

Committee: General Purposes Committee

Date: 7 November 2012

Agenda item:

Wards: Abbey, Cannon Hill, Hillside, Pollards Hill and Ravensbury

Subject: Review of Polling Districts and Polling Places

Lead officer: Caroline Holland, Director of Corporate Services

Lead member: Councillor Mark Allison

Forward Plan reference number: 1200

Contact officer: Michael Bentley, Head of Electoral Services

Recommendations:

- A. That the General Purposes Committee considers the options for polling districts and polling places in Abbey Ward and recommends its preferred scheme to full Council.
 - B. That the General Purposes Committee recommends that the full Council makes no change to the polling districts and polling places for Pollards Hill Ward.
 - C. That the General Purposes Committee recommends that the full Council agrees the designation of Drake House as the polling place for polling district MC in Hillside Ward and Gifford House as the polling place for polling district FC in Ravensbury Ward.
 - D. That the General Purposes Committee recommends that the full Council makes no change to the polling place for polling district SD in Cannon Hill Ward.
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1 PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1. The Council has a duty to divide its area into polling districts for elections and to designate the polling places for those polling districts. This report includes a review of polling district QA in Abbey Ward and a review of all polling districts in Pollards Hill Ward. These were required following the full borough reviews reported to Council in November 2011.
- 1.2. The review in Abbey Ward has been expanded to include polling district QB – for which a new polling place was designated by Council in March 2012 for elections in 2012 only – and the remaining polling districts in Abbey Ward.
- 1.3. There are also new polling places required in both Hillside Ward (polling district MC) and Ravensbury Ward (polling district FC) due to the proposed loss of the currently designated buildings. The Committee is also asked to consider a possible alternative polling place for polling district SD in Cannon Hill Ward.

2 DETAILS

- 2.1. The General Purposes Committee considered a full review of polling districts and polling places at its meeting on 3 November 2011. That review was required by the Electoral Administration Act 2006, which substituted new

sections 18A to 18E into the Representation of the People Act 1983 in place of the previous section 18.

- 2.2. The Committee's recommendation to the meeting of the Council on 23 November 2011 was agreed, apart from an amendment to leave the existing arrangements for Pollards Hill Ward in place until after the Greater London Authority elections on 3 May 2012. In addition, the Council agreed that there should be a further review of polling district QA in Abbey Ward and its polling place of Pelham Primary School after the 2012 elections.
- 2.3. Each ward is considered in the same order as in the Executive Summary.
- 2.4. **Abbey Ward** – The recommendations of the General Purposes Committee of 14 March 2012, endorsed by the Council meeting of 28 March 2012, included the designation for 2012 elections only of All Saints Church Hall to replace South Wimbledon Community Centre. This was to cater for the adaption of the building for use as an annex for All Saints C of E Primary School. This report therefore considers the current and future arrangements across the whole of Abbey Ward.
- 2.5. An options paper was prepared for consultation. Pelham Primary School in Southey Road – the polling place for polling district QA – is less than 200 metres from Merton Hall on the other side of Kingston Road, which is the polling place for polling district QC. There are also two other buildings that might be available for polling that are much closer to Merton Hall. In addition, a suitable alternative building is Wimbledon Methodist Church on the corner of Griffiths Road and Merton Road. All these buildings were considered under the 2011 review but it was decided to retain Pelham Primary School for polling purposes. The main reason to discontinue the use of Pelham Primary is to avoid the disruption caused by its use on polling day. It was confirmed earlier this year in consultation with all schools used for polling that it was one of the schools that had to be closed to normal use on polling days.
- 2.6. The best options for QA appear to be:
 - Retain the current boundary of QA and continue to use Pelham Primary as the most suitable building to serve the polling district. (Proposal Maps A and C)
 - Designate Wimbledon Methodist Church instead of Pelham Primary School; because of its position on its eastern edge, this would suggest changing the boundary to re-allocate the southern and western part of the polling district to Merton Hall. (Proposal Maps B and D).
- 2.7. For polling district QB, All Saints Church Hall proved to be a suitable replacement for South Wimbledon Community Centre in May 2012. It was expected that any return to the previous South Wimbledon Community Centre site would involve using the separate building that has been retained for wider community use. The problem with this is that the building's entrance is in Victory Road and vehicular access is only from Quicks Road. Moreover, it is now apparent that there is not enough room in that building to accommodate the two polling stations needed.

- 2.8. There will be a hall retained in the main building that is being adapted for use by All Saints C of E Primary School. The entrance would be on Haydon's Road, which would be a return to the pre-2012 arrangement. The disadvantage is that it is likely that the school annex would have to close on polling days. The other factor needing to be considered for polling district QB would be a change to its boundary if Wimbledon Methodist Church became a polling place.
- 2.9. The best options for QB appear to be:
- Continue the designation of All Saints Church Hall with an unchanged polling district boundary if Pelham Primary School is retained as a polling place (Proposal Map A); or, if Wimbledon Methodist Church is designated for QA, re-allocate Hamilton Road, Hardy Road and part of Quicks Road to QA (Proposal Map B).
 - Return to the old South Wimbledon Community Centre building (the new All Saints Primary School annex) with an unchanged polling district boundary if Pelham Primary School is retained as a polling place (Proposal Map C); or, if Wimbledon Methodist Church is designated for QA, re-allocate Hamilton Road and part of Quicks Road to QA (Proposal Map D).
- 2.10. For polling district QC, the only change that needs to be considered is if the polling place for polling district QA was changed to Wimbledon Methodist Church. In that event, it is suggested that all of Palmerston Road, some of Pelham Road and all the roads south of Pelham Road could more conveniently attend Merton Hall (see Proposal Maps B and D). This would mean that polling district QC would be expanded and require two polling stations rather than the current one. Merton Hall is large enough to accommodate the two.
- 2.11. The polling place for polling district QD was changed from Merton Abbey Primary School to High Path Community Resource Centre in the 2011 review. This is more convenient for the majority of the polling district's electors and less disruptive. There are no proposals for change in QD.
- 2.12. The results of the Abbey Ward consultation will be reported verbally to General Purposes Committee.
- 2.13. **Pollards Hill Ward** – The recommendation to full Council in November 2011 involved forming an additional polling district and re-allocating parts of two existing polling districts to a new polling place (Church of the Ascension Church Hall). This is shown as Proposal Map E. This was not supported by full Council and the further review currently being undertaken was requested. The arrangements were left unchanged for the May 2012 elections from those previously in force (shown as Proposal Map F).
- 2.14. Pollards Hill Ward councillors do not favour any changes to the existing arrangements. The consultation has not indicated any political party support for a change to the arrangements proposed in 2011.
- 2.15. **Hillside Ward** – In Hillside Ward, there is likely to be a need for a new polling place to replace Wimbledon Community Centre, which is proposed to be demolished. The Wimbledon Guild are willing to make Drake House

available for polling purposes. This is a better venue and, for the majority of electors in polling district MC, slightly more convenient. It is less than 100 metres south-west along St George's Road and disabled access and other facilities are excellent.

