

Committee: General Purposes Committee

Date: 4th November 2015

Agenda Item

Wards: Village, Raynes Park, Cannon Hill

Subject: Review of Polling Places

Lead officer: Caroline Holland, Director of Corporate Services

Lead member: Councillor Mark Allison

Contact officer: Andrew Robertson, Head of Electoral Services

Recommendations:

- A. That the General Purposes Committee recommends that the full council agrees the designation of Christ Church as the polling place for polling district KB in Village Ward and polling district LA in Raynes Park Ward.
 - B. 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 A new polling place is required in Village Ward and Raynes Park Ward due to the loss of the currently designated building.
- 1.2 The Committee is also asked to consider whether Hillcross Primary School should remain as the designated polling place for polling district SD in Cannon Hill Ward in light of a recent consultation.

2 DETAILS

- 2.1 **Village Ward and Raynes Park Ward:** The current polling place for polling district KB in Village Ward and polling district LA in Raynes Park Ward is the Christchurch Hall, 2 Cottenham Park Road. This building is due to be demolished in early 2016 with a new community building being built in its place. Christ Church, which is adjacent to the Christchurch Hall, has adapted the rear of the church for use as a meeting place and is agreeable to this area being used as a polling place. The church has also agreed that no services would be held on polling day and that the venue would be used exclusively for polling purposes. Following a site visit the church has been assessed as meeting the requirements of a polling place. It is adjacent to the church and so is well known to electors, has step free access, and sufficient space for two polling stations. This proposal would involve the minimum of disruption to electors.
- 2.2 **Cannon Hill Ward:** The current polling place for polling district SD is Hillcross Primary School on Ashridge Way. There is currently some opposition from parents who have children at the school to the school being used as a polling place, because Hillcross Primary School is required to close on polling day. Due to building works, there were also some accessibility issues for electors

when the school was used at the general election in May 2015. After the election, the Cannon Hill Ward councillors received some complaints about the use of Hillcross Primary School as a polling station, and as such requested that the polling place be reviewed ahead of the next scheduled elections in 2016.

3 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 3.1 **Village Ward;** In Village Ward, the Westside Lawn tennis club is located over the road from Christ Church at 20 Woodhayes Road, SW19 4RF. Following a site visit, the tennis club was not judged to be as suitable a venue as the Church. The polling station would be located in the clubhouse, which is accessed through quite a long walk past the tennis courts. The clubhouse does not have level access, and entry is up two fairly steep steps. The clubhouse would also remain open on polling day to club members and contains a bar. However the polling station would be separated from the main clubhouse by wooden screen doors.
- 3.2 **Raynes Park Ward;** The Norwegian school is located on the other side of polling district LA at 28 Arterberry Road, SW20 8AH. Following a site visit, the school office staff were helpful and were cautiously positive about the school making itself available as a polling station. However, the school did have some access issues. Access to the main building is up an unlit 50 metre uphill driveway, and the building itself does not have level access. There is also the issue of separating the public from the children at the school; this would be very difficult and in all likelihood the school would probably have to close if it were to be used as a polling station. The school is not under local authority control so the final decision on whether it could be used would be entirely up to the Head Teacher.
- 3.3 **Cannon Hill Ward;** The alternative to Hillcross Primary School being used as a polling place is the Central Ward Residents and Sports Club, also on Ashridge Way. In 2012 the Central Ward Residents and Sports Club was proposed as an alternative polling station for polling district SD, but it was the view of the council and the Returning Officer that Hillcross Primary School should remain the designated polling place.
- 3.4 In 2012, the Cannon Hill Ward councillors were firmly against the proposal despite the disruption caused to the school and to parents. They saw the school as a longstanding historic polling place, which is easily accessible to voters from both the Ashridge Way and Monkleigh Road sides of the school. They believed 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 may suffer.
- 3.5 The location of the club is in Ashridge Way, almost opposite the driveway to the school. 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. The club has also indicated that it will be willing to close to patrons

on election day, so that the sole use will be for polling purposes. The club also has ample parking facilities.

