

Notice of North Norfolk District Council Interim Review of Polling Places 2020

Notice is given that North Norfolk District Council, in accordance with sections 18A to 18E of the Representation of the People Act 1983, is undertaking an interim review of some polling places within its area following the three elections held across the district in 2019.

In total we are looking at reviewing polling arrangements in eight of our Polling Districts.

The first three changes are to make permanent the arrangements which were put in place as a temporary measure in 2019 and are as follows:

- **Matlaske (GR8)**
Matlaske Parish Council expressed a preference for their community to vote at Baconsthorpe Village Hall, rather than Little Barningham Village Hall due to a lack of parking at the latter location and this request was agreed.
- **Sustead (ER8)**
The lack of availability of the polling station at Sustead saw voters from Bessingham, Metton and Sustead vote at Hanworth Village Hall and it is believed that this arrangement worked well and could operate in this way in the future, especially with the refurbishments of Hanworth Village Hall almost being complete.
- **Tunstead (HT8)**
The polling station for Tunstead moved from the Primary School to the Community Room in the Horse and Groom Public House as the Primary School is no longer available to use following a change in its administration.

The next five changes are the proposals to close existing Polling Stations and to use existing stations in nearby Polling Districts:

- **Bale (PR1)**
The Parish of Gunthorpe is currently served by two Polling Stations either side of the A148 with Gunthorpe North (PR1) using Bale Village Hall and Gunthorpe South (PR4) using Gunthorpe Village Institute.

Both Polling Districts have very small electorates 85 and 76 electors respectively and other than the problems which some electors might find in crossing the main A148 road which divides the two parts of the Parish, it is difficult to justify the continued operation of two polling stations to serve this community. Back in 2011, the then Returning Officer, Philip Burton, proposed closure of the Bale Polling Station with all registered voters in Gunthorpe Parish being asked to vote at the Village Institute, but in the face of local objections this proposal was not progressed. Whilst it is recognised that Gunthorpe and Bale are quite dispersed communities, voters in other parts of the District travel equal distances to access a polling station such that it is not believed that voters would be particularly disadvantaged if a decision was taken to move to operate a single polling station to serve this parish. The vast majority of people living in these communities would in any event have access to personal transport to access work, health, education and retail services, such that it remains difficult to justify operation of two polling stations for such a small community.

Our proposal would be to use one single Polling Station situated at Gunthorpe Village Institute to serve electors in the parish of Gunthorpe;

- **Horsey (HI2)**

Currently this Polling District uses the School Room at Horsey Methodist Church on All Saints Lane. There are currently 49 eligible electors who can vote inside the Polling Station; this being the smallest electorate in the District.

From previous feedback it has been advised that exterior lighting is poor and there no suitable access for disabled voters as there is no ramp and the door is not wide enough to accommodate a wheelchair. Furthermore it has been reported there was no first aid kit in the building.

This is our most remote Polling Station to the far East of the district and the only viable alternative is to move the polling arrangements for Horsey to Sea Palling Village Hall on Waxham Road which is 3.8 miles away and some 8 minutes if travelling by car.

Arguably the distance for voters to travel to Sea Palling might be an issue in terms of people's ability to exercise their franchise, but this could be addressed through promoting postal voting arrangements as at the present time the cost of operating this polling station relative to the number of electors voting in person at this location is very high. The cost of the village hall to hire is £80 and is staffed by one Presiding Officer and one Poll Clerk which in total costs £500 including training fees and expenses. At the recent Parliamentary election, comment was made by two voters that they were surprised given the small population of the parish that a polling station was still provided in the village. Over the three elections held last year the cost per voter at the Polling Station was £29.00, £30.53 and £16.11 respectively.

- **Ingworth (ER6)**

Currently voters in the Ingworth Polling District use the Reading Room on The Street in Ingworth as their polling station.

This is not a good building to use as a Polling Station. Recent feedback has reported that there is no adequate parking, the approach to the entrance is obstructed and there is no ramp available for assisting people with mobility issues in getting into the polling station. The door is not wide enough for a wheelchair user to enter and indeed inside there is not enough room for one to move around. Also it has been reported the tables and chairs are not adequate and that the station is unclean. There are no toilets in the building (which is a single room) so a portable one needs to be provided for staff at an extra cost. This is situated outside down the end of a track so in darkness it is far from ideal. The kitchen facilities are not suitable, with no hot water and the fire safety doors are not easily opened. Considering the hours Polling Staff are required to work at the Polling Station consideration must be given to their comfort and wellbeing. Finally there have also been flooding issues at this Polling Station during periods of heavy rainfall including at the Referendum in 2016.

There are currently 72 eligible electors who can vote inside the Polling Station. The cost of the village hall to hire is £80 and is staffed by one Presiding Officer and one Poll Clerk which in total costs £500 including training fees and expenses. Over the three elections held last year the cost per voter at the Polling Station was £12.34, £14.50 and £9.21 respectively.

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

- **Morston (CO4)**

Currently voters in the Morston Polling District use the Village Hall on Quay Lane as their polling station. There are currently 61 eligible electors who can vote inside the Polling Station.

There have been no issues raised in the log books or feedback forms from the three elections held in 2019. However access to the Polling Station is down Quay Lane which is not the widest and is used often by vehicles towing boats or marine craft. Furthermore there is not a great deal of space to park and the area is also the access for a small static caravan park.

The cost of the village hall to hire is £75 and is staffed by one Presiding Officer and one Poll Clerk which in total costs £500 including training fees and expenses. Over the three elections held last year the cost per voter at the polling station was £22.12, £23.96 and £15.97 respectively.

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

- **Sidestrand (PO3)**

Currently voters in the Sidestrand Polling District use the Reading Rooms on Cromer Road as their polling station. There are currently 66 eligible electors who can vote inside the Polling Station. There have been no issues identified by the Presiding Officers or the Polling Station Inspectors about the building itself although it has been noted that the parking for the polling station is in a field across the Cromer Road and that there is no footpath along the area from the Reading Room.

The cost of the village hall to hire is £160 and is staffed by one Presiding Officer and one Poll Clerk which in total costs £500 including training fees and expenses and over the three elections held last year the per voter cost at Polling Station was £28.70, £33.00 and £12.69 respectively.

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

Any changes which are implemented as a result of this review will be communicated to any elector affected by the change and any revised arrangements will come into effect when the next scheduled elections take place on 6th May 2021.

Following the agreement from Full Council at their meeting on Wednesday 23rd September 2020 to proceed to a consultation we are inviting comments from Parish Councils and local electors on these proposals. Any person wishing to make a representation should do so by **Monday 2nd November 2020** by the following means:

- By email: elections@north-norfolk.gov.uk
- In writing: Electoral Services
North Norfolk District Council
Holt Road
Cromer
Norfolk
NR27 9EN

Steve Blatch
Chief Executive and Returning Officer
28 September 2020