

**REPRESENTATION AND PROPOSALS OF THE ACTING RETURNING OFFICER
OF THE FOLKESTONE AND HYTHE PARLIAMENTARY CONSTITUENCY**

Dated: 02 October 2023

BACKGROUND

The Polling Districts, Polling Places and Polling Stations review for the Folkestone & Hythe District area began on Monday, 02 October 2023. It is an extremely important review, ensuring the electorate, where possible, are equipped with the most appropriate polling stations and places within the polling districts they live in. There are various stages to the review including pre-requisite work carried out by my electoral services team, a consultation period inviting as many people as possible to contribute and finally any changes and recommendations being implemented for future elections.

CONSIDERATIONS

The welcomed accessibility requirements implemented by the Elections Act 2022 raises particular focus on the suitability of polling stations and how the electorate access their right to vote in person. Some stations were changed for the Local elections in May this year, to accommodate the accessibility requirements brought about by the Elections Act 2022.

New Parliamentary boundary lines have been drawn by the Boundary Commission and from the 01 November will be implemented for the next General Election. This means that North Downs East (NDE1-10) and North Downs West (NDW1-9) wards of the Folkestone and Hythe District Council area will form part of the Ashford Constituency at Parliamentary elections.

The pandemic has also had a long-lasting effect on venue availability, choice, and longevity. It has meant that some long-standing venues have been sold or committed to long term rentals for consistent income. Due to economic pressures, understandably, regular rental agreements will take precedent over an infrequent or unscheduled election. Space has also become a premium for some venues and as a result, they have unfortunately had to decline our hire arrangements for future elections.

All polling districts have been reviewed by the team in consultation with me. Most polling districts have coterminous boundary lines with Parish and District wards which can only be changed via a local boundary review conducted by the Local Boundary Commission.

Guidance published by the Electoral Commission on polling district and polling station reviews has been referenced during the pre-requisite work carried out by my elections team.

PROPOSALS

The following polling districts are considered in my proposals:

BR1 Part of Broadmead Town and Broadmead District wards
HR1 and HR2 Part of Hythe West Town and Hythe Rural District wards

The following polling stations are considered in my proposals:

BR1 Grace Taylor Hall
CH2 Cheriton Scout Hut
HR1 Win Pine House
RM2 Dymchurch Village Hall
RM5 Burmarsh Church Hall

Each of the aforementioned areas and stations are part of my proposals for the review, I would like these proposals considered in conjunction with any other suitable representations that you may receive during the consultation period.

I have formed a proposal to either mitigate a risk or offer a solution to a potential issue in the future from the following pieces of information collated by my team:

- Current polling district electorate sizes
- Potential electorate growth areas
- Major housing development plans within the next 4 years
- Evaluation of current polling stations during the Local and Parish elections
- Voter ID and accessibility requirements set by the Elections Act 2022
- Polling district street analysis
- Polling station turnout figures from 2011 – present day
- Electorate and staff feedback from recent elections

BR1 Proposal

Part of Broadmead Town and Broadmead District wards

To leave BR1 as one whole polling district and move the polling place/station from Grace Taylor Hall to Folkestone Sport Centre.

During the pre-requisite work carried out by the elections team, it was evident from feedback at the most recent May polls, and the requirements of the Elections Act that the electorate of Broadmead had outgrown Grace Taylor Hall.

The options for BR1 were as follows:

- Split BR1 and create two polling districts and places,
- Leave BR1 intact and move the polling place/station; or
- Do nothing.

To avoid confusion, with less administration costs, the most efficient way to resolve the issues presented to us is to propose the second option and move the polling station from Grace Taylor Hall to another venue.

The current polling station electorate is 2,500 and has remained stable for the last 3 polling district reviews (which equates to 12 years). Broadmead was historically split in to two polling districts but then reverted to one district following a boundary review approximately ten years ago.

