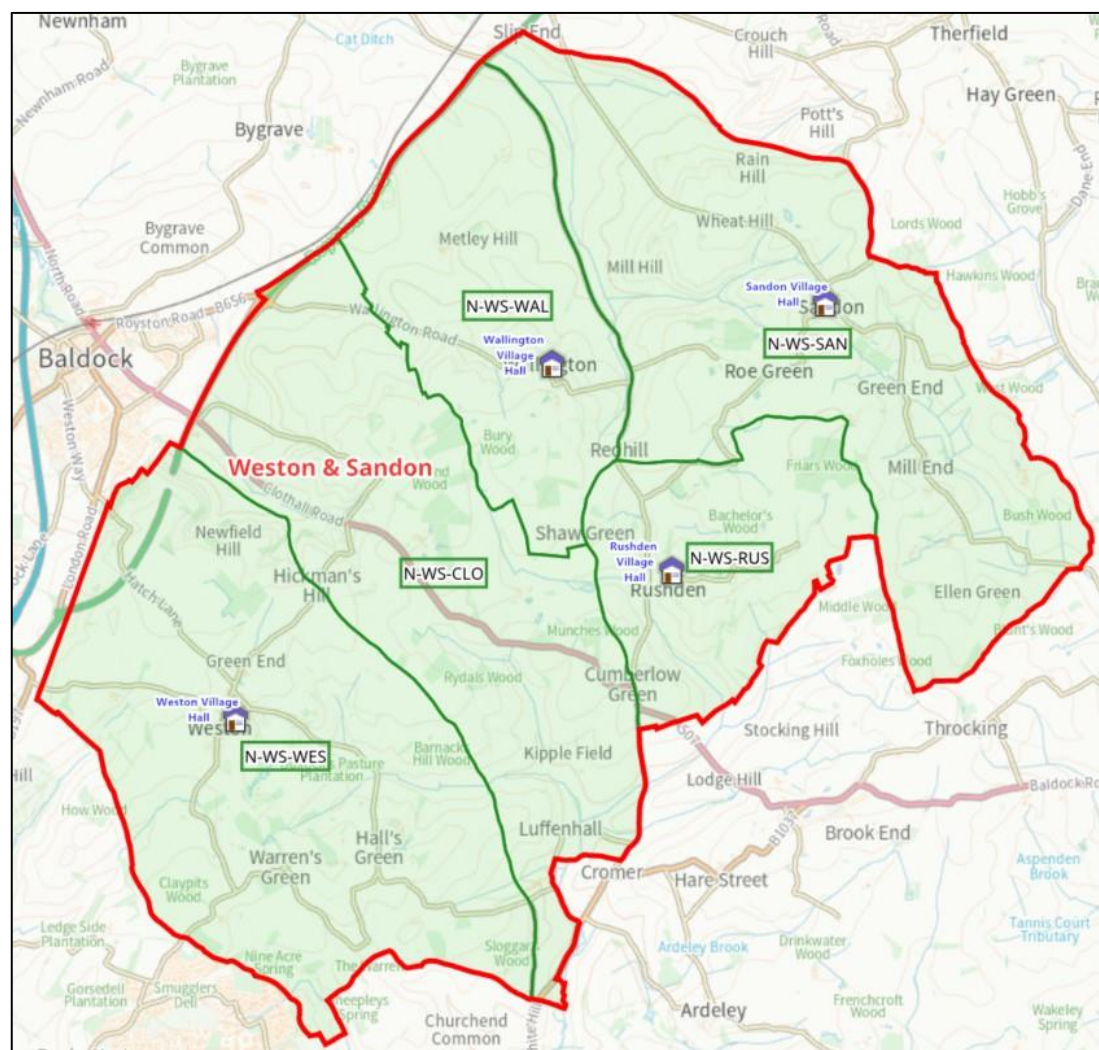
Royston Palace ward



Polling District	2023 Electorate	Proposed Polling Place	Returning Officer comments	Summary of consultation responses and, if applicable, alternative facilities considered
N-RPA-1 Royston Palace 1	2330	Coombes Community Centre, Burns Road, SG8 5PT		
N-RPA-2 Royston Palace 2	1821	Royston Town Hall, Melbourn Street, SG8 7DA		Consultation response from member of the public in favour of retaining the polling place at Royston Town Hall.

Proposed Polling Scheme by District ward

Weston & Sandon ward



APPENDIX A

Polling District	2023 Electorate	Proposed Polling Place	Returning Officer comments	Summary of consultation responses and, if applicable, alternative facilities considered
N-WS-SAN Sandon	393	Sandon Village Hall, Payne End, SG9 0QU		Consideration was initially given to merging the stations of Sandon, Wallington & Rushden parishes because they are small electorates and in the same district ward and county division. However, the local District Ward Councillor raised concerns that the villages are a distance apart and that there is no public transport easily linking them, nor safe walking/cycling routes. Therefore, this proposal was decided against, and the separate polling places were retained.
N-WS-WAL Wallington	114	Wallington Village Hall, The Street, SG7 6SW		Please see above considerations for Sandon.
N-WS-WES Weston	786	Weston Village Hall, Maiden Street, SG4 7AA		Consultation responses from members of the public in favour of retaining the polling place at Weston Village Hall.
N-WS-CLO Clothall (W&S)	120	Weston Village Hall, Maiden Street, SG4 7AA	Clothall parish was divided in the new district ward boundaries, hence the creation of this new polling district. Polling Place outside Polling District	
N-WS-RUS Rushden	204	Rushden Village Hall, Rushden, SG9 0SN		Consultation response from member of the public in favour of retaining the polling place at Rushden Village Hall due to its easy accessibility on foot. Please see above considerations for Sandon.

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Polling Station	We want to know your thoughts. Such as whether the Polling Station locations should change; about any changes we are proposing; and of any accessibility issues.	Any suggested alternatives or improvements that could be made?	Any other comments?
Ashwell Parish Room	I have found the location of the polling station in Ashwell and previously for Clothall Common to be well located and easy to access. As such I am not sure how they could be improved.	No	
Ashwell Parish Room	It is important to have local polling stations for the elderly otherwise they may become disenfranchised because of the inability to access a polling station.	Mobile polling stations.	
Ashwell Parish Room	I am very happy with my local.Polling Station and have no comments to make.		
Ashwell Parish Room	The polling station in the Church Rooms in Ashwell is quite satisfactory.		
Ashwell parish room	Ashwell parish room	none	none
Baldock Community Centre	I don't use polling stations. I find it an inconvenient way to vote. I use postal voting only.	My elderly (85) mother in law has no photo ideal so can't vote.	Making web based voting possible would appeal to the younger generation who don't vote.
Baldock Community Centre	Polling Station at Community Centre in exactly the right location.	No	Excellent service when voting.
Baldock Community Centre	I am happy with the proposals as they stand.		
Baldock Community Centre	I would really like the polling station for my post code to remain at the Baldock Community Centre please. It is a helpful, central location.	No	No
Baldock Community Centre	Baldock one is fine.		
Baldock Community Centre	The Baldock Community Centre is perfect. Don't change it.	No	No

Baldock Community Centre	As proposed, the Baldock Community Centre should remain as Polling Station for Baldock West, being ideally situated with suitable access for all.		
Baldock Community Centre	The location for the Baldock West Polling Station remaining at Baldock Community Centre is ideal.		
Baldock Community Centre	I am very happy with the location and layout of my local polling station in Baldock (Community Centre), and when I lived in Letchworth was perfectly happy with the location there (St Hugh's Church Hall).	No	No
Baldock Community Centre	I am happy with the locations and the changes proposed.		
Baptist Church Hall	I am happy with the polling station locations as they are.		
Baptist Church Hall	Our polling station is very suitable and in a good location for me to access. The access in the room is also suitable however, I am an able bodied person.	No	no
Barkway Village Hall	The polling station in my village is ideal	No alternative	No
Barley Town House	Excellent venue conveniently located in the centre of the village. No accessibility or parking issues.	None.	None
Benslow Music	No need for stations to change, in my opinion. My local station is Benslow Music and to my knowledge there are no accessibility issues or restricted access.	Postal voting should be advertised more, as this reduces the need for this and makes life a lot easier - but few people seem to know about it	
Benslow Music	Benslow Music works very well as a Polling Station, without disruption to schooling or any other service.	You could allow for a queue inside by having the officers at the back of the room and the booths at the side, so a U shape is formed, coming and going. I realise there may be security reasons for the current setup	
Benslow music school is convenient and works well	Benslow music school	No	No
Benslow Music Trust	Very happy with current station.	No	No

Benslow Music Trust	The polling station I use at Benslow music school is great! Don't change it.		
Benslow Music Trust	As our road has now been shunted into another Ward, life would be easier if we could continue to use Benslow Music Trust.		
Benslow Music Trust	No change		
Benslow Music Trust	My polling station is at the music school on Benslow Lane and I do not want to go anywhere else. For me it is very accessible in all respects.	None	I do not intend to ever use a postal or on line voting system
Benslow Music Trust	my polling station location and access is fine	no	no
Breachwood Green Village Hall	Its perfectly ok in breachwood green village hall If it changes I will probably not vote	None	
Cassel Memorial Hall	No changes needed		
Cassel Memorial Hall, West Street LU2 8LN	The polling station in The Cassell HALL. Lilley is always wellrun		
Catholic Parish Church Hall	I use the polling station at the church on Nightingale Road. It's very convenient and seems easily accessible.	No, seems good. Good signage and location	Would like the polling station to remain where it is
Catholic Parish Church Hall	The polling station that I was a poll clerk at, which was the church on Nightingale Road in Hitchin used a fire exit door as the disabled access door, Although this was okay temporarily this isn't very safe and there needs to be proper disabled access.		
Central Methodist Church Hall	LOCATION PERFECT AS IS		
Central Methodist Church Hall	locations I've come across in Letchworth are sensible, and access is easy regardless of physical ability	improve the temporary signage, and put it out a day in advance to remind voters of the poll and the polling station location	

Clulow Room	The polling station has always seemed fit for purpose to me. However, I would favour a big push for people to use a postal vote as this would remove any access obstacles	Encourage postal voting	I have voted in every election in NHDC and never had any difficulty. I think you do a pretty good job for democracy. The council's next priority is to ensure EVERYONE has valid i/d for casting their vote to ensure the Tory gerrymandering is stopped dead in its tracks. I suggest you focus on all eligible voters under 30 first!
Clulow Room	Happy with our current polling station as it's convenient and easily accessed	No	No
Clulow Room, St George`s Hall	No changes to current setup	No	No
Clulow Room, St George`s Hall	The proposed changes affecting our ward seem logical and acceptable. Our polling station location is unchanged and is acceptable.	None.	None.
Clulow Room, St George`s Hall	Not enough polling stations. The people who live in the Norton side of LGC have to travel nearly to town to vote	At least one additional polling station at the Norton end of LGC	
Clulow Room, St George`s Hall	Polling station locations should remain as they were as they have been tested over a period of time to be the right place for residents.		Your new boundary map is too small to properly identify the almost blanked out areas on the OS map. It needs to be clearer.
Coombes Community Centre	As long as disadvantaged and disabled people can access polling stations and there are good transport links I'm happy with any changes		
Grange Community Centre	the polling station seems to serve the area around here well. access is not a problem. The station is big enough to accommodate crowds. It has always been well laid out for polling. No change of venue, nor layout, in my opinion		

Grange Community Centre	More than happy with the current arrangement as far as my Polling Station is concerned.	No.	
Graveley Village Hall	Polling Station should stay as is, ie Village Hall	No	Many are on-line voting, that should be less accessible and more encouragement should be made to vote at Poll Station
Graveley Village Hall	Happy with current polling station. It's in the best location and does have disabled access to the rear for wheel chairs etc	No	
Great Ashby Community Centre	The current location in Great Ashby Community Centre is absolutely fine for me.	N/A	None
Great Ashby Community Centre,	Bringing in compulsory voter ID is ludicrous. You already have your polling card, why do you need additional ID? Not everyone has a driving license or passport or even knows they need to 'apply' for a voter's ID card. It's discriminatory and over the top for the miniscule amount of voter fraud that's reported each year.	Go back to the previous method of voter's card being sufficient ID.	
Great Wymondley Village Hall	I like being able to walk to our village hall that is used as a polling station. I feel it encourages the community to vote		
Great Wymondley Village Hall, Great Wymondley SG4 7ET	I am severely disabled, but can get to my current polling station in the village. Getting to any other location would not be possible, without a lift and support		
Hinxworth Village Hall	Fine where it is.	No	No

Hinxworth Village Hall, Francis Road SG7 5HL	Happy with current location (village hall)	N/A	Sometimes the polling staff are wasteful with heating being on full blast unnecessarily!
Hitchin Music Centre	The polling station at the Hitchin Music Centre in Benslow Lane is excellent. It has a small number of parking spaces which allow less mobile persons to gain access		
Hitchin Rugby Clubhouse	<p>I use a postal vote for 2 reasons</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. I dislike being asked my voting choice by people outside polling station 2. I would be directed to King George V playing fields, at some distance and in the wrong direction for going into town, the Catholic Church Grove Rd is a polling station much nearer to me. 		
Hitchin Rugby Clubhouse	<p>I am happy with my polling station. It is always a pleasure to go to the rugby club to vote; the volunteers are helpful and welcoming, it is well organised and affords voter privacy.</p> <p>I do not have strong views about changing venues. My feeling is 'If it isn't broke don't fix it'. I am fortunate it is close to where I live. If it were decided to change the venue I don't foresee any scenario which would stop me voting.</p>		

Ickleford Village Hall	<p>What changes are you proposing? I can't comment on something that I don't know about!</p> <p>This is a very wide question with little content nor direction!</p> <p>I'm basically happy with my current polling place/station in Ickleford, can park, easy access, no queues, open til 10pm</p> <p>Feel that I should be able to vote at any location rather than in a specific location, so my vote is not dependent on my location at the time of voting. Should be capable of doing that with today's technology, surely?</p>	<p>need better booths to use, better forms with photos and names and party affiliations on. I don't watch TV so I'll not be familiar with candidates that don't actually visit or present themselves to me personally.</p>	I think this is a super poor questionnaire
Ickleford Village Hall	No, it is okay where it has been for ever.	No	None
Ickleford Village Hall	<p>The Village Hall is nearby for me and so easily accessible. It's in the middle of the village , close to bus stop, school , shop and pubs , and it has parking. There's a concrete ramp up to the front doors , and there are toilets. I think it's perfect for a polling station.</p>	None	None
Ickleford Village Hall	<p>The polling station at Ickleford village hall is a considerable distance to travel for residents of the Lavender Grange development in Lower Stondon (that is part of Cadwell ward). It is 2.9 miles to drive and would take over an hour to walk there. Holwell, with a similar number of residents, has a polling station.</p>	Identify a location in Lower Stondon to use as a polling station.	
Jackmans Old Library	The Library on the Jackmans estate is particularly convenient and worth retaining.	Happy with options	Like the current options in our ward

Jackmans Old Library	My local polling station is OK. It's near Shops and fairly central to the ward. The only accessibility issues are with surrounding paths. Over growing hedgerows, broken uneven tarmac and fallen leafs making it difficult for some less mobile people to navigate. Although May isn't Autumn, there is often still a thick mat of old leaves in several places.	If people want to vote in Person maybe the parties who want their vote could check the routes people have to take.	
Kelshall Village Hall	The polling station in Kelshall is excellent and always has been. We have no suggestions for any improvements; just keep it going in the way it always has.	None. It's a very well run operation.	No
Kimpton Memorial Hall	The proposed seems ok to me.		
Kimpton Memorial Hall	Kimpton Memorial Hall is ideal as a polling station. All on one level, easy access, car parking including designated disabled parking.	No	
Knebworth Village Hall	Where are they?		
Knebworth Village Hall	No change needed to my polling station in Knebworth.		
Knebworth Village Hall	Knebworth village hall is centrally situated with parking	No	Nil
Knebworth Village Hall	Knebworth Village Hall is a good polling station.	None	No
Market Hill Rooms	Convenient loacation. Usually cold.	None	None
Market Hill Rooms	I have a postal vote but when I walked to the polling station thought it was well located	None	None
Museum at One Garden City	Letchworth museum polling station is a good model. It provides a practical solution for the area with both pedestrian access and nearby parking	Nil	Nil

Museum at One Garden City	The polling location changed at the last local election from the community hall by church at top of broadway to the museum building. The new location was awful - narrow corridor access, poor signage to a back room, small room with only single door with entrance, rude election staff with slow processing. Although, staff were rude and poor communicators at the previous location too.	Careful choice of election staff, think about signage for directions to the polling room, empathy and support when ID not brought as voters unaware of changes	Choose a site with door width able to cope with an in and outflow
Museum at One Garden City	More signage inside the building	As above	
Museum at One Garden City	For us the polling station has always been within walking distance so we are very happy		
Museum at One Garden City	Looks like no change for where we vote. So fine. But very badly designed consultation. Very hard to make out what's happening and to respond.	No	No
Museum at One Garden City	My polling station is in the Letchworth museum near Morrisons. It is easily accessible.	No	No
New Fellowship Hall, Bendish lane SG4 8HX	No change. The village hall is perfectly suitable for polling providing lots of room for the booths, parking and toilet facilities for the voters, plus a kitchen for those checking voters.	None	No
New Testament Church of God	I am perfectly happy with the venue and location of my local polling station.	Better signage, the sign gets attached to the metal fencing but parked cars obscure it.	Very clean and welcoming venue.
New Testament Church of God	No	N/A	N/A
New Testament Church of God	The station should NOT change	No	None