3.6 The main advantage of using the Central Ward Residents and Sports Club is that Hillcross Primary School would no longer have to close to serve as a polling place, which would avoid disruption for parents and pupils. However, the club does have some disadvantages:

- The building is approached by an unlit 40 metre driveway into an unlit car park. The driveway would have to be illuminated by temporary lighting.
- Access into the polling station room would be by a shallow permanent ramp and surround that has some wear and tear. A wooden ramp would also need to be constructed to get over the lip in the doorway.
- This door to the polling station would remain open, with any party tellers having to remain outside.
- The club can only be accessed by Ashridge Way, whilst the school can be accessed by Ashridge Way and Monkleigh Road on its opposite side.

4 CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN AND OUTCOMES

4.1. **Village Ward and Raynes Park Ward;** all councillors for both Wards have been consulted and are in agreement with the proposal to designate Christ Church as the polling place for polling district KB in Village Ward and polling district LA in Raynes Park Ward in lieu of the Christ Church Hall.

4.2. Political party agents have also been consulted on the proposal. Both the Labour and Conservative group are in support designating the Church as the polling place.

4.3. It is the view of the Returning Officer that the General Purposes Committee recommends that the full council agrees the designation of Christ Church for polling district KB in Village Ward and polling district LA in Raynes Park Ward, until the Christchurch Hall has been rebuilt.

4.2 **Cannon Hill Ward;** Electoral Services conducted a consultation exercise with members of the public on whether the school should continue to be used as a polling place. The consultation was open from 14 September to 9 October and was published on the Electoral Services and Consultations pages of the council website. The Cannon Hill Ward councillors also publicised the consultation to their e-mail list of residents. The survey was completed by 19 people, with the majority of respondents being parents who have a child at the school.

- Only 6 people completing the survey had visited the school as a voter. All respondents reported that they were satisfied with the facilities at the school as a polling station, however 2 of those respondents commented on the disruption to parents caused by the school being used.

- In answer to the question: 'Should Hillcross Primary School be used as a polling station?' 4 people answered yes and 11 people answered no.
- Looking at the comments giving reasons for the decision, it is clear that the people against the use of the school are the parents of children at the school and most do not visit the school in order to vote.
- Two comments are in support of the school being used.

Detailed responses to the Hillcross Primary School consultation can be found in Appendix C.

- 4.3 The Cannon Hill Ward councillors and political party agents have also been consulted on whether to continue to use Hillcross Primary School as a polling place for polling district SD.
- 4.4 It is the view of the Cannon Hill Ward councillors that whilst it would be preferable to avoid using a school as a polling station that is required to close on election day; the primary concern needs to be whether the electors in the polling district will be adversely affected if the polling station were to be moved. Therefore, whilst being sympathetic to the consultation responses of parents who have children at the school, it is their view that the polling place should remain at the school as that is the most convenient option for the majority of electors in the polling district.
- 4.5 The Merton Conservative Group is against the proposal to move the polling place from Hillcross Primary School to the Central Ward Residents and Social Club. Whilst they acknowledge the inconvenience for parents and hope that an arrangement can be made where the school can remain partly open, they state that:
- Hillcross Primary School is the longstanding historic polling station for this polling district and is well known and recognised in the local community. No compelling argument is being made as to why a change is necessary, or how this will make voting easier for local residents
 - It is clear from the consultation results that there is no appetite for change among electors in polling district SD. The consultation only received 19 responses and there was no unanimous opinion overall. Moreover, amongst the 6 respondents who had visited the school to vote, satisfaction with the polling place overall was high, suggesting that the electors in SD are content with the existing arrangements.
 - The proposed alternative is further away from the centre of the polling district, and the current polling place (Hillcross Primary School) would create a barrier electors would have to walk a considerable distance around to reach.
 - Accessibility to Hillcross Primary School is significantly better than for the Central Ward and Residents Social Club, where temporary modifications would have to be made each time it was used as a polling station. These temporary modifications, along with the hire charge

levied by the social club, would undoubtedly prove more costly to the council than the £40 heating and hire charge that is levied by the school as a council owned building.

