

REGULATORY SERVICES COMMITTEE - 20 JUNE 2018

PART I - DELEGATED

5. REVIEW OF POLLING DISTRICTS AND POLLING PLACES (CED)

1 Summary

- 1.1 To review the performance of the new polling station in Oxhey Hall and Hayling Ward, namely The Scout Hut, HMS Cape Town, Green Lane, Oxhey Hall, Watford WD19 4LT, which currently serves Polling District DCAA.
- 1.2 Upon Committee review to confirm or change the current polling station/district set-up following consideration of feedback received after the local elections held on Thursday 3 May 2018, as directed by Regulatory Committee on 16 January 2018.

2 Details

- 2.1 This report of the Returning Officer sets out the various options available for voters in Polling District DCAA as part of Oxhey Hall and Hayling Ward.
- 2.2 The Regulatory Committee have the powers to approve polling districts and polling places in respect of the District and Parish Wards.

3 Background

- 3.1 Following an Extraordinary Regulatory Services meeting held on 16 January 2018 it was agreed by Members that the new scout hut at the pavilion site be used for the election on Thursday 3 May 2018. The voting arrangements would be closely monitored and be reviewed post-election by the committee.
- 3.2 Feedback has been sought from all interested parties including agents, candidates, councillors and voters.
- 3.3 Recent polling station voting patterns and percentage turnout:

Polling Station	Current Electorate	May 2018	May 2017	May 2016
DCAA: HMS Cape Town Mobile Polling Station	826	198 (23.97%)	161 (23.4%)	261 (37.99%)
DCA: Oxhey Hall Community Centre	1810	572 (31.60%)	506 (33.76%)	648 (43.72%)

4 Outcome of the Consultation

- 4.1 Representations, comments and proposals received are listed in Appendix A.

5 Available Options

- 5.1 Option 1: Continuance of arrangements put in place on 3 May 2018, as agreed by Regulatory Committee in January this year.

- 5.2 Option 2: Re-instatement of the Portacabin in Pavilion car park last used in a by-election held in October 2017, as well as Parliamentary and County Council elections held last year.
- 5.3 Option 3: Merge polling district DCAA with DCA. All voters to vote at Oxhey Hall Community Centre, Broadfields Lane, Watford WD19 4TT.
- 5.4 Option 4: Any other possibilities or suggestions for the Returning Officer to consider prior to the next scheduled set of elections to be held on Thursday 2 May 2019.

6 Financial, Equal Opportunities, Staffing, Environmental, Community Safety, Public Health, Customer Services Centre, Communications & Website, Risk Management and Health & Safety Implications Legal Implications

6.1 None specific.

7 Legal Implications

7.1 The Representation of the People Act 1983 section 18D requires that local authorities designate the Polling Places within their Parliamentary constituencies. Under the act Returning Officers have the right to use certain public buildings for use as polling stations at elections.

7.2 Section 18B (4) of the RPA 1983 states that in conducting any review of Polling Places the authority must:

- a) Seek to ensure that all electors in the constituency have such reasonable facilities for voting as are practicable in the circumstances.
- b) Seek to ensure that, so far as is reasonable to all electors, including those who are disabled, and when considering the designation of a Polling Place, must have regard to the accessibility needs of disabled persons.

7.3 In addition the Polling Place for a Polling District must be within the area of the district unless special circumstances make it desirable to designate an area either wholly or partly outside of the polling district.

7.4 It should be noted that voters can appeal any decision of the Council to the Electoral Commission who may direct any Local Authority to make alterations to any review outcome that they deem necessary.

7.5 Any changes to Polling Districts and Places will take effect with the publication of the next revision of the Register of Electors.

8 Recommendation

8.1 That the Committee consider the feedback and suggestions made for Polling District DCAA and designate a polling place in accordance with the guidance and electoral law.

Report prepared by Michael Summerville, Electoral Services Manager

APPENDICES / ATTACHMENTS

Appendix A: Schedule of representations, comments and proposals received.

Appendix B: Pictures of existing polling station building and surrounding area.

Appendix A

I would like my comments to be passed to the committee as I feel very strongly that the venue (new scout hut) used for the Oxhey Hall ward local elections recently was entirely inappropriate.