New Testament Church of God	Do not need to be changed, we can walk to ours within the asked 15 minutes distance.	None needed	None needed
New Testament Church of God	Very happy with the locations	No	Very happy
New Testament Church of God	The proposals look fine.	No	No
Peace Memorial Hall	The polling station is in the right place at Peace Memorial Hall for this end of the village as it is easily accessible especially for those without their own means of transportation. I believe fewer people would vote if the had to travel further or even outside the village	None	None
Peace Memorial Hall	I do not think the idea of an additional polling station in Codicote is a good idea. Firstly it has always been this way and in these tough economic times it seems crazy to incur extra costs opening a new polling station for only a few hundred potential voters	Stay as is	Stay as is
Peace Memorial Hall	The Peace Memorial Hall in Codicote is the most convenient location for most people in the village, owing to its central location. The only alternative spaces are located in the edge of the village, which would be unsatisfactory if the aim is to maximise the number if people voting.		
Peace Memorial Hall	Our polling station is accessible and based centrally. Happy for it to stay at the same location as before.	allowing parking spaces for 10 min.	none
Peace Memorial Hall (For FFB**)	My polling station is in the middle of Codicote. It is slightly too far to walk but parking in Codicote is a nightmare. I have yet to find a car park, and parking on the main road is not good. I am sure this affects people other than me and especially people with mobility problems.	I don't know if there is maybe a sports club nearby which could be used and has parking facilities. Otherwise, I really don't know.	
Peace Memorial Hall Codicote	Codicote Poling Station has always been satisfactory and well staffed.	No	No

Pirton Village Hall	The polling station in Pirton is fine - it is convenient and centrally located in he village. No	No	No
Pirton Village Hall	As far as I am aware there is no proposal of change in Pirton Parish and I see no need to change the current location of the polling station in the village hall or of the arrangements within the station.		
Pirton Village Hall	I believe that the Polling Station in the village hall is in the ideal location in the middle of the village. I also believe that the hall is as accessible as possible with a ramp to the front door. However, my experience of such matters is limited	None	None
Pirton Village Hall	Very happy with our polling station at Pirton Village Hall. Well known and accessible.		
Pirton Village Hall, High Street SG5 3PS	There is still a polling station at the village hall in Pirton which is convenient for residents in the village.	None	None
Pirton Village Hall, High Street SG5 3PS	I can only comment on my local polling station in Pirton and believe it should remain otherwise travelling outside of the village to vote would be an unnecessary hassle. Keep voting locations local to people to ensure voters feel able to easily vote.		
Pirton Village Hall, High Street SG5 3PS	It is very important that the vast majority of the electorate are within walking distance to a polling station.	It would be helpful to the working population to be able to vote at any polling station- so one local to where they work.	
Pirton Village Hall, High Street SG5 3PS	Currently village hall, side access is used as building is used for other purposes. The access is extremely difficult as there is a high step and nothing to hold on to. Impossible for wheelchair access. A ramp is needed.	See above. Or Pirton Methodist Church in High St which has disabled access	
Preston Village Hall	Polling station should stay in the Village Hall as it is central to the village and easy to access.	None	None

Radwell Village Hall	No change should be made. There are villagers who do not drive and thsi is ideal.	no	
Reed Village Hall	Our Polling Station is in Reed Village Hall and is very convenient for us and I would think for most people in the village. There is no need to change the location of this Polling Station.		
Royston & District Museum & Art Gallery	My local polling station is perfectly fine.	No	None
Royston & District Museum & Art Gallery	Polling location should not change it is very convenient in the museum.	No	No
Royston & District Museum & Art Gallery	The polling station at the Royston Museum was no good for me. There was nowhere to park. If you have mobility issues such as arthritis you cannot vote.	The Royston Golf Club or Tannery Drift, school were good locations.	

Royston & District Museum & Art Gallery	<p>The polling station locations look fine and are OK for us as we can walk to them and don't need parking (Royston Museum has no parking). I think more people vote if they can park easily at the polling station, it means they can vote quickly and easily on their way to or from work. I'm not sure how suitable the Royston Museum site is for disabled people, as there is no parking, but all the disabled people I know use their postal vote, so it's not an issue but this will not be everyone's preference. The area also gets quite congested at certain times, e.g. rush hours and peak takeaway collection times. The Town Hall might be a better location and there is plenty of room to accommodate more than one ward.</p>		
Royston & District Museum & Art Gallery,	<p>Don't use schools! Another day of children's education lost. Use community centres porta cabins anything else. It's one short 10 minute inconvenience for the voter but a whole day lost of education for the child.</p>	See above	
Royston Leisure Centre	<p>The Royston polling stations work well, and are within 10 minutes of all houses in the town. No need for change.</p>	None needed	Please leave well alone: 'If it ain't broke, don't fix it'!
Royston Leisure Centre	<p>The Royston Polling stations work well. None is further than 15 minutes walk from a home, and if a car is needed, then the Town Hall has adequate parking for that ward, and so has Coombes Community Centre for that ward. Meridian Ward may have a few problems at Icknield Walk School, but they are not insurmountable.</p>		Leave well alone!

Royston Leisure Centre	Current arrangements perfectly satisfactory for me	Secure cycle parking	
Royston Leisure Centre	i liketo beable to vote in person , to access the leisure centre by car i travel in excess of 1 and a half miles just to get there. Almost 3 miles round trip to get to a property which is approx imately 300 yards away, I travel by car as my wife is unable to walk the distance. the walking distance by footpath in excess of half a mile.	revert to local school which can be accessed by bus	
Royston Leisure Centre, Woodcock Road	Happy with the Leisure Centre Royston to serve the Twigden Estate and surrounding houses.		
Royston Leisure Centre, Woodcock Road	The Royston Leisure Centre is our polling station and is perfect for the job. No changes needed.		
Royston Town Hall	I'm very happy voting in Royston Town Hall. It's convenient, with easy parking and a pleasant indoor atmosphere. No changes required.	Nothing. It's fine as it is.	No other comment.
Rushden Villajge Hall	Please keep the existing polling station in Rushden village hall We can walk to it and do not need to be driven	No it is fine as it is	our polling station has good parking so if we had to be driven it is just a step away from the door
St Andrew Catholic Church Hall	Our Lady Immaculate and St Andrew Catholic Church Hall - I believe the church can afford to install a ramp It needs a ramp installed on the steps leading into the main hall. The only way in for wheelchair users is the fire exit at the back - which isn't ideal as it needs to remain closed.	which can be used all year round.	
St Faiths Community Centre	Please keep St Faith church as it is our community centre and convenient for all village to walk to with a few spaces for disabled to park	Better heating in winter	I doubt if many villagers would bother to travel to another village
St George`s Church	No change necessary for me.		

St George`s Church	The polling station location has changed a couple of times over the past few years, (Grange community Centre, Northfields Primary School, St Georges church / Clulow room) but all them have been fine, easy to find, park and access.	none	none
St Ippolyts Parish Hall	<p>No. I can access St Ippolyts parish hall easily to vote. ST John would be harder.</p> <p>Also people would have to drive rather than walk to polling station.</p> <p>Please keep st Ippolyts parish hall as polling station.</p>	None needed	No change needed
St Ippolyts Parish Hall	<p>I hope St Ippolyts village Hall remains as our polling station as it is walkable.</p> <p>St John's is much further away & involves crossing the very busy Stevenage Road,so not a safe option.</p>	Don't change something that works well for the electorate	See answer to 6 above
St Ippolyts Parish Hall	I don't think the polling station in st Ippolyts should change as this will deter people from voting, especially those older members of the community	Keep st ipps polling station	
St Ippolyts Parish Hall	I do not want my polling station to change. I am very happy voting at St Ippolyts Hall. I do not understand why it is being proposed that we should vote outside of the Parish	No change is needed	I would have like to be contacted to let me know that it was proposed that my polling station should change.
St Ippolyts Parish Hall	I'm happy with my local polling station it's disabled friendly and all the helpers are polite and courteous.	None	

St Ippolyts Parish Hall	I would urge the council to keep the voting station for St Ippolyts North at the Parish Hall and not St Michaels Community Centre. Whilst acknowledging this part of St Ippolyts Parish is continuous with Hitchin it is part of St Ippolyts, not Hitchin and voting within the Parish reinforces this. The Parish Hall has two rooms so voting could be done separately from St Ippolyts South if needed. Thank you.	Please see above	
St Ippolyts Parish Hall	Hitchin Priory Ward - St Ippolyts North FLB consider voting should remain at St Ippolyts Parish Hall along with St Ippolyts South FLA. Reason: both are within St Ippolyts civil parish. There are elections in 2024 for parish and district etc. Accessibility to St John's community centre by bus, bike, foot, mobility scooter or wheel chair is more difficult also crossing the Three Moorhens roundabout.	None	No
St Ippolyts Parish Hall	I am happy with my local polling station . review of changes it seems locations are accessible to the population	0	0
St Ippolyts Parish Hall	I'm happy with St Ippolyts village Hall as my local polling station. I believe polling stations should be as near as possible & accessible for voters to encourage everyone to vote.	Keep them as local as possible.	

St Ippolyts Parish Hall	We presently vote at St Ippolyts Parish Hall, which I prefer to St John's community centre. This is because it is both easier to walk to and drive to St Ippolyts Hall. Driving to St John's Community Centre means making a nasty right turn across Hitchin Hill into St John's Road. If walking it is very difficult to cross the Stevenage Road at The Three Moorhens roundabout.		
St Johns Community Centre	Happy with my polling station	Not to my station	None
St Johns Community Centre	My polling station currently is very convenient		
St Michaels Community Centre	Our one in the community centre is absolutely fine as it is, None no change needed		None
St Michaels Community Centre	St Michael's Mount Community Centre is fine for me.	Not for my use	
St Michaels Community Centre	I think polling stations should be in towns and villages with easy access even in university's and colleges	free bus for the elderly or disabled	make it a welcoming atmosphere and more postal votes
St Thomas of Canterbury	My closest polling station is at the end of the road and is a perfect location. Sometimes your not sure if you should go in due to the doors of the church not being open. But that's not an issue, you can just check.	Be good to be able to do online voting, just in case you can't make it home in time from work.	The staff are always helpful
St Thomas of Canterbury	No, location is fine	I recall that the candidates stand just inside the room doorway and this can be disconcerting	Monitoring of number of voters turned away because they lack suitable ID.
St Thomas of Canterbury	Our polling station (St Thomas Church, Bedford Road) has worked very successfully up until now. It is easily accessible, was wheelchair access and sufficient parking at rear or in adjacent roads.		

St Thomas of Canterbury	Our polling station in Bedford Rd is ideal for pedestrians but not great for anyone who needs a parking space as Bedford Rd is very busy and a main road. Good way to control the environment though. Less air pollution from cars and other forms of transport	No	No
Studlands Rise First School	I am happy with the current number and location of polling stations in Royston		
Studlands Rise First School	My polling station is a 5 minute walk away. Providing it stays in the same place. Studlands Rise School		No
Studlands Rise school	We are satisfied with the current arrangement at Studlands Rise school as it is close to our home and we are able to park next to the school.		
Tapps Garden Centre	The changes appear to make sense to me.		
Tapps Garden Centre	Changing the Location of Polling Stations to a local school, or main building ie Community Centre?	Have you thought of changing the Polling Station for Clothall Common to either Tapps Garden Centre, or one of the schools?	No

Tapps Garden Centre	<p>Historically and typically schools, community centres and villages halls have been the nominated location. Perhaps church halls could be added if not already. Appreciate more locations means more staff resources, its a balance between keeping what we have verses taking away or adding too the locations available, this all impacts on visitors numbers. Whilst in the main these locations are reachable by the vast majority of the population, primarily because the residents in the vicinity frequent these facilities, perhaps its more a case of can we ie NHDC do more to assist those who can't reach this locations ie rather than expecting the public to make their own way we could suggest car sharing, as this would benefit both more people getting to the polling station who can't and it would cut down on the number of vehicles entering a location. Liaising perhaps with the taxi companies to see if they would be willing to provide a 'shuttle service' in a given area, same with any community bus ie Baldock Community Bus, Lynx Bus services or if any of the blue light services could provide the same. All of these have the added advantage for residents to make use of these transport services to keep our local towns vibrant.</p>	<p>Ensuring the venues are accessible for the public needs. Greater publicity, so the public can decide how they can ensure their vote counts, encouraging postal votes, perhaps identifying those that can vote but may not for a variety of reasons ie housebound. The list could be endless</p>	<p>Decide what we the authority can do that makes a difference to the public needs.</p>
Tapps Garden Centre	<p>If it's not broke don't try to fix it - voting facilities in Baldock have sufficed well for those that vote (except for bad weather which is obvious) for decades. They have been on ground level , well directed etc etc . If people don't vote then it's their choice and an entirely different matter.</p>	<p>What Baldock has currently is adequate for purpose of voting - of course improvements can be made , carpet at entry , coffee after voting etc</p>	<p>To have a consultation on this subject looks extremely bad on Local Authorities and their capabilities. Every 5 years ? It simply a matter of discussion in house that should with the brains available to make any decision required for improvement.</p>

Tapps Garden Centre	The polling station that myself and my wife use is very convenient and only a 10 minute walk	No	I think postal voting should be abolished and replaced with a strict proxy voting system
Tapps Garden Centre	Happy with the Polling station in my ward.		
Tapps Garden Centre	As long as the polling station remains in Baldock and has parking whilst voting - ok - As we have "postal votes" will the latter apply to local elections as well as "national election"	So far never had any problem voting - if it's not broke don't try to fix or change what's worked for the past 50 years of my voting experience's.	
Tapps Garden Centre, Wallington Road	Community centre in Baldock is perfectly good		
The Annex at Garden City Academy	I am happy using the Jackmans nursery school	I am not happy about the people sitting outside the polling station wanting our details. I think this should be discontinued	
The Annex at Garden City Academy	The polling station is very convenient for me and is very accessible. The staff have always been very friendly and polite.	The classroom they use at Radburn junior school Allison could be a bit larger, because of cueing	
The Cloisters	Great polling station at the Cloisters.		
The Cloisters	Do not close schools.	Sports hall	
The Cloisters	OK with current location and layout.	None	
The Cloisters	Locally i would suggest that the Polling Stations are adequate and meet needs of local population - moving Polling Station at Lordship School would be an inconvenience to many.	This questions suggests that decisions have already been taken and this poll is pointless	

The Cloisters	In my opinion Polling Stations are in right place locally currently .		why not engage with technology and use lottery card that could be processed at local supermarket when doing local shop.
The Cloisters	works fine at moment	no	no
The Cloisters	Happy with current locations	No	No
The Cloisters	Polling Station covering Letchworth South East ward should be moved back to Lordship Farm School	Polling Station covering Letchworth South East ward should be moved back to Lordship Farm School	Lordship Form School has ample and easily accessible facilities, unlike The Priory where the station is hidden around the back of the building.
The Cloisters	I am content with Letchowrth SE and SW		Thanks for previous discussions especially regarding Willian.
The Memorial Hall	Polling Station in The Memorial Hall, Kimpton is fine		I have a postal vote so largely irrelevant
The Old Forge	The polling station in Upper Bygrave is great. It's within walking distance for anyone living in Upper or Lower Bygrave. There is parking available outside for people with limited mobility.	No	No
Walsworth Community Centre	Polling should be within a reasonable walking distance for people who live in a town or village	It can be a bit confusing or intimidating when entering a polling station for the first time. People should be asked if the need an explation of how things work	Where possible, polling stations should be near a public transport route and with parking for cars
Walsworth Community Centre	I vote at Walsworth community centre and that is entirely suitable. I do wonder, however, why such a small district requires 51 councillors. What do they all do? Apart, of course, from collecting their allowances. A district council has very few powers so we don't need so many.	Fewer councillors	And they could be efficient and even answer emails. Now there's a novel idea.