- 4.6 The school has also been consulted and it is their opinion that despite not wishing to lose any learning days, they accept that the school is a long standing polling place and they will not object to the school being used as a polling station for future elections.
- 4.7 It is the view of the Returning Officer that Hillcross Primary School should be retained as the polling place for polling district SD.
- 4.8 Building works at the school have now been completed so accessibility will not be an issue for future elections. The Central Ward Residents and Social Club has less than ideal access, with adjustments needing to be made if it was to be used on polling day. The school is also in a more advantageous location in the centre of the polling district, with access via Ashridge Way to the east of the polling district and Monkleigh Road to the west.
- 4.9 The response to the consultation on whether Hillcross Primary School should remain as a polling station was very low, and was also split. Only 11 respondents voted against the school being used as a polling station, with 4 people voting for the school to remain as the polling place. Most of the respondents who did not want the school to be used were not voters at the school. Of those respondents who had used the school as a polling place, all were satisfied with the facilities.
- 4.10 As a result of the split response to the consultation and the low numbers of people responding as a whole; moving the polling station into the Central Ward Residents and Social Club risks causing confusion for, or inconveniencing, the majority of voters in the polling district, (around 2150) based on the opinion of a very small number of respondents, the majority of which are not electors at the polling place.
- 4.11 Taking all the above factors into account, the Returning Officer therefore recommends that the council makes no change to the polling place for polling district SD in Cannon Hill Ward.

5 TIMETABLE

- 5.1 The Council meeting on 18th November must make the decision on these proposals so that all polling districts have a designated polling place for the elections on 5th May 2016.

6 FINANCIAL, RESOURCE AND PROPERTY IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 Provision for the hire of buildings for use as polling places is included within the budget for the elections to be held on 5th May 2016. It is estimated that the proposal to use the Central Ward Residents Club would add around £500 extra cost to the election budget in 2016. This would consist of additional accommodation costs of using a building not funded out of the public purse.

7 LEGAL AND STATUTORY IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 The Council has a duty under the Representation of the People Act 1983 (RPA 1983) to divide its area into polling districts for parliamentary and local government elections, to designate a polling place for each polling district, and to keep these under review. The Local Authorities (Functions and Responsibilities) (England) Regulations 2000¹ list section 18 of the RPA1983 as one of the functions that are not to be the responsibility of an authority's executive. This function has not been specifically delegated by the Council.

8 HUMAN RIGHTS, EQUALITIES AND COMMUNITY COHESION IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 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.
- 8.2 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;

¹ SI 2000/2853

- 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.
- 8.3 The right to free elections forms part of 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.
- 8.4 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.
- 8.5 The aim of enhancing community cohesion and engagement would be expected to be achieved by the principles in 8.1 and 8.2 through promoting democratic engagement by seeking to make voting in person as easy as possible for residents of all communities.

9 CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 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.

10 RISK MANAGEMENT AND HEALTH AND SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 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.

