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Community overview and scrutiny committee

Committee Report

Public

Date of Meeting:

13th FEBRUARY, 2003

Title: REVIEW OF POLLING ARRANGEMENTS

Report of: HEAD OF LEGAL AND DEMOCRATIC SERVICES

Report reference: LDS 08/03

Summary:

The Departmental Service Plan provides for an annual review of polling arrangements in the City. This Report presents the results of this year's review and makes recommendations for changes to existing arrangements as appropriate.

Recommendations:

(See over)

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Recommendations:-

It is recommended that

- a. Harraby Community Centre be designated as the polling place for polling districts DD and DC (paragraph 24);
 - (b) the polling arrangements in Denton Holme ward remain unchanged (paragraph 28);
 - (c) Gilsland Methodist Church Hall be designated as the polling place for polling districts PX1, PX2 and PX3 (paragraph 32);
- d. if the Secretary of State makes the necessary order to alter the boundary between Stanwix Rural and Kingmoor parishes, a new polling district designated PAG3 be created and the polling place be Rockcliffe Community Centre (paragraph 35);
- e. the locations of all other polling places remain unchanged (paragraph 20).

Introduction

1 The Council has a statutory duty under the Representation of the People Act 1983 to divide its area into polling districts, to designate a polling place for each district and to keep both polling districts and polling places under review. The Departmental Service Plan provides for a polling review to be carried out on an annual basis. Councillors for wards in which elections will be held in May this year have been consulted on the polling arrangements in their particular wards.

2 The current polling places are listed the Appendix and these have been reviewed in the light of any representations received.

3. The final recommendations arising from the Council's review of parishes (Report TC 47/02) were agreed by the Council on 5th March, 2002 and subsequently submitted to the Secretary of State for approval. A number of the recommended changes to parish boundaries also affect City ward and County electoral division boundaries and consequently require the approval of the Electoral Commission, following consideration by the Boundary Committee for England.
4. This Committee is, however, currently unable to undertake any work arising from parish reviews because it is fully committed to reviews of metropolitan authorities and county councils. It is anticipated that the Committee will be able to consider parish review recommendations later in the year with a view to any agreed changes being in place for the 2004 elections. This means that there will be no changes to City ward boundaries at this year's elections in May.

5. In the meantime, the Secretary of State has approved most of the Council's recommendations in respect of parish boundaries and, although formal confirmation of his decision has not yet been issued, the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister is preparing a statutory order to allow these changes to parish boundaries to be implemented in time for the parish elections in May. For the purposes of this report, the creation of one new polling district is necessary at this stage as a consequence of the parish review, as explained in paragraphs 33 to 35 below. A further report on alterations to other polling districts will be prepared following the decision of the Electoral Commission on the proposals to realign City ward boundaries.

Statutory Provisions

6 In exercising its duty to keep polling districts and places under review, the 1983 Act requires Councils to ensure that all electors are given "*such reasonable facilities for voting as are practicable in the circumstances*". Each parish must be a separate polling district or districts. 'Polling place' is not defined in the Act but it refers to the building or area in which the polling station is situated.

Access for Disabled Voters

7 The Act also says that a Council shall "*so far as is reasonable and practicable, designate as polling places only places which are accessible to electors who are disabled*". The effect of this requirement is that a building should not be designated as a polling place if the only means of access to any polling station situated in it would be by means of steps, when another more suitable building is available in the polling district. However, a building would not be a more suitable polling place if it is so far away from most of the electors in the area as to be inconvenient for them to reach it.

8. With the exception of mobile polling stations, most polling places are accessible to disabled voters and where there are particular difficulties, temporary access ramps are installed. (Community buildings will be required to have satisfactory permanent access for the disabled by 2004.) Polling compartments specifically designed for voters in wheelchairs are also provided where it is practical to do so.

Free use of rooms

9. In addition to free use of school premises, described in paragraph 16 below, any room the expense of which is payable out of any rate may also be used free of charge. This would apply to a room in a local authority building e.g. a Community Centre.

Duties of Returning Officer

10 It is the responsibility of the Returning Officer to provide sufficient polling stations

within each polling place and to allot electors to the stations as he thinks most convenient. One or more polling stations may be provided in the same room. The Returning Officer also has a duty to appoint the polling staff and provide the necessary equipment.

