

From: TERRY HOLLOWAY <terryholloway.33@btinternet.com>
Sent: 23 January 2023 19:10
To: Smith, Ben <Ben.Smith@westsuffolk.gov.uk>
Subject: Re: Polling Station in Great Wratting

[THIS IS AN EXTERNAL EMAIL]

Dear Ben,

Thanks for your comments. I don't think the Broadlands whole school would be a good option for our village.

All members of the Parish Council believe that Great Thurlow would be the best option for us if we can't have our own polling station as in many previous years .

Are you able to provide me with an easy link please, which I can send to people living in our villllage to help them to register for a postal vote ?

With all best wishes

Terry

Sent from my iPad

On 23 Jan 2023, at 17:48, Smith, Ben <Ben.Smith@westsuffolk.gov.uk>

Dear Terry,

Thank you for your email. As advised in my previous email, unfortunately the Thurlow Estate option was not appropriate and we have not received a response from Broadlands Hall School. I'm also not sure if Broadlands Hall School would be a better option for the Great Wratting electorate and would welcome your views on this. Aside from that option, we have not received any further responses in relation to Great Wratting or Little Wratting and any potential facilities that could be used for polling in the area.

With regard to postal voting, the deadline for applications for a postal vote at the 4 May elections is 5pm on Tuesday 18 April. As advised in my previous email, we will write to every elector in the village to advise them of any change of polling station and we will include an application form for a postal vote and reply paid envelope so that they may apply for a postal vote if they wish. Electors can apply for a 'permanent' postal vote so that they continue to receive postal votes in the post for any elections that are held.

Many thanks,

Ben

Ben Smith
Business Partner Governance
Legal and Governance Services
Direct dial: 01284 757101
Email: Ben.Smith@westsuffolk.gov.uk
www.westsuffolk.gov.uk
West Suffolk Council
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From: TERRY HOLLOWAY <terryholloway.33@btinternet.com>
Sent: 23 January 2023 11:52
To: Smith, Ben <Ben.Smith@westsuffolk.gov.uk>
Subject: Re: Polling Station in Great Wratting

[THIS IS AN EXTERNAL EMAIL]

Dear Ben,

I wonder if you could give me an update please on the polling station for Great Wratting. We had a Parish Council meeting last week and a great deal of disquiet was expressed at the prospects of us not having anywhere to vote in the village.

I am assuming that it is now too late for village residents to register for postal voting for the next elections on the 4th of May?

Best wishes
Terry

Sent from my iPad

On 22 Dec 2022, at 11:22, Smith, Ben <Ben.Smith@westsuffolk.gov.uk> wrote:

Dear Terry,

Thank you for your prompt responses, it's much appreciated, especially this close to Christmas.

My colleague spoke to Thurlow Estate and unfortunately the space is only available short-term as they are looking to let it out ahead of May 2023. The alternative arrangements that we make for polling should be available for at least five years to avoid confusing electors with ever-changing polling stations.

As mentioned in my previous email, we also contacted the Broadlands Hall School in Little Wratting earlier this year to enquire about their facilities but have not received a response from them. This may be a potential option for us to explore further for Great and Little Wratting and I would welcome your views on this.

Thank you for the update regarding Withersfield or Great Thurlow being more convenient than Kedington, and appreciating the point that neither option is ideal. I would like to assure you that whatever change is made we will write to every elector in the village to advise them of the change and we will include an application form for a postal vote and reply paid envelope so that they may apply for a postal vote if they wish. We have seen an increase in postal voting in recent years as many see it as a more convenient and efficient (and a safer way during the pandemic) way of casting their vote. For example, I can see on our system that approximately 20% of Great Wratting electors vote by post. We also tend to see a higher % of postal votes returned compared to the % of electors that vote at a polling station. However, we do not promote postal voting as the only option and continue to encourage electors to choose the method of voting that works best for them.

Many thanks,

Ben

Ben Smith
Business Partner Governance

Legal and Governance Services
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From: TERRY HOLLOWAY <terryholloway.33@btinternet.com>
Sent: 21 December 2022 18:30
To: Smith, Ben <Ben.Smith@westsuffolk.gov.uk>
Cc: Stevens, Peter <peter.stevens@westsuffolk.gov.uk>; Bobby Bennett <Bobby.Bennett@suffolk.gov.uk>
Subject: Re: Polling Station in Great Wratting

[THIS IS AN EXTERNAL EMAIL]

Dear Ben,

The best person to speak to is **information redacted** . He is the agent for the Thurlow Estate.