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

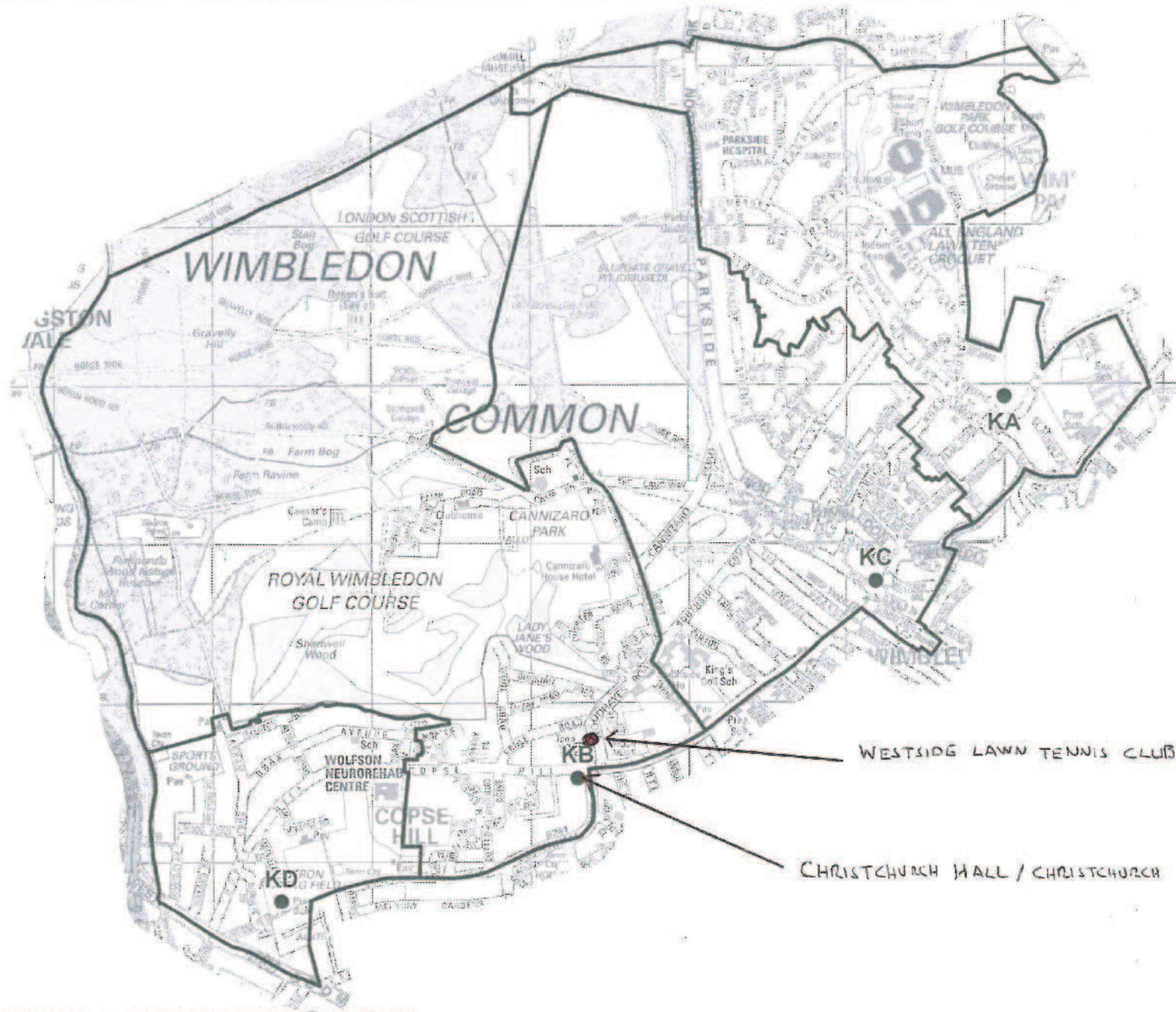
- a) Maps of Village Ward and Raynes Park Ward with location of Christ Church.
- b) Map of Cannon Hill Ward with location of Hillcross Primary School and Central Ward Residents Club.
- c) Detailed responses to Hillcross Primary School consultation.

12 BACKGROUND PAPERS

- Reports on polling stations made by Electoral Services staff, by presiding officers and polling station inspectors at past elections.

