

CARLISLE CITY COUNCIL

Report to:- THE MAYOR AND MEMBERS OF THE CITY COUNCIL

Date of Meeting:- 5TH MARCH, 2002

Agenda Item No:-

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Public	Operational	Delegated No
<hr/>		
Accompanying Comments and Statements		
		Required
		Included
Environmental Impact Statement:		No
Corporate Management Team Comments:		No
City Treasurers Comments:		No
City Solicitor & Secretary Comments:		No
Head of Personnel Services Comments:		No

Title:- REVIEW OF POLLING ARRANGEMENTS

Report of:- TOWN CLERK AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE

Report reference:- TC 48/02

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.

It also provides an up-date on changes to electoral law for Members information.

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NOTE: In compliance with Section 100D of the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985, the Report has been prepared in part from the following papers:-

The Representation of the People Act 1983
Representation of the People Act 2000
LGA Research Report 14 - An Evaluation of May 2000 Local Electoral Pilots

Recommendations:-

It is recommended that

- (a) Pennine Way Primary School continue to be the polling place for polling districts DD and DC (paragraph 22);
- (b) St. Elisabeth's Church Hall be designated as the polling place for polling district EB (paragraph 26);
- (c) if no suitable vacant Council property is available on polling day, a portacabin sited adjacent to the shops on Petteril Bank Road be used as the polling station for polling district FD (paragraph 30);
- (d) the polling arrangements in Castle ward remain unchanged (paragraph 35);
- (e) new polling districts designated OH and EE be created in Dalston and Harraby wards respectively as shown on Map 6 and the polling place for both districts be a portacabin sited in a convenient location near the entrance to Carleton Grange (paragraph 37);
- (f) polling district PAM be merged with district PAG2 and the polling place for the enlarged PAG2 district and PAG1 be Rockcliffe Community Centre (paragraph 41);
- (g) the locations of all other polling places remain unchanged (paragraph 18).

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 in Appendix 1 and these have been reviewed in the light of the representations received.
- 3 The Council has expressed the view on previous occasions that additional measures should be introduced wherever practicable to improve turnout at local elections. This is also the prime objective of the government's review of election procedures which has resulted in recent legislative changes. The report provides a summary of these changes in electoral law for Members information.

Statutory Provisions

- 4 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

- 5 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.
- 6 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

- 7 In addition to free use of school premises, described in paragraph 14 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 or Council house.

Duties of Returning Officer

- 8 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

- 9 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)
- 10 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

- 11 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. (Electrical connections were formerly made to lamp standards but statutory Regulations no longer permit such connections to be made.) 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 Council/Private Houses

- 12 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
- 13 Empty Council houses have been used at recent elections in a number of wards, including Belle Vue, Botcherby and Denton Holme, and such premises will continue to be used at future elections wherever they are available.

Use of Schools

- 14 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.

- 15 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 in support of this view and is very much in favour of polling stations being sited elsewhere if at all possible.
- 16 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 14 are now schools and a recommendation is made below to relocate from one of these. For the reasons given in paragraph 11 above, portacabins are not considered to be viable alternatives to school premises.

Review of Polling Places and Polling Districts

- 17 Polling arrangements in Burgh, Great Corby and Geltsdale, Hayton, Irthing and Lyne wards have not been reviewed on this occasion because no elections are scheduled to take place in those wards this year.
- 18 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
Belle Vue
Brampton
Currock**

**Denton Holme
Morton
St. Aidans
Stanwix Urban**

**Yewdale
Wetheral**

- 19 The remaining wards are discussed in turn below.

BOTCHERBY WARD

- 20 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 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.
- 21 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 would be a suitable venue. Both buildings, however, are outwith Botcherby ward and are not as conveniently located for the majority of electors as the school.
- 22 **It is recommended that Pennine Way Primary School continue to be the polling place for polling districts DD and DE.**
- 23 Botcherby Family Centre was used as the polling place for polling district DB until it was damaged by fire and subsequently demolished in 2001. In the absence of another community building in the area, an empty Council house in Borland Avenue was used at the combined Parliamentary/County Council elections in June last year. A similar arrangement will be made at the forthcoming City elections in May, subject to availability of a suitable property. If a vacant house is not available, a portacabin will be used instead.