Walsworth Community Centre, 88 Woolgrove Road SG4 0AU	Happy with the arrangements as they are	No	No
Westmill Community Centre	I have looked at the proposed changes in ward boundaries, but cannot find any information as to where it is proposed to put the Polling Stations. This is important to me, as I am not very mobile! I evidently live in Oughton Ward, just off the Bedford Road, so where would I vote?		
Westmill Community Centre	Polling station should stay the same		
Westmill Community Centre	I am content with the venues recently used for my polling station.	O	No
Westmill Community Centre	Current polling station is too far to walk [Westmill Community Centre, Rear of John Barker Place, SG5 2PG] - I have no transport.	The Zeo Centre, Bedford Road, SG5 1HF [as proposal] would be a good improvement and easy to walk too.	The proposal of local elections only every four years, it a lot better than every year, maybe.
Westmill Community Centre, Rear of John Barker Place SG5 2PG	I can only comment on the Polling stations I have voted at - and the ones I have "worked" at as a volunteer Poll Clerk. All that I have been at were OK re location and accessibility. There's always niggles of some kind, and sometimes the actual polling booths leave a lot to be desired - even the newest design of plastic 4 station folding booths. But on location and accessibility - they are acceptable.	Short of custom designed facilities (which is clearly not financially viable) not really.	None

Weston Village Hall	I have no issues at all with the polling arrangements for Weston. From my point of view they have always worked well.		
Weston Village Hall	Adequate and satisfactory.	None	No
Whitehill J.M. School	Our polling station is in my child's school, which has to close for each election. (Whitehill Junior School, Hitchin). Please reconsider this and find a polling place that is not a school.	No schools should need to close for elections to take place.	
Whitehill J.M. School	Stop using schools. There are many other suitable buildings available without disrupting childrens education.	Use buildings like community halls.	
Whitehill J.M. School	Yes - please stop using schools. The additional closures are so disruptive to the children. Better use of the community centres could be achieved.	Perhaps use bigger venues e.g. town hall and leisure centres rather than closing primary schools.	I'm sure there could be a way to use technology to help streamline this e.g. booking slots etc
Whitehill J.M. School	For the past few years, we have voted at Whitehill Junior School, Hitchin. Previously we voted at St. Andrews School which was more convenient but, frankly, the difference is not great. We have no access problems.		
Whitehill J.M. School	WhiteHill School entails a walk up Hollow Lane which for a pensioner is not good	Polling station should be in British School	
Whitehill J.M. School	Do not change polling station in my ward, unless you can find a venue that is not A school which keeps children from their schooling	No	

Whitehill J.M. School	Schools should no longer be used as polling places. Children have lost a considerable amount of school time in recent years and any unnecessary closures to children must be avoided.	There are plenty of other community places that could be used. Also churches, pubs village halls etc. could be used.	
Whitehill J.M. School	Our Polling Station is only a 5 minute walk from our house, and is entirely to our satisfaction. Access is easy, there is plenty of room and it is easy to move around the building, with a separate entrance and exit. No need to change .	No, it's fine as it is.	On one occasion when the school could not be used, we went to the Chapel in St John's Road cemetery, which was also fine, no problems.
Whitehill J.M. School, Whitehill Road	As a parent it is incredibly frustrating that both Whitehill and Highbury schools have to close to be made available as polling stations		
Whitehill School	Whitehill School, Hitchin - current location - is accessible and has good facilities.		
Wymondley Baptist Church	Should not change. Perfect place noq	No	Don't move it
Wymondley Baptist Church	I am happy with the polling station locations in my ward.		
Zeo Centre	I have always voted at Zeo Church on Bedford Road. Once when this was not available I voted at Christchurch, Bedford Road. Both are convenient and accessible, particularly to residents of Maples Court and Archers Court.	None	None
	I'm happy with *my* current polling station location/arrangements.	N/A	N/A
	Is this one of your consultations where you pretend you care what I think.		
Great Ashby	The polling station is in a good location due to it being near the shops. It also has heavy footfall due to the bus stop and a school nearby.	No.	No.

For many years my wife and I have used postal votes.
We feel that the PV system that you have devised to
avoid fraud and to give convenience works well. At the
moment we do not know where our Polling Station is !
We consider voting is important.

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Thomas Marsh

From: Fiona Hill <Fiona.Hill@hertfordshire.gov.uk>
Sent: 29 October 2023 23:57
To: Thomas Marsh
Subject: Review of Polling Districts, Polling Places and Polling Stations

Dear Tom,

I hope all is well and thank you for notifying me of the Review of Polling Districts, Polling Places and Polling Stations. Please find some feedback below.

Regarding the current Polling Stations in Royston, I have received a few comments on the limited parking at the Royston and District Museum. Studlands Rise First School is in a hilly area, but there is parking available, so this does not seem to cause any real issues.

There have, in the past, been objections if schools have been closed when used for polling stations or if community venues have prevented regular clubs from taking place.

I have received no recent objections to any of the current polling stations in the Royston and Ermine Wards.

Kind regards,

Fiona

Fiona Hill
County Councillor for Royston East and Ermine

****Disclaimer****

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Thomas Marsh

From: Cllr Matt Barnes
Sent: 04 October 2023 21:30
To: Elections
Subject: Polling District Review

Categories: Tom

Hello,

Thank you for conducting this review – it seems like a daunting task! I have already provided some input which has been reflected, but do so now formally.

My comments relate to Royston only, specifically Heath and Meridian wards as I have no significant concerns about Palace which is anyway unchanged.

I should preface by stating that I think the new warding arrangements for Town are highly unsatisfactory – given the difficulty all political parties face with finding candidates to serve as volunteers in these roles, electors in single member wards are likely to be deprived of proper choice in future, rather than be better served in single member wards. It would be far better if the Town wards followed District boundaries and, if necessary to avoid a 6-member ward, to consider splitting Meridian into North and South - perhaps along Newmarket Road. I appreciate this is not the main purpose of this review, but it is clear the creation of the 3 single member wards create logistical and democratic challenges which are difficult to get around.

That aside, here are my comments on the current proposals:

Royston Heath

- DBB1 & DBB2: I think the number of electors is incorrect – both show 2740. I think this is the combined total. Could this be reviewed?
- DCA2 & DBA1: I support the introduction of the Evangelical Church if that can be arranged
- DBB2 & DBE: Could/should use the Museum alongside DBA2 if it is big enough. This would allow Market Hill Rooms to be used for Meridian only, which may reduce confusion/delivery complexity

Royston Meridian

- DAA2: No concerns - Royston Leisure Centre is an ideal location for this district
- DAA1: Royston Leisure Centre is not an ideal location for this district, particularly for those at the southern and eastern boundaries. Travel distance and geography discourages voting / favours car users. The Meridian Gate development in the east will make this problem worse. Alternative locations worth exploring include Icknield Walk First School (which is the ideal location), King James Academy Royston, the Girlguiding hut, or Royston Town Football Club
- DAB: Population is due to grow considerably with a large development in the local plan at the eastern edge. This will add pressure to the Studlands Rise school site which is otherwise fine, although a little far from Priory Lane for which Market Hill Rooms would be considerably more convenient. If the Town ward boundaries are amended to amalgamate the South ward, moving Priory Lane and Priory Close to DBB1 ought to be considered.
- DBB1: No concerns

Personal details as per register of interests.

Thanks again for your hard work on this. Please acknowledge receipt.

Kind regards,
Matt

Cllr. Matt Barnes

Royston Meridian ward – North Herts Council



Thomas Marsh

From: Carina Helmn <Clerk@kimptonpc.org.uk>
Sent: 03 October 2023 11:30
To: Elections
Subject: Election Polling Stations

Categories: Tom

Dear Tom

In reply to your email, Kimpton Memorial Hall is the correct central location in Kimpton for the Election Station.

With kind regards

Carina Helmn

Clerk to Kimpton Parish Council

Serving the communities of Kimpton, Peter's Green and Blackmore End

www.kimptonpc.org.uk
[Privacy Notice](#)

Parish Room, Kimpton Memorial Hall, Hall Lane, Kimpton, Herts, SG4 8RD



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Thomas Marsh

From: clerk@stippolyts-pc.gov.uk
Sent: 11 October 2023 15:36
To: Elections
Subject: Polling District Review

[REDACTED]

Dear Tom,

Thank you for informing St Ippolyts Parish Council 27th September by email of NHC current review of polling districts, places and stations and 3rd October of the formal consultation which ends 30th October.

It was agreed at the 9th October Parish Council meeting, St Ippolyts north Polling Place remain at St Ippolyts Parish Hall in line with the Polling Place for St Ippolyts south. Any proposals for St Ippolyts north to use St John's Community Centre incur difficulties in accessibility by foot, bus and bike, crossing three moorhens roundabout and a larger distance for some in St Ippolyts north.

St Ippolyts Parish Hall has good access for the parish and there is greater consistency having both wards at one site.

Regards

[REDACTED]
St Ippolyts Parish Clerk
clerk@stippolyts-pc.gov.uk

Please note my working hours are: Monday 9am-3pm, Tuesday 12pm-3pm and Wednesday 9am-3pm

Response to consultation on
Polling Districts, Polling Places and Polling Stations in North Hertfordshire
(October 2023)

I am responding to the above consultation in a personal capacity (as a resident of Hitchin who has lived in the town for over 30 years). My response does not necessarily reflect the views of any political party or other organisation with which I am associated.

I have focused my attention on Hitchin, the area with which I am most familiar. However, I also would like to make a suggestion for considering combining some smaller polling places in order to reduce costs for the council and therefore support it in providing other services to residents.

I note that the consultation document has changed since the consultation was launched. In case it changes again, these comments are based on the proposals in the version dated 16 October 2023.

I note that all responses will be made public. I am happy for my name to be published if you wish to do so, but would request that my e-mail address and other contact details are not published unless you are required to do so by law.

I have numbered my points.

Hitchin Bearton

(1) I disagree with the proposal for the proposed polling place for **H-HBE-1 (Hitchin Bearton 1)**. Currently voters in this polling district vote at the Walsworth Community Centre (which is proposed still to be used as a polling place for H-HWA-1 (Hitchin Walsworth 1)). Even though the Walsworth Community Centre is not in Hitchin Bearton ward, it is much closer to H-HBE-1 polling district than the proposed new polling place (Hitchin Rugby Clubhouse), especially for voters who walk. In my view, if a suitable polling place cannot be found within H-HBE-1 itself (which would be best) then the polling place should remain as Walsworth Community Centre, as moving it more than double the distance away could deter voting in this area.

For additional context, I would note that although H-HBE-1 covers quite a large geographical area, a lot of it is industrial (or unpopulated) and most of the residences are close to the crossroads, which is not far from Walsworth Community Centre.

(2) For **H-HBE-5 (Hitchin Bearton 5)** the proposal of Bancroft Bowling Green seems satisfactory. However, if (and only if) you end up using Benslow Music Trust for H-HHI-1 (Hitchin Highbury 1) then I would suggest considering splitting H-HBE-5 into two polling districts. One would be Benslow Lane, Benslow Rise and Ibberson Way. The other would be the remaining roads (including Trevor Road and the south side of Walsworth Road). This would enable residents in the former to use the Benslow Music Trust as a polling place, which would be more convenient for most of them, and would mitigate the potential congestion problem I mention in point (3) below.

Hitchin Highbury

(3) For **H-HHI-1 (Hitchin Highbury 1)** the recommendation is to use the Benslow Music Trust. I note that there are several footpath options connecting this area with the higher part of Benslow Lane so the Benslow Music Trust is (in my view) easily accessible on foot. However, my view is that it is unsuitable for voters who travel there by car. The reason for this is that Benslow Lane cannot accommodate two-way traffic near the bottom because of the on-road parking; consequently locating the polling place there risks creating congestion (not only in Benslow Lane, but potentially also Highbury Road, Walsworth Road and Verulam Road) at peak times on polling day. This leads me to prefer Whitehill Junior School as the polling place for both polling districts in this ward.

Hitchin Oughton

(4) It is proposed that **H-HON-2 (Hitchin Oughton 2)** will have a polling place of the Zeo Centre. While this is a sensible location, the overall proposals appear to envisage that the Zeo Centre would only serve this (fairly small) polling district and nowhere else. This seems inefficient (as it would increase election staffing requirements and costs). I suggest consideration be given to using the Baptist Church Hall in Upper Tilehouse Street instead, given that is proposed to be used for Hitchin Priory ward.

I note that the consultation response suggests that other venues within the polling district itself are being considered. If a suitable venue could be found that was within the polling district and therefore an even shorter walk for most electors then I consider it might merit being a separate new polling place for that district.

Hitchin Priory

(5) I note that for **H-HPR-4 (Hitchin Priory 4)** two options are presented. I do not live near this area, so am not familiar with all the footpaths, but looking at a map, it appears that it would be much easier (and more pleasant) to walk to St Ippolyts Parish Hall than to St Johns Community Centre. I would expect that drivers would probably also prefer this as it would avoid the (at times) busy A602 roundabout. My advice, to aim to improve turnout, would be to select St Ippolyts Parish Hall.

Hitchin Walsworth

(6) I oppose the proposed relocation of Chaucer Way into **H-HWA-3 (Hitchin Walsworth 3)** from **H-HWA-2 (Hitchin Walsworth 2)**. If every voter were a pedestrian then I would strongly support it. However, many voters drive and there is no shortcut for vehicles: it is much further to drive to St Michaels Mount Community Centre (and will not be a pleasant drive during peak hours given the need to travel along the congested Cambridge Road).

(7) I understand that at present the new Hurlocke Fields development (on the North Herts College site, off St Michaels Road), which includes new roads such as (this may not be an exhaustive list) Chapman Way, Springfield Lane and Brockett Drive,

is allocated to polling district BDB, which is going to become H-HWA-2 (Hitchin Walsworth). In my view this development would be more appropriately allocated to **H-HWA-3 (Hitchin Walsworth 3)**, as the exit of this development is onto St Michaels Road so it is far easier to drive or walk to St Michaels Mount Community Centre than the New Testament Church of God. The map appears to suggest that these residences will be allocated to H-HWA-3, but it is not mentioned explicitly in the consultation documents, which is why I have proactively commented on it.

I would note that if you accept my view in (6) on moving Chaucer Way back into H-HWA-2 then you will need to take care where you redraw the boundary line to avoid inadvertently moving the new Hurlocke Fields development into H-HWA-2 as well. Please note that the Hurlocke Fields development is still under construction with many unoccupied properties, especially at the Chaucer Way end, but my comments hold both now and once all development is complete as I understand that there will not be a vehicular exit from the new development onto Chaucer Way.

Polling places for small numbers of electors

(8) In 2021, Bim Afolami MP published a letter he had written to North Hertfordshire Council advocating that the hamlet of Peters Green be given its own polling place (<https://www.bimafolami.co.uk/news/backing-local-petition-secure-polling-station-peters-green>). While in an ideal world we would all have polling places close to us, the Kimpton Parish Council website (<https://kimptonpc.org.uk/kimpton-village>) says that Peters Green has a population of 80; presumably the number of registered voters is nearer 60-70 or so. Of these some will already have postal votes and some will be non-voters. I would estimate only about 40 or so would cast votes in person for a general election (and about half that for a local election).

The costs of a polling place will include venue hire and staffing costs. With at least two election staff needing to be present from sometime before 7 am to sometime after 10 pm, I would expect the marginal cost of an additional polling place to be a minimum of £500 and I anticipate it would be nearer £750 after factoring in other staff support costs, staff training, and other expenses.

In my view Mr Afolami's suggestion did not take into account the wider interests of North Hertfordshire residents and, if implemented, would be a poor use of public funds given the financial pressures that councils are under (in part because of significant reductions in funding for councils from central government since 2010). There are probably very few voters in Peters Green who wish to vote and cannot drive (or be given a lift) to Kimpton Memorial Hall. Mr Afolami argued that the lack of a polling place in Peters Green left voters "unable to exercise their basic democratic right", but this ignores the fact that a postal voting option exists for any voter for whom voting in person is difficult.

Therefore, in case anyone mentions it in the response to the consultation, I would be opposed to the creation of an additional polling place in Peters Green in the Kimpton and Codicote ward.

(9) I have also looked at other wards and think there are some other instances where polling places could be combined for greater efficiency. I have considered the

number of electors (A) and distance in miles between the proposed polling place and the nearest alternative within the consultation proposal (B). I have considered each case where A multiplied by B is less than 300.

The following is the subset of these where the alternative seems sensible. The table shows the ward, the polling district, the electorate, the suggested change in polling place (which in each case is already part of the proposal for at least one other polling district) and the distance between the two polling places (as calculated using the AA route planner at www.theaa.com).

The value of A x B is a proxy for an inconvenience factor and the lower the value of A x B, the stronger the argument for any individual proposal. I have therefore listed them in increasing order of A x B.

Ward	Polling District	Electorate (A)	Consultation proposal	Alternative suggestion	Distance (miles) (B)	A x B
Letchworth Norton	N-LWN-4	261	Norton Common Bowls Club	St George's Hall	0.3	78
Ermine	N-ER-KEL	123	Kelshall Village Hall	Therfield Chapel	1.0	123
Graveley, St Ippolyts and Wymondley	H-GW-GTW	128	Great Wymondley Village Hall	Wymondley Baptist Church	1.1	141
Royston Heath	N-RHE-4	201	Market Hill Rooms	Royston & District Museum	0.7	141
Arbury	N-AR-RAD	114	Radwell Village Hall	Newnham Village Hall	1.6	182
Hitchwood	H-HD-KWA	178	Kings Walden Village Hall	Breachwood Green Village Hall	1.4	249
Letchworth South West	N-LWSW-4	162	William Village Hall	The Cloisters	1.6	259
Offa	H-OF-HEX	87	St Faith's Community Centre	Cassel Memorial Hall	3.3	287

If Royston Evangelical Church (one of the two options) is not used as the polling place for N-RHE-2 (Royston Heath 2) then the above table would be extended to include an alternative of using Royston & District Museum for N-RHE-1 (Royston Heath 1) so as to avoid needing to use Royston Evangelical Church at all:

Ward	Polling District	Electorate (A)	Consultation proposal	Alternative suggestion	Distance (miles) (B)	A x B
Royston Heath	N-RHE-1	143	Royston Evangelical Church	Royston & District Museum	1.0	143

Depending on whether the last row is included or not, between 1,250 and 1,400 electors could potentially be inconvenienced by this proposal. However, not all electors vote and some already have postal votes.

For any village that loses a polling place, electors without an existing postal vote could be sent a postal vote application form and a postage-paid return envelope.

This would give them the opportunity to avoid any travel costs from losing their polling place. I would support this initiative being extended to Peters Green and any other small settlement in the district that does not currently have a polling place within the settlement and where it is not proposed to provide one.

Even allowing for a likely higher postal vote take-up in these polling districts, I anticipate the council would save a few thousand pounds per election by adopting this proposal.

I confess I am not familiar with any of my suggested alternative venues and have only inspected them externally using Google Maps. It might be the case that some could not accommodate the additional traffic / parking, although from my inspection I do not expect that to be the case. Perhaps also the cost saving would not be as high as I have estimated if additional staff would be needed at the alternative polling place to accommodate the higher numbers. Possibly there is not enough space to administer the additional polling district in some. However, I would recommend that council officers consider whether my proposed alternatives are feasible for some or all of the polling places listed and, if so, present it along with the cost saving to councillors (or whoever will be taking the decision) as an alternative option.