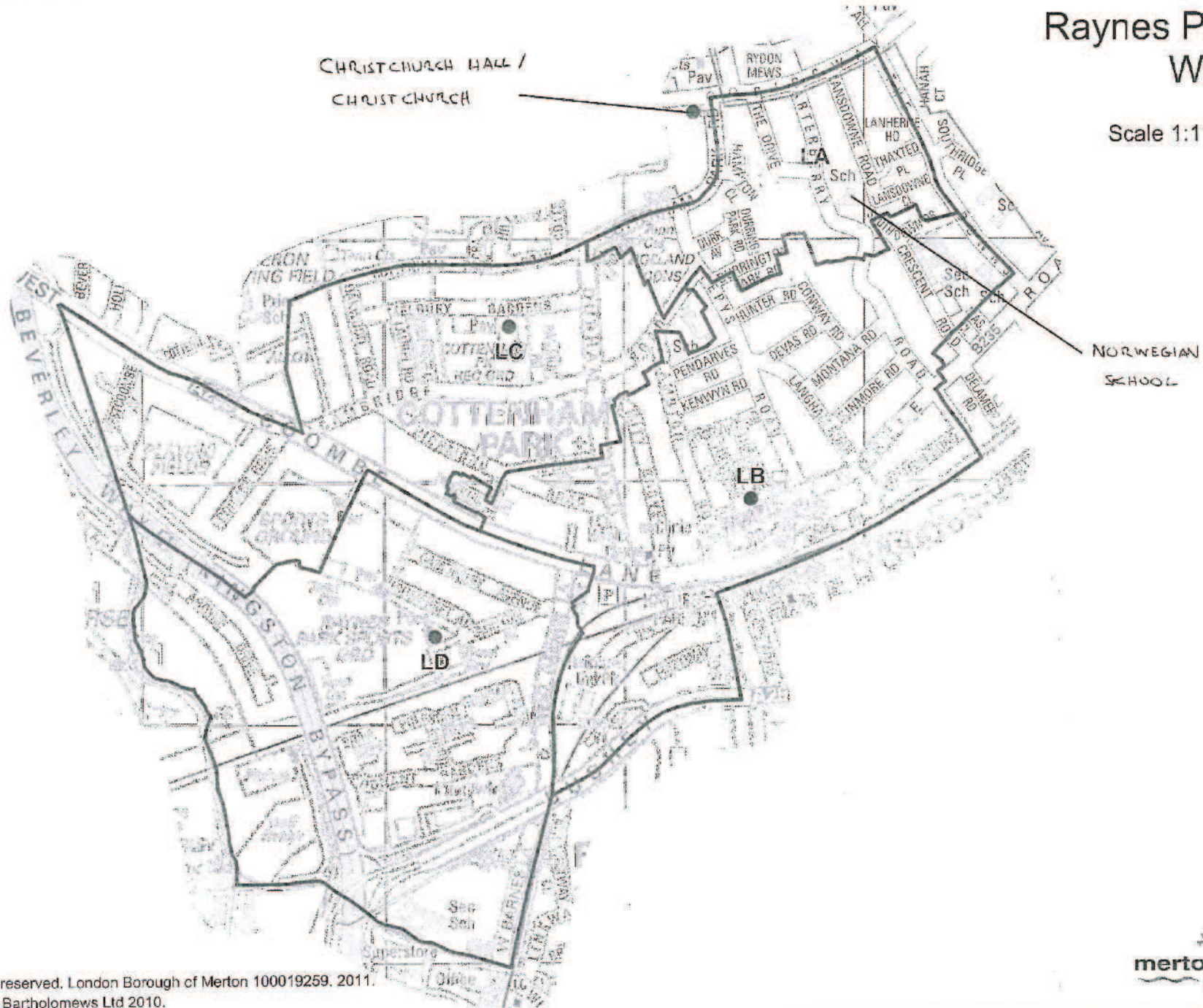
Village Ward

Scale 1:17,500



Raynes Park Ward

Scale 1:11,000



Cannon Hill Ward

Scale 1:11,000

CENTRAL WARD
RESIDENTS CLUBS

HILLCROSS
PRIMARY
SCHOOL



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16 respondents accessed the campaign

Step 1:1.00-1:Who is completing

This multiple response question was answered by 16 respondents.

Response	Number of Respondents	Percentage of Respondents
I am an Elector who visits Hillcross Primary School to vote	4	25%
I am a parent who has a child at Hillcross Primary School	13	81.25%
Other	2	12.50%

Step 1:1.01-1:Please Specify

This open response (Free text) question was answered by 2 respondents.

Response	Number of Respondents
concerned voter	1
resident on Hillcross Avenue	1

Step 1:2.00-1:Have visited Hillcross

This single response question was answered by 16 respondents.

Response	Number of Respondents	Percentage of Respondents
Yes	6	37.50%
No	10	62.50%

Step 1:3.00-1:satisfaction with polling station (Step free access)

This single response question was answered by 6 respondents.