The reasons for this are as follows:

The polling station is quite a long walk from the Pavilions car park and the main route includes walking over rough ground and down a fairly steep set of steps. This route would be impossible for anyone with mobility issues.

I didn't observe what the lighting is like along this route but if it is inadequate would make the route hazardous, even for able bodied voters. I certainly wouldn't feel safe taking this route alone after daylight hours.

When I returned to check the signs for the alternative route for disabled people, I did find a sign below some building site regulations which wasn't at all obvious. I checked that route which is even longer as it has to avoid the steps. Again, the ground is quite bumpy in places and there are a couple of width restrictors which would make it awkward for wheelchair users.

I do realise that the previous arrangements were more expensive (the portakabin) but this must be balanced with accessibility for people who want to exercise their right to vote. I urge the committee to review this and take what I hope will be a sensible decision.

I'd be grateful to hear what the outcome of the meeting is.

Voter in Oxhey Hall and Hayling Ward
Received 22 May 2018

I was dismayed to find that the relocated polling station at Oxhey Pavilion, Green Lane is now situated in a position that is not readily accessed by car and necessitates a somewhat lengthy walk along a lonely pathway at the edge of recreation ground. I found this a rather intimidating experience and, I would suggest, may cause significant difficulties, especially for vulnerable voters – the elderly, disabled or those alone. It certainly discriminates against those with compromised mobility. At night-time this must prove even more off-putting and may be putting people at some risk of falls or fear of mugging.

At a time when election turnouts are noticeably low, I think it is important not to raise further barriers to voting.

I appreciate that postal voting would offer an alternative to avoid these problems but this is not so straight – forward for some people.

I would ask the Committee to wisely reconsider these voting facilities.

Local Resident

It remains my view that it would be better to merge the DCAA polling district back into the DCA polling district (as used to be the case until a couple of years ago). That would completely remove the need for a polling station at this location. There are clearly some disadvantages of either the previous mobile station or HMS Cape Town.

From the junction of Brookdene Avenue with Oaklands Avenue/Green Lane, it is hardly any further to the Oxhey Hall Community Centre than to this polling station (around 700m vs 600m). That means that the vast majority of the electors in DCAA are almost as close to the Community Centre if they are walking; and for anyone infirm, arrangements at the Community Centre are significantly better as there is a much shorter walk from the car park. Indeed electors in much of Brookdene Avenue are actually closer to the Community Centre than to this polling station (via Hampermill Lane). The only exception are the electors in The Highlands and immediately adjacent. Many of these voters already have postal votes; and this of course remains an option for all. Overall accessibility would be significantly improved by closing this polling station and enabling all voters in Oxhey Hall to vote at the Community Centre.

I am aware that this has been previously discussed by the Regulatory committee; but I wonder whether it should be revisited in light of experience of trialling the new location.

I have copied this to the ward members and the Chair of the Committee.

Councillor Matthew Bedford

Received 22 May 2018

Thanks for the opportunity to comment on the election arrangements this May.

Our comments are on the new polling station at HMS Capetown, the new Sea Scout Hall.

Although the venue itself is very pleasant there were issues with the location on the day. To start the day there were insufficient signs to guide voters to the new PS and Andrew had to suggest that more be put up when he arrived to tell at 7.00. This was done but as the surroundings to the Pavilion pub are like a building site at the moment, some people still struggled to find where to vote.

Our tellers throughout the day reported complaints from residents about the access route, the steep steps on the main route being a problem for more elderly and infirm voters, more so as it began to get dark. Although there was another route which the less agile and wheelchair users could use, this was quite a lot further to walk from the car park.

The weather was kind to us on 3 May, but I think in bad weather, residents would find even more problems with getting from the car park to the scout hut if it was muddy and wet.

To sum up we do have reservations about the suitability of this venue for future use as a PS due to the distance from the car park and the difficulty of access for less mobile and less confident residents.

We would be very happy to show you these points if you would like to meet us at the venue.

Kind regards

Councillors Alison and Andrew Scarth

Oxhey Hall and Hayling Ward, TRDC

Received 21 May 2018

Adequacy of Polling Stations: Further comments to follow but the Labour Group opposes a reduction in the number of polling stations in Oxhey Hall and Hayling Ward. It would clearly be desirable to reinstate the mobile polling station about which there were no complaints as far as we are aware from voters. Given the unwillingness to continue with this arrangement in certain quarters and on highly dubious grounds, it was correct to use the new Scout Hut instead. There has, as we understand it, been one self-publicised complaint from a member of the public, who according to our records, never having experienced voting at the deficient Oxhey Hall Community Association building naturally wanted the Porkabin reinstated.