- 2.16. Ward councillors are fully supportive of the designation of Drake House as the polling place for polling district MC. The proposal is to make no changes to the polling district boundaries. This is shown as Proposal Map G.
- 2.17. **Ravensbury Ward** – In Ravensbury Ward, there is a need to replace Wyvern Youth Centre, which is no longer in use and is proposed to be disposed of. The only option available would appear to be on the nearby Gifford House site in Connaught Gardens, just off St Helier Avenue. There is no suitable accommodation in the main building that serves as the office for Merton and Richmond Legal Services. However, the prefabricated, but fully accessible, building at the rear of the main building can be used. All facilities are good apart from the size of the room that would need to be used. There are two polling stations needed for polling district FC, although neither have particularly large electorates. With careful use of the available space, it is considered that there would be adequate facilities for voters.
- 2.18. The proposal for polling district FC in Ravensbury Ward is shown as Proposal Map H. It is not proposed to change the polling district boundary even though there may be an argument to move some electors in the south of the polling district into polling district FD (Malmesbury Primary School). This may not be more convenient for all those potentially affected and may be viewed as an unwanted disruption to their voting arrangements. In the north of the polling district, there is a short public footpath that leads from Wandle Road into Connaught Gardens.
- 2.19. The results of the consultation on the proposal for polling district FC will be reported verbally to General Purposes Committee.
- 2.20. **Cannon Hill Ward** – In Cannon Hill Ward, Central Ward Residents and Sports Club has offered the use of part of their building for polling purposes. The current longstanding polling place for polling district SD is Hillcross Primary School. The driveway to the club is in Ashridge Way, almost opposite the driveway to the school. The club is further towards the east of the polling district, but little would seem to be gained for voters by any adjusting boundary change in the west of the polling district. The school has a further access advantage in that it is also served by its other driveway from Monkleigh Road on the opposite side.
- 2.21. The main attraction of designating Central Ward Residents and Sports Club is that the disruption of closing the school would be avoided. (Hillcross Primary School is one that needs to close to pupils on polling day.)
- 2.22. The club has been inspected and its management have been helpful in enabling the building to be used by the local community for polling purposes. There are unfortunately some drawbacks to its potential use. The building is approached by an unlit 40 metre driveway into an unlit car park. The club would not be for the sole purpose of polling as the main part of the building would remain open for its normal uses. Access into the polling station room would be by a shallow permanent ramp and surround that has some wear

and tear. This door would remain open, with any party tellers having to remain outside, and the room may be difficult to keep heated to reasonable levels in cold conditions. Inside the room there would need to be temporary adjustments to adequately screen and separate the polling station from the main club.

- 2.23. Cannon Hill Ward councillors are firmly against the proposal despite the disruption caused to the school and parents. They see it as a longstanding historic polling place, which is easily accessible by voters from both the Ashridge Way and Monkleigh Road sides of the school. They believe that if the polling place moved to the Central Ward Residents and Sports Club, the school would form a barrier for those on the western side of the polling district and turnout on that side would be likely to suffer.
- 2.24. Taking into account the issues of shared use with the licensed premises, less than ideal access and separation arrangements, and the increased distance for access to voting for electors from the western side of the polling district, the view of the Returning Officer is that Hillcross Primary School should remain as the polling place for polling district SD.

3 PARLIAMENTARY BOUNDARIES REVIEW

- 3.1. The initial proposals of the Boundary Commission for England were reported to the November 2011 General Purposes Committee and the full Council. The review was based on a reduction in the number of UK constituencies from 650 to 600 and a requirement to keep within a 5 per cent deviation from the electoral quota. In London, this meant a reduction from 73 to 68 constituencies and increased instances of proposed constituencies crossing London borough boundaries. In Merton, the initial proposals involved shared constituencies with Kingston upon Thames, Lambeth, Sutton and Wandsworth.
- 3.2. The revised proposals of the Boundary Commission were published on 16 October. These now involve Merton sharing proposed constituencies with two rather than four neighbouring boroughs:
- Mitcham and Morden Constituency – Merton wards of Colliers Wood, Cricket Green, Figge's Marsh, Graveney, Lavender Fields, Longthornton, Lower Morden, Pollards Hill, Ravensbury and St Helier; Wandsworth ward of Furzedown.
 - Putney Constituency – Merton ward of Wimbledon Park; seven Wandsworth wards.
 - Wimbledon and Coombe Constituency – Merton wards of Abbey, Cannon Hill, Dundonald, Hillside, Merton Park, Raynes Park, Trinity, Village and West Barnes; three Kingston upon Thames wards.
- 3.3. The consultation period on these revised proposals ends on 10 December 2012. The Boundary Commission must then make its final recommendations to the Government by 1 October. They were due to be implemented in time for the next general election in May 2015. Before they are implemented, they must be approved by Parliament. Members may be aware that there is now some doubt that Parliament will do this.

4 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 4.1. The current arrangements and the consideration of the options are outlined above.

5 CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN OR PROPOSED

- 5.1. Relevant ward councillors and political party organisers were consulted in this review. The schools involved were consulted earlier in 2012. All Saints C of E Primary School has been alerted and has confirmed that there is suitable accommodation for polling at its new Haydon's Road annex.

6 TIMETABLE

- 6.1. The Council meeting on 21 November 2012 must make the decision on the review in order for the revised registers of electors to be published on 1 December to reflect any changes made to polling district boundaries.
- 6.2. The next full review must be completed before the end of 2015 under existing legislation. The Electoral Registration and Administration Bill currently before Parliament contains provisions to bring this forward to January 2015 in order to be in time for the scheduled May 2015 general election.

7 FINANCIAL, RESOURCE AND PROPERTY IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1. Current electoral registration budgets are covering the costs of this review. Future budgets will need to cover the next full review due in 2014/15 and any interim reviews needed. It is estimated that, depending on the final decisions, there may be under £1,000 extra cost to the local election budget in 2014 (and every four years thereafter, assuming no by-elections). This will consist of the additional accommodation costs of using buildings not funded out of the public purse.