Review Criteria

11 Apart from the requirements outlined above, there are no specific statutory criteria for determining the suitability of premises for election purposes or even the number of polling stations to be provided for a given electorate. The following factors, however, are taken into account:

- the convenience of the location within the polling district
for the majority of electors
- extent of parking provision
- internal size and layout of the premises having regard to the
number of voters allotted to the polling station(s)
- lighting and heating
- cost (where there is a choice between similar premises)

12 The suitability of each polling place has been considered according to these criteria, taking account of the availability of alternative premises. An electorate of about 1000 - 1200 is a manageable number per polling station at a parliamentary election but the number of voters to be allocated to any particular polling place will have regard to the distribution and density of households within the Ward concerned.

Mobile Polling Stations

13 Where no suitable permanent buildings are available, mobile stations are used instead. Portacabins, however, are much less satisfactory than permanent premises - they offer limited space, lack facilities for the staff on duty, present difficulties for disabled voters and are more expensive than halls or schools. Lighting is battery powered and not to the same standard as that provided by a mains supply. The availability of suitable accommodation is subject to commercial considerations and the commitments of suppliers to other longer term hirings. Improvements in the type of unit hired will, however, continue to be sought.

Use of Houses

14 Following an earlier review the Council agreed that no existing polling place should be replaced with a portacabin unless the premises concerned becomes unavailable and there is no suitable alternative. It was also agreed that, where appropriate, private houses and vacant Council property be used as alternatives to mobile stations, on the following basis:

- The property is in a convenient location for the majority of
electors in the polling district concerned;

- There is sufficient time for due notice of the change in station
to be given to electors and candidates;
- Signs are erected to show the changed location;
- The condition of the property is satisfactory.

15 Empty Council houses have been used at recent elections in a number of wards, including Belle Vue, Botcherby and Denton Holme. Since the transfer of the housing stock to Carlisle Housing Association, the Returning Officer no longer has a statutory right to use such property but it may nevertheless be possible to make arrangements to use suitable vacant premises.

Use of Schools

16 The 1983 Act also provides for the use, free of charge, for the purpose of taking the poll or the counting of the votes of "*a room in a school maintained or assisted by a local education authority or a school in respect of which grants are made out of moneys provided by Parliament*", subject to making good any damage and defraying any expenses. These provisions also apply to grant maintained schools. There is no requirement that a school must close when part of it is being used as a polling station, but nearly all do so because of practical difficulties in staying open or on security grounds.

17 Closure for elections, however, can be disruptive to the school timetable and inconvenient for working parents. In response to requests from school governing bodies, the number of schools used as polling places has been reduced in recent years. There are now pressures on schools to meet performance targets and many feel that closure would be detrimental to their pupils' education. The Local Education Authority has made representations previously in support of this view and favours polling stations being sited elsewhere if at all possible.

18. In the light of these concerns, the Council agreed at a previous review that suitable alternatives should be sought where schools are currently used as polling stations so that they would not have to close on election days. Of the 98 polling places in the Council's area, only 12 are now schools and recommendations are made below to relocate from a further two schools. For the reasons given in paragraph 13 above, portacabins are not considered to be viable alternatives to school premises.

Review of Polling Places and Polling Districts

19. Polling arrangements in Brampton, Great Corby and Geltsdale, Hayton and Wetheral Wards have not been reviewed on this occasion because no elections are scheduled to take place in those wards this year.

20 No representations have been received in respect of the following wards and **it is recommended that the polling arrangements in these wards remain unchanged:**

Belah Dalston St. Aidans

Belle Vue Harraby Stanwix Urban

Burgh Longtown & Rockcliffe Upperby

Castle Lyne Yewdale

Currock Morton

21 Botcherby, Denton Holme, Irthing and Stanwix Rural wards are discussed in turn below.

BOTCHERBY WARD

22 Pennine Way Primary School has been used for many years as the polling place for over 1700 electors in polling districts DD and DE (Map 1). The Headteacher has made representations on a number of occasions on behalf of the Governors suggesting that either Harraby library or Harraby Community Centre might be used instead in order to avoid disruption to the school.

23 The library is situated within North Cumbria Technology College, near the front of the building. There is, however, no convenient separate room to accommodate the polling station and it would therefore have to share space within the library itself, resulting in potential conflict with the other normal activities in the College. Car parking close to the library entrance is also very limited. The Community Centre has satisfactory facilities, access and parking facilities and is considered to be a suitable venue. Although both buildings are outwith Botcherby ward and are perhaps not as conveniently located for some electors as the school, relocation would benefit both the school and working parents.

