

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



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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

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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