HARRABY WARD

- 24 Inglewood Infant School is the polling place for polling district EB (Map 2). It has been suggested that St. Elisabeth's Church Hall on Mayfield Avenue might be used instead so that the school could remain open on election days.
- 25 The Hall is well located within the polling district, offers satisfactory facilities and a ramped access leads directly from a large car park. Local Members had expressed some concern about electors being aware of the change of venue if the polling place were relocated. In all cases where polling stations are moved, voters are notified individually by letter in addition to being sent their official poll card.
- 26 **It is recommended that St. Elisabeth's Church Hall be designated as the polling place for polling district EB.**

- 27 Some 28 electors in Leywell Drive on Carleton Grange estate are within Harraby ward and currently vote at Harraby Catholic Club on Edgehill Road. A recommendation to change their polling place is put forward in paragraph 37 below.

UPPERBY WARD

- 28 The polling place for polling district FD was the former Housing Office at No. 1 Lightfoot Drive (Map 3). The property has now been sold and is no longer available for polling purposes. The alternatives would appear to be Petteril Bank Community Centre, which is used as the polling place for the neighbouring FE polling district, a vacant Council house or a portacabin.
- 29 The Community Centre would be further away for the majority of electors who voted at the former Housing Office and the use of a Council house would depend on the availability of satisfactory premises on election day. Portacabins, however, have their drawbacks, as outlined in paragraph 11 above, and a vacant Council property is considered to be the better option, subject to it meeting the criteria set out in paragraph 12 above. Ward Councillors favour the siting of a portacabin beside the shops on Petteril Bank Road where it would be centrally located within the area it serves and, being in a prominent position, would be clearly visible to voters.
- 30 **It is recommended that if no suitable vacant Council property is available on polling day, a portacabin sited adjacent to the shops on Petteril Bank Road be used as the polling station for polling district FD.**

CASTLE WARD

- 31 At the last polling review, the Council agreed to combine former polling districts JC and JD to form a new district JC (Map 4) and designated the Methodist Church Hall on Wigton Road as the polling place for the new district. Before the merger, only electors in the old JD district voted at the Church Hall; the polling place for the former JC district had been Caldew Lea School.
- 32 The County Councillor for the Castle division has requested that the decision to combine the previous polling districts be reconsidered on the grounds that the turnout at the 2001 elections was affected by the merger. He would favour reinstating a separate polling place for electors north of Wigton Road, particularly those who live on or near to Newtown Road and are furthest from the Church Hall. Suggested locations are
- a vacant shop or house on Newtown Road;
 - vacant business premises on Port road
 - the former hospital physiotherapy department building on Granville Road.

- 33 City Councillors for the ward have not commented on the current review but during the last review suggested that the physiotherapy department might be a suitable alternative to the school. The building would be convenient for electors who live in the Newtown Road area but it is currently for sale and its long-term future is therefore uncertain. The other options are considered to be less satisfactory than the Church Hall both in terms of the facilities which might be provided, their convenience for the majority of electors who would vote there and the availability of off-street car parking – the car park at the Church Hall has recently been extended.
- 34 It is accepted that nationally the turnout at the 2001 combined elections was lower than expected. Within the Castle ward, polling district JC did in fact have the highest turnout of the five polling districts in the ward. The figures were JA - 51.1%; JB - 40.6%; JC - 51.6%; JD - 46.7% and JE - 45.6%. In the circumstances, it is difficult to draw any specific conclusion about the effect of relocating the polling station on voter turnout. No comments were received from electors about the change of polling location.
- 35 **It is recommended that the polling arrangements in Castle ward remain unchanged.**

DALSTON WARD

- 36 The largest part of the new Carleton Grange estate off Garlands Road lies within Dalston ward (polling district OD) and currently has 232 electors (map 5). The designated polling station for this portion of the ward is the portacabin at the Carleton Day Centre on Carleton Road. Part of the estate is also in Harraby ward and the 28 electors from there vote at Harraby Catholic Club on Edgehill Road. (A smaller section of the estate falls in Wetheral Ward but it is not yet developed.) It would be much more convenient if all residents of the estate and other new housing being developed in the Garlands area could vote locally. Ward Members consider that there are now sufficient voters to warrant their own separate polling station and have suggested that a portacabin be sited near the entrance to Carleton Grange.
- 37 In the absence of suitable permanent premises in the vicinity, it is accepted that a portacabin is the only option. **It is therefore recommended that new polling districts designated OH and EE be created in Dalston and Harraby wards respectively as shown on Map 6 and the polling place for both districts be a portacabin sited in a convenient location near the entrance to Carleton Grange.**