8 LEGAL AND STATUTORY IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1. The Council has a duty under the Representation of the People Act 1983 (RPA) to divide its area into polling districts for parliamentary elections, to designate a polling place for each polling district, and to keep these under review. The Local Authorities (Functions and Responsibilities) (England) Regulations 2000 list section 18 of the RPA as functions that are not to be the responsibility of an authority's executive. This function has not been specifically delegated by the Council.
- 8.2. The Electoral Registration Officer is required to make any necessary adaptations to his registers of electors and to publish a notice stating that the adaptations to polling districts have been made (RPA, section 18A). The Electoral Administration Act 2006 (in section 16) introduced a number of changes to section 18 of the RPA. The statutory requirements on full reviews, and the challenging of any reviews, are contained in the RPA, sections 18A to 18E and Schedule 1A).
- 8.3. Under section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 it is the duty of a public authority in the exercise of its functions to have due regard to the need to:
- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act;

- Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not;
- Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

Having due regard for advancing equality involves:

- Removing or minimising disadvantages suffered by people due to their protected characteristics;
- Taking steps to meet the needs of people from protected groups where these are different from the needs of other people;
- Encouraging people from protected groups to participate in public life or in other activities where their participation is disproportionately low.

8.4. In providing services and access to them the Council is required by law to make reasonable adjustments in order to avoid discriminating against disabled persons. When considering what adjustments should be considered as reasonable the council is required to have regard to the relevant code of practice. The following are some of the factors to be taken into account when considering what is reasonable:

- Whether taking any particular steps would be effective in overcoming the substantial disadvantage that disabled people face in accessing the services in question;
- The extent to which it is practicable for the service provider to take the steps;
- The financial and other costs of making the adjustment;
- The extent of any disruption which taking the steps would cause;
- The extent of the service provider's financial and other resources;
- The amount of any resources already spent on making adjustments; and
- The availability of financial and other assistance.

9 HUMAN RIGHTS, EQUALITIES AND COMMUNITY COHESION IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1. The right to free elections forms Article 3 of Protocol 1 of the Human Rights Act 1998. Any resident is entitled to vote, if qualified by age and nationality, and if not subject to any other legal incapacity.
- 9.2. As indicated above, the principles have been followed of seeking to ensure that all electors have such reasonable facilities for voting as are practicable in the circumstances, and seeking to ensure that so far as is reasonable and practicable every polling place is accessible to electors who are disabled. There is a commitment to ensure that all polling places are accessible.
- 9.3. The aim of enhancing community cohesion and engagement would be expected to be achieved by the principles in 9.1 and 9.2 through promoting democratic engagement by seeking to make voting in person as easy as possible for residents of all communities.

10 CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1. Integrity plans are maintained for elections. These involve working closely with Merton Police on operational matters, together with liaising with the Metropolitan Police Service officer specifically delegated with responsibility for potential election offences.

11 RISK MANAGEMENT AND HEALTH AND SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

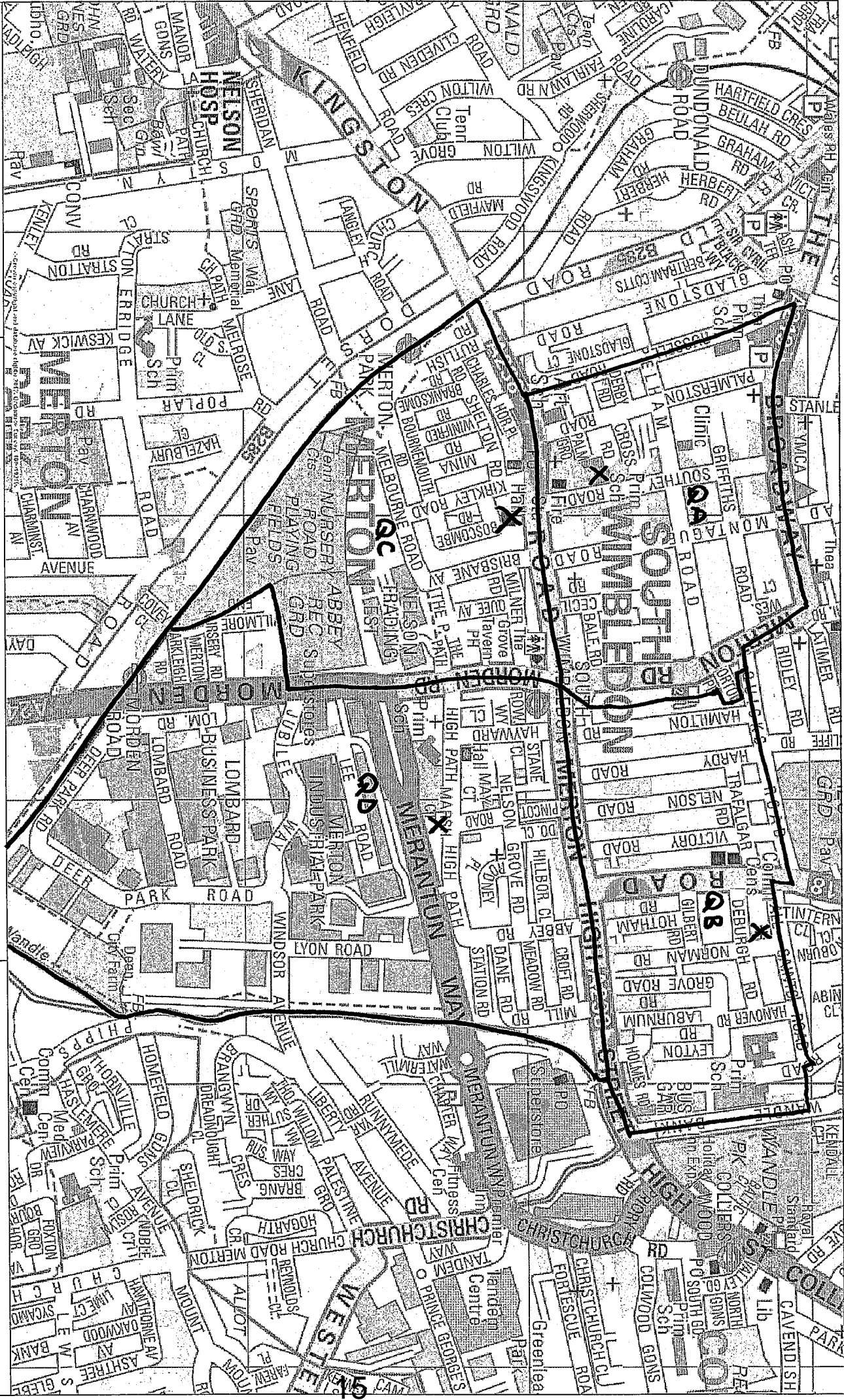
- 11.1. The authority should complete the review by the end of November 2012 to enable the new registers of electors to be published in December 2012 to reflect any changes to polling district boundaries. Any challenge to the Electoral Commission would impact on these arrangements.
- 11.2. In reviewing polling places, the reasonable facilities for staff at polling stations during elections have been considered. The physical fabric of possible polling places has also been considered to reflect the need for members of the public to visit their polling station.