Response	Number of Respondents	Percentage of Respondents
Very satisfied	4	66.67%
Satisfied		
Neither satisfied or dissatisfied	1	16.67%
Dissatisfied		
Very dissatisfied		
Don't know	1	16.67%

Step 1:3.00-2:satisfaction with polling station (Parking)

This single response question was answered by 6 respondents.

Response	Number of Respondents	Percentage of Respondents
Very satisfied	4	66.67%
Satisfied		
Neither satisfied or dissatisfied	1	16.67%
Dissatisfied		
Very dissatisfied		
Don't know	1	16.67%

Step 1:3.00-3:satisfaction with polling station (Public transport links)

This single response question was answered by 6 respondents.

Response	Number of Respondents	Percentage of Respondents
Very satisfied	4	66.67%
Satisfied		
Neither satisfied or dissatisfied	1	16.67%
Dissatisfied		
Very dissatisfied		
Don't know	1	16.67%

Step 1:3.00-4:satisfaction with polling station (Location)
This single response question was answered by 6 respondents.

Response	Number of Respondents	Percentage of Respondents
Very satisfied	4	66.67%
Satisfied	1	16.67%
Neither satisfied or dissatisfied		
Dissatisfied		
Very dissatisfied		
Don't know	1	16.67%

Step 1:4.00-1:Currentpollingplacecomments
This open response (Free text) question was answered by 2 respondents.

Response	Number of Respondents
Everything about it is fine. My only objection is that with mor and more pupils attending it is no longer appropriate to disrupt a whole day of education and force the parents to seek alternative childcare arrangements for something that actually takes up so little space. You could put a portocabin on the playing field and still keep the school open!	1
It is very inconvenient to have the whole school shut down for voting: could it not be done e.g. in Martin Way Methodist Church's Hall which is pretty similar in terms of location, is a large and convenient space and could easily accommodate voting for the day?	1

Step 1:5.00-1:Should Hillcross be used?
This single response question was answered by 15 respondents.

Response	Number of Respondents	Percentage of Respondents
Yes	4	26.67%
No	11	73.33%
Don't know		

Step 1:6.00-1:Why used or not used

This open response (Free text) question was answered by 15 respondents.

Response	Number of Respondents
As a full time working parent i believe in is not appropriate for a school to close for children in random day of the week an parents left with not option/alternative but taking time. Surely there many more places that could be used for polling stations	1
As a working parent with children at the school i would prefer it not to be used as a polling station as it is causes childcare issues and im sure there are plenty of halls (including church halls) or centers that can be used instead	1
because schools are well known in the area they serve. It is well known that pooling stations are generally in local schools, churches or community halls.	1
Hillcross school is more a neutral venue and easier to access for residents in this ward. Moving it to a biased venue (central ward club) is an affront to democracy and should be refused.	1
Hillcross should not be used as a polling place as children are losing a days education each time the school is used as a polling station. That day is not made up for in the school calendar. If there are other viable possible venues that could be used as a polling station then I would rather Hillcross not be used for polling days.	1
I am a parent at Hillcross school and I object to the school being closed to become a polling station. As working parents it is hard enough through the year to cover school holiday and inset days. Closing a whole large school for polling as well is not acceptable to education or working life. Why should our children miss out on a days teaching, when parents are threatened with fines for keeping children out of school at all? With the increased size of the school for 3 form entry, this now has an even greater impact on the c.350 families in the school community. I understand that the nearby The Central Ward Residents and Sports Club, is a viable option instead. I'm sure previously considered issues of lighting in the car park, and ramp access can surely be accommodated or should be in place as health and safety factors, for a building that is open to members anyway ?	1