Giles Woodruff
25 October 2023

Daneshill House, Danestrete, Stevenage SG1 1HN • Tel: 01438 242242 • Textphone: 01438 242555 • Fax: 01438 242566 • stevenage.gov.uk

Melanie Stimpson
North Herts District Council
Gernon Road
Letchworth Garden City
SG6 3JF

Your ref:
Our ref: MP/LF
Contact: Luke Fattorusso
Direct Dial: 01438 242174
Email: luke.fattorusso@stevenage.gov.uk

26 October 2023

Dear Melanie,

REVIEW OF PARLIAMENTARY POLLING DISTRICTS AND POLLING PLACES
NORTH HERTS DISTRICT COUNCIL

As Acting Returning Officer for the Stevenage Constituency, I fully support the allocation of Parliamentary Polling Districts as outlined in the draft proposals within the Stevenage Constituency.

I also fully endorse the allocation of Polling Places for those Polling Districts within the Stevenage Constituency as outlined in the draft proposals.

Yours sincerely,



Matt Partridge
Acting Returning Officer
Stevenage Constituency

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COUNCIL
23 November 2023

***PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT**

TITLE OF REPORT: CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT REPORT

REPORT OF: THE SERVICE DIRECTOR LEGAL AND COMMUNITY & MONITORING OFFICER

EXECUTIVE MEMBER: THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL: COUNCILLOR ELIZABETH DENNIS

COUNCIL PRIORITY: **People First**

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 Further to the report in July 2023, this report covers proposed:
- changes to section 8 Planning Control Committee's Terms of Reference:
 - removal of Appendices 1-2 to Section 8, with these to be incorporated in a new Procedure document (**Appendix A**), with the aim of addressing issues that have arisen during the last year.
 - minor change to section 14 delegations for some Service Directors – regarding attestation of the Common seal.
 - Noting some minor changes to the Area Forums Terms of Reference (**Appendix B**) to include more specific language relating to Strategic Planning.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

That Full Council:

- 2.1. Approves the proposed amendments to the Planning Control Committee's Terms of Reference as per 8.1 of this report.
- 2.2. Approves the removal of Appendices 1-2 to Section 8 of the Constitution;
- [If recommendation 2.2 approved, 2.3-2.4]*
- 2.3. Notes the proposed Procedure for Speaking at the Planning Control Committee (**Appendix A**);
- 2.4. *Agrees to the principle, that if the Procedure at 2.2 requires further amendment, that the Monitoring Officer may do so in consultation with the Chair and Vice Chair of Planning Control Committee, and the Group Leaders.*
- 2.5. Approves the amendments detailed in 8.7 regarding delegations to attest the affixing of the Council's Common seal.
- 2.6. Notes that the Area Forum Terms have been updated as per **Appendix B**, as agreed with the Leader¹.

¹ See 8.8 of this report

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1. Recommendations 2.1-2.3 are to deal with a number of situations that have arisen over the last year (or so). Recommendation 2.3-2.4 allows for greater flexibility to update a Council Procedure, rather than making this a Constitutional matter, when amendments are required. Recommendation 2.5 is for practical resource reasons for attesting/ sealing documents.
- 3.2. Recommendation 2.6 brings this to the attention of Full Council; the text amendments are to bring the definitions in line with the adopted Local Plan and accompanying procedural guidance approved by the Project Board.

4. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 4.1. None proposed, other than, in respect of Appendices 1-2 to Section 8 of the Constitution, that these could remain a Constitutional document. However, this makes, what is a procedure for engagement, inflexible.

5. CONSULTATION WITH RELEVANT MEMBERS AND EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS

- 5.1. The Chair, Vice Chair of Planning Control Committee, Executive Member for Planning (and a Group Leader), and Leader, Opposition Group Leader were consulted, on all the proposed changes prior to the Appendices A-B to this report being finalised.
- 5.2. The Leader also agreed the amendments to the Area Forums Terms of Reference at Appendix B.

6. FORWARD PLAN

- 6.1 This report does not contain a recommendation on a key Executive decision and has therefore not been referred to in the Forward Plan.

7. BACKGROUND

Recommendations 2.1-2.4

- 7.1 The review of arrangements, follows issues that have arisen regarding public and Member engagement / speaking at Planning Control Committee, summarised as:
- Which Members can request Planning Control Committee to determine an application ('call-in'/ 'called-in') an application;
 - Who can then speak if they do so/ priority of those allowed to speak, if the Member has called in an application e.g., if they are a Ward Member/ are not a Ward Member;
 - Having to register to speak if you have successfully called in the application;
 - Not having a set 'protected' slot for the applicant/ agent;
 - Who can represent the community as Ward Advocate – if a Ward Member has an interest;
 - Exercising a Councillor Speaking Right if a Member has an interests/ and conflict between different Codes in the Constitution;
 - Those on Committee who have potentially predetermined the matter/ have the appearance of bias;
 - Inconsistencies in the Code of Conduct/ Planning Code and the Appendices to section 8.

Recommendation 2.5

- 7.2 Currently the position is that the Managing Director, Service Director Resources, Service Director Legal & Community, and qualified lawyers can attest (sign) a document that has been sealed.

Recommendation 2.6 Area Forums

- 7.3 Full Council approved the change of Area Committees, to Area Forums at its meeting on 18 April with effect from the new municipal year May 2023.
- 7.4 The Area Forums are informal decision-making bodies and as noted at the time of the approved changes (and as per section 9 to the Constitution), those Terms of Reference may be amended by the Leader, Executive or Officer in consultation with the Executive.

8. RELEVANT CONSIDERATIONS

Recommendations 2.1

- 8.1. The proposed change to the Planning Control Committee's Term of Reference at 8.4.5 (c)(iii) are as follows:

- (iii) within three (3) weeks of the matter appearing in the weekly lists of applications a Ward Member¹⁹ requests in writing the matter to be determined by the Committee:
- 1 detailing the reasons, which in the opinion of the Development Conservation Manager and the Chair of the Planning Control Committee are based upon one or more valid material planning considerations;
and
 - 2 detailing the reasons that the matter is in the wider public interest.

Where a Ward Member makes such a request they should attend the relevant Committee meeting to present their reasons/grounds to the Committee. If they are unable to attend the relevant Committee meeting the Member must arrange for another member to present on their behalf or provide a written statement presenting their reasons/grounds, otherwise the item may be deferred.

- (d) applications submitted by the Council for its own development other than those for which no objection has been received;
- (e) the granting of orders to revoke or modify planning permissions where compensation may be payable;
- (f) the granting of certificates of alternative development;
- (g) any application made by an elected member of the Council;
- (h) any application made by an employee of the Council where applications are other than for householder development;
- (i) any application for householder²⁰ development made by an employee of the Planning and Building Control Service or Chief Officer²¹;
- (j) to receive updates on Planning Appeals lodged and Appeal Decisions made;
- (k) to receive quarterly updates on planning enforcement matters;
- (l) to consider whether to confirm tree preservation orders to which objections have been received.

¹⁹ Ward Member with an Other Registrable, or non-Registrable Interest and/or Disclosable Pecuniary Interest must not be involved in the request to referral to Committee. In a single Member Ward, another District Councillor can request referral.

²⁰ A Ward Member with an Other Registrable, or non-Registrable Interest, and/or Disclosable Pecuniary Interest must not be involved in the request to referral. In a single Member Ward, another District Councillor can request referral.

- 8.2. The proposed changes would mean:
- that a request for the Planning Control Committee to determine certain applications ('call-in') would fall to Ward Members for the particular ward in which the application was sited. If that is a *single ward*, and the Member has an interest, or sits on the and cannot therefore call-in, then another nominated Member can do so.
 - that the Development Control Manager (as opposed to Service Director) and the Chair of the Committee, determines whether a call-in is valid.
 - footnote clarifications to all relevant Councillor interests under the Code of Conduct and the ability to call-in, if such interests arise [note an alternative nominated Member may do so].

Recommendation 2.2

- 8.3. The Procedure for speaking at the Planning Committee appended at A to this report, is based upon Appendices 1-2 to section 8 to the Constitution. However it has been updated to an amalgamated version for the public and non-Members of the Committee. It is drafted on the basis that Ward Member(s) call-in; the first Ward Member does not then have to register to vote and there is a priority agreed allocation scheme for other Members to potentially do so (with the agreement of the Chair). There is a speaking slot for the applicant/ agent (if they register to speak), which provides additional protection for the Council, as currently if there are supporters, then *potentially* the applicant/ agent must seek their agreement to speak on their own application, if they are not the first to register.
- 8.4. The Procedure at Appendix A has (as stated in 5.1) been considered by relevant senior Members, and will (subject to comments from Council), be the version used for future Planning Control Committees. However, Full Council believe that some further amendments to Appendix A are required, then subject to reasoned comments, can be finalised post Council by the Monitoring Officer, in consultation with those set out under recommendation 2.4.

Recommendation 2.5

- 8.5. The proposal is to add to all Service Directors' delegations, that they can attest the Council's Common Seal under section 14 (a) of their functions (subject to following the normal authorisation procedures in place).

Recommendation 2.6

- 8.6. The amendments to the Area Forums Terms of Reference, are to bring the definitions in line with the adopted Local Plan and accompanying procedural guidance approved by the Project Board. In terms of what this means for consultation at Area Forums, Members should note that SP9 is wider than the previous Area Forums provisions under section 9.7.6, so it is possible that more will come to Area Forums for questions and comments (i.e. exceptionally, developments below 100 dwellings may be considered significant, if there are specific complexities and sensitivities and they will also come to the Area Forums).

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

General

- 9.1. Full Council's terms of reference include "approving or adopting the Policy Framework". The Policy Framework includes the Constitution.
- 9.2. Section 37 Local Government Act 2000 requires the Council to have in place a Constitution and to keep that under review. The Local Government Act 2000 section 9P sets out the requirements of a local authority's Constitution, including the requirements to prepare it and keep it up to date and the requirement to make it available for public inspection.

10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 None identified in relation to the report.

11. RISK IMPLICATIONS

- 11.1. Good Risk Management supports and enhances the decision-making process, increasing the likelihood of the Council meeting its objectives and enabling it to respond quickly and effectively to change. When taking decisions, risks and opportunities must be considered.
- 11.2 Ensuring the Council has appropriate governance arrangements in place is an important risk mitigation measure. The Council's Constitution is a fundamental part of those governance arrangements.

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. Otherwise, no specific equality issues identified.

13. SOCIAL VALUE IMPLICATIONS

- 13.1 The Social Value Act and "go local" requirements do not apply to this decision as this is not a procurement exercise or contract.

14. HUMAN RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 14.1 None identified.

15. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

- 15.1 None identified in respect of the specific amendments proposed.

16. APPENDICES

- 16.1 Appendix A – Procedure for Speaking at the Planning Control Committee
- 16.2 Appendix B – Area Forums Terms of Reference (showing changes approved as tracked changes).

17. CONTACT OFFICERS

Author:

- 17.1. Jeanette Thompson, Service Director Legal and Community, Monitoring Officer, email jeanette.thompson@north-herts.gov.uk;

18. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 17.1 Constitution see webpage <https://www.north-herts.gov.uk/council-constitution>

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Procedure for Speaking at the Planning Control Committee

1. Scope of scheme – general

- 1.1. This scheme covers the public (which includes the applicant/ agent), and generally non-Members of the Planning Control Committee (the “Committee”), who are District Councillors, and their right to speak at the Committee. It does not cover Members of the Committee, *other than* those, who have successfully requested that the application be determined by the Committee (“**call-in**” or “**called-in**”) and / or are acting as the Ward Advocate¹, or nominating someone to act as Ward Advocate, and do not then sit on the Committee that determines the application. It does not cover Officers (Council/ or e.g. Highways Officers).
- 1.2. Only those members of the public and Members of Council, who are *required to register*/ have permission or agreed to share speaking time on a planning application at the Planning Control Committee (‘Committee’) meeting (please see 2 below), can do so.
- 1.3. The scheme applies to applications, made under the Town and Country Planning, Listed Building and Conservation Area Acts and related legislation, which are the subject of a written report to a particular Committee meeting, and not to those applications which are determined under officer delegation.
- 1.4. Anyone addressing the Committee will need to have made written representations during the consultation and base your comments on issues which are **material planning considerations** relevant to the application. There is no set list, although some examples of material planning considerations may include:
 - design, appearance, and materials
 - environmental impact of the development
 - any policy in the Council’s Local Development Framework / relevant Local Plan
 - any policy in an applicable Neighbourhood Plan
 - Government planning policy guidance, circulars, orders and statutory instruments.

Issues that cannot be considered by the Committee:

Boundary disputes, private rights of way, private covenants or agreements, the applicant’s conduct, private affairs or how a business is run, the applicant’s motives (including profit), the impact on property values, suspected further development, loss of views over other people’s land or land ownership.

- 1.5. The scheme speakers are divided into “group(s)”:
 - **Objectors** – against approval of the application, the speaking time will be allocated on a first-come-first-served basis, and the right to address the Committee is confined to persons who have previously made written representations on the application (either as an individual or as part of a consulted group during the consultation).
 - **Ward Member** - who called-in the application (under section 8.4.5(c)(iii) of the Constitution), and Objector: Ward Advocate/ other Member, who is able to register and speak under 6.2 below.
 - **Supporters** – in favour of approval of the application and the right to address the Committee is confined to persons who have previously made written representations on the application (either as an individual or as part of a consulted groups during the consultation).
 - **Ward Member/ Ward Advocate/ Member** – Supporter(s) who are able to register and speak under 6.2 below.
 - **Applicant/ Agent or Representative** - for the planning application.

¹ See Constitution definition section 2.2

Procedure for Speaking at the Planning Control Committee

- 1.6. In all cases, where more than one person has registered to speak within a group, it is strongly recommended that one individual is nominated to address the Committee to make effective use of the allocated time. However, no more than two people may speak as a group on an application.
- 1.7. The time allocated to each group of speakers is 5 minutes. This time limit is strictly adhered to.
- 1.8. In the case of a Major application² or being of significant public interest, the Chair may agree to extend the speaking time allocated to each “group” to a maximum of 10 minutes. *Any request to extend the speaking time **should be made to the Chair in writing by 5pm, three clear working days prior to the meeting date.*** The Committee, Member & Scrutiny Team will be advised/ and then advise all registered speakers of the extension.
- 1.9. The Committee, Member and Scrutiny Team should receive a copy of the speaker’s verbal presentation, no later than **12 noon, the day of the meeting.** *Failure to provide a copy within this time may prevent participation at the meeting.*
- 1.10. Please note, any speech should be about the planning application – not about the applicant, agent, officers or Members. When speaking, it should be respectful and in a civil manner. The Council will not allow any inappropriate (discriminatory, offensive, or defamatory) comments about any party. Those engaging in the above, will be instructed to cease by the Chair. The Chair also has discretion to suspend a meeting for the purpose of maintaining order.
- 1.11. Persons addressing the Committee should not expect questions to be answered by the Chair, Members or Officers (unless 1.13 below applies).
- 1.12. Points of clarification may be asked by Members of the Committee, which relate to points raised during the public / Member presentation.
- 1.13. Any queries regarding the content of the Officer’s report should be raised by the public or non-Members of the Committee, in advance of the meeting with the Planning Officer directly by no later than midday of the meeting, so a suitable response can be provided at the meeting, if appropriate, in material planning terms.
- 1.14. Those under 1.2 above, wishing to speak at a meeting will be required to attend in person at the Council Chamber, District Council Offices, Gernon Road, Letchworth, SG6 3JF.

2. Registration Process

- 2.1. Persons (public or Member*) will only be allowed to address the Committee if they have registered by **5pm the day before the meeting**, but not before the agenda for the meeting has been published (i.e. no later than 5 clear working days before the meeting). If requests are made before the agenda has been published, these persons will be advised that they will need to make contact after the publication of the agenda.
- 2.2. Registration requests should be made to Committee.Services@north-herts.gov.uk in the first instance. Alternatively by phone 01462 474655.

² As defined under the Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (England) Order 2015, or replacement legislation

Procedure for Speaking at the Planning Control Committee

- 2.3. Anyone registering should confirm if their details can be appropriately shared with others within the relevant group (see 1.5), so that nominated speaker/ or time allocation can be agreed. This requirement does not apply to Members – whose *Council* contact details are available. The Committee, Member & Scrutiny Team must receive confirmation from the first registered speaker, if they choose to share their time.

**Please note the Ward Member who called-in the application, does not need to register to speak, as per 6.1 below*

3. Procedure at Meetings

- 3.1. Those persons who have registered to speak should arrive at least 15 minutes before the meeting to contact the Committee, Member & Scrutiny Services Officer.
- 3.2. At the appropriate point in the meeting, the Chair announces the item and invites the Planning Officer to speak.
- 3.3. The Planning Officer presents the proposal. Committee Members are invited to ask questions of the Planning Officer.
- 3.4. Objectors: The representative(s) of those persons objecting to the application is/are invited to address the Committee.
- 3.5. The Committee may ask points of clarification of the speaker(s). The Chair can decline to put a point of clarification if they consider this to not be a point of clarification, irrelevant in planning terms or that this was covered in the Planning Officer's report or during any of the representations.
- 3.6. The Ward Member who called-in the application *and if shared* Objector: Ward Advocate/ other Member. Similarly points of clarification may be asked of the speaker(s) as per 3.5
- 3.7. Supporter(s): The representative(s) of those persons is/are invited to address the Committee. Similarly points of clarification may be asked of the speaker(s) as per 3.5.
- 3.8. Ward Member/ Ward Advocate/ Member – Supporter (subject to 6.2) of the application is/are invited to address the Committee. Similarly points of clarification may be asked of the speaker(s) as per 3.5.
- 3.9. The Applicant, Applicant's Agent or representative is/are invited to address the Committee. Points of clarification may be asked of the speaker(s) as in 3.5.
- 3.10. The Chair will invite the Planning Officer to comment on any of the issues raised during the above.
- 3.11. The Committee will debate the proposal and then make its decision.