12 APPENDICES – THE FOLLOWING DOCUMENTS ARE TO BE PUBLISHED WITH THIS REPORT AND FORM PART OF THE REPORT

- Proposal maps of Abbey Ward, Pollards Hill Ward, Hillside Ward, Ravensbury Ward and Cannon Hill Ward proposals.

13 BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 13.1. Reports on current and potential polling places and polling stations made by Electoral Services staff and by presiding officers and polling station inspectors at past elections.



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ELECTORAL SERVICES

Abbey Ward

Existing polling district boundaries

Existing polling places

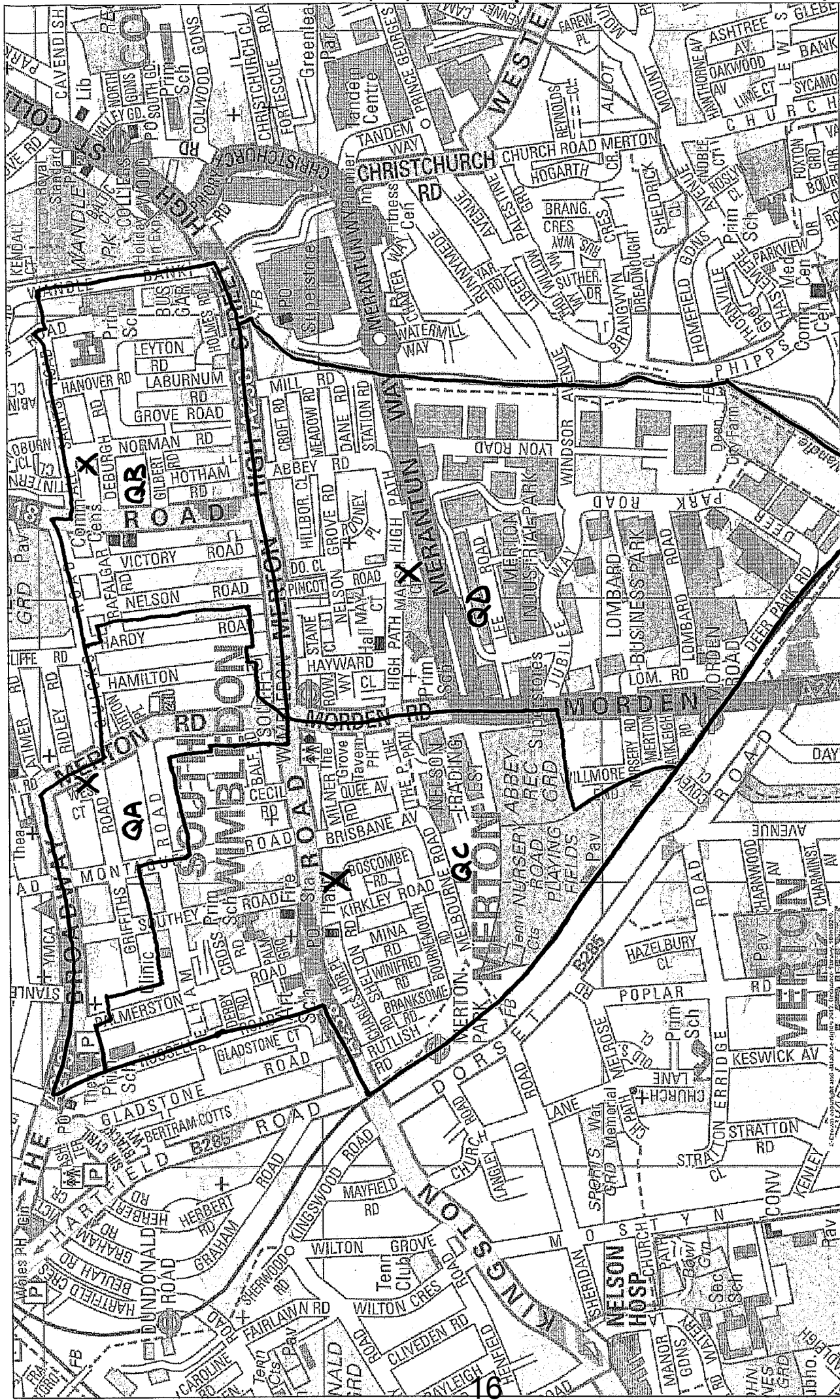


Scale 1/8700

Date 17/10/2012

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Morden
Surrey
SM4 5DX





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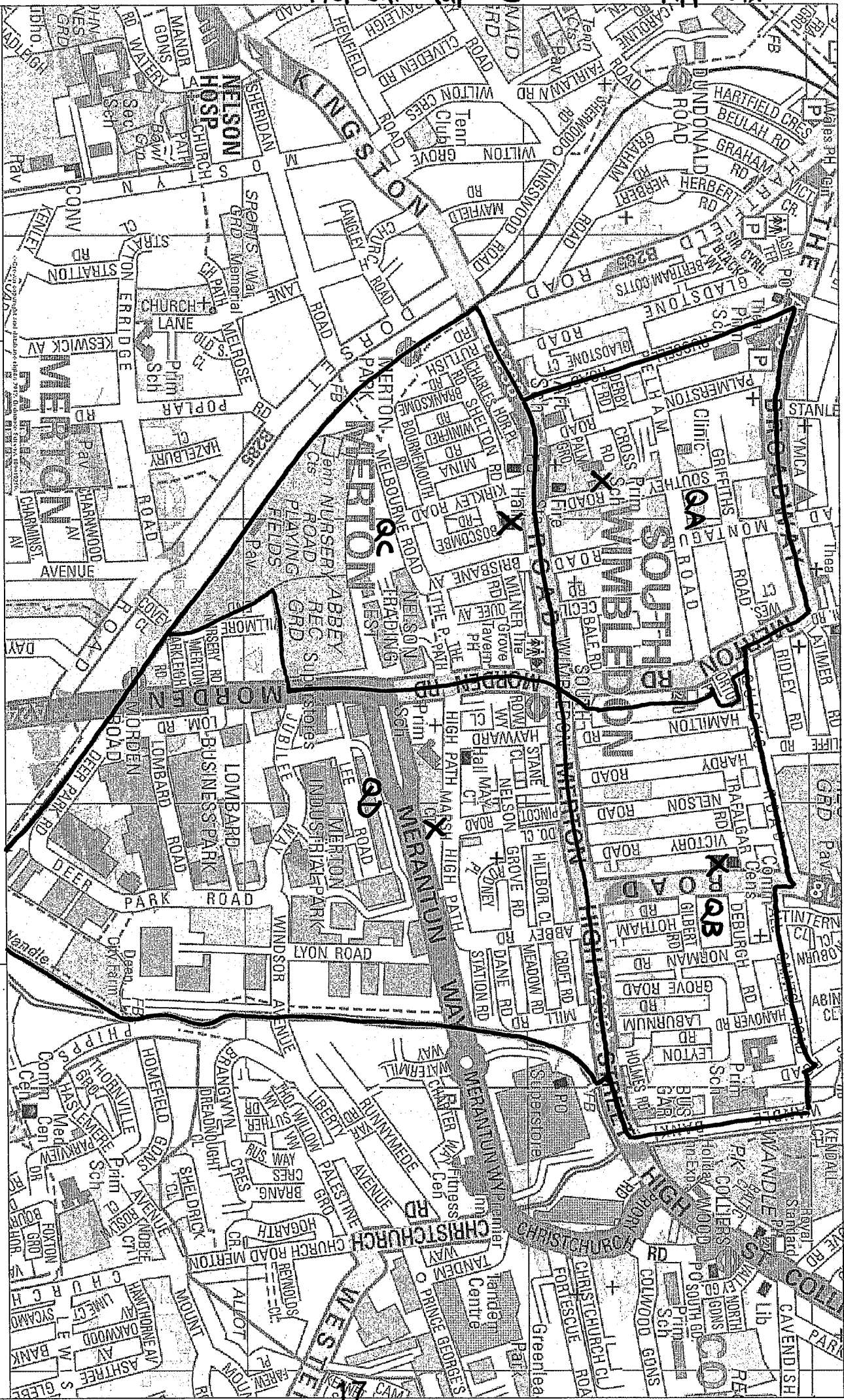
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Abbey Ward