There seem to be a number of improvements which could easily be made were the mobile polling station not reinstated. A ramp, with handrail needs to be installed on the steps leading down the pathway to the hut and either emergency lighting needs to be rigged, or the floodlights put on as the lighting in place, we are informed is of a nature that it only illuminates when someone approaches. We do not see these issues as insurmountable and a ramp would also enable the disabled to have a shorter route to cast their vote. There may have been a few teething problems, as there would be with any new polling station in use for the first time, but these should not be used as a fig leaf to denude voters of a polling station in that vicinity.

Having re-familiarised ourselves with them, we shall chronicle again the deficiencies of the Oxhey Hall Community Association building in regard as to its use as a polling place, on another occasion. However, what is beyond doubt that pedestrian voters take their lives in their hands as there is no footway on either of the accesses (one of which is an unmade track). Parking is extremely limited whereas at The Pavilion parking is plentiful and

available. Perhaps the undesirability of visiting this inadequate polling station accounts for the high percentage of postal voters in the DCA polling district?

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We shall be complaining to the Electoral Commission should all voters all be sent back to the Oxhey Hall Community Association.

Councillor Stephen Cox, Labour Party Agent

For and on behalf of Three Rivers District Labour Group

Received 24 May 2018

Deficiencies of Oxhey Hall Community Association as a Polling Station



Narrow entrance from Raglan Gardens – believed not sufficiently wide for two vehicles to pass



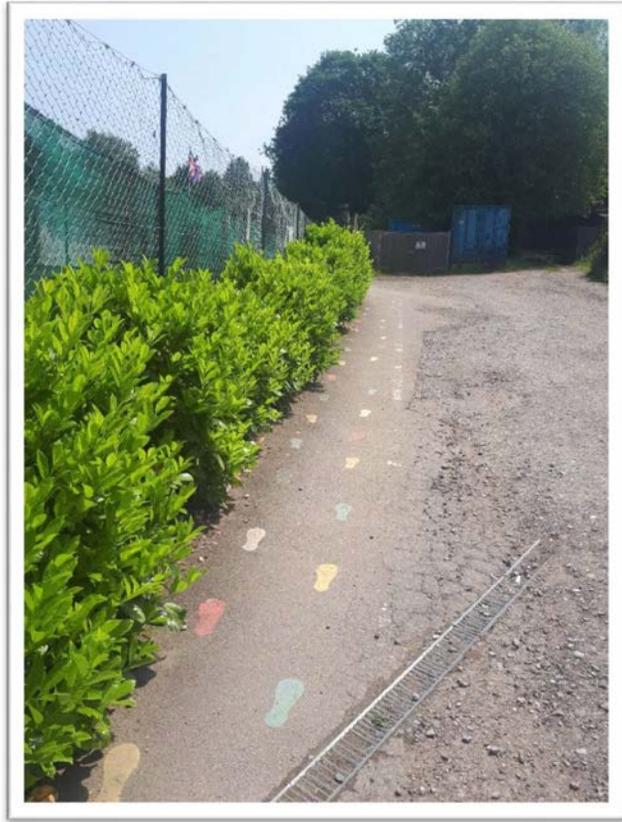
Danger: The warning signs are in place to alert drivers of a 5mph limit. Pedestrians have no option but to walk on the on the carriageway as there is no pavement whatsoever.



