



<b>Report for:</b>	Electoral Review Committee
<b>Date of meeting:</b>	<b>9 January 2019</b>
<b>Part:</b>	<b>1</b>
If Part II, reason:	

<b>Title of report:</b>	<b>POLLING PLACES AMENDMENTS</b>
<b>Contact:</b>	<p>Cllr Williams: Leader of the Council</p> <p><b>Responsible Officer:</b> Sally Marshall, Chief Executive in the role of Returning Officer. Mark Brookes – Solicitor to the Council</p> <p><b>Author:</b> J Doyle: Elections Team Leader</p>
<b>Purpose of report:</b>	To consider the various options for the arrangement and re-designation of Polling Stations and to consider the results of the consultation on these issues with the various stakeholders
<b>Recommendations</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. That arrangements be finalised with Camelot Rugby Club for its use as the polling station for Boxmoor Ward, polling district AGB.</li> <li>2. That the future of the polling station for the Tring East Ward, polling district DAA be agreed.</li> <li>3. That the transfer of the polling station for Nash Mills Ward, (polling districts BA, BAA, and BAB), from Nash Mills Primary school to Nash Mills Parish, Village hall be agreed.</li> <li>4. That the temporary relocation of Polling District AC from Communal Hall, Old House Road, to the Community Centre Queens Square, Adeyfield, be noted.</li> </ol>
<b>Corporate objectives:</b>	<p>The holding of elections contributes to the Council's community leadership role and fosters public engagement in the democratic process.</p> <p>The responsibility for the good conduct of elections falls on the Electoral Registration Officer, who for all Local Government</p>

	Election matters is the Chief Executive
Implications:	<u>Financial</u> The allocation of some polling stations could result in extra costs in the event of a by-election.
'Value for money' implications	<u>Value for money</u> The provision of Polling Stations for elections is reviewed on a regular basis and the funding is overseen by the Electoral Commission and the Elections Claims Unit.
Risk implications	Electoral matters require continual review to ensure that the democratic process operates effectively. A failure to provide polling places would result in huge reputational damage.
Consultees:	The Returning Officer; Election Agents, Parish Councils, Ward councillors.
Background papers:	Tring Town council Response Nash Mills School submission
Glossary of acronyms and any other abbreviations used in this report:	PH - Portfolio Holder EC – Electoral Commission. ECU – Elections Claims Unit

## BACKGROUND

1. In preparation for any elections required in 2019 the availability and suitability of the various polling stations to be used were confirmed and reviewed. As a result of this review Polling Stations in the following locations were identified as no longer suitable or a more suitable option considered.

### 1.1. **Boxmoor Ward Camelot Rugby Club**

The polling station for the AGB polling district (electorate 2210) was the Social Centre for the Blind, Alston Road, Boxmoor. This building has been sold and boarded up. With the future use of the site uncertain, it can no longer be used for election purposes.

The suggested alternative is at Camelot Rugby Club, Chaulden Lane, Hemel Hempstead. Although on the edge of the ward, the proposed site has a substantial amount of parking spaces and as a purpose built sports club has access suitable for all.

### 1.2. **Tring East Ward – Polling District DAA**

At the moment Polling District DAA including (Tring Parish Dunsley Ward) is served by the Grove Road Primary School as a polling station. The current electorate is 2340. The actual Polling Station is in a hall in the main building and accessed from a separate entrance to the side of the building.

The school's representatives have expressed serious reservations about the use of the site as a Polling Station, mainly on safeguarding grounds, though there are also recorded incidents of teaching staff being abused by visitors to the polling station. Historically this venue has experienced difficulties surrounding disabled access, as the school gates have been kept closed to prevent vehicular (and pedestrian) access in an effort to maintain security and ensure the safety of children crossing the road that runs through the grounds. The head is amenable to partially opening the gates to allow pedestrian access and to make arrangements to allow access for the disabled in cars (contact phone number, signs, bollards and a turning circle).

The hall to be used is accessed by a well-lit path, around the side and to the rear of the building and adjacent to the Playing Fields (which will not be used on that day) leading to fire doors at the rear of the building.

Use of this venue requires some arrangement being made to provide screens for the Political Party Tellers to sit inside the station in the event of inclement weather, as there is no cover for them outside.

As an alternative the school and some parents have suggested the 'scout hut' 200 metres down Grove Road. Officers have visited the building and the facilities are adequate for use as a Polling Station.

The site has some off-road parking provision though it is situated close to a junction and on a well-used road.