4. Circulation of Documents

- 4.1. The public / Members will not be allowed to distribute documents at the meeting itself and they should not normally approach Members of the Committee before or during the meeting. Any documentations should already have been provided during the consultation period.

Procedure for Speaking at the Planning Control Committee

- 4.2. Note: Supplementary documents from Planning Officers or consultees received following the agenda publication, will be compiled, and published as one update after **4pm on the day before the meeting**. Any documents received after this will not be supplied as a supplementary document to the agenda and the Planning Officer will provide as a verbal update at the meeting.

5. If the planning application is deferred

- 5.1 If a proposal is deferred after public speaking has occurred on that item, there is no automatic entitlement to speak when it comes back to Committee. Previous presentations will be taken into account. However, if the public/ Member wish to speak again, they will need to register to speak again on the deferred application as per 2 above.

6. Non-Committee Member speaking at Planning Control Committee (& Committee Members who call-in and speak to/ acting as Ward Advocate).

- 6.1. The right of non-Planning Control Committee Members to speak at the Committee is, in the first instance, allocated to the (first) Ward Member from the ward in which the application is situated, who called-in the application to the Committee (**in compliance with the Committee's terms of reference**). The Ward Member who called in the application is not required to register with the Committee, Member & Scrutiny Team. They are, however, required to attend the meeting to present their reasons/ grounds to the Committee. If they are unable to, the Member must arrange for another Member to present on their behalf (and notify the Committee, Member & Scrutiny Team), or provide a written statement presenting their reasons/grounds (which the Chair will read out), otherwise the item may be deferred.
- 6.2. Other non-Planning Control Committee Members' requests to speak, will be considered by the Chair in the following circumstances, and may be entitled to speak, after registration, in this priority order:
- **If not called-in under 6.1**: the **Objector** Ward Advocate/ Member(s) in whose ward the application site is located (this is subject to the first to register to speak, agreeing to share time within that group); the **Supporter** Ward Advocate/ Member(s) in whose ward the application site is located (this is subject to the first to register to speak agreeing to share time within that group);
 - **if 6.1 call-in applies**: (subject to the Ward Member under 6.1 agreeing to share time), Other Ward Advocate/ Member(s) in whose ward the application site is located;
 - On applications in Wards where all relevant Ward Members serve on the Planning Control Committee (including single Member Wards), such Members may nominate another Member³ to the Committee, Member & Scrutiny Team, in advance of the deadline, to be registered and address the Committee in the role of Ward Advocate either for or against an application. Where this is a single Member ward application site, *that nominated Member will have priority over other Members within the Objector, or Supporter category registering to speak. If that nominated Member has called-in the application they would fall under 6.1.*
 - Applications which are Major⁴ or of significance within the wider area, other Members may address the Committee, in addition to the relevant Ward Member(s) if the Chair agrees in writing, in advance of the meeting;

³ This should be agreed with the Member in advance and ensure that Member can attend.

⁴ As defined under the Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (England) Order 2015, or replacement legislation

Procedure for Speaking at the Planning Control Committee

Conflicts of interest/ Predetermination/ bias or apparent bias

- 6.3 Any Member who has an interest (Disclosable Pecuniary Interest – DPI, Other Registrable Interest- ORI; or non-Registrable Interest - NRI, should comply with the requirements of the Councillor Code of Conduct and Planning Code of Good Practice that applies at the time of the meeting. *In the event of conflicting language in Codes, the Councillor Code of Conduct prevails and a Member should seek advice from the Monitoring Officer / Deputy on its interpretation prior to involvement in the planning process.*
- 6.4 **Please note**, a Member with an interest should not call in an application nor act as a Ward Advocate, or determine an application. They may register to speak to exercise a Councillor's Speaking Right if they have an ORI, or NRI, *subject to 6.2 above*, although a Member is strongly encouraged to appoint another Member to represent them at the Committee. A Councillor Speaking Right does not apply when a Member has a DPI, and a Member should not attend/ remain during such an item, without a dispensation from the Monitoring Officer. ***If the Member attends the meeting and is exercising a Speaking Right or has a Dispensation, they must still declare the interest(s) they have prior to speaking at the meeting.*** More details on the Code requirements can be found in sections 8 and 17 of the Constitution.
- 6.5 A Member of the Committee, who has called-in an application and intends to act as Ward Advocate (and does not have an interest) may do so. If they do so, they cannot then sit or be involved in any related determination of the application, at that meeting, or if deferred, at a later meeting when the application is finally determined (even if they choose not to register to speak at the later meeting(s)).
- 6.6 Any non-Planning Control Committee Member, who does not have an interest, who has expressed a view for or against an application may potentially request determination by a Committee – if this complies with the Committee's Terms of Reference. Other Members may apply to speak as per 6.2. This does not apply to Planning Control Committee Members who have expressed such views *and are therefore excluded* from participating in the Planning Control Committee decision making process. Whilst it is possible to register to speak on such planning applications, such Members should seek advice from the Monitoring Officer/ Deputy (or relevant Planning Lawyer) in advance of doing so.

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SECTION 9

Area Forums¹

9.1 Introduction:

To promote greater engagement with our communities, North Herts Council has five informal Area Forums which cover different geographical areas of the district. These are to provide a 'sounding board' for community opinion and an opportunity to input to the Council, via a Forum or their Councillors at a local level. In addition to the local community, County Councillors, Parish/Town, Community Councillors and other partners such as the Police, are welcomed to the Forum meetings, and to speak on an item.

9.2 All Members of the Council will be a member of the Area Forum that includes their own Ward.

9.3 The Area Forum elects its Chair and Vice-Chair annually. If a Chair and Vice Chair cannot be appointed at the first meeting of an Area Forum or at the next available meeting, such appointment shall be made at the subsequent ordinary Council meeting by Full Council.

9.4 Meetings: each Forum will aim to meet four (4) times per year, with the flexibility to meet virtually, hybrid or in person. The dates are agreed by Full Council at Annual Council, however, may be moved or cancelled in consultation with the Chair (or Vice Chair in their absence).

9.5 Although this is an informal body, the quorum for all Area Forums shall be 3 (three). The Forums will aim to make recommendations by consensus; however, in the event of a vote, and a tie, the Chair will have a casting vote under normal principles.

9.6 The aim is for each Area Forum to set a topic or theme for each meeting at the start of the municipal year, with input from the Councillors, communities and partners. The Chair will aim to do this with all the Area Forum membership, however, will have the final say as to agenda setting.

9.7 **Terms of Reference**

9.7.1. To act as a Forum for discussion on matters of local interest and to elicit/hear the views of local bodies and organisations.

9.7.2. To consider and act as an advisory body to the relevant Executive Member for grants who approves these (in consultation with the relevant Service Director). Any 'between meeting' grant applications can be dealt with in urgent situations with the recommendation of the Area Forum members by email or in urgent situations, the Chair.

9.7.3. To undertake a community leadership role in bringing together different interest groups from the public, private and voluntary sectors to work in partnership to meet the Council's corporate strategic and local objectives.

9.7.4. To receive petitions, presentations and questions from members of the public, groups and outside bodies on matters relating to their area.

9.7.5. To provide local input into service specifications where feasible for a local area and input for relevant local area consultations.

¹ These terms of reference may be amended by the Leader, Executive or Officer in consultation with the Executive. These are not formal decision-making bodies

9.7.6. In line with the Council's adopted Statement of Community Involvement to receive any presentations from developers, their agents and / or Council officers on masterplans and relevant on relevant applications for Strategic Housing Sites and other significant development (as defined in Policy SP9 of the Council's Local Plan), ask questions and provide comments accordingly.

9.8 Area, wards and membership

Area Forum	Membership	Composition
Baldock and District	6	The Wards of Baldock East and Baldock Town, the Arbury Ward and the Weston and Sandon Ward which comprise the parishes of Ashwell, Bygrave, Caldecote, Clothall, Hinxworth, Newnham, Radwell, Rushden, Sandon, Wallington and Weston.
Hitchin	13	The Wards of Hitchin Bearton, Hitchin Highbury, Hitchin Oughton, Hitchin Priory (including the north ward of the parish of St Ippolyts) and Hitchin Walsworth.
Letchworth	13	The Wards of Letchworth Grange, Letchworth East, Letchworth South East, Letchworth South West and Letchworth Wilbury.
Royston and District	7	The Wards of Royston Heath, Royston Meridian and Royston Palace (which comprise the area of Royston Town Council) and the Ermine Ward (which comprises the parishes of Barkway, Barley, Kelshall, Nuthampstead, Reed and Therfield).
Southern Rural	10	The Wards of Cadwell, Chesfield, Codicote, Graveley and Wymondley, Hitchwood, Offa & Hoo, Kimpton and Knebworth which comprise the parishes of Codicote, Graveley, Great Ashby, Hexton, Holwell, Ickleford, the south Ward of the parish of St Ippolyts (south ward), Kings Walden, Kimpton, Knebworth, Langley, Lilley, Offley, St Pauls Walden, Pirton, Preston and Wymondley.

**COUNCIL
23 NOVEMBER 2023**

***PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT**

TITLE OF REPORT: MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY

REPORT OF: *Service Director: Resources*

EXECUTIVE MEMBER: *Finance and IT*

COUNCIL PRIORITY: SUSTAINABILITY

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report recommends the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) for 2024/25 to 2028/29 to guide and inform the Council's Business Planning Process. The focus is primarily on setting a budget for 2024/25, as well as determining the actions that will be necessary in setting a longer term budget following on from that. It reflects on the many uncertainties that the Council faces.. Whilst it recommends a five year budget strategy, there will be a need to amend the strategy over time as further information becomes available.

The MTFS supports and is supported by the Council Plan. This reflects that the Council can only deliver priorities and projects that it can afford and should prioritise its spending around delivering its priorities.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1. That Council adopts the Medium Term Financial Strategy, as attached at Appendix A.

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 Adoption of a MTFS and communication of its contents will assist in the process of forward planning the use of Council resources and in budget setting for 2024/2025 to 2028/2029, culminating in the setting of the Council Tax precept for 2024/25 in February 2024. This will (alongside the existing Council Plan) support the Council in setting a budget that is affordable and aligned to Council priorities.

4. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 4.1 The Council needs to have a strategy for setting its budget to ensure that it meets its statutory duty to set a balanced budget over the medium term, and ensure that spend is prioritised towards delivering statutory services and its strategic aims (as set out in the Council Plan).
- 4.2 In line with the Financial Management Code (published by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy), the Council aspires to set a longer-term financial

strategy (e.g. 10 years) that considers the various risks and plans scenarios to deal with them. However, this MTFS deliberately takes a shorter-term view, which reflects the significant uncertainty faced by the Council

5. CONSULTATION WITH RELEVANT MEMBERS AND EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS

- 5.1 The Executive Member for Finance and IT and Deputy have been consulted in developing this Strategy.
- 5.2 No external consultation has been undertaken in the preparation of this report.
- 5.3 Members will be aware that consultation is an integral part of the Corporate Business Planning process, and consultation on the individual actions and projects planned to support the Objectives will be carried out in accordance with the Corporate Business Planning Timetable and the Council's Consultation Strategy.
- 5.4 As in previous years, Member workshops are being held in regard to corporate business planning proposals.

6. FORWARD PLAN

- 6.1 This report does not contain a recommendation on a key Executive decision and has therefore not been referred to in the Forward Plan.

7. BACKGROUND

- 7.1 The Council is required to set a balanced budget each year. This can include using reserves if this is affordable over the medium term. The Council therefore sets a 5 year Medium Term Financial Strategy each year to help determine the approach that it will take to setting the detailed budget for the following year.

8. RELEVANT CONSIDERATIONS

- 8.1 The Medium Term Financial Strategy is attached as Appendix A. It details the forecast impact of reducing resources and quantifies what the Council will need to do to balance its budget in the medium term. It also reflects the significant uncertainty over funding, expenditure and income and therefore highlights the need to be able to react to any changes.

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 Finance, Audit and Risk Committee's Terms of Reference include at 10.1.5 (b) "[t]o review and recommend the Medium Term Financial Strategy to Cabinet (including, although not limited to consideration of associated procedures, policies and process)".
- 9.2 Cabinet's terms of reference include at 5.6.38 the power, by recommendation "to advise the Council in the formulation of those policies within the Council's terms of reference". Council's terms of reference include at 4.4.1(b) "approving or adopting the budget". The MTFS is part of the budget setting process.
- 9.3 Councillors are reminded of the requirement, under section 30 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992, to set a balanced budget prior to the commencement

of the financial year in question; and also that the Local Government Act 2003 requires the Chief Finance Officer to report on the robustness of estimates and the adequacy of reserves allowed for in the budget.

10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

10.1 Revenue financial implications are covered in Appendix A.

10.2 The main purpose of the Medium Term Financial Strategy is to consider the revenue funding, income and expenditure for the Council. This includes considering the revenue implications of capital expenditure which are linked to the reduced income from treasury investments (as capital reserves are spent) and the costs of borrowing (which is forecast to be required when capital reserves are used up). The Strategy also considers discretionary capital spend (i.e. not directly linked to continuing service delivery) and the need to deliver value for money. This would include using capital expenditure to reduce revenue costs or generate income.

11. RISK IMPLICATIONS

11.1 The key risks within the budget assumptions are referred to in Appendix A.

11.2 There are financial and reputational risks involved in arriving at a balanced budget against the uncertainty surrounding levels of government funding. We seek to mitigate the risks through the use of the established corporate business planning process and early involvement of members in the process.

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 The MTFS attempts to align resources to the delivery of the Council Plan, which sets the corporate objectives. Through its corporate objectives the Council is seeking to address equality implications in the services it provides and through the remainder of the Corporate Business Planning Process will carry out Equalities Impact Assessments for relevant Efficiency or Investment options.

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 directly apply to this report.

15. HUMAN RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

15.1 The MTFS makes assumptions in relation to pay inflation. As the actual rate of inflation will be subject to national pay bargaining, the actual costs will depend on the results of

those negotiations. The budget also makes assumptions around funding for increments. The budget does not make any allowance for pay increases above inflation. This means that there will be no improvement to the Council's ability to attract staff in relation to pay, which will particularly impact on difficult to fill posts. The Human Resources Team and the Leadership Team continually try to identify staff benefits that are not related to pay, and therefore more affordable.

- 14.2 The delivery of projects to deliver council objectives depends on having adequate people resources with the requisite skills.
- 14.3 The development of budget proposals will take up staff time. As they are developed these budget proposals will identify the ongoing impact on staff.

16. APPENDICES

- 16.1 Appendix A- Medium Term Financial Strategy 2023-28

17. CONTACT OFFICERS

- 17.1 Ian Couper, Service Director: Resources ian.couper@north-herts.gov.uk; ext 4243
- 17.2 Antonio Ciampa, Accountancy Manager Antonio.ciampa@north-herts.gov.uk, ext 4566
- 17.4 Ellie Hollingsworth, Policy and Strategy Trainee, corporatepolicy@north-herts.gov.uk, ext 4220

18. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 18.1 None

North Herts Council

Medium Term Financial Strategy
2024-29

Purpose of the Strategy

This strategy sits alongside the Council Plan. It sets out our financial forecasts over the next five years and how we will manage the funding that we think we will have available, to deliver as much as we can, in line with our priorities.

The strategy is significantly impacted by inflation, including both the known impacts (e.g. the embedded impact of the high levels of inflation that we have already seen) and the unknown impacts (e.g. current and future pay inflation, future contract inflation levels). The Council's main source of income is Council Tax. Even with the additional flexibility of a 3% increase, that was (and still is) significantly less than general inflation. Most of the financial impacts of Covid-19 have now passed, although we are still seeing parking income that is less than pre-pandemic levels.

The Council is aware that high inflation levels are also affecting many of our residents. The strategy assesses our ability to use reserves to manage some of that impact, so we can avoid having to cut services at a time when our residents might need them the most.

We also face continued uncertainty over our future funding. The 2023/24 funding settlement gave some indications of what 2024/25 funding would be. But, on one hand, that was at a time when inflation was forecast to drop more quickly than it seems to be. And, on the other hand, was more optimistic about the overall state of Government finances. Beyond 2024/25 there is very little indication of what Local Government funding will look like. It seems increasingly likely that a new funding formula will be further delayed. The positive from that is that the threat of "negative RSG" is further deferred.

This strategy goes hand in hand with our Council Plan, as we can't promise to deliver things that we can't afford. The detailed projects contained within the Council Plan have been incorporated into our forecasts.

Delivering our Vision and Priorities

Our vision and priorities are set out in detail in our Council Plan.

Our vision is that 'we put people first and deliver sustainable services, to enable a brighter future together'. Our priorities therefore focus on: People First, Sustainability and A Brighter Future Together.

Most of the money that we spend is on delivering statutory services. We will always look to deliver these services in line with our priorities. Even as our funding has continued to reduce, we have tried to maintain our ability to offer discretionary services that are linked to our priorities. Our forecasts are that we will need to further reduce our costs in the future. This will mean that difficult decisions will need to be taken. We will make those decisions in line with our priorities.