24 It is recommended that Harraby Community Centre be designated as the polling place for polling districts DD and DE.

DENTON HOLME WARD

25. New development at the former mills at Holme Head is divided between polling district HE, for which the designated polling place is a portacabin in Longsowerby, and district HC with Denton Holme Community Centre as the polling place (Map 2). A Member has suggested that a separate polling station should be provided for this part of the ward in view of the number of electors now concentrated in the area and the relative distances to the respective polling places.
26. The current electorate in polling district HE is 1137 which is considered to be an acceptable number, even for a portacabin. Polling district HC has 1015 electors. When the development is fully occupied, however, greater pressure will be placed on the existing provision and additional facilities may have to be provided at that time. Until then, it is considered that a separate polling station for this part of the ward is not justified, particularly in view of the lack of suitable premises in the area.
27. The only alternative would be another portacabin which could serve not only the mills development but also the wider North Street/ Beveridge Road/ Holme Head Way area and thereby reduce the number of electors using the Longsowerby polling station in particular. Portacabins are, however, considered to be a last resort for the reasons outlined in paragraph 13. They are also becoming increasingly difficult to hire, equip and staff, and it is felt that their drawbacks currently outweigh the argument in favour of additional polling provision in this part of the ward.

28. **It is therefore recommended that at the present time the polling arrangements in Denton Holme ward remain unchanged.**

IRTHING WARD

29. Gilsland School (Map 3) is the polling place for the following polling districts:

District Parish Electorate (Feb. 2003)

PX1 Upper Denton 72

PX2 Waterhead 96

PX3 Kingwater 11

Total 179

30 The school has suggested that the Methodist Church Hall might be a suitable alternative venue to allow it to remain open on polling days. The Hall has recently been refurbished and would provide good facilities for both electors and the staff on duty. It is more centrally located within the village and is wheelchair accessible.

31 While the local Member supports relocation in principle to avoid disruption to school, he has expressed concern about car parking provision in the vicinity of the Hall having regard to the fact that the majority of voters attending the polling station are likely to travel by car. Although the Hall does not have its own car park, there is a private business car park adjacent to the Church which is likely to be available outside normal working hours and a public house car park near by. On-street parking is available in the cul-de-sac beside the Hall.

32 On balance, the Hall is considered to be an acceptable alternative to the school and **it is recommended that Gilsland Methodist Church Hall be designated as the polling station for polling districts PX1, PX2 and PX3.**

STANWIX RURAL WARD

33 One of the parish review recommendations submitted to the Secretary of State for approval, referred to in paragraphs 3 to 5 above, proposes the transfer of that part of Harker Park in Stanwix Rural parish from that parish to Rockcliffe parish (Map 4). It is also recommended that the area in question transfers from Stanwix Rural ward to Longtown and Rockcliffe ward. Until the Electoral Commission makes a decision on whether the ward boundary should be altered, however, the ward and parish boundaries in the Harker area will not be coterminous (assuming that a statutory parish order is made in time for the parish boundary to be altered before the elections in May).

34 In order to transfer the electors affected from Stanwix Rural parish to Rockcliffe parish without also moving them from Stanwix Rural to Longtown and Rockcliffe ward, it is therefore necessary to create a new polling district. The most convenient polling

place for these electors would be Rockcliffe Community Centre, being the polling place for the rest of Harker Park, instead of Houghton Village Hall as at present.

35 It is recommended that, if the Secretary of State makes the necessary order to alter the boundary between Stanwix Rural and Rockcliffe parishes, a new polling district designated PAG3 be created as shown on Map 4 and the polling place be Rockcliffe Community Centre.

