

Review of Polling Districts and Polling Places: 2019
Acting Returning Officer's Proposals for that part of the Brentwood & Ongar Parliamentary Constituency that falls within the Borough of Brentwood

Introduction

Elections over the last four years have provided a robust test of the electoral arrangements within the Brentwood Borough:

- 2016 Borough Council and PCC elections (34% turnout)
- 2016 EU referendum (79.5% turnout)
- 2017 County Council election (33% turnout)
- 2017 UK Parliamentary election (71% turnout)
- 2018 Borough Council election and Parish by-election (35% turnout)
- 2019 Borough Council election (32% turnout)
- 2019 European Parliamentary election (38% turnout)

In the main, the electoral arrangements have worked well within the Brentwood area and very little adjustment to the existing schedule of polling districts and polling places is needed. Where availability issues at polling stations have been identified, proposals for alternative arrangements are set out below.

In assessing the capacity of polling stations, account has also been taken of known residential development projects, such as William Hunter Way, Bank Place, Essex Fire Brigade HQ, the various office conversions being undertaken and sites like the Police Station and the former garage site in Ingrave Road. All these areas could see substantial increases in the electoral roll, which might necessitate single polling stations being split into double stations within the same building to accommodate elector numbers and increased turnout. Additionally, potential residential areas which have been identified through the Draft Local Plan, would need to be considered in a future review.

When designating polling districts, the council has a duty to seek to ensure that all the electors in the constituency have such reasonable facilities for voting as are practicable in the circumstances. In addition, and unless there are special circumstances that lead the council to determine otherwise, each parish must be in a separate polling district.

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. The polling place must also be small enough to indicate to electors in different parts of the polling district how they will be able to reach their designated polling station.

It is the statutory responsibility of the Returning Officer for the particular election to provide a sufficient number of polling stations and allot the electors to those polling stations in such manner as he or she thinks the most convenient.

Proposals under the 2019 review

The proposals relate to three wards:

Brentwood South
Pilgrims Hatch
Tipps Cross

Proposals in respect of Brentwood South Ward

This ward is currently divided into four polling districts:

BA – Hogarth
BB – Rose Valley
BC – Three Arches
BD – Thrift Park

Due to property development at the junction of Knights Way and Cherry Avenue, the situation has arisen where one floor of the building is addressed in each road. Normally addresses in Knights Way would be included in the Thrift Park (BD) polling district but the properties currently lie within the boundary of the Three Arches (BC) polling district.

As there is a natural break in the housing between numbers 53 and 55 Cherry Avenue, it is suggested that the boundary between polling districts BC and BD should be amended so that the following properties are included in the Thrift Park (BD) polling district:

55, 57 and 59 Cherry Avenue
40a Knights Way

This would mean that the electors would vote at St Stephen's Church instead of the Three Arch Bridge Community Hall in Maple Close.

No other amendments are proposed for the Brentwood South Ward.

Proposals in respect of Pilgrims Hatch Ward

This ward is currently divided into two polling districts:

- LA – Bishops Hall Park
- LB – Larchwood Gardens

Concerns have been raised about the availability and suitability of the polling station in the Larchwood Gardens (LB) polling district. There are currently 3,176 electors on this particular register, drawn from the western part of the Pilgrims Hatch Ward.

At present, the electorate within this polling district votes at Larchwood Primary School. Although the main hall has previously been used to accommodate the double station, the facilities made available in recent years have consisted of two rooms to the side of the school, accessed externally. One room is normally used by the school for cookery and contains equipment which cannot be moved. The other room has games equipment, such as table football, which is difficult to relocate. Additionally, there is no longer a facility to store polling booths on site and so special arrangements have to be made to deliver booths on the day of the poll before 6.30am and to collect them after 10pm. The practical issues are making it increasingly challenging to run the polling stations effectively and efficiently.

Whilst the use of these rooms has made it possible for the school to remain open on polling day, the arrangements are causing difficulty at the school and the Head Teacher would prefer that an alternative venue be found.

No suitable alternative buildings within the polling district have been identified which are able to accommodate an electorate of this size. Other options have therefore been explored. The best solution identified would be to relocate the polling stations to the Bishops Hall Park Community Centre. This building is within the Ward, being the polling station for the Bishops Hall Park (LA) polling district.

The building has two separate rooms, the larger of which could accommodate double polling stations for the LB polling district, with the smaller being used for the LA polling district (currently 1519 electors). It also has an adjacent car park, which would assist voters with mobility issues or coming from outlying parts of the polling district. This would be an improvement over the existing arrangements at Larchwood Primary School.

It is suggested that the best way to modify the electoral arrangements would be for the two existing polling districts to be retained. However, the polling place description for the Larchwood Gardens (LB) polling district would need to be amended as shown.

Existing description:

The area within ¼ mile radius of the junction of Larchwood Gardens and Ongar Road, Pilgrims Hatch

Proposed description:

The area within ½ mile radius of the junction of Gloucester Road and Balmoral Road

No other amendments are proposed for the Pilgrims Hatch Ward.

Proposals in respect of Tipps Cross Ward

This ward is currently divided into three polling districts:

- PA – Blackmore
- PB – Stondon Massey
- PC – Hook End and Wyatts Green

It was noted in reviewing the polling place details that the description for the Stondon Massey (PB) polling district referenced a particular building and it is suggested that this should be updated in line with other descriptions for ease of future reference.

There would be no change to the polling station used in Stondon Massey.

Existing description:

The area within 700 yards radius of Brooks Farm, Stondon Massey

Proposed description:

The polling district

No other amendments are proposed for the Tipps Cross Ward.

Shenfield Ward

Currently electors within the Shenfield Ward vote at Shenfield Library which accommodates a triple station. This has been operating successfully since 2013, with Thursday being the day on which the library is normally closed.

The recent review of library services by Essex County Council has raised some uncertainty about the future availability of the premises for use as a polling station. Whilst there is currently no indication that they will not be provided, the situation will be monitored. Previously, the polling stations were located at Shenfield Parish Hall and this remains a suitable alternative should the library cease to be available.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Stephen Summers', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Stephen Summers
Acting Returning Officer
July 2019