Proposed polling district boundaries —
 Proposed polling places X

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ELECTORAL SERVICES



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ELECTORAL SERVICES

Abbey Ward

Existing polling district boundaries

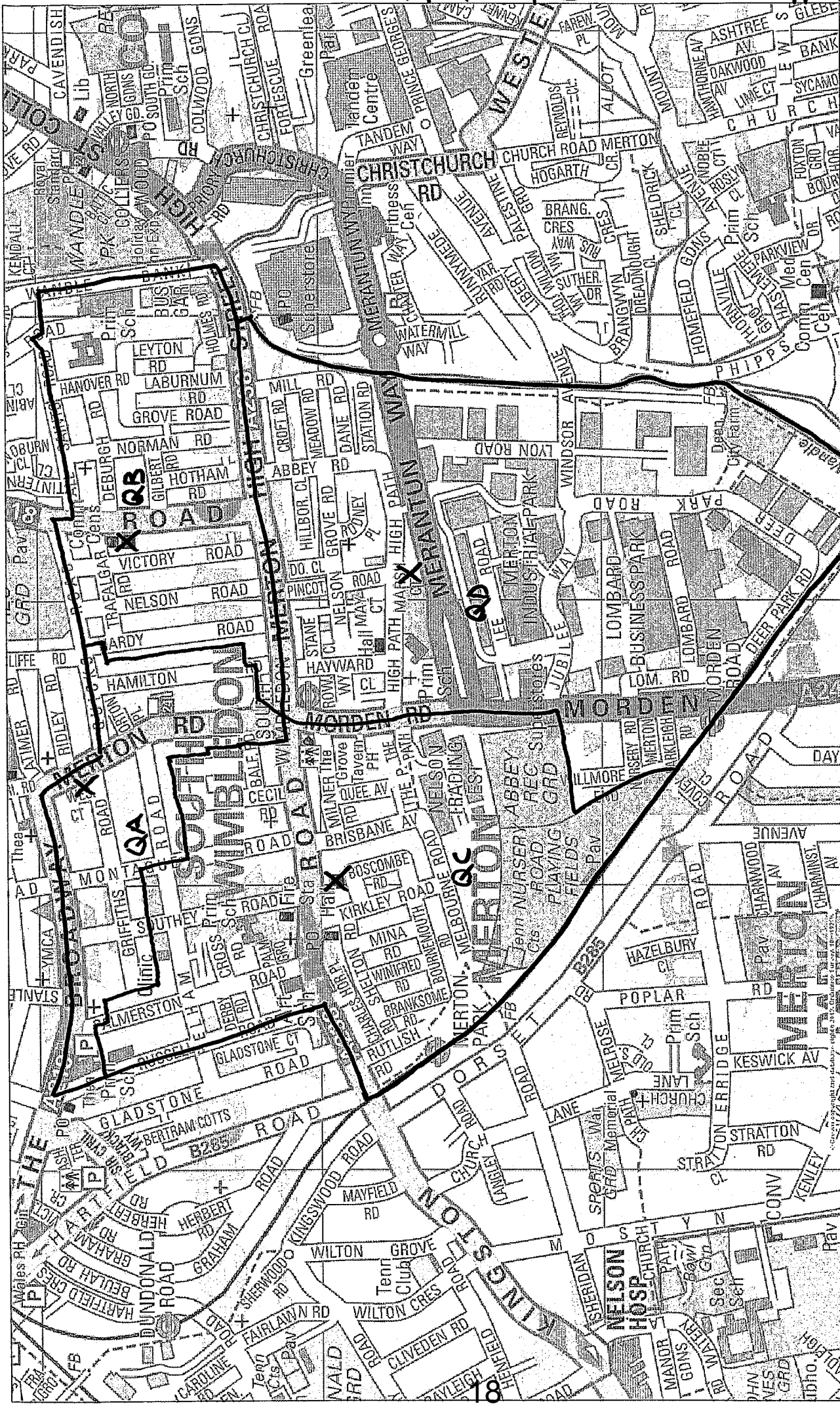
Proposed polling places

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 London Borough of Merton