February 2003

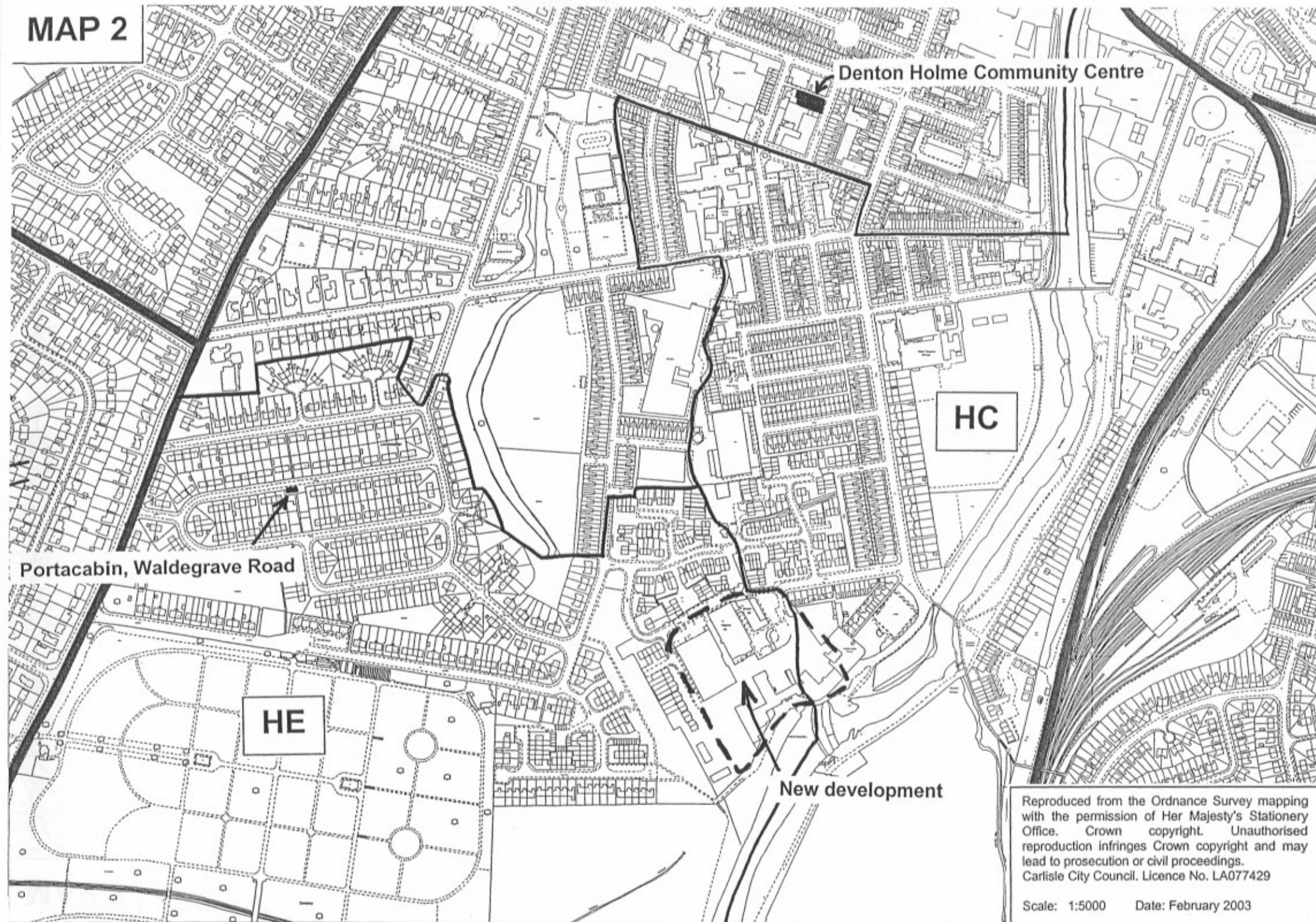
MAP 1