I don't believe that 500+ children should miss a whole day of their schooling for the purpose of voting. It is not only unfair on the children it is also extremely inconvenient and expensive for all working parents who need to make childcare arrangements.	1
I don't believe that any school should be closed for the day to be used as a polling station, education is precious. It also impacts working parents who have to take a day off work to cover the day that the school is closed.	1
It creates childcare problem for many parents. There are other places in Morden such as community halls, church halls etc that stay empty all day and can easily be used for that purpose. The school is growing and has more children than ever, so the disruption is greater and greater each year.	1
It is an extremely convenient location	1
It is in a very central location to many houses/properties	1
It seems very contradictory that Merton Council threaten to fine parents for taking their kids out of school due to the "loss of learning hours etc etc" yet somehow this gets forgotten when it suits the council ??? Hillcross have done the last few years but think now it's time to find another place	1
it's another day taken out of a child's education with extra cost and problems for the parents to find childcare.	1
Please see previous comment: shutting down the whole school is very inconvenient.	1
The polling station takes up one room. The use of this room disrupts the whole school and results in a loss of education and pushes childcare back onto the parents for this time. The school is too large now for this disruption to be considered acceptable.	1

Step 2:7.00-1:alternativevenueyesorno

This single response question was answered by 15 respondents.

Response	Number of Respondents	Percentage of Respondents
yes	7	46.67%
no	8	53.33%

Step 2:9.00-1:Alternaitvetype

This single response question was answered by 7 respondents.

Response	Number of Respondents	Percentage of Respondents
school		
church hall	1	14.29%
church		
community building	5	71.43%
other	1	14.29%

Step 2:9.01-1:Please Specify

This open response (Free text) question was answered by 1 respondents.

Response	Number of Respondents
Sports club	1

Step 2:10.00-1:Alternative owner

This open response (Free text) question was answered by 5 respondents.

Response	Number of Respondents
Church	1
Don't know but is already a polling station and is 300yards away from hillcross	1
Not sure. There also a Community Centre almost opposite Hillcross School on Ashridge Way.	1
residents / members? Here is the web link. Right oposite Hillcross School on Ashridge Way: http://www.central-ward.co.uk/	1
Unknown	1

Step 2:11.00-1:alternative suitable

This multiple response question was answered by 7 respondents.

Response	Number of Respondents	Percentage of Respondents
step free access	6	85.71%
parking	6	85.71%
public transport links	7	100%
is accessible for disabled voters	6	85.71%

Step 2:12.00-1:alternative other comments

This open response (Free text) question was answered by 7 respondents.

Response	Number of Respondents
It has a big hall	1
it is directly across the road from hillcross Primary school so would have the same catchment but choosing it as a venue would disrupt far less people / families than are currently disrupted by using Hillcross	1
It is located immediately opposite the school in Ashridge way, near bus stops, it has parking and disabled access. Part of the club can function while part of the club can be used for polling. Electoral Services officers reviewed this site in 2012. Previous issues determined of lighting, heating and access could be addressed in conjunction with the club to improve, for it's own success and health and safety standards and attraction to new members.	1
It's already a polling station and is 300 yes from hill cross	1
It's location is right opposite Hillcross school, so centrally located.	1
large hall that is plenty big enough for a polling station	1
Not sure on Step Free Access / dissabled accessible.	1

Step 3:13.00-1:organisation response

This open response (Free text) question was answered by 2 respondents.

Response	Number of Respondents
Myself	1
n/a	1

Step 3:14.00-1:Gender

This single response question was answered by 15 respondents.

Response	Number of Respondents	Percentage of Respondents
Male	5	33.33%
Female	10	66.67%

Step 3:15.00-1:AGE (5 BANDS, ADULTS)

This single response question was answered by 15 respondents.

Response	Number of Respondents	Percentage of Respondents
18 - 29		
30 - 44	13	86.67%
45 - 64	2	13.33%
65 and over		

Step 3:16.00-1:Disability

This single response question was answered by 15 respondents.

Response	Number of Respondents	Percentage of Respondents
Yes		
No	15	100%

Step 3:17.00-1:Ethnicity

This single response question was answered by 14 respondents.

Response	Number of Respondents	Percentage of Respondents
White British or Irish	11	78.57%
White Eastern European	2	14.29%
White Other	1	7.14%
Black British		
Black Caribbean		
Black African		
Mixed White & Caribbean		
Mixed White and African		
Mixed White and Asian		
Mixed Other		
British Asian		
Indian		
Bangladeshi		
Pakistani		
Tamil		
Chinese		
Other		

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