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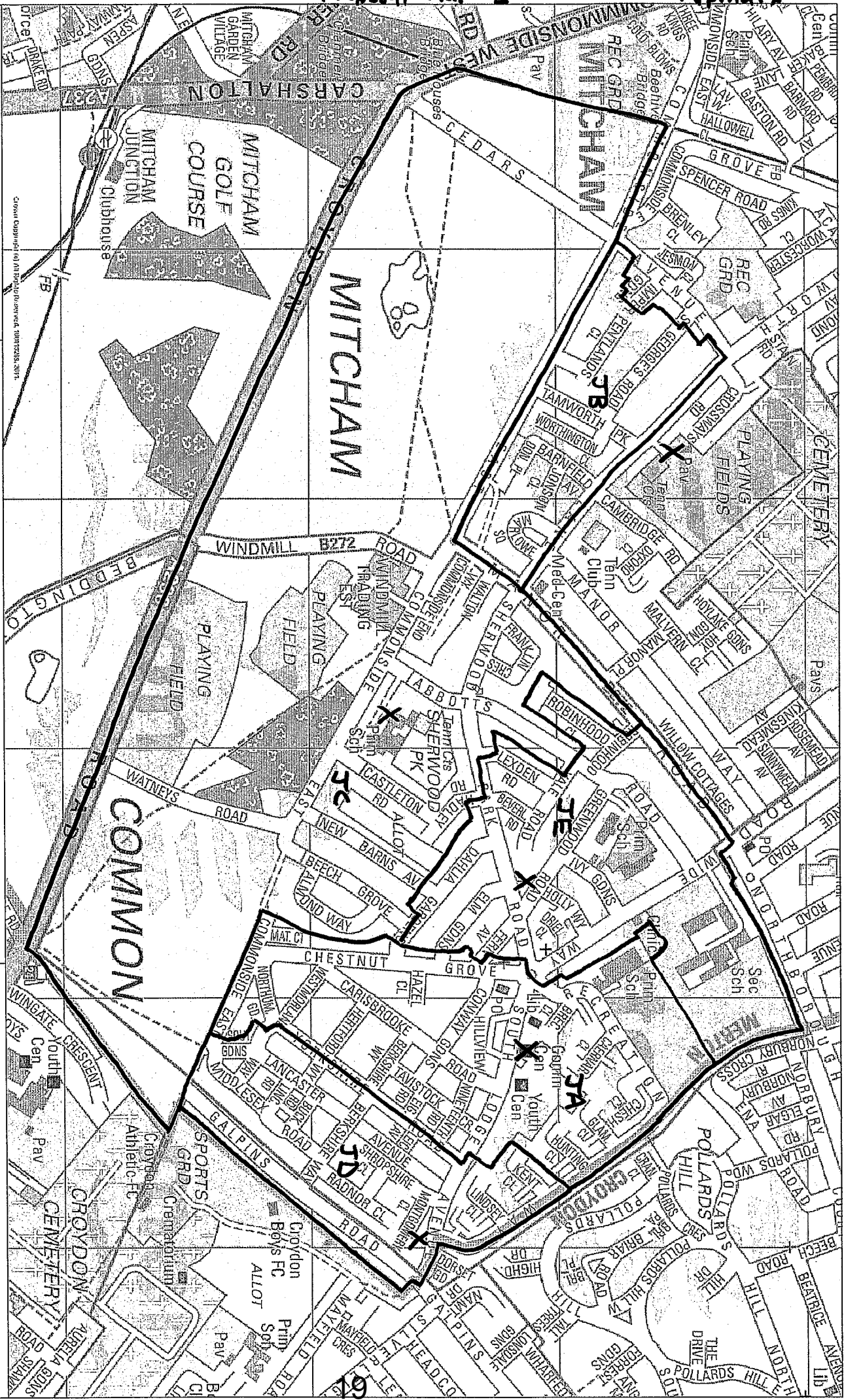
Abbey Ward

 Proposed polling district boundaries

 Proposed polling places

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ELECTORAL SERVICES

Pollards Hill Ward

Proposed polling district boundaries (2011)

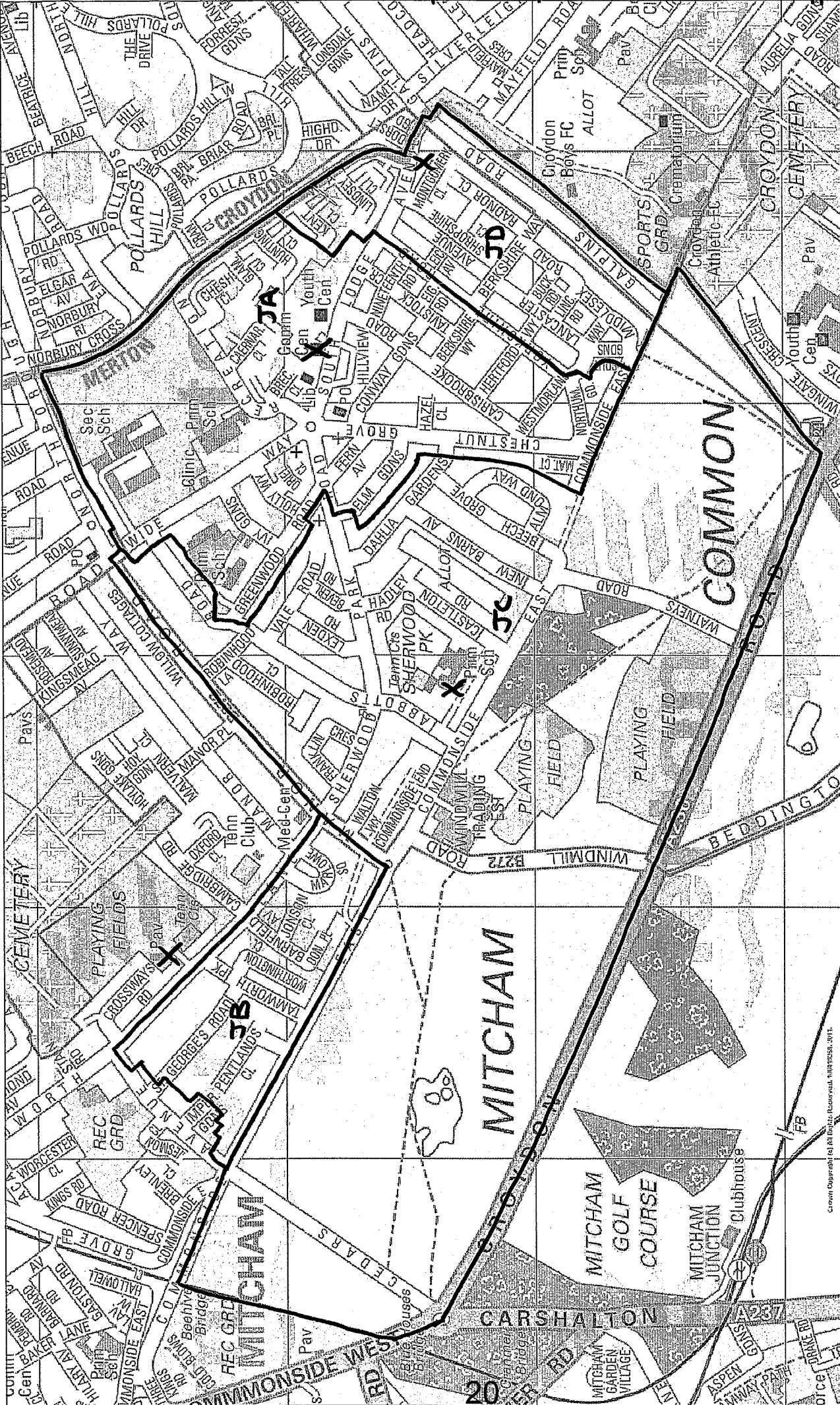
Proposed polling places (2011)

