

Results and comments following the initial polling place polling station review consultation

Headcorn Ward

The proposed change from Headcorn Village Hall to Headcorn Baptist Church received two comments one for and one against.

For:- 'I think that making the Polling Station more central is a good idea. Must be better for older or infirm people who do not have a postal vote'

Against:- 'No change needed. The village hall is known and used by most people in the village. The many activities going on there mean that voters call in when attending other events. The station has never been overcrowded and has good disabled access. There has been no discussion with the management cttee. The proposed site at The Baptist Church is off a small cul de sac, residents might not take to kindly to the polling station as it operates very early in the day to very late in the evening.'

My response:- Due to the demand on the local use of the big hall regular bookings are prioritised over an election booking and the small hall is allocated to the council isn't large enough for the size of the electorate.

The car park is behind the church but the polling station can be access by electors on foot from the High Street so disruption would be minimal.

Proposal:- To change the polling station from Headcorn Village Hall to Headcorn Baptist Church.

Parkwood Ward

It is proposed to increase the number of stations within Parkwood Ward from three to four.

The Consultation Summary states eight comments were received reporting they were satisfied with the current arrangements however the raw data has comments from only five electors. The majority of the comments were concerned with the proposal to move the station to Langley Park School.

Against:- 'The proposed area is not a nice place, I don't feel comfortable getting out of my car there and certainly wouldn't allow my daughter go to vote alone, nor my wife.'

'Current station is fit for purpose. Easy, walkable access for the highly populated elderly.'

'Polling stations that interrupt other facilities e.g. schools should be the last resort.'

'If the polling station must move, then it should be to a convenient, socially active location, with good public transport links.'

For:- 'Support the use of Langley Park'

My response:- Having read the comments I believe the respondents had not fully understood the proposal. The polling station at Christchurch Hall is not moving we are just creating an additional station at Langley Park to cope with the growing number of potential voters in the area. It is only the residents of the Boughton Monchelsea Parish that are being asked to relocate. Local residents in Parkwood are remaining at Christchurch Hall. The community hall was built at the school to be hired out and the school will not be closed on the day of elections.

It is a distance for the electors of Boughton Monchelsea Parish (UX) to travel to the new location but there is a solution to create a new polling district UZ to encompass the Langley Park estate, and then send UX to Heather House. If Heather House is not available it is proposed to use the hall at Holy Family Church. (see map)

We had also considered using Boughton Monchelsea Village Hall but the disadvantage in using the hall would be the conflict of ward elections. It would confuse electors of Boughton Monchelsea who only vote in a fourly cycle whereas Parkwood votes twice in that time frame.

Shepway North Ward

The proposal is to relocate from the Red Cross Centre to Greenfields School on a permanent basis.

There was a good response from the electors in this ward. Using the raw data I counted thirty eight responses four against the move thirty four for the move.

Against:- 'they should not close a school and make alternative arrangements'.

'Inconvenient location.'

'could we not use the church on Northumberland Road.'

'I would like to return to School Lane Red Cross Centre.'

For:- The majority who were for the move cited the car parking as the biggest factor in their decision.

My response:- The Red Cross Centre is currently being used to store equipment as a number of their sites have closed. We were unable to ascertain whether the facility would be available to us in the future so it is proposed to move to Greenfields Community School on a permanent basis.

Allington Ward

It is proposed to add an additional polling station in St Nicholas Church Hall to accommodate the increase in elector numbers in the area.

There were thirteen comments all in favour of the current arrangements at the hall, however as soon as the community hall is available at Hermitage Park the additional station will be moved.

I have consulted with the presiding officers at the church hall and they are certain that the facility can accommodate a third station in the interim.

Barming and Teston Ward

It is proposed to move the electorate from Barming Village Hall to a mobile station in the car park at the Redstart Public House.

There were thirty seven comments and all respondents were satisfied with the current polling station

There were thirty one responders against the move and six for the move.

The majority cited the lack of a footpath, street lighting in North Street and lack of car parking as their reasons against the move.

For:- 'I think this would be good for the village as it is not too far as this station' (Barming Village Hall) 'for some to walk.'

'The Redstart would be fine.'

'The proposed relocation to the Redstart Pub is a very good alternative; it is located within the polling district.'

'I would be happy with the proposed change to the polling station for Barming.'

'Barming Parish Council understand the rationale behind the proposed change and believe that the Redstart Public House is the only suitable place.'

My response:- This is a tricky one that will require a further visit to the area to walk the journey to the proposed station along North Street.

It is good to have the backing of the Parish Council as they appreciate the lack of suitable facilities in the area. We have looked at the Parish Hall on Tonbridge

Road and that is on the boundary of the ward. The hall in South Field is too far from the main thoroughfare for people to walk.

I don't think the electors really understood the reasons for a new polling station, it is down to the number of people moving into the new properties in Heath Ward where Barming Village Hall is located.

The Redstart public house is within the ward of Barming.

I suggest we meet with Councillor Gooch on site to discuss this proposal.

South Ward

The proposed change from St Stephens Day Centre to the Archbishop Courtenay School received two comments.

For:- 'Archbishop Courtenay School will be a huge improvement on polling day, assuming the steps aren't used as the main entrance.'

Against:- 'too far for some to walk. No parking.'

My response:- the steps will be in use but there is an alternative entrance to the main hall via a gentle slope suitable for wheelchairs, prams and people with walking difficulties. As the school will be closed there is ample car parking.

The main issue here is regarding moving the electors who are in Tovil parish that vote at the Hockey Club to Archbishop Courtenay School. The rationale was to have parish elections solely at the school this would save the parish council money outside of the normal schedule for elections.

Against:- Thirty nine electors were satisfied with the Hockey Club as their current polling station and cited travel arrangements and the distance to walk as too far. Electors were under the misapprehension the Hockey Club polling station would be closed.

My Response:- To close St Stephens Day Centre and relocated electors north of the B2010 Dean Street, Farleigh Hill and Tovil Hill to Archbishop Courtenay School.

Electors on the South side would then go to Maidstone Hockey Club which will include those electors that would have moved to allow the parish council elections to take place in one location. (see map)

Staplehurst Ward

The proposal is to use the South Hall in conjunction with the North Hall at Parliamentary elections.

There were eight comments and all respondents were satisfied with the current arrangements.

One respondent was concerned how it would be possible to use two buildings with different entrances. ' I don't see how you could use both, and have one place to check off who is voting. If you have to send people to another area, once they have collected their voting slip, then it does little to ease the main issue which is congestion outside the polling station.'

My response:- the halls would be clearly marked outside with a street list that was relevant to which building or part of.

Other responses:- The responders mainly requested that polling stations remained open in their area or that their station was too far away and public transport was not good.

My response:- Unfortunately there is always someone who has a polling station nearer their home but is in a different ward. The only solution at present would be to appoint a proxy or vote by post.

However it is interesting that an elector who votes at the Hawkenbury Public House has indicated that it would be easier for them to vote in Headcorn.

It seems like a good opportunity to discuss the closure of this station.