Some of what we might like to achieve uses up resources (such as money, staff time or energy). We will look to be creative in identifying opportunities that deliver our priorities without using up resources. This will include looking for external funding and working with others.

Looking forward

We would like to use this document to provide a long-term (10 year) overview of our future funding, and risks and opportunities in relation to our spending and income. Unfortunately, we are faced with such significant uncertainty in the short to medium term in relation to our future funding from Government, recovery from cost of living, that our focus has to be on that. That means that this strategy is focused on the next five years, with a particular focus on the next two years.

Over the last few years, we had taken the opportunity to increase the level of our general fund reserves. The plan is that we can use these to soften the impact of inflationary pressures and expected future funding reductions. However reserves can only be spent once, and it is clear that spend will need to be reduced in the medium term and balanced against the funding we receive. This will require some difficult decisions on which services meet our statutory obligations and best deliver against our priorities.

This strategy is based on significant uncertainty and as better information becomes available then this will be used. The budget that Full Council sets in February 2024 will be focused on 2024/25, but will also consider the medium term impact.

Our current budget position

Our budget for this year (2023/24) was set at a meeting of Council in February 2023. This also set indicative budgets for future years. In June 2022 we reported our end of year position for 2021/22. This report also detailed spend that had not taken place in 2021/22, that would now take place during 2022/23. The numbers below also reflect our forecasts for 2023/24 as reported at the end of the first quarter of the year (up to end of June).

	£ millions
General Fund balance at the end of 2022/23	11.990
Less: How much we plan to spend during 2023/24	(17.879)
Add: Our expected funding during 2023/24	17.394
Add: other reserves that we plan to use to fund our expenditure / release in to the General Fund *	1.144
Equals: General Fund balance at the end of 2023/24 (start of 2024/25)	12.649

* We can only use our reserves once. The use of reserves in response to the cost of living crisis is exceptional and must not form part of an ongoing sustainable strategy.

We have a Business Rates grant reserve. Government provide businesses with various Business Rate reliefs and provide us with funding to cover them. Due to the way that Business Rate income is dealt with, we often receive the funding earlier than the actual impact on our accounts. So, the funding is put into a reserve until it is needed. In the past we have also gained from Business Rate pooling arrangements and have put these gains into the reserve to protect us from future risks. On top of the amounts that we know that we will need to cover collection fund impacts, we will also continue to set aside £1m to cover fluctuations in Business Rates income (which is made up of £0.5m for normal risk and an additional £0.5m to reflect the uncertainty from the current economic situation). On top of the £1.144m, detailed in the table above, we have a further £1.86m to release to the General Fund.

The following sections consider the significant factors that impact on us setting a budget for the next five years, including the assumptions made and the impact of those on setting a balanced budget.

Covid-19 impacts

In 2022/23 and 2023/24 we set aside central budgets to cover the potential ongoing impacts of Covid-19. We have seen those impacts substantially subside, so the assumption is that there will not need to be a central budget in 2024/25 (or beyond). In 2023/24, car parking income (including season ticket sales) has still not recovered to pre-pandemic levels, but are still continuing to improve back towards those levels. There will not be a permanent adjustment made to the budget, but it is highlighted as a risk.

Inflation and cost of living impacts

The UK (as well as many other countries) has seen a period of very high inflation. The Bank of England are forecasting that high inflation (above the 2% target) will persist until the first half of 2025. Even as inflation comes down, it still just means that prices are rising less quickly. The impact is already embedded in the prices that the Council needs to pay.

As a result of high inflation the Council needs to consider the following impacts:

- The cost of providing contracted services
- Pay inflation for our staff
- Increases in fees and charges, and impact on demand/ ability to pay
- Eligibility for Council Tax Reduction Scheme
- Interest rate increases

Contracted services inflation

Our largest contract is for waste collection and street cleansing. The contract is inflated in May each year based on a basket of indicators with the following weightings: 35% wage inflation, 40% general inflation, 15% fuel inflation and 10% uninflated. The increase in May 2023 was 9.9%, and we are forecasting an increase of 3% in May 2024, before returning to around 2% from May 2025. The May 2024 inflation estimate is partly driven by a reduction in fuel costs (since inflation was last calculated in May 2023) and this can be affected by wider global and political events.

Inflation on our grounds maintenance contract is linked to CPI and the increase for 2024/25 is estimated at around 5%.

Electricity and gas prices seem to have stabilised after some exceptionally high increases. We are forecasting an increase of 5% for 2024/25. As with fuel prices, these can be affected by wider global and political events.

Overall the estimate for contract expenditure inflation is around £600k in 2024/25, and then reducing to around £325k from 2025/26 onwards.

Pay inflation

For 2023/24, we increased our inflation estimate up to 4% (it had previously been 2%), and kept it at 2% for each year from 2024/25 onwards. The pay award for 2023/24 has still not been settled. In the Quarter 1 (2023/24) budget report, the forecast spend was increased to be in line with the employer offer. This has also been adjusted in future projections. The final pay award may still be higher than this.

As inflation has not subsided, it will be necessary to increase the pay award estimate for 2024/25. It is estimated that this should be 4%. For 2025/26 onwards it is expected that inflation should be around 2%, but as it is unlikely to be at that level by April 2025 it is recommended that 3% is assumed for the 2025/26 pay award. The estimates for 2026/27 onwards can stay at 2%.

The Council struggles to recruit staff, especially in certain professional areas (e.g. planning, estates, legal, IT and environmental health). Whilst the Council promotes the non-financial benefits it can offer employees, a lot of this struggle will relate to pay. The pay award estimates will not affect the Council's attractiveness in the employment market. That would require a much more significant change to the employment offer. That is not covered within this strategy but has to be considered in the context of delivering the Council Plan and the Council Delivery Plan.

Increases in fees and charges, and impact on demand/ ability to pay

It has previously been decided that parking charges should be modelled on assuming a 2% increase each year. That is not a target increase, and actual increases will need to consider managing demand, cost of provision, encouraging modal shift away from private car use and supporting the vitality of town centres. This assumption of a 2% increase will be retained. The Council will also bring forward the date of implementation of increases in each year, to reverse the delays (during the year) that arose following the Covid-19 pandemic. The target will be that the increases are applied from September in 2024/25, July in 2025/26 and June from 2026/27 onwards.

The Council has previously made a decision to change the garden waste charge to £49 for an extended 18 month period (up to April 2025). The current assumption is that this will revert to being an annual charge from April 2025 onwards. This will need to be reviewed during 2024, when the costs of the waste contract from May 2025 are known.

We believe that trade waste and the trade recycling market can bear increases in costs, and that we should be pricing in line with the wider market. The starting assumption is that increases in charges should be in line with forecast contract collection cost increases and disposal cost increases. This will be reviewed prior to April each year, and actual increases may be higher or lower.

Where fees and charges are set by regulation (e.g. planning fees) then the Council will set charges in line with those regulations. The assumption is that any ancillary charges will be increased in line with increases in general fees and charges.

All other fees and charges provide a relatively low amount of income. These have historically been increased in line with CPI + 2%. This has been adjusted in recent years as CPI has been exceptionally high. The target is that these fees and charges should recover the full cost of provision. Costs of provision are generally likely to increase with pay inflation. Therefore the assumption will be that prices should increase in line with pay inflation estimates.

Our current assumption is that increases at these levels would not affect demand. For most of our services we seek payment in advance of receiving the service, so we are also not expecting an increase in levels of overdue debt.

Eligibility for Council Tax Reduction Scheme

The Council Tax Reduction Scheme (CTRS) determines who is eligible for a discount on their Council Tax bill. For pensioners there is a mandatory scheme set by Government. For working age residents, we can determine how any discounts are determined.

We moved to a banded scheme for working-age CTRS eligibility in April 2023. The new scheme and current economic conditions have resulted in an increase in the total value of support that is being provided. This has been seen in the tax base calculations (the weighted number of properties that pay Council Tax) which have decreased by 0.34%. Our budget assumptions are based on a net 0.5% increase in the tax base to reflect property growth. We actually expect the increase in properties to be around 0.65%, as some of the Council Tax from each additional property will be used to fund the direct costs (i.e. waste collection) that we will incur.

The Council Tax forecasts for 2024/25 will be based on this lower than expected Council Tax base. The exact reasons for the increased eligibility will be examined during the remainder of this year and in to early 2024/25. The forecasting assumption is that there will be a reversal of the tax base drop.

Interest Rate changes

Even though inflation is starting to come down, it is looking more likely that higher interest rates will need to stay in place for longer than previously expected to return (and keep) inflation at target levels. The medium-term assumption is that interest rates will return to around 2% (in line with the Bank of England inflation target). As the Council currently has minimal borrowing and relatively high cash investment balances, this could mean in the short-term that significant additional income will be generated (compared to previous forecasts). These forecasts will be updated as part of the Investment Strategy (to be approved at February Council) and will incorporate interest rate forecasts from our treasury advisors.

Pension costs

The latest triennial valuation (for March 2022) was completed before the 2022/23 budget was set. That valuation set our pension contribution rates for the next three years up until 2025/26. Forecasts for 2026/27 onwards will be based on the current valuation.

Contract costs

The Council is currently in the middle of procurements for its waste and street cleansing contract, and for its leisure contract. As we do not have final tenders for either contract, the current forecasting assumption is that these contracts will continue in line with current budgets (with adjustments for inflation). However, we are aware that other Councils have seen exceptional increases in prices when looking at new contracts, even where there were inflationary clauses over the previous contract period. There is therefore a risk of an increase in these contract amounts.

Waste legislation changes

Government have previously consulted on a series of proposals in relation to waste collection. These include:

- Introducing consistent waste collection across all areas of the country (e.g. same materials in the same types of bins) and being stopped from charging for garden waste collections. The latest feedback is that we will still have flexibility as to how we collect recyclable materials (i.e. including co-mingled collections) and will be able to charge for garden waste collections. We will be required to provide a weekly food collection service (as we already do) and may get some new burdens funding for that (only to be added in to the budget when we know how much it would be). We may be required to collect residual waste at least fortnightly, with indications that such a change would not be covered by new burdens funding.
- Introduction of a Deposit Return Scheme (DRS), which would have an impact on what we collect at the kerbside. It is likely to mean that higher value recycling materials would be taken to deposit return locations, leaving us to collect the remainder. This would negatively affect the net costs of disposal for recycling materials.
- Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR), which places the financial burden for waste on those that are producing it at source.

It is still not yet fully known if, how and when the above will be adopted (especially DRS and EPR). Where they are adopted, we would usually expect (see comments above in relation to fortnightly residual collections) to receive New Burdens Funding, but we don't know how this will be calculated and allocated. However, for forecasting purposes it will be assumed that there will be a net zero impact on waste costs, although there are risks in relation to that.

Housing growth, planning income and impact on tax base

The adoption of the Council's Local Plan means that there will be large new developments in the District. The precise timing of these developments is not known, and may be affected by the impacts of high interest rates, high inflation and a potential economic recession.

As these sites go through the planning process, they will generate significant planning income. Some of the capacity to deliver these has already been included in previous staffing growth bids. There will also be additional internal and external resource required. Where possible, the cost of short term external resources, and to a limited extent the internal resources, will be met through Planning Performance Agreements. However, these are voluntary agreements and cannot be required. The forecast cost of longer-term internal resources is forecast to be less than the additional income generated. Due to the uncertainty over timing, it is not possible to come up with a precise planning income forecast, and the impact and timing of the expected planning fee increases are not yet confirmed. So, the approach will be to develop a prudent estimate averaged over a number of years, with higher proportions of the total in later years. Where there are over-achievements in early years, these will be put into a central reserve to enable the smoothing of any shortfalls in later years. When prudent, any balance in the reserve will be released back to the General Fund. The reserve will not be used to directly fund additional planning expenditure. The estimates relating to this planning income will be developed in time for the setting of the 2024/25 budget. They are not incorporated into the estimates contained in this strategy.

The Council has not yet fully assessed the impact on its costs of significant housing growth (beyond estimating additional waste collection costs). So, even though that housing growth will lead to a significant

increase in the tax base, this is not assumed as additional Council Tax funding income. Instead (as detailed in the section on CTRS) average annual net 0.5% growth will be assumed.

Delivering our priorities

Our Council Plan sets out our vision and priorities for 2022-27. As there have been no changes to that vision and priorities, it has not been necessary to update the Council Plan this year. The Council will continue to monitor the projects that support the delivery of the Council Plan through the Council Delivery Plan. The Council Delivery Plan is reviewed on a quarterly basis by Overview and Scrutiny and Cabinet.

As detailed in the previous section on pay inflation, the Council is facing issues with staff recruitment and retention. This is impacting on the delivery of the Council Delivery Plan and will continue to do so. Cabinet will be carrying out a prioritisation review of the Council Delivery Plan.

The table below details those projects that are in the current Council Delivery Plan (as reported to Cabinet in September 2023) and the financial implications of those projects in 2024/25 onwards:

Project	Resources
Churchgate area regeneration	Overall expected that the scheme will be at least cost neutral in net revenue terms, including the revenue effects of any capital spend.
New Ways of delivering housing on Council Land	Overall expected that the scheme will be at least cost neutral in net revenue terms, including the revenue effects of any capital spend. The impact of delays to capital receipts will need to form part of any decision.
Resident/ Public EV charging in our car parks	Grant funding has been awarded, so no further costs assumed, subject to finalisation of the private sector partner funding
Royston Leisure Centre Solar Thermal Solar PV on leisure centres	This funding may be reallocated to provide match funding for a Public Sector Decarbonisation Fund (PSDF) bid. That bid may enable more energy saving schemes to be delivered for a similar level of Council contribution. If PSDF bid is not successful, then the projects will progress. The schemes have a payback that means they will generate revenue savings that exceed the revenue cost of capital. These savings are not yet included in future forecasts.
Town Centre Strategies	Likelihood of additional costs as there is not the capacity to deliver through existing staff resources and further studies will be required. May be reflected as a financial risk.
Charnwood House	There is a capital budget allocated for improvement works. This will require some The match funding from a community group. The revenue budget assumes that the Council will not incur any property management costs from 2025/26 onwards.
Place Narrative for North Herts	Being delivered via existing staff.
Cycling Networks	An infrastructure plan is expected to have been adopted by April 2024. The actual cycling infrastructure is expected to be delivered via developer contributions, as well as old grant funding that is held in a reserve.
Empty Homes Strategy	Strategy will be adopted by April 2024. Being delivered by existing staff, although low level of resource available.
Alternative Methods of Payment for parking	Funding included in the capital programme. Assumed that no impact on parking income.
Financial Sustainability	Being delivered via existing staff.
Health inequalities	Fully dependent on external funding. We have been flexible with funding to offer some job security to those staff undertaking work on this.
Leisure centre procurement	To be completed before April 2024
Local Authority Housing Fund	Due to be completed before April 2024.
Master Planning	Income through voluntary Planning Performance Agreements is expected to match any additional external costs.
Museum Storage	Funding included in the capital programme. To review alternative options and any additional ongoing revenue costs before making a decision on proceeding.
Oughtonhead Common Weir	Funding included in the capital programme.
Playground Renovation Programme	Planned as a continuous cycle which requires an extra year of funding to be added in each budget cycle.
Royston Town Hall Annexe	May generate income or a capital receipt (not budgeted) but dependent on Estates staff resource to progress.

Shared Prosperity Fund	All direct costs funded from the grant. However it does require some resource in terms of project delivery, project monitoring and required grant returns. Some of the grant administration can be covered from the grant.
Town Centre Recovery	Mainly being delivered via the Shared Prosperity Fund, although that is time limited funding (to March 2025).
Waste and Street Cleansing Contract Procurement	The majority of the procurement work should be completed by April 2024. Project support (including project management, Legal and professional advice) is being funded from the waste reserve.
Work with relevant partners to prevent and relieve homelessness whenever possible	Mostly being delivered from grant funding. Risk in relation that grant funding continuing.
Enterprise Strategy	Expectation is that the Strategy will set out what is due to be delivered using existing resources.
Local Plan delivery and review	Expectation is that can be delivered from existing staff resource, with previously agreed (and to be proposed) budget growth. Recruitment and retention may increase costs if that means greater use of agency staff or consultants.
Waste depots	There is a capital allocation in place for a new depot in Baldock. It has not yet been possible to test the accuracy of the forecast costs or any associated additional revenue costs. Therefore, there is likely to be a need to update those budget estimates in future years.

There is not currently any resource allocated for any new projects that are not listed above. Whilst these could be added as part of the budget setting process, the forecast section below determines that net savings need to be identified and delivered. Any discretionary cost increases will therefore increase the savings that have to be made in other areas.

Future funding from Government

Our funding is controlled by Government in the following ways:

- If we want to increase our Council Tax by more than a certain amount, then we must hold a referendum. Government set this limit each year and last year it was the greater of 2.99% or £5 on a band D property (with the other bands increased in proportion). In previous years it was 1.99% or £5.
- They set how much of the Business Rates that we collect that we can retain.
- They determine how funding from New Homes Bonus works. This is a reward to councils for encouraging the building of new homes.
- They can allocate other general funding and grants.

There was supposed to be a significant change to the way that we and other local authorities were funded. This would have included a new funding formula and a change to how much of the Business Rates that we collect we could retain. It is now expected that the earliest that this change will be introduced will be 2026/27, although it is possible that it could be from 2025/26.

