

From: Joanne Kirk <stradishallparishcouncil@yahoo.co.uk>
Sent: 30 January 2023 09:43
To: Smith, Ben <Ben.Smith@westsuffolk.gov.uk>
Subject: Re: Interim Polling Place review - Stradishall

[THIS IS AN EXTERNAL EMAIL]

Hi Ben,

Thank you for the update. It is good that residents will be sent an application for a postal vote. Hopefully that will help residents who may struggle to get to Sterling House.

Kind regards

Joanne

Joanne Kirk
Clerk to Stradishall Parish Council
Tel: 07880 686069

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On 27 Jan 2023, at 15:49, Smith, Ben <Ben.Smith@westsuffolk.gov.uk> wrote:

Dear Joanne,

As recently discussed, I have been liaising with **information redacted** at Café 33 regarding the potential to have a polling station at the café but unfortunately she has confirmed that they are not able to provide the area due to the restrictions we would have to place on her staff use of the coffee making area and the customers use of the toilets. We must ensure that voting is private and unfortunately that cannot be achieved and they are not willing to close the area for the day due to the impact on trade.

It looks like Sterling House is the suitable alternative and will be the option which is recommended for approval. This appears more suitable for the residents closer to the Highpoint Prison but I appreciate it will be further to travel for those closer to the church.

As I advised before, 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.

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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[<image001.png>](#)

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From: Joanne Kirk <stradishallparishcouncil@yahoo.co.uk>
Sent: 17 January 2023 11:09
To: Smith, Ben <Ben.Smith@westsuffolk.gov.uk>
Subject: Re: Interim Polling Place review - Stradishall

[THIS IS AN EXTERNAL EMAIL]

Dear Ben,

Thank you for getting back to me. It is such a shame that the church can no longer be used. I fully appreciate the reasons you have given but it will be a sad loss for the village.

We actually have our meetings in Cafe 33 which is on the A143 just before the prison. Would you like me to ask the manager if that would be a feasible option?

Kind regards

Joanne

Joanne Kirk
Clerk to Stradishall Parish Council
Tel: 07880 686069

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On 16 Jan 2023, at 17:46, Smith, Ben <Ben.Smith@westsuffolk.gov.uk> wrote:

Dear Joanne,

Thank you for your email on behalf of Stradishall Parish Council. I would like to assure you that we wish to continue to provide a polling station in Stradishall 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 at the church, the survey found that the building is not accessible and therefore should not be used as a polling station. It was considered inaccessible because the footpath to the church has a steep incline on mud and stone. It would be very difficult for a person in a wheelchair or with limited mobility to be able to get to the church door from the parking area at the church gate. In addition, there is poor external lighting and no running water or toilet facilities on site. As a result we are exploring alternative facilities to future-proof our polling arrangements and provide better accessibility for all electors.

If steps can be taken to make the building accessible then that would be beneficial, not only for polling but presumably for its wider community use too, and its good to hear that they are investigating the possibility of becoming a community hub which may help with this. If those improvements are made then polling may be able to return to the church in the future.

With regard to alternative venues, we have recently surveyed Sterling House and found it to be a very good alternative with good facilities on site for polling. A good proportion of Stradishall households are near to Sterling House but I appreciate that it is not close to the current polling station at the church. We would welcome your view on this option and 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?

I'm very grateful for any suggestions that you may be able to make regarding alternatives. 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.

I would also 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 15% of Stradishall 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 Smith
Business Partner Governance
Legal and Governance Services
Direct dial: 01284 757101
Email: Ben.Smith@westsuffolk.gov.uk
www.westsuffolk.gov.uk
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From: Joanne Kirk <stradishallparishcouncil@yahoo.co.uk>
Sent: 11 January 2023 18:59
To: elections <elections@westsuffolk.gov.uk>
Cc: Smith, Ben <Ben.Smith@westsuffolk.gov.uk>
Subject: Re: Interim Polling Place review - Stradishall

[THIS IS AN EXTERNAL EMAIL]

Dear Ben,

We discussed the review of polling districts at our meeting on Monday. The feedback from Stradishall PC is that it would be a real loss to the community not having a polling station in the parish.