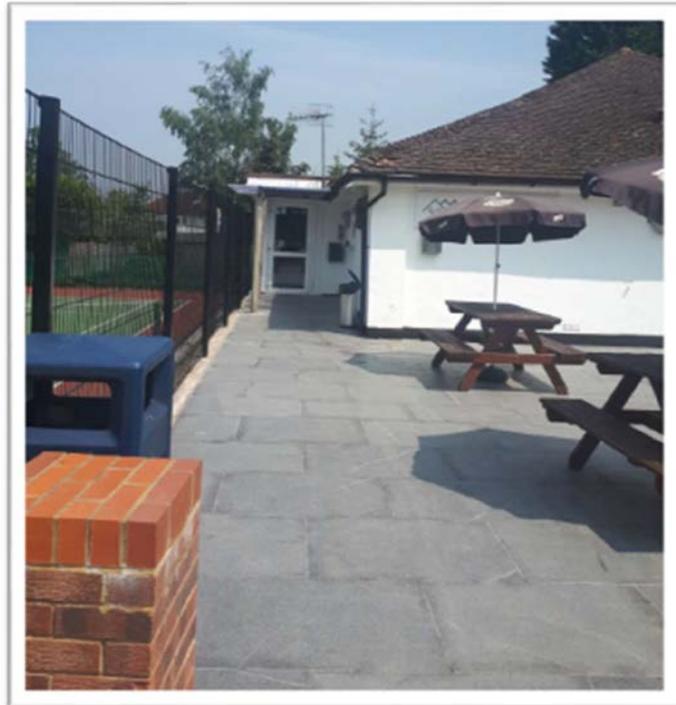
The car park has eleven marked spaces, three of which could be occupied by election staff all day. There is no lighting on the opposite side of the car parking area, nor marked bays. Parking on both sides would increase the chances of an accidental collision.



The widest area leading up to the polling station is an unmade road. There is a narrow pathway to the left. It is lit by a solitary leaning lamppost and it is doubtful if this casts sufficient light to illuminate the full length of the path.



The badly lit path is up a reasonably steep incline, quite narrow and is bordered by the laurel bushes and the unmade road.



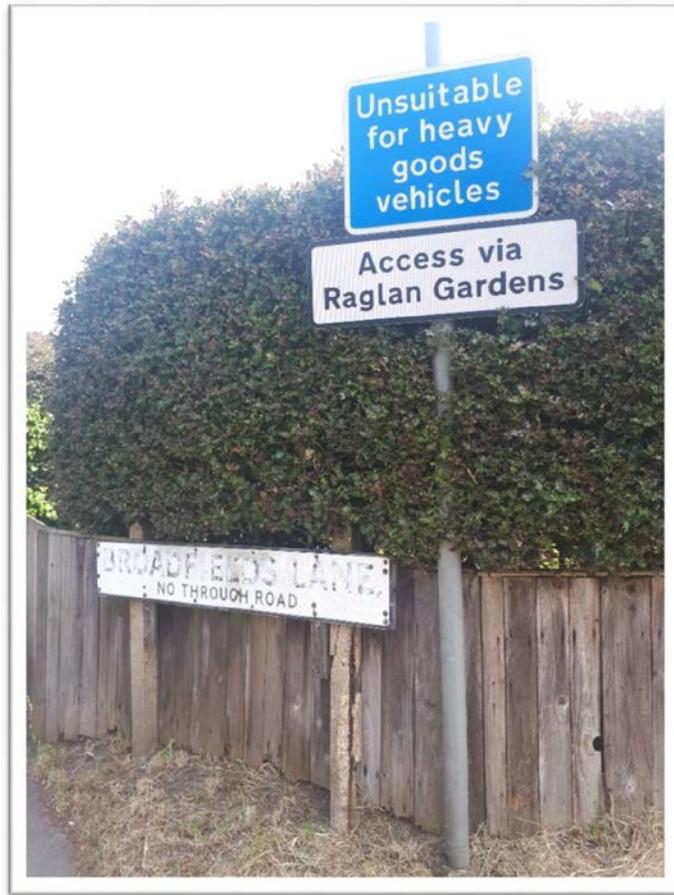
The entrance is a standard single doorway width.



There three columns designed to prevent 'light pollution' on one side of the car park. It is restricted to lighting the path between the car park and tennis courts. The columns which do not stand as tall as a streetlamp column.



Danger: This is the other access to the polling station. It is an unmade track, suitable for single-file traffic only. Again there is no pathway for pedestrians, and nor is there any lighting.



The narrow lane is Broadfield Lane and signs to the left-hand side of the entrance serve to underline the undesirability of using this access.



A resident to the right-hand side of the entrance has a warning notice affixed to their boundary wall

Councillor Stephen Cox
Labour Party Agent
For and on behalf of Three Rivers District Labour Group
Received 29 May 2018

Appendix B

Pictures of the HMS Cape Town building Oxhey Hall & Hayling Ward.