We had been told that in 2019/20 our funding from Business Rates would be cut by over £1m. This had become known as negative RSG (Revenue Support Grant). This cut in funding has not yet taken place. When a new funding formula is introduced, we are working on the assumption that it will be broadly in line with the formula that determined we should have a negative RSG imposed upon us. Although the assumption is that the cut will be £1m, rather than being inflated from the 2019/20 total. Also, assuming that it would be phased in over two years, with half the impact (£0.5m) in the first year (2026/27).

We currently provide our Parish, Town, and Community Councils with a total of £39k of funding, in addition to what they raise through their precepts. This was initially linked to the localisation of Council Tax support (CTRS). Our policy has been that this support should reduce in line with the funding that we receive from

Government. The amount that each Council receives is very small and could be covered by a small increase in their precept.

There has been a consultation on the New Homes Bonus, which made several proposals on how it might be changed in future years. There has not yet been any indication of what might be adopted. The assumption is that New Homes Bonus will continue for one more year. However, this is somewhat superseded by guarantees in relation to Core Spending Power.

The Councils 'Core Spending Power' (a measure of funding determined by Government) is made up of the following:

- Baseline retained Business Rates
- Council Tax
- New Homes Bonus
- Other general grants- in 2023/24 this included a Services Grant of £100k

For 2023/24 the Council's Core Spending Power is £17.2m. In 2023/24 there was a guarantee from Government that core spending power (before the impact of Council Tax rate increases, but after an assumption on growth in the base) would increase by at least 3%. Where this was not going to be achieved through other funding, Councils would receive a funding guarantee grant from Government. The Council did not get a funding guarantee grant, as it received a high level of New Homes Bonus. Based on announcements in 2023/24, it is assumed that the 3% promise will also apply for 2024/25. For 2025/26 onwards we will assume that Core Spending Power will not reduce, even where negative RSG is applied.

Council Tax

As detailed previously, we will assume that our Council Tax base for 2024/25 will be based on the latest September 2023 Tax base calculation. For 2025/26 we will assume that the base will be 1% higher than the 2023/24 budgeted Council Tax base (i.e. a reversal of the reduction seen for 2024/25). The assumption for 2026/27 onwards is a net tax base growth of 0.5% per year. The actual growth is expected to be higher, but some of the additional income will be needed to provide services to the new properties (e.g. waste collection).

We are assuming that Government will allow Council Tax increases for 2024/25 by up to 2.99% without the need for a local referendum. In calculating the funding that is available, Government assume that councils will increase their Council Tax by the maximum available. To do as much as we can to maintain our service provision, we will increase our Council Tax by the maximum possible, without the need for a referendum.

For 2025/26 onwards we are assuming that Government will revert to increases of up to 1.99% without a local referendum for lower tier Councils. The assumption is that the Council will choose to increase by this amount.

For each year it is likely that there will also be the provision for Council Tax increases of £5 for a band D property (other bands pro rata), even if this is more than the stipulated percentage. The Council's tax rate is now at a level where the percentage increases will be higher than the £5 increase.

Our reserves

We are required to make sure that we have a certain level of reserves when we set our budget. This is to provide protection against known and unknown risks. This includes us being able to react to changes in demand and any emergencies that may arise. Our allowance of known risks is based on estimating the monetary impact of an event happening and applying a percentage to this, based on the likelihood of it happening (high, medium or low). Our allowance for unknown risks is based on 5% of net expenditure and 3% of budgeted income (excluding Housing Benefit). For 2023/24 this gave a minimum balance of £2.5m. It is assumed that it will need to continue to be at around that level.

We are forecasting that our General Fund reserves at the start of 2024/25 will be £12.65m. We will plan to use our reserves to smooth some of the impact of the savings that we are forecasting that we need to deliver. We will also plan to retain reserves to give us time to respond to the further uncertainties that are detailed in this strategy. In planning our future budgets, we need to make sure that we stay safely above the minimum General Fund level.

Our future forecasts and savings required

Based on all the assumptions detailed in the previous sections (and the additional assumptions detailed in Annex A), we are forecasting the following budget position over the next five years.:

£ thousands	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29
General Fund balance at the start of the year	12,649	12,649	12,037	11,331	11,979
Less: How much we plan to spend during the year on existing services (before making savings)	18,999	19,771	19,152	18,770	18,617
Add: Our expected funding during the year	17,894	17,907	17,927	17,938	17,944
Add: other reserves that we plan to use to fund our expenditure	1,105	751	0	0	0
Add: additional net savings that we need to deliver *	0	500	1,000	1,000	600
Equals: General Fund balance at the end of the year	12,649	12,037	11,331	11,179	11,106

* These are the additional savings that need to be delivered in each year. Over the five-year period the cumulative annual savings that will be required are **£3.1 million**.

Addressing our funding gap

The table above shows savings that we need to deliver to achieve a balanced budget by 2028/29. That means that by that year our funding will equal our expenditure. Savings could mean any of the following:

- Being able to deliver our existing services at a lower cost. The use of technology and automation may enable to do this in some areas. But generally, the savings that we have delivered across a number of years have been through efficiencies, meaning that there are fewer opportunities left.
- Being able to generate additional income from services that we are able to charge for, less any costs in providing that additional level of service.
- Being able to generate income from commercial activities. The opportunities to do this are limited by economic conditions and government policy. We also need to make sure that these activities are in line with our priorities.
- Reducing the level of services that we provide, or no longer providing services that we are not required to provide. Whilst we would always want to avoid this, we have to consider the overall sustainability of our Council.

It is expected that the majority of the work to identify savings will need to take place after the May 2024 elections, as that will give the administration at that time the ability to fully align their spending and priorities over the 4-year period of the election cycle. The current level of the Council's reserves allows that approach, as long as any investments (increases in spend, decreases in income) in the 2024/25 budget are focused on essential areas only.

Capital budgets

We are currently able to fund our capital expenditure (spend on assets that have a useful life of more than one year) from our capital reserves. Previously that has meant that the revenue cost of our capital investments has been fairly low. However, as interest rates are currently over 5%, every £1m of capital investment is an annual revenue cost of £50,000 in lost income.

Over the next few years we will run out of capital reserves. When that happens, we have to charge a Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP). A MRP charge is a revenue cost that spreads the cost of unfunded (i.e. not met from capital receipts or grant funding) capital expenditure over the life of the Councils assets, so that over time capital expenditure is fully funded. The intention is that the life of the assets will be assumed to be 40 years, so for unfunded capital expenditure of £40m there would be a revenue cost of £1m per year for 40 years. If interest rates are still around 5% when we have to make a MRP charge then the cost of capital would be around 8% (i.e. every £1m of capital investment is an annual revenue cost of £80,000).

In the longer term we will also have to borrow externally to fund borrowing costs too (in addition to MRP). The cost of that borrowing will depend on interest rates at the time, but the cost of borrowing will always be at a premium above investment returns.

Therefore, all discretionary capital spend will be assessed on the assumption that funding costs will be incurred.

We are also aware that there is significant inflation on construction and material costs at the moment. As this might continue for some time, the potential for cost increases will be assessed when considering options for new capital spend.

Any opportunity to generate capital receipts from the sale of surplus land and buildings will help to provide additional capital funding and reduce the revenue costs of capital that have been described.

ANNEX 1 Other Budget Assumptions

- Treasury Investment income will be assessed as part of the Investment Strategy each year. Yields will be based on estimates from our treasury advisors.
- Contract inflation in accordance with the individual contract terms.
- No allowance is made for general inflation on remaining expenditure. Although after allowing for salary and contractual inflation, the remaining amount is insignificant.
- An assumed 99% collection rate for the purposes of calculating the Council Tax base.
- An assumed 97% collection rate for Business Rates
- A vacancy factor set at approximately 2.5% of salary budget to yield in the region of £400k is included in the base budget in each year.
- The Council will not subsidise areas which are the responsibility of another precepting body other than through a one-off match-funding arrangement where this is in the interests of the local Council taxpayers.
- All assumptions are subject to further refinement during the budget process as more certain information becomes available.

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COUNCIL
23 NOVEMBER 2023

***PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT**

TITLE OF REPORT: USE OF URGENCY IN RELATION TO CALL-IN FOR DECISION ON BUSINESS RATE POOLING

REPORT OF: *Service Director: Resources*

EXECUTIVE MEMBER: *N/A*

COUNCIL PRIORITY: SUSTAINABILITY

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

To notify Council that the urgency provisions in relation to call-in were applied to a delegated decision made by the Service Director: Resources (in consultation with the Executive Member for Finance and IT) in relation to Business Rate Pooling on 9 October 2023. This was due to the timing and availability of the information required to make the decision and the deadline for submitting the pooling application. Allowing for potential call-in would have made it impossible to meet the deadline set by Government of 10 October 2023. As per the Constitution, the Chair of the Council agreed to the decision being treated as a matter of urgency. The Constitution requires that use of this provision is reported to the next meeting of Council, together with the reasons for urgency.

Provisions for the use of call-in and urgency are set out in paragraph 6.3.11 (b) (i) of the Constitution.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1. That Council notes the use of urgency provisions in relation to the Business Rate Pooling decision made on 9 October 2023.

All information in relation to this decision is available to view via the link below (background papers)

3. CONTACT OFFICERS

- 3.1 *Ian Couper*, Service Director: Resources, ian.couper@north-herts.gov.uk; ext 4243

4. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 4.1 *Decision notice:*
[3. BR Pooling delegated decision for 2425 in Oct 23.docx \(north-herts.gov.uk\)](#)

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**COUNCIL
23 NOVEMBER 2023**

PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT

TITLE OF REPORT: ELECTORAL SERVICES – SCALE OF FEES 2024/25

REPORT OF: Service Director - Resources

EXECUTIVE MEMBER: Scale of Fees – Non-Executive function.
(Electoral Services: Community & Partnerships)

COUNCIL PRIORITY: PEOPLE FIRST / SUSTAINABILITY / A BRIGHTER FUTURE TOGETHER

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1. To agree the Scale of Fees for electoral events held during 2024/25.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1. That the Council agree the Scale of Fees for 2024/25 as set out in Appendix A.

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1. To enable the Council to remunerate the Returning Officer and the staff employed to carry out tasks during electoral events and to be open and transparent regarding other payments.

4. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

4.1. For the scales of fees to remain at the 2023/24 rates or to increase/introduce some areas for reasons explained within the report.

5. CONSULTATION WITH RELEVANT MEMBERS AND EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS

5.1. The Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC), is responsible for central government elections and last year launched a project to introduce indicative fees for all election roles at polls which they fund.

5.2. DLUHC convened a Working Group with several Returning Officers and Electoral Service Managers across the country when setting their proposed fees. The outcomes of these meetings have been disseminated by the various regional lead officers, which have allowed Returning Officers and Electoral Service Managers to feed into this process.

- 5.3. In addition to the Association of Electoral Administrators Eastern Regional Group, the Electoral Services teams within Hertfordshire form a Hertfordshire County Group.
- 5.4. Given that DLUHC have drafted indicative fees for elections roles, which will be applicable to any UK Parliamentary or Police and Crime Commission elections during the 2023/2024 financial year, this provides the blueprint now used for our overall scale of fees, given the reasoning set out in the report.
- 5.5. Following the local elections held in May 2023, post-election staff surveys were undertaken to gauge feedback on, amongst other areas of the election, the new rates of pay introduced. The responses received were generally in support of the new rates, with a few suggestions for amendments put forward.
- 5.6. Following the proposals to introduce an uncontested fee for parish and town councils there has been consultation with the town and parish councils, which all District Councillors were informed of prior, and Group Leaders consulted upon.

6. FORWARD PLAN

- 6.1 This report does not contain a recommendation on a key Executive decision and has therefore not been referred to in the Forward Plan.

7. BACKGROUND

- 7.1. Each Local Authority is required to appoint a Returning Officer (RO). The RO is appointed in an independent capacity by the Council to organise and run elections free from the political structure of the authority. Councils must provide their RO with the resources they need to run elections. This includes the cost of recruiting and paying staff to act as Presiding Officers and Poll Clerks, along with any other ancillary staff necessary for the success of a poll.
- 7.2. For national polls the government issues a Fees and Charges schedule which identifies for each authority a “maximum recoverable amount” along with a fee which may be claimed by the appointed RO for the rendering of their services. The RO will pay their appointed staff from the monies provided by government and will account for their expenditure by way of a return to the Election Claims Unit (ECU) at the Cabinet Office.
- 7.3. As explained in paragraph 5.1, DLUHC, launched a project to introduce indicative fees for all elections roles at polls which they fund. This will introduce set fees which should be paid to elections staff at UK Parliamentary elections, Police and Crime Commissioner elections and national referenda.
- 7.4. For all such national elections, the RO will be expected to adhere to the range proposed for each role by the DLUHC. To pay outside of this range will require special agreement from the ECU or risk the ECU refusing to reimburse the difference where roles exceed their expected amounts.
- 7.5. No such formal structure exists for local elections, which is why a local scale of election fees is required to cover staff costs associated with the administration of elections and other electoral events, e.g., County Council elections, District Council elections, Town and Parish elections, Neighbourhood Planning Referendums or Town/Parish Poll.

- 7.6. Although local elections are not formally subject to the same fees as national elections, in practice the scale of fees should be uniform across all election types as having separate fees for local and national elections would cause confusion and major issues with staffing elections which pay different amounts to those held either at the same time or in other years.

8. RELEVANT CONSIDERATIONS

- 8.1 In the May 2023 elections, the RO appointed more than 400 temporary roles to deliver the polls.
- 8.2 In May 2024, the RO will need to appoint more temporary staff as the authority moves to whole council elections, meaning all wards are up for election at the same time and therefore more polling stations required to be staffed.
- 8.3 The proposed Scale of Fees has been influenced by the indicative fees by DLUHC. As explained, local elections are not formally subject to the same fees as national elections. However, providing uniformity across all election types will prevent confusion and major issues with staffing elections.
- 8.4 In addition to the May 2024 district and parish elections, there will be two scheduled national polls during the lifetime of this scale of fees - the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) elections in May 2024 and the UK Parliamentary General Election, which must be called before January 2025. If the Council opted to pay staff more than the fees listed in Appendix A, the additional costs would likely be rejected by the ECU and the Council would be liable for the financial difference.
- 8.5 The indicative fees by DHLUC were adopted by the Authority last year and having considered the most recent version, DLUHC have recommended a Sunday and Bank Holiday uplift rate of twice the normal rate.
- 8.6 One area of feedback in response to the post-election staff survey following the May 2023 elections was in relation to the rate of pay for Postal Vote Opening Assistants (£12.50 per hour in 2023/24), who felt the rate for this role should not be less than the Counting Assistant role (£13.50 per hour in 2023/24) owing to the fact that these roles are in many ways, similar. Having considered the responses, the rate for this role has been increased in line with the Counting Assistant and remains within the indicative fee bands set by DHLUC.
- 8.7 Another area of feedback related to the fee for Count Table Supervisors. The DHLUC indicative fees suggested that fees previously paid to some roles, particularly count related roles, were higher than they were willing to pay. Therefore, last year the fees for all roles were revised - meaning several of the fees were reduced and for count related roles reduced quite significantly.
- 8.8 Some feedback to the post-election staff survey following the May 2023 elections suggested that the rate of pay for Count Table Supervisors had been reduced too significantly given the level of responsibility. The fee for this role has therefore been increased to the maximum DHLUC has indicated they are willing to pay for such role.
- 8.9 The scale of fees includes a role of Count Manager/Senior Count Supervisor. DHLUC have indicated that they will only reimburse a fee for one of these roles. It is likely that

for the forthcoming elections, the RO will wish to appoint two Senior Count Supervisors given the small core team and to aid the smooth operation of the count. Therefore, when the ECU claim is submitted, the Authority may not be reimbursed for these roles.

- 8.10 Currently, Parish and Town Councils are only recharged where an election is contested.
- 8.11 As per Section 36 of The Representation of The People Act 1983 (RPA), states that all expenses reasonably incurred by the Returning Officer shall be paid by the relevant local authority.
- 8.12 Where the number of candidates that wish to stand for election is equal to or less than the number of seats being elected, then that election is considered uncontested, and anyone validly nominated is elected.
- 8.13 Most parish elections are not contested. However, the work involved for the RO and the Electoral Services Team up to the close of nominations remains the same. For instance, the election still must be set up within the electoral management system, a briefing prepared where clerks and candidates are invited (and strongly encouraged) to attend, an informal checking service of nomination papers made available, the nomination papers must be formally accepted and notices proofed and published.
- 8.14 It is only at the stage of the close of nominations that it is known whether the parish will have a contested election. Following which, rather than a notice of candidates, uncontested notice(s) must be published and circulated.
- 8.15 Given the significant amount of work involved, it is felt reasonable that parishes contribute to this process, and it is therefore being proposed to introduce an uncontested fee, which would be effective from the elections in May 2024, and would be banded dependent on the number of seats on the parish.

Up to and including 5 seats	£250
Between 6 and up to and including 10 seats	£450
Over 10 seats	£650

- 8.16 The Parish and Town Councils have been consulted and a summary of responses is included within Appendix B. It is considered to be a modest contribution and with scheduled elections only occurring every 4 years, parishes have the opportunity to factor this into their precept budget setting process.
- 8.17 This change would only apply to scheduled elections and by-elections called by the electorate of the parish, as these involve going through a nominations period. Not to casual vacancies (i.e. death, resignation or disqualification of a councillor) where no election is called after the statutory 14 day period, when parishes are free to co-opt.
- 8.18 In the event of a warded parish, where some wards are contested, whilst others are uncontested, the fee would only apply to the uncontested seats, e.g.,

A parish council has 10 seats which are split between 2 wards. One ward has 4 seats and the other ward has 6 seats. The ward with 4 seats was contested, but the ward with 6 seats was uncontested. The Parish Council would bear the full costs for the ward that went to poll (or a portion if the election was shared) and be charged £450 for the uncontested ward.