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Date 24/10/2011

Pollards Hill Ward

Existing polling district boundary —

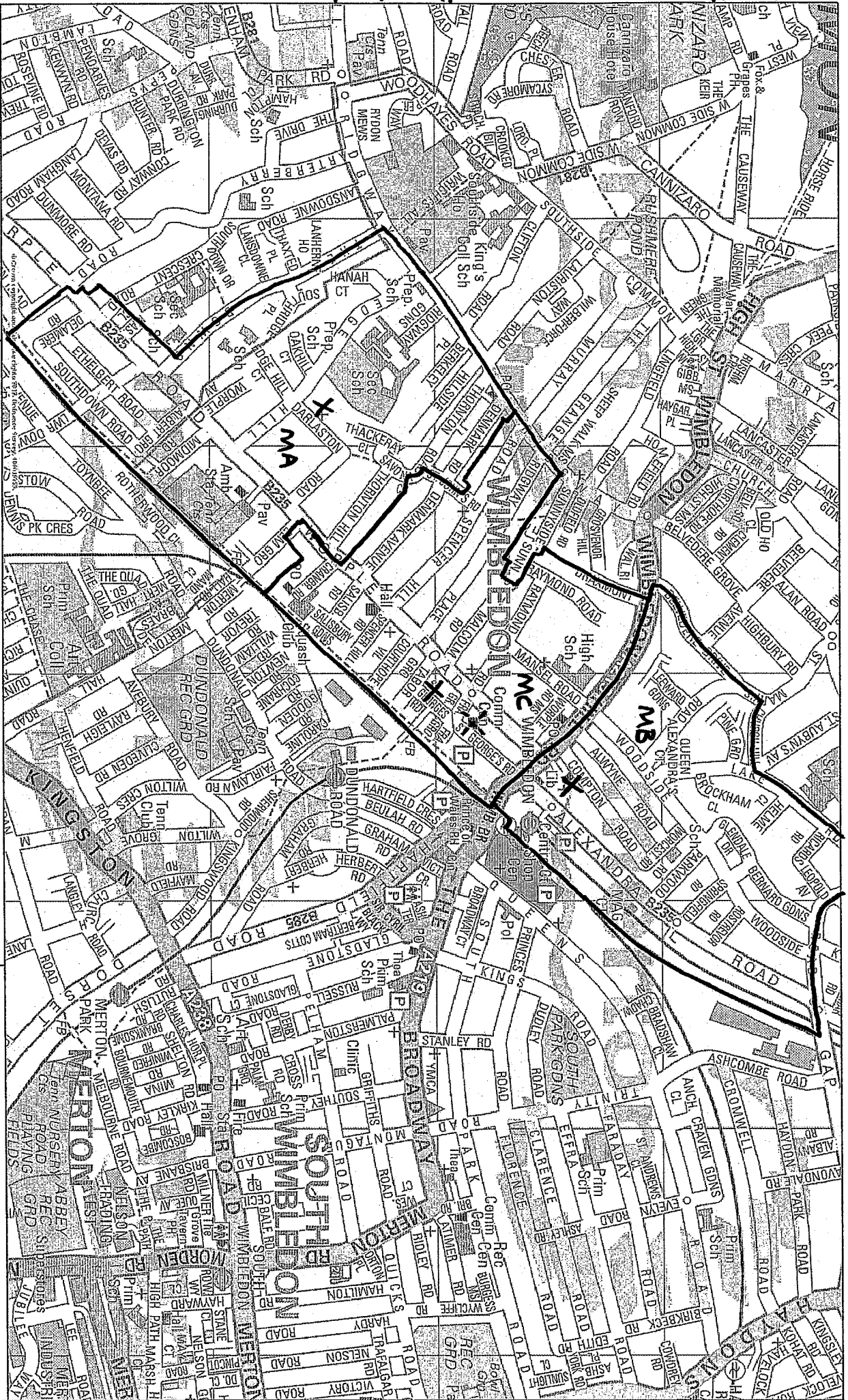
Existing polling places X

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ELECTORAL SERVICES



Hillside Ward

Existing polling district boundaries

Existing polling places

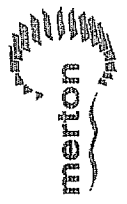
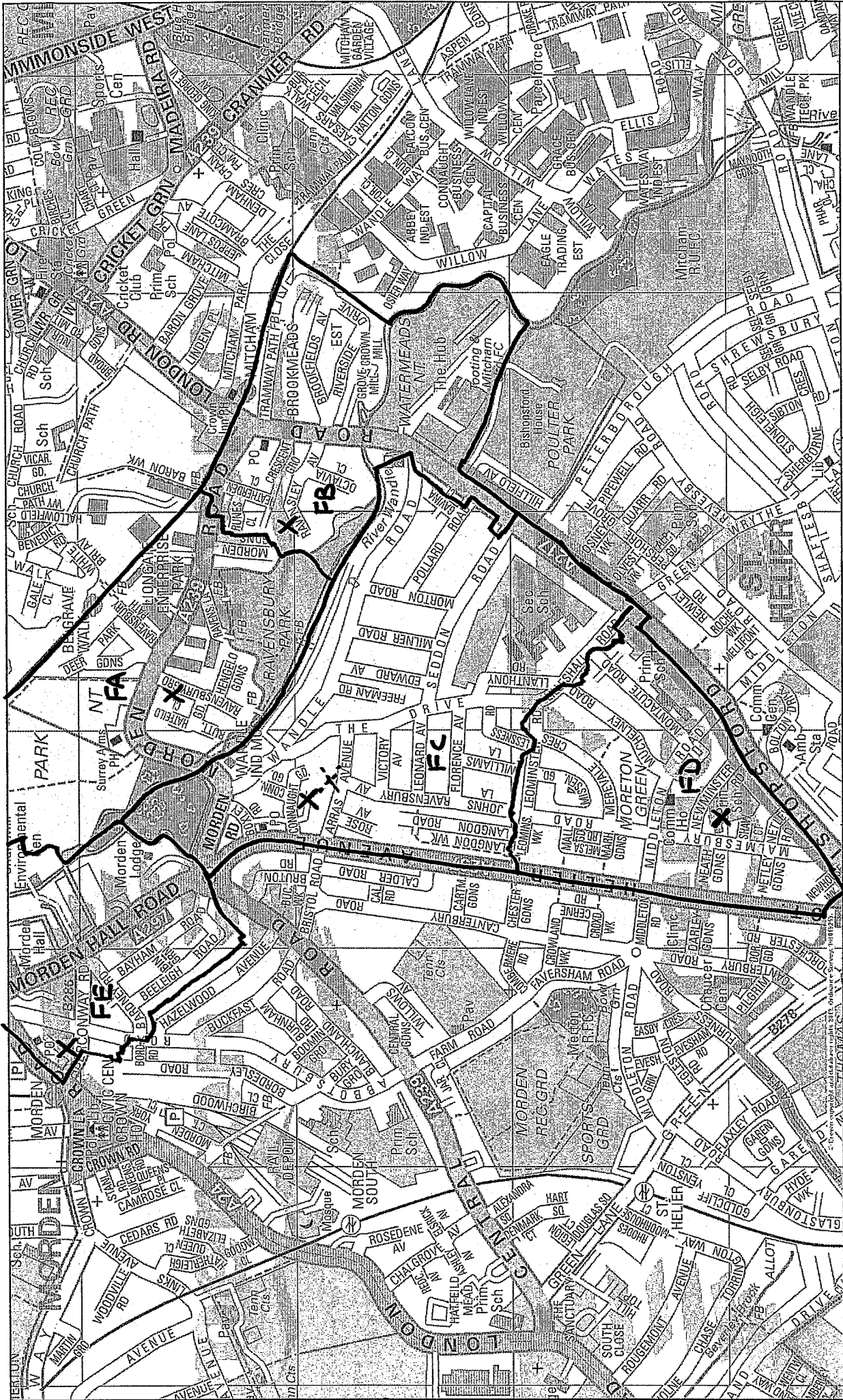
Proposed polling places

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Date 28/10/2012

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Morden
Surrey