The church has been used successfully for many years. The lack of toilet facilities has been overcome by providing a portaloos.

Stradishall PC is concerned that making people travel to Denston or Stirling House will deter residents from voting and make voting less accessible for residents who do not have access to transport.

St Margaret's Church is currently investigating the possibility of becoming a community hub. If successful the issues you have raised will be addressed.

Since no complaints have been received from residents about the use of St Margaret's Church, we would like to be allowed to use St Margaret's Church for the May elections and in the period after the elections will look to address the issues raised in the review.

Would WSC be willing to allow this?

Kind regards

Joanne Kirk
Clerk to Stradishall Parish Council
Tel: 07880 686069

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On 19 Dec 2022, at 15:54, Smith, Ben <Ben.Smith@westsuffolk.gov.uk> wrote:

Dear Ms Kirk,

You may be aware that the Elections Act 2022 introduces changes which impact the voting process at polling stations and as a result West Suffolk Council has undertaken an audit of all polling station facilities to make sure they comply.

The feedback gathered has identified some polling stations which are not available at the next elections on 4 May 2023 and some polling stations which are not compliant as they do not provide electors with reasonable facilities for voting or are not accessible to electors who are disabled.

As a result, an interim polling places review and consultation is being undertaken and is focussed on changes to the polling scheme where venues are not available or are not suitable. The aims of this tailored review is to:

- seek to ensure that all electors have reasonable facilities for voting as are practicable in the circumstances; and
- ensure that so far as is reasonable and practicable, every polling place is accessible to electors who have a disability.

Details of the review can be found on our website, see here: [Review of Polling Districts and Polling Places 2022 \(westsuffolk.gov.uk\)](https://www.westsuffolk.gov.uk/review-of-polling-districts-and-polling-places-2022)

With regard to the Stradishall polling place, in Stradishall parish, the feedback from the audit and site visit was that the St Margaret's Church is not accessible as the footpath to the church is not accessible due to the steep incline on mud and stone. It would be very difficult for a person in a wheelchair or with limited mobility to be able to get to the church door from the parking area at the church gate. In addition, there

is poor external lighting and no running water or toilet facilities on site. As a result it is recommended that we explore alternative facilities in the polling district or close to the polling district boundary. If an alternative is not available, it is recommended that we combine with a polling station in a neighbouring polling district (Denston). This will future-proof our polling arrangements and provide better accessibility for all electors.

We would welcome your feedback regarding this proposal and if there are any suggestions as to alternative locations where a polling station could be held in Stradishall, then we would be pleased to receive details so that we could investigate this further.

When making comments or suggesting alternative venues, please consider that whatever arrangements we make, they should be accessible to disabled electors and provide reasonable facilities both for electors and polling staff.

The deadline for responses to the consultation is Friday 27 January 2023 and the revised polling arrangements will be published on 10 February 2023. We will notify you of the outcome.

Comments and representations can be submitted in the following ways:

Email: elections@westsuffolk.gov.uk

Post: Electoral Services, West Suffolk Council, Western Way, Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk, IP33 3YU

We would be grateful if you could publicise the review in your parish so that residents may make representations and suggest alternative venues too. Please direct them to our website where details of the review can be found, see here: [Review of Polling Districts and Polling Places 2022 \(westsuffolk.gov.uk\)](https://www.westsuffolk.gov.uk/review-of-polling-districts-and-polling-places-2022)

We will also share details of the review on our social media pages, sharing to local community pages where available, and with local ward councillors.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me by email to ben.smith@westsuffolk.gov.uk or telephone 01284 757101.

Kind regards

Ben

Ben Smith
Business Partner Governance
Legal and Governance Services
Direct dial: 01284 757101
Email: Ben.Smith@westsuffolk.gov.uk
www.westsuffolk.gov.uk
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