- 8.19 It has been indicated that elections staff should be entitled to holiday pay and that this should be reflected separately on their pay slip. In the absence of any official guidance from DHLUC, the fee paid for the roles listed in the Scale of Fees will have a portion of the fee listed on the payslip as a holiday percentage of 12.07% (which is based on the statutory holiday entitlement), e.g.:

A Presiding Officer, based on 19 hours will be paid a gross fee, including holiday pay of £304, of which £32.74 will be listed on the payslip as holiday pay.

- 8.20 It is necessary to ensure that roles continue to be paid at least the National Living Wage, having taken account of holiday pay. The Scale of Fees reflects that, whilst currently unknown, some roles are likely to be affected by the increase in the National Living Wage as of 1 April 2024. These rates will be set in line with the table in Appendix A when the National Living Wage for 2024/25 is announced.

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 The Democratic Services Manager has been appointed as RO as per section 14.6.13 of the Constitution.
- 9.2. Section 36 of The Representation of The People Act 1983 (RPA) provides that [at (4), (5), (5A)] all expenditure properly incurred by a Returning Officer in relation to the holding of a district, parish or community election be paid by that council, or parish or community council for which the election is held.
- 9.3. A RO is entitled to recover charges in respect of services rendered or expenses incurred for elections, as per section 29 RPA.
- 9.4 There is no specific delegation to set fees for elections. The RO has responsibility for elections, although setting their own fees is not recommended. An officer may under 14.6.2(e) of the Constitution “...*always refer a delegated decision to the Cabinet or Council or any of their respective Committees rather than make the decision*”; section 14.5.1 further provides “*All those functions relating to elections*” falls to the Council as an effective default.
- 9.5 The canvass, along with other statutory functions, is the responsibility of the Electoral Registration Officer and is contained within Sections 52 – 54 of The Representation of The People Act 1983 (RPA).

10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1. The fees for elections are considered in the budget setting process. In the case of Parish elections, each Parish is charged for its contested election, and it is proposed that they also pay a fee for uncontested elections.
- 10.2. The Electoral Commission recommends ratios when allocating electors and staff to Polling Stations which dictates that each Polling Station requires a Presiding Officer and between 1 and 3 Poll Clerks. Due to the ongoing Polling District Review, it is not yet known how many polling stations will be used in the May 2024 elections. However, it is estimated that there will be around 80 polling stations in use.

- 10.3. Although the Presiding Officer fee itself is unchanged, the increased number of stations associated with all out elections will mean that Presiding Officers fees will equate to around £25,920 compared with £19,456 in 2023.
- 10.4. Equally, an estimated 160 poll clerks would cost £32,000 compared with £21,500 in 2023.
- 10.5. In 2023, Postal Vote Openers worked a collective 235 hours. As such, with the increase to the hourly rate would equate to an additional £235, although the postal voting team will be working more hours at the forthcoming elections due to the increased elections and number of postal votes.
- 10.6. The district elections in 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 and therefore less than the overall costs in 2023 when the district elections were standalone.
- 10.7. Parish and Town Councils currently elect by thirds. Over the last three years, as an illustration of how the Parish and Town Council were elected, if an uncontested fee had been charged based on the current proposals, would have generated a total uncontested fee of £10,900, the majority being recharged in this financial year:

Area	Seats	Contested or Uncontested	Fee based on proposals
Ashwell	12	Uncontested 2023	650
Barkway	7	Uncontested 2023	450
Barley	6	Contested May 2023	
Bygrave	5	Uncontested 2023	250
Caldecote (2) and Newnham (4)	6	Uncontested 2023	450
Codicote (East) (2) and (Village) (8)	10	Uncontested 2023	450
Graveley	5	Uncontested 2022	250
Great Ashby	12	Uncontested 2023	650
Hinxworth	5	Uncontested 2023	250
Holwell	5	Uncontested 2023	250
Ickleford	8	Uncontested 2023	450
Kimpton	8	Uncontested 2022	450
Kings Walden (Breachwood Green) (6) and (Kings Walden) (2)	8	Uncontested 2023	450
Knebworth	12	Uncontested 2022	650
Lilley	7	Uncontested 2023	450
Offley (5) and (Cockernhoe) (4)	9	Uncontested 2023	450
Pirton	9	Uncontested 2023	450
Preston	7	Uncontested 2023	450
Reed	5	Uncontested 2023	250

Royston Town (Meridian) (5); (Palace) (5); (South) (2); (West) (3)	15	Palace; South; West - contested May 2022 Meridian - uncontested May 2022 Meridian - by-election - contested Sept 2022 South - by-election - contested May 23	250
Rushden (3) and Wallington (2)	5	Uncontested 2023	250
Sandon	6	Uncontested 2023	450
St. Ippolyts (North) (3) and (South) (5)	8	Uncontested 2021	450
St. Paul's Walden	7	Uncontested 2021	450
Therfield	7	Uncontested 2023	450
Weston	9	Uncontested 2023	450
Wymondley (Great Wymondley) (2); (Little Wymondley) (5) and (Todds Green) (1)	8	Uncontested 2023	450
		TOTAL	10900

- 10.8 As holiday pay is not currently incorporated as a separate line on pay slips will mean that the Council's payroll provider, Liberata, will need to make a change to the system and will likely charge a fee for doing this.

11. RISK IMPLICATIONS

- 11.1. Good Risk Management supports and enhances the decision-making process, increasing the likelihood of the Council meeting its objectives and enabling it to respond quickly and effectively to change. When taking decisions, risks and opportunities must be considered.
- 11.2. The Council needs to ensure it complies with statutory requirements. One element of this is to ensure that it has sufficient staff required to operate an election. Staffing of polling station roles continues to present one of the biggest challenges in the running of elections. Whilst other factors such as the hours of work and working environment contribute to this, feedback from staff in previous years has suggested that pay is a major factor as to why people are hesitant to work. If the Council does not pay a competitive rate, it will become increasingly difficult to staff elections because of fees.
- 11.3. The impact of the Elections Act has also increased the complexity in the administration for polling station staff (Presiding Officers, Poll Clerks and Polling station Inspectors), who are now expected to, amongst other reforms, verify the identity of every voter before a ballot paper is issued.
- 11.4. Furthermore, The Electoral Registration Officer has a statutory duty to maintain the Electoral Register, which includes conducting an annual canvass. The recruitment of efficient Canvassers is difficult and if they are not paid a competitive rate, it will become increasingly difficult conduct an annual canvass.

- 11.5. The Scale of Fees must be balanced against setting a rate that is fair, ensures that we can get suitable staff and doesn't risk any rate being paid dropping below the National Living Wage.

12. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 12.1. There are no equalities implications - 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.

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 There are no human resource implications, other than those set out.
- 15.2 Staff are contacted as to their availability to work prior to any election any changes to the fees, and the reasons, will be explained in this correspondence.

16. APPENDICES

- 16.1 Appendix A Electoral Services Scale of Fees 2024/25.
- 16.2 Appendix B Responses following consultation with Parish and Town Councils regarding the proposal to introduce and uncontested fee.

17. CONTACT OFFICERS

- 17.1 Melanie Stimpson, Democratic Services Manager (and Returning Officer/Electoral Registration Officer)
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- 17.3 Ian Couper, Service Director: Resources
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- 17.4 Tim Everitt, Performance and Risk Officer
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- 17.5 Reuben Ayavoo, Policy and Communities Manager
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ELECTORAL SERVICES – SCALE OF FEES
1 APRIL 2024 – 31 MARCH 2025

ELECTORAL SERVICES - SCALE OF FEES	2024/25 RATE (All Fees To Be Paid Hourly Rates)	NIGHT TIME AND SATURDAY RATE (Payable at 1.5 Times Normal Rate) (Minimum 4 Hours Applicable to Count Roles)	SUNDAY AND BANK HOLIDAY (Payable at 2 Times Normal Rate) (Minimum 4 Hours – Applicable to Count Roles)
Duty	Fee (£)	Fee (£)	Fee (£)
1. Polling staff			
Presiding Officer	16.00	N/A	N/A
Presiding Officer (covering two stations – additional payment)	100.00 (flat fee)	N/A	N/A
Poll Clerk	The higher of 12.50 or the National Living Wage excluding holiday pay *	N/A	N/A
Presiding Officer (Parish/Town Poll only)	16.00	N/A	N/A
Poll Clerk (Parish/Town Poll only)	The higher of 12.50 or the National Living Wage excluding holiday pay*	N/A	N/A

ELECTORAL SERVICES – SCALE OF FEES
1 APRIL 2024 – 31 MARCH 2025

2. Counting staff			
Count Manager / Senior Count Supervisor per hour	26.00	39.00	52.00
Count supervisor per hour (including ballot box receipt and Central Team)	18.38	27.57	36.76
Counting Assistant per hour	13.50	20.25	27.00
Count Media & Comms Manager	17.50	26.25	35.00
Control of Entry / Councillor Liaison / Reception Duty	13.50	20.25	27.00
Elections Porter	The higher of 12.50 or the National Living Wage excluding holiday pay*	As per the multiple above	As per the multiple above
3. Postal voting staff			
Postal Vote Opening Manager	25.00	37.50	50.00
Postal Vote Supervisor – per hour	17.50	26.25	35.00
Postal Votes Assistant – per hour	13.50	20.25	27.00

ELECTORAL SERVICES – SCALE OF FEES
1 APRIL 2024 – 31 MARCH 2025

Postal Vote Quality Control (set fee)	15.00	22.50	30.00
Car Parking fees for Garden Square Multi Storey	As per parking charges	-	-
4. Polling Station Inspector staff			
Polling Station Inspector (set fee)	19.00	N/A	N/A
5. Clerical Assistance/Ballot Box Preparation			
Administration per hour	To be set at National Living Wage excluding holiday pay*	As per multiple above	As per multiple above
6. Returning Officer's fees			
(a) For each contested ward/parish:	300.00	N/A	N/A
(b) For each un-contested ward/parish	35.00	N/A	N/A
7. Training			
Presiding Officer	30.00	N/A	N/A

ELECTORAL SERVICES – SCALE OF FEES
1 APRIL 2024 – 31 MARCH 2025

Poll Clerk	30.00	N/A	N/A
Senior/Polling Station Inspector	30.00	N/A	N/A
8. Travel for Polling Station Inspectors/Canvassers (Returns) /Postal Vote Issue/Postal Vote Drive			
Mileage payable at the recommended HMRC approved amount of 45 pence per mile for cars for the first 10,000 miles and 25 pence per mile thereafter.			
9. Canvasser – Canvass Forms and Invitation to Register Forms (RETURNS)			
Per hour Canvassing	The higher of 12.50 or the National Living Wage excluding holiday pay*		
10. Poll Card Delivery and Canvass Form (DELIVERY)			
Poll Card Delivery (per card)	0.20		
Canvass Form Delivery (per form)	0.20		
11. Uncontested Elections (including the Returning Officer uncontested fee)			
Up to and including 5 seats	250.00		
Between 6 and up to and including 10 seats	450.00		
Over 10 seats	650.00		
12. Holiday Pay	12.07% (included within the fees listed)		

ELECTORAL SERVICES – SCALE OF FEES
1 APRIL 2024 – 31 MARCH 2025

	* Where rates need to be set so they are at least in line with the National Living Wage then the basis rate needs to be at least equal to the National Living Wage rate for 2024/25 (when it is set). The equivalent amount for this table will be 12.07% higher to reflect holiday pay.
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Responses to Uncontested Fee Proposal

Town/Parish Council	Summary of Consultation Response	Comments
Ashwell	Ashwell Parish Council discussed this at their November meeting. They were of the view that as electoral services were a district council responsibility the cost should be borne by North Herts Council.	
Caldecote and Newnham	Will not be paying any uncontested election fees; the staff at NHDC already receive a salary for their roles, which I imagine already covers the responsibilities you outline in your note. So I am not certain why you are now asking us all to pay twice for the same activity?	Not requesting payment towards officers' salaries – it is a contribution towards the work that must be undertaken on behalf of a Parish/Town Council for their election. In the current arrangements, the District Council is essentially subsidising the cost of parish elections. Not proposing that officers are paid twice - that the Parish covers the costs of running their own election.
Codicote	Codicote Parish Council will be objecting to the proposal on the basis that the Parish Council has no say in the matter, and it has always been a core service previously provided.	Reasons for introduction of fee has been included within the officer's report and explained during consultation with respective Parish/Town Councils.
Great Ashby	Council has no objection to the introduction of a fee, as it recognises the volume of work involved for North Herts Council Officers irrespective of an election being contested or uncontested. It also assists Great Ashby Community Council (GACC) with the budgeting process; as the fee is fixed and known, GACC can put the appropriate amount into reserves each year. Council would like to highlight that they found the style and format of the paper form not particularly user friendly and would welcome any efficiencies being introduced into the process (such as online submissions) that would reduce the overall cost of an election.	With regards to the suggestion of online submissions, the Nominations process must be a paper based process as this is a legislative requirement.
Graveley	They all feel that the proposal is reasonable and agree that it should be a tiered charge against the number of seats for each Parish.	

	From perspective of Parish Clerk, agree it is reasonable and you have given enough notice so that any Parishes that do have elections next year, the RFO's can now include these costs in the budget's that are being set for next year's precept.	
Hinxworth	Object. The cost of this will be down to the electorate who will bear this cost through precept. Voting is a democrat right and therefore this cost should not be paid for by the voters. Unanimous in our view point.	
Ickleford	In support of introducing a fee for elections whether they are uncontested or not. Suggested that the fee be set according to the precept rather than seats as the precept for Lilley Parish Council is a third of Ickleford Parish Council. So, an increase in the precept to assimilate the fee would be a much higher percentage of the precept for Lilley than Ickleford. Irrespective – Ickleford Parish Councillors are supportive of the introduction of an uncontested fee.	The suggested fee has been determined having looked at the various elements involved in an uncontested election. Unsure of a methodology for setting an uncontested fee to assimilate to a precept.
Knebworth	Councillors of view that there is no need to change the current arrangement.	Reasons for introduction of fee has been included within the officer's report and explained during consultation with respective Parish/Town Councils.
Offley	Outlined proposal is fair.	
Pirton	Overall, little reaction from Pirton Parish Councillors. One Councillor thought that the proposed charge was "petty" and that the money could be better spent supporting organisations in the village.	
Reed	We feel that the proposal to charge the council is unreasonable for three reasons: 1. Reed is a particularly small parish and so the proposed charge would be disproportionate compared to other, larger parishes. 2. This appears simply to be a way of appearing to reduce the overall NHDC costs by simply passing them on to another body. At the end of the day, it is	The proposals include a tiered banding, proportionate to the number of seats in that parish at that election. As set out above, the District Council is essentially subsidising the costs of elections for Parish/Town Councils. This proposal is for the true cost of the elections to be met by the authority for whom the elections are for.

	<p>all coming out of the pockets of hard working tax payers.</p> <p>3. NHDC has always had these costs as part of the costs of running elections. The parish has not, and even though it may be seen by some as a small amount, for the parish this would inevitably result in an increase to the council.</p>	
Royston	Matter discussed by Royston Town Council Finance Committee and they raised no objection to the introduction of an uncontested elections fee	
Rushden and Wallington	<p>This seems a bit like robbing Peter to pay Paul.</p> <p>Surely all that will happen is that Parish Councils will increase their precept requests by this amount to cover the costs and therefore precept costs as a whole for NHDC will increase to the same but opposite amount that the budget for the Elections Team will reduce (by the income derived from this fee).</p> <p>This seems to be adding another layer of administration onto an already admin heavy service provision. Surely the Elections Team are there to provide a non-chargeable service to local Parish Councils as do many other council departments. For this reason we are opposed to this proposal as it adds no value to the democratic process and we believe that it will only add increased costs to NHDC overall.</p>	<p>The proposal is not based on income generation - it is a contribution towards the work that must be undertaken on behalf of a Parish/Town Council for their election, which the District Council funds unless the election is contested.</p> <p>Within legislation it states that the Returning Officer shall be paid all expenses reasonably incurred by the relevant local authority.</p> <p>Having a set fee with enable the Town/Parish Councils to budget over the four years between elections.</p>
Weston	<p>Agree that costs have to be covered, therefore in principle, expecting Parish Councils to pay something for uncontested elections is not unreasonable. However, those cost would then need to be covered by the precept, which is a tax on exactly the same people that the District Council would otherwise be expecting to pay to cover the costs. In other words, it is the same money coming from the same source, the only relevant question therefore is not who collects the money to cover the cost, but rather, what is the most cost-effective and efficient way to cover the cost?</p> <p>In response to this, the Council's view was that the cost would inevitably be lower if the</p>	<p>The election to Town/Parish Councils occurs every four years and the uncontested fee could be budgeted over that four year period.</p> <p>It is a contribution towards the work that must be undertaken on behalf of a Parish/Town Council for their election, which at the moment the District Council funds unless the election is contested.</p>

	<p>District Council covered it out of their own budget. Instigating a new process, invoicing individual councils, collecting payment, chasing receivables and accounting for the same, will inevitably be more expensive and less efficient than simply leaving things as they currently are.</p> <p>For this reason, Weston Parish Council do not believe that a separate charge to parish councils for uncontested elections is an optimum solution to covering the cost of the process.</p>	
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