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 Date 28/10/2012

Ravensbury Ward

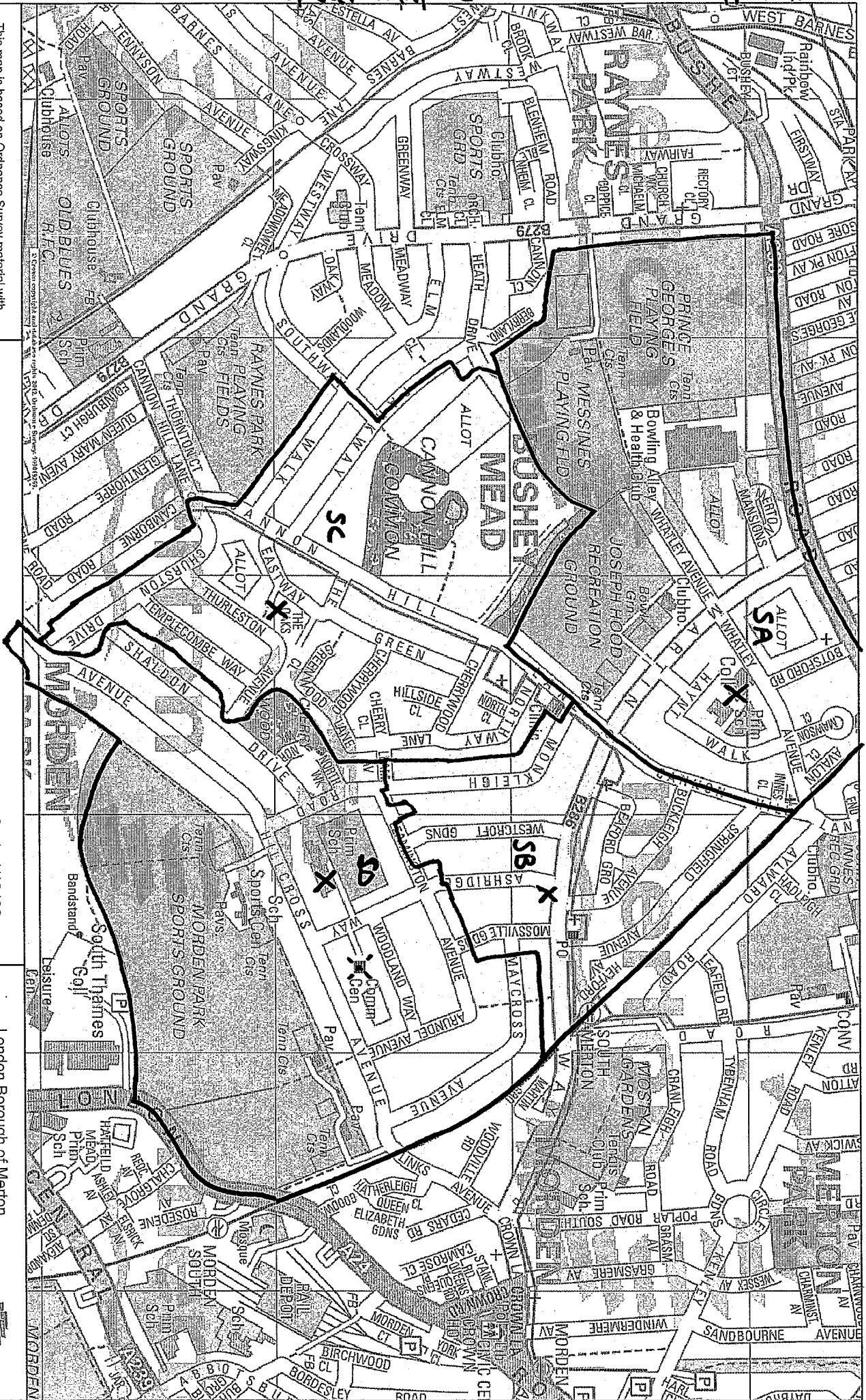
Existing polling district boundaries
 Existing polling places
 Proposed polling places

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ELECTORAL SERVICES



Cannon Hill Ward

Existing polling district boundaries

Existing/proposed polling places

Alternative polling place

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Date 28/10/2012

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Surrey
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