Grace Taylor Hall has been a long-standing polling place and station for Folkestone & Hythe District Council. The new polling station in Folkestone Sports Centre will be a welcomed addition to our portfolio with better facilities; a large, ramped entrance, larger staff area and the ability to implement a one-way system if required to protect users and voters to the facility. There is also designated disabled parking just outside the entrance with 3 bus stops approximately 6-minute walk away, depending on from the direction of approach – Beech Close, Julian Road or Radnor Park Road.

HR1 and HR2 Proposal

Part of Hythe West Town and Hythe Rural District wards

To leave HR1 and HR2 intact, without moving the boundary lines, and to pause the creation of a new polling district.

It is clear, from housing planning forecasts, that the development of Nicholls Quarry will grow the electorate within the HR2 polling district. Much of this will take place over the next four years plus and is likely to affect the mandatory polling review scheduled in 2028.

My proposal for the 2023 review is to leave HR1 and HR2 intact without moving the boundary lines. Until such time that the housing development has been occupied, the polling district electorate size does not exceed the recommended allowance of electors at a polling station, set by the Electoral Commission.

CH2 Proposal

Cheriton Scout Hut

To move the polling place/station for CH2 from Cheriton Scout Hut to the Shorncliffe Pavillion when that site is up and running.

The Cheriton Scout Hut group stepped in for us in the lead up to an election some years ago and has remained a polling station ever since. For Parliamentary elections, this venue becomes very busy, and access is hard for electors that wish to drive to it.

Nearby parking is available on Firs Lane and in The Range car park, however if the weather is particularly poor, Hawkins Road becomes gridlocked, and this becomes an understandable frustration for electors trying to exercise their vote.

The team sought alternative venues within the polling district, and most have not been suitable, except for one – The Shorncliffe Pavilion.

The Shorncliffe Pavilion is a big venue, with a large car park and accessible entrances. At present there is no governing body to allow us to rent this space for elections. Our team is working with officers and community groups to allow this venue to open and function for the community. When the time comes, my proposal is to move the polling place and station to this venue for the CH2 polling district.

HR1 Proposal

Win Pine House

To make Win Pine House the permanent polling place/station for this polling district.

Win Pine House communal area was procured as a polling station for the May 2023 elections. The venue is directly opposite the previous polling place of Hythe Football Club and has an accessible entrance, separated from the main sheltered scheme. Lyell Close has unrestricted on-street parking and is also a 4-minute walk from the Fort Road bus stop, or a 5-minute walk from the Reachfields bus stop.

RM2 Proposal

Dymchurch Village Hall

To keep Dymchurch Village Hall as a double station, for the replacement of The Neptune Pub.

Unfortunately, for reasons beyond our control, The Neptune Pub decided not to remain a polling place. The elections team sought other locations in the polling district but to no avail. Dymchurch Village Hall is a large venue with adequate means to hold two

distinct polling stations. This was the only option for the May 2023 elections that recently took place -

We received no negative feedback for the use of the facility as a double station so I would like to propose that RM2 polling district vote at Dymchurch Village Hall for future elections.

RM5 Proposal

Burmarsh Church Hall

To move the polling place/station from Burmarsh Church Hall to Fallow Fields Campsite.

Burmarsh Church Hall has been a polling station for many years, unfortunately parts of the building (the kitchen and toilets) have been condemned and can't be used by the polling station staff, or by the public if they need to use the facilities.

Arrangements were made for the May 2023 elections to allow Burmarsh Church Hall to be used. However, going forward, as a duty of care to anyone working or voting in Burmarsh, I propose changing the polling station to the Fallow Fields Campsite which is a short distance down the road. The elections team investigated other venues in the area, however due to accessibility requirements and the space for equipment needed, these venues were too small to accommodate our requirements.

Thank you for your time and the consideration of my proposals. I look forward to receiving your comments and reflections on my proposals.

Susan Priest

(Acting) Returning Officer