Its debatable whether Withersfield or Great Thurlow is the most convenient , but both are preferable to Kedington, which involves crossing the A143.

Our main concern remains that if the polling station is moved out of our village a high number of residents will not vote because of the lack of access to a polling station in the Village. We must really do everything possible to ensure votes can be cast in Great Wratting.

Best wishes
Terry

Sent from my iPad

On 21 Dec 2022, at 17:59, Smith, Ben <Ben.Smith@westsuffolk.gov.uk> wrote:

Dear Terry,

Thank you for your email.

I'm grateful for the suggestion regarding a caravan. Unfortunately they are similar to portacabins in that they are very difficult to obtain for short-term hire but they are also very inaccessible and West Suffolk stopped using caravans a few years ago for that reason.

I note the suggestion regarding a potential office/building at the Hall and will follow up on this to see if there is a suitable room that we can hire for use as a polling station. Do you have a contact at Thurlow Estate that you could share with me please?

I also note that Parish Council meetings are occasionally held at Withersfield Village Hall, which is also where we have a polling station. We will continue to look at alternatives within Great and Little Wratting but I wondered if this would be more suitable than Kedington as an alternative if we do need to look at neighbouring villages. Welcome your thoughts on this.

Thanks again for your help and input and I look forward to receiving a contact for Thurlow Estate.

Many thanks,

Ben

Ben Smith
Business Partner Governance
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From: TERRY HOLLOWAY <terryholloway.33@btinternet.com>

Sent: 21 December 2022 17:35

To: Smith, Ben <Ben.Smith@westsuffolk.gov.uk>

Cc: Stevens, Peter <peter.stevens@westsuffolk.gov.uk>; Richard Bowler <gtwrattingpc@yahoo.co.uk>; Bobby Bennett <bobby.bennett@suffolk.gov.uk>

Subject: Re: Polling Station in Great Wratting

[THIS IS AN EXTERNAL EMAIL]

Good evening Ben,

Thanks for your very helpful response, and it's very good to hear you are trying hard to enable us to keep a Polling Station in Great Wratting.

We all favour the usual position for the Polling Station at The Hall, and although the best solution would for a Portakabin to be acquired which includes a lavatory, it is disappointing to note that is no longer a feasible solution.

I've just spoken **information redacted** who lives at the Hall and he has confirmed that there is a lavatory very close to the place where the Portakabin is normally positioned. This belongs to the Thurlow Estate and we are quite certain that it can be made available, which removes one logistic problem.

If a Portakabin is not an option, perhaps a caravan could be rented to sit in that position? I imagine you have various contacts for that sort of rental, but if you are not successful I will do what I can to try and find one from local contacts. Failing that the village does own a gazebo with sides, which could be erected in the same place and heated.

We hold our Parish Council meetings in the dining room of the Red Lion Public House, which is closed on the evenings when we hold our meetings. Previously, we held our Parish Council meetings in the Church, as well as in Withersfield Village Hall. It's a pity that the Red Lion is not considered feasible as a Polling Station.

There are also some outbuilding at the Hall, including a office, which possibly might be suitable if the Thurlow Estate agree to their use.

With all best wishes

Terry

Sent from my iPad

On 21 Dec 2022, at 12:02, Smith, Ben <Ben.Smith@westsuffolk.gov.uk> wrote:

Dear Terry,

Thank you for your email response regarding the polling arrangements for Great Wratting village. I would like to assure you that we wish to continue to provide a polling station in Great Wratting and are very open to potential options. I've detailed below our work on this so far and look forward to your feedback and any other options that you may be able to suggest.

With regard to the current arrangements with a portacabin, we do not own such facilities and so the logistical issues have related to the supply of an accessible portacabin and required facilities such as portaloos, lighting and generators which cannot be guaranteed by contractors at short notice. Elections are ordinarily scheduled for a specific date (1st Thursday in May) but we must always be prepared for a by-election or a snap general election, as we saw in December 2019. We may see more snap general elections in the future as the fixed term parliament act has been repealed by parliament.

Unfortunately, we are also finding that the portacabin suppliers are not willing to supply the cabins on short contracts due to the time and effort involved in arranging delivery and collection. At the May elections last year our Property Team dedicated significant resource to sourcing a suitable portacabin and liaising with contractors to arrange for it to be delivered and put in place. The portacabin was sited successfully but the contractor did not deliver the portaloos which caused significant logistical issues on the day as our staff had to travel to a nearby polling station in Kedington to use the toilet. I'm sure that you will appreciate that this is far from satisfactory from a staffing perspective and I must ensure that whatever arrangements we make, they should not only be accessible to disabled electors but also provide reasonable facilities for electors and polling staff. As a result of the above, continuing with a portacabin is not a suitable option.