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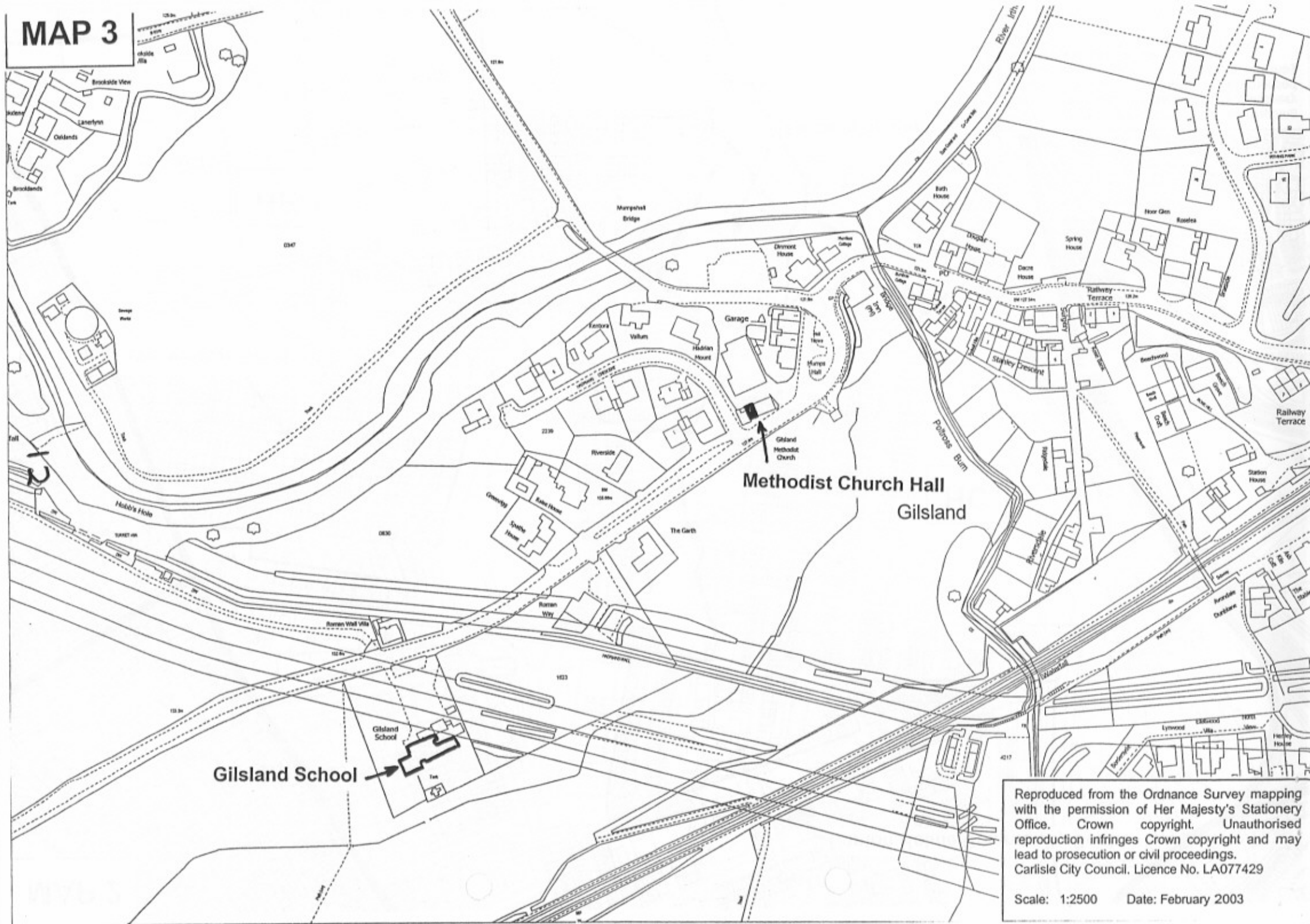
MAP 2