Tring town Council have been consulted on this issue and dealt with it at their meeting on 26 November 2018. Their conclusions are attached in the accompanying letter at annex A.

### **1.3. Nash Mills School**

At the moment Polling Districts BA, BAA, and BAB are served by Nash Mills Primary School, Belswains Lane, Hemel Hempstead. The current electorate is 2760.

Once again, the school's representatives have expressed reservations about the use of the site as a Polling Station, mainly regarding the disruption of the pupils' education and on safeguarding grounds. These have been summarised by the Head Teacher at annex B. Prior to, and after, every recent election the Head Teacher reiterates these concerns, supported by letters from a few parents. The matter is also usually the subject of an MP enquiry/response.

For recent elections we have tried to alleviate some of the disruption by installing a temporary polling station in the staff car park (portakabin) though this is time consuming, not without its own logistical challenges, and incurs additional expense on the part of the Borough Council. Due to the size of the electorate being served at this station, this option is not suitable for 'national' events, such as parliamentary elections or referenda, where a large turnout is expected.

The alternative being suggested in this case is to move the polling station to Nash Mills Parish, Village Hall, Lower Road, Nash Mills. The hall has adequate facilities for its use as a polling station and the benefit of a substantial amount of adjacent car parking. Recent housing developments in the area have increased the amount of electors in the area immediately surrounding the proposed polling station. However, electors from the Bennetts End side of the polling district would have an appreciable increase

in the distance they have to travel and be required to by-pass the current polling station on the way to the new site.

**1.4 Communal Hall, Adeyfield – Polling District AC**

Members should be aware that due to renovation work scheduled for the coming summer months there is the likelihood that the current polling station at Communal Hall, Old House Road, Adeyfield will not be available for election purposes in May 2019. As a temporary measure the electorate for this polling district (AC) will be redirected the short distance to Adeyfield Community Centre in Queens Square. This alternative has been used in the past when the Communal Hall has not been available and the Community Centre has adequate facilities to allow for a separate station to be included, in a separate room if desired, without causing confusion to the electorate. This temporary arrangement will be made clear and explicit in all the election materials (e.g. Poll Cards) sent to the electorate.

2. While this committee has the authority and power to make the changes/decisions suggested in this report they will also be reported to a future council meeting as part of a Polling District Order.

Response from Tring Town Council Meeting held in November 2018 regarding the use as a polling station of Grove Road School, Tring.

See accompanying .pdf.

The Head Teacher at Nash Mills Primary School has provided the following as a summary of their concerns regarding the continued use of the school as a polling station.

The reasons for wanting our school to stop being used as a polling station are as follow:

1. We tried to remain open once before but found members of the public wandering in our playground, in corridors as they searched for a toilet and two entered our Foundation Stage building. This breaches safeguarding procedures and so, reluctantly, the school has been closed to the children on general election dates and staff have used the day for training on-site. However, we would never choose to have a training date in the middle of a week, especially so close to the start of the summer term, due to the disruption for parents and carers.
2. Impact on children's learning. Elections usually take place the week of the first Bank holiday in May, which is often just a few weeks after our return from the Easter holiday. Year 6 take their SATs in the middle of May, which is usually the first full week after the Bank holiday. Although the children will have been revising, a day off at this vital period is far from ideal.
3. Whenever we have an INSET Day, we tag it onto a holiday as this causes the least problems for parents and carers, most of whom work. Having one on a Thursday means learning lacks continuity.
4. We have been very grateful for the times when DBC has been able to provide a Portakabin; although this means that the children's play area is restricted, as staff park on the playground, it has enabled their learning to continue with no disturbance. However, some of the public were found inside as the election officers needed the gates onto the playground open for access - again, this is a serious safeguarding issue.
5. The village hall is only 0.4 miles away with plenty of parking readily available and, with the increased housing at that end of the village, it would be the most sensible site for a polling station as none of the issues raised above would be applicable.
6. An increasing number of people are submitting postal votes - to have to close a school for a smaller number of adults to vote, affecting the education of 240 children and causing child-minding issues for their families, seems disproportionate.

I hope that the Electoral Review Committee will bear these points in mind and thank those serving on the Committee for their consideration. I strongly believe that everyone should be made to vote, notwithstanding exceptional circumstances; however, with the increased pressures on working families and schools, I also believe that the time is ripe for a change in using school buildings for these purposes.

Kind regards

Rosie Washford Mower  
Headteacher  
Nash Mills C of E Primary School