The Red Lion pub seemed a good alternative and we engaged with the landlord earlier this year and undertook a site visit to see if it could be a potential polling station. The pub is well situated in the village but does not offer suitable access to disabled persons and wheelchair users. Unfortunately the rear entrance which is used as a disabled person access is not suitable as it presents steps and tight corners. We also inspected the marquee and whilst this is a more accessible space, we found that it was being used for storage, there is no heating and the lighting would not be adequate. As a result, it was not considered to be suitable for use as a polling station.

We note that Great and Little Wratting poll together and also contacted the Broadlands Hall School in Little Wratting earlier this year to enquire about their facilities but have not received a response. This may be a potential option for us to explore further and I would welcome your views on this.

I'm very grateful for your suggestion regarding Rook Tree Barn, which we were not aware of, and a colleague of mine contacted them this morning to enquire. They

advised that they do have a small training room but we would not be allowed access due to safeguarding and confidentiality reasons as they are an adoption agency.

If you are aware of any other potential alternatives then please do let me know. I did wonder where the Parish Council holds its meetings and if this would be a suitable facility for polling?

My thanks to you for engaging with the review so far, your local knowledge and input with this process is gratefully received. A polling station does not have to be a community centre or village hall and we are open to considering alternatives, provided they are accessible to disabled electors and provide reasonable facilities both for electors and polling staff. Throughout the country a number of unusual polling stations are being used; some examples are a launderette, a domestic garage, a boxing club and a public house. But, whatever arrangements we make, they should be accessible to electors, provide reasonable facilities both for electors and polling staff and be available for five years to avoid confusing electors with ever-changing polling stations.

Many thanks,

Ben

Ben Smith
Business Partner Governance
Legal and Governance Services
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From: TERRY HOLLOWAY <terryholloway.33@btinternet.com>
Sent: 20 December 2022 20:58
To: Smith, Ben <Ben.Smith@westsuffolk.gov.uk>

Cc: Stevens, Peter <peter.stevens@westsuffolk.gov.uk>; Richard Bowler <gtwrattingpc@yahoo.co.uk>; Bobby Bennett <Bobby.Bennett@suffolk.gov.uk>
Subject: Polling Station in Great Wrating

[THIS IS AN EXTERNAL EMAIL]

Dear Ben,

Peter Stevens has kindly shown me your email and has asked for some comments from me which I have provided. I am certain they will be reflected in his response to you. However, as Parish Council Chairman for Great Wrating I consider it important to write personally to you to express the deep concern of the Parish Council to the proposal that we might be deprived of a Polling Station in our village.

Let me preface my remarks by commenting that my fellow Councillors and I were surprised to learn that there were "significant logistic issues" at the last election by the use of the Portakabin at Hall Farm, and we would welcome having more details please. We are a small village and I do not believe there are many residents who would have found difficulty entering the Polling Station.

Previously, a Caravan was provided as a Polling Station in the layby outside Coronation Cottages, and in more recent years this has been replaced by the Portakabin at Hall Farm. This is an ideal and central location within the village. It would be wholly unacceptable to the Parish Council for our residents to be obliged to travel to either Kedington or Great Thurlow in order to vote. Using your terminology, that would cause "significant logistic issues" to people living in Great Wrating because there is no public transport within our village and many elderly residents, who are quite capable of walking to the village centre, lack the means of travelling 2 miles to Kedington or Great Thurlow. To compel residents of Great Wrating to travel to a neighbouring village to vote would run in the face of democracy because it would provide a major disincentive for people to vote.

If there is a requirement to provide a Polling Station which has easy access for disabled people, then that is what you must provide for us. Our very firm opinion is that the solution is **not** for you to remove the opportunity for our residents to vote by removing the Polling Station from Great Wrating .

There is another potential venue within the village for a Polling Station, which is the Marquee behind the Red Lion Public House - subject to an agreement being made with the landlord. There are also premises at Rook Tree Barn which have disabled access, and which could possibly be considered as a suitable venue subject to agreement by the tenants.

Thank you for your consideration of our **very strong objections** to the proposals to remove the Polling Station from Great Wrating

With best wishes
Terry Holloway
Chairman
Great Wrating Parish Council
07785316763

Sent from my iPad

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