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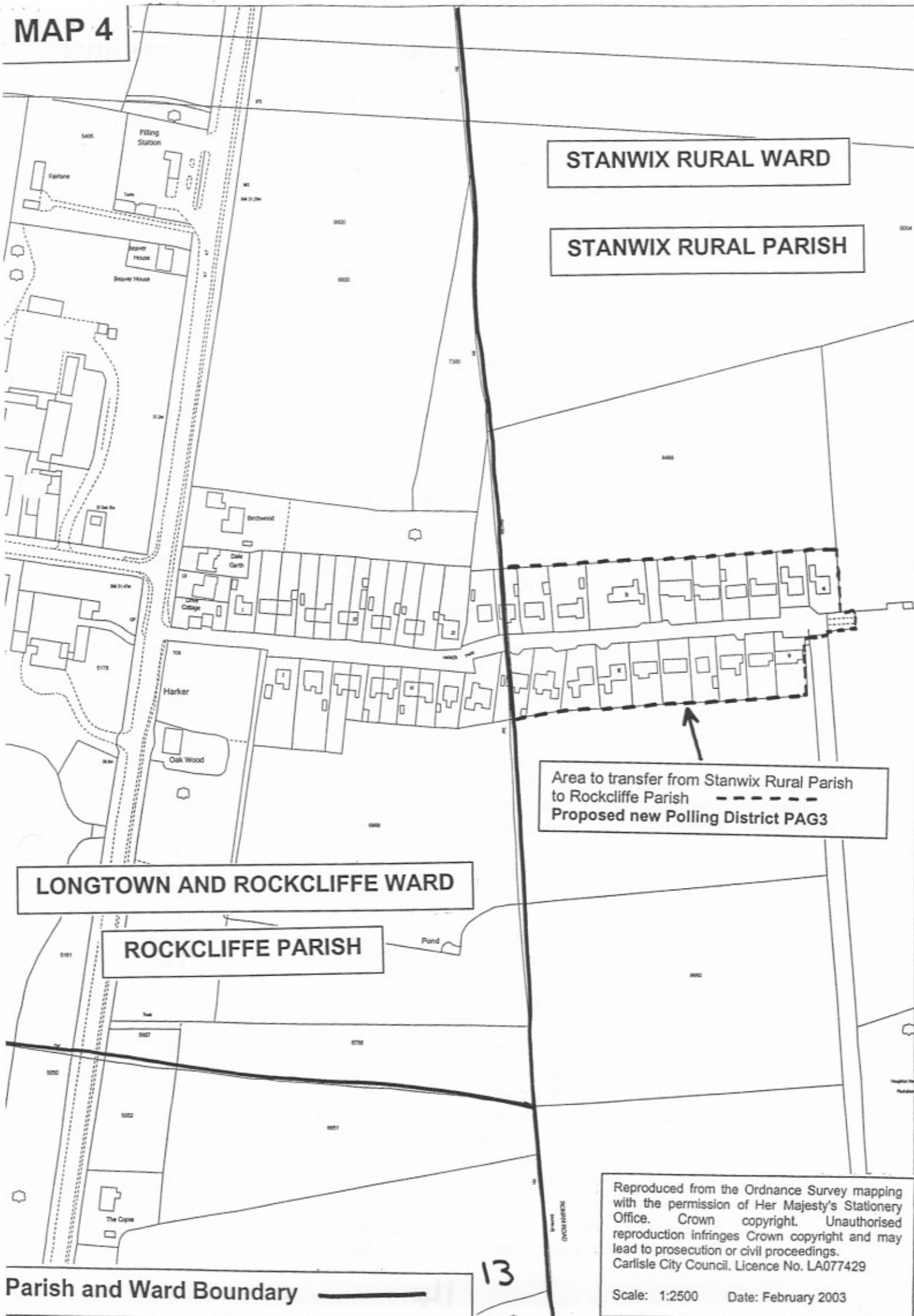
MAP 3



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Scale: 1:2500 Date: February 2003

MAP 4



Polling Places – Urban Wards

APPENDIX

WARD	POLLING PLACE	POLLING DISTRICT	ELECTORATE (February 2003)
Belah	Kingmoor Junior School	AA;AB	1959
	Belah Community Centre	AC	784
	Portacabin, Etterby Road	AD	1066
	Newfield Grange Hotel	AE	939
Stanwix Urban	Portacabin, Knowefield Avenue	BA; PBG	1179
	Stanwix Community Centre	BB; BC; PBJ	2452
	Belah School	BD	1087
St. Aidans	St. Aidan's Church Hall	CA	1131
	Norman Street School	CB	1442
	St. Cuthbert's Court, Myddleton St.	CC	496
	Greystone Community Centre	CD	1567
Botcherby	Botcherby Community Centre	DA	1364
	Portacabin, Borland Avenue	DB	672
	Portacabin, Cumrew Close	DC	756
	Pennine Way School	DD; DE	1708
Harraby	The Pinegrove Hotel, London Road	EA	1076
	St. Elisabeth's Church Hall	EB	1071
	Harraby Catholic Club	EC	1135
	Harraby Methodist Church Hall	ED	1209
	Portacabin, Garlands Road	EE	33
Upperby	St. Margaret Mary's Social Club	FA	858
	Upperby Junior School	FB	855
	St. John's Ambulance, Scalegate Rd.	FC	1047
	Portacabin, Petteril Bank Road	FD	574
	Petteril Bank Community Centre	FE	736
Currock	Currock Community Centre	GA	1043
	Beacon Hall, Beaconsfield Street	GB	1315
	Currock Methodist Church Hall	GC	906
	St. Herbert's Church Hall	GD	1093
	Methodist Church Hall, Wigton Road	HA	336
Denton Holme	Denton Holme Community Centre	HB; HC	1829
	St. James Church Hall	HD	806
	Portacabin, Longsowerby	HE	1131
	Portacabin, Lorne Crescent	HF	342
Castle	Newtown School	JA	922
	Ukrainian Club, Silloth Street	JB	762
	Methodist Church Hall, Wigton Road	JC	1299
	Carlisle College, Victoria Place	JD	801
	St. Cuthbert's Court, Myddleton St.	JE	543
Morton	Morton Primary School	KA; KB; KC	2467
	St. Edmunds Chapel, Newlaithes Ave.	KD	1031
	Portacabin, Borrowdale Road	KE	719
	Portacabin, Scawfell Road	KF	599
Yewdale	Yewdale Community Centre	LA; LB	2399
	Portacabin, Richmond Green	LC	1195
	Portacabin, Nairn Way/Egerton Grove	LD	1230
Belle Vue	Belle Vue Junior School	MA; MB	2070
	Newtown School	MC	947
	St. Bedes School	MD	713
	Portacabin, Hawthorn Grove	ME	476

