



Fakenham Magna Parish Council

Ben Smith
Business Partner Governance
Legal and Governance Services
West Suffolk Council

January 22nd, 2023

Dear Ben,

Thank you for your e-mail dated 19th December 2022 detailing the changes to the voting process brought about by the Elections Act 2022, and the results of West Suffolk Council's recent audit of polling station facilities. We were able to discuss your findings and proposals at our Parish Council meeting the week before last.

The audit is incorrect in one respect, in that there are car parking facilities in the field next to the church. This field is leased by the Parish Council from Euston Estate and is used on a routine basis when church services and elections are held; indeed it is where the election officials park their cars!

We would agree that accessibility issues are important, and in this instance they could be remedied with some matting for the path, and wooden ramps for the steps. Moreover, we believe that moving the polling station away from the village would have several detrimental effects.

Firstly, it's likely it would reduce the election turnout from the village. Having to drive to a polling station in the next village would be inconvenient for everyone and in these days of voter apathy, we worry would dissuade village people from voting at all.

Secondly and an obvious follow-on from the first point is that not everyone in our village has access to a car. Might West Suffolk Council be in danger of exchanging one group of people with accessibility problems, with another? How would you ensure that 'non car drivers' are not disadvantaged by this decision?

Thirdly the decision further erodes the 'community identity' of the village. Elections are infrequent and holding them within the village fosters a feeling that the village matters to the larger district and that it is recognised as a community in its own right.

Lastly the decision feels tone deaf to the effects on the environment of 50 more cars making a short journey down the road. Have all the above factors been considered?

It seems likely, in any case, that people with mobility issues take the opportunity to use the postal vote and we welcome the Council's efforts to ensure all electors are aware of the postal vote system. Perhaps the balanced answer lies there with some simple remedial action in the church, rather than forcing everyone to get in their cars?

Yours Sincerely

Signature redacted

Adam Jones
Chairman - Fakenham Magna Parish Council