Polling Places – Rural Wards

Ward	Polling Place	Polling District	Electorate (February 2003)
Brampton	Moot Hall, Brampton	PK	2229
	Brampton Community Centre	PKA	1165
	Milton Village Hall	PL	128
Burgh	Beaumont Parish Hall	NA	360
	Village Hall, Burgh-by-Sands	NB	605
	Ash House, Thurstonfield	NC	332
	Village Hall, Great Orton	ND	317
	Victory Hall, Dalston	OA	1796
Dalston	Primrose Hall, Gaitsgill	OB	294
	Embassy Ballroom, Cummersdale	OC	382
	Portacabin, Carleton	OD	260
	Wreay Village Hall	OE	320
	6 Low Moor Avenue, Blackwell	OF	467
	Portacabin, Black Lion, Durdar	OG	317
	Portacabin, Garlands Road	OH	456
	Watson Hall, Castle Carrock	PP1	245
	Helme Farm, Cumrew	PR1; PR2	97
	Cumwhitton Public Hall	PS	259
Great Corby and Geltsdale	Heads Nook Village Hall	PAB2	275
	Talkin Village Hall	PAC	122
	Great Corby Village Hall	PBB	361
	Downagate Community Centre	PBC	324
	Hayton W.I. Hall	PAA	541
	Heads Nook Village Hall	PAB1	313
	Methodist Church Hall, Corby Hill	PAD	806
Irthing	Lees Hill School	PG1; PG2	186
	Roadhead Public Hall	PH2	37
	Cricket Pavilion, Lanercost	PO1; PO2	170
	Taylor Institute, Low Row	PW	258
	Gilsland School	PX1; PX2; PX3	179
	Lacy Thompson Hall, Hallbankgate	PY1; PY2	584
	Walton Village Hall	PAX	248
Longtown and Rockcliffe	Longtown Community Centre	PE1- PE4	2142
	Moat Village Centre	PF1; PF2	161
	Rockcliffe Community Centre	PAG2; PAM	624
Lyne	Blackford School	PAY	288
	Roadhead Public Hall	PH1	333
	Hethersgill Parish Hall	PAE	316
	Fir Ends School, Smithfield	PAJ	295
	Nicholforest Hall	PAK	311
	Westfield House, Roweltown	PAS	143
	Stapleton Public Hall	PAW	193
	Village Hall, Newtown, Irthington	PAF	537
Stanwix Rural	Rockcliffe Community Centre	PAG1	82
	The Four Oaks, Cargo	PAH	238
	Scaleby Village Hall	PAR	271
	Crosby Parish Hall	PAT1; PAT2	404
	Houghton Village Hall	PAU1; PAU2	1426
	Women's Institute Hall, Linstock	PAV	256
	Newfield Grange Hotel, Newfield Drive	PBK	131
	Cotehill Village Hall	PAZ	506
Wetheral	Cumwhinton Village Hall	PBA	333
	Parish Centre, Scotby	PBD	1077
	Memorial Hall, Warwick-on-Eden	PBE	179
	Wetheral Village Hall	PBF	1031
	Portacabin, Aglionby	PBH	224
	Portacabin, Cumrew Close	PBL	118