[A separate report to Council on the Review of Parishes (TC 47/02) contains a recommendation to enlarge Dalston ward to incorporate the whole of Carleton Grange estate. This would also rationalise the polling arrangements in the area.]

LONGTOWN & ROCKCLIFFE AND STANWIX RURAL WARDS

- 38 Park House Hotel was the polling place for the Parkhouse and Crindledyke portion of Kingmoor Parish in Stanwix Rural Ward (polling district PAG1 - 75 electors) and the Harker portion of Rockcliffe Parish in Longtown and Rockcliffe Ward (polling district PAG2 - 196 electors) – see Map 7. The building was not available as a polling station at the combined Parliamentary/County Council elections last June because it was undergoing renovation and Rockcliffe Community Centre was used instead. The Community Centre also serves as the polling place for the Rockcliffe portion of Rockcliffe parish (polling district PAM) and no complaints were received about the change of venue from electors who would ordinarily have voted at Park House.
- 39 The former hotel has now been converted into a restaurant and can no longer accommodate a polling station. In the absence of other suitable permanent premises in the Park House area, Rockcliffe Community Centre is considered to be a satisfactory alternative. It is slightly further away for the majority of electors but most are likely to travel by car to vote and the additional distance is not thought to be excessive. The Community Centre offers good facilities and access, and has a large car park.
- 40 If the polling station were relocated to the Community Centre, all electors in Rockcliffe parish would vote at the same place and the existing two polling districts in the parish could be merged into one. The designations PAG1 and PAG2 would be retained to indicate that electors from two separate parishes vote at the same polling place and the designation PAM would no longer be required.
- 41 **It is recommended that polling district PAM be merged with district PAG2 and the polling place for the enlarged PAG2 district and PAG1 be Rockcliffe Community Centre.**

Recent Changes in Electoral Law

- 42 Following a review of electoral procedures by a Home Office Working Party, the Home Secretary introduced legislation in late 1999 to implement many of the Report's recommendations. The Representation of the People Act 2000 received Royal Assent in March 2000 and one of the few sections of the Act which came into effect immediately was one which allowed local authorities to run approved pilot schemes to experiment with alternative voting arrangements at elections in May 2000.

- 43 The aim of the pilot schemes was to determine whether any change in voting procedures would enhance turnout and/or make voting easier. The schemes included all postal ballots, extending polling hours, weekend polling and, and electronic voting and counting. The Local Government Association evaluated the schemes and concluded that it was difficult to come to an overall judgement about their success. They were certainly welcomed by those electors who made use of them but they cost local authorities money and resulted in an increase in turnout only where votes could be cast by post. Postal voting, however, appeared to be more expensive than conventional means and gave rise to concerns about possible electoral fraud.
- 44 No pilots took place last year because they are not permitted if a general election coincided with local elections. A number of further pilots are taking place this year and will be evaluated in due course by the Electoral Commission.
- 45 The majority of the other provisions of the 2000 Act came into force in February 2001. These were:
- introduction of a scheme of continuous or 'rolling' registration to replace registration according to a single annual qualifying date. An annual canvass is still carried out by reference to residence on 15th October but the register is also updated on a monthly basis throughout the year;
 - homeless people, mental patients and remand prisoners are able to register by making a 'declaration of local connection';
 - postal votes are available on demand;
 - large print versions of ballot papers are displayed in polling stations and templates provided to assist blind and partially sighted voters.
- 46 Provision in the Act to introduce two registers – a complete one for electoral purposes and an edited one for sale – and to give electors the option of opting out of the commercially available register was not introduced at that time, pending further discussion with the direct marketing/credit industry. The full register was therefore still available for sale when it was published in February 2001. However, following a recent court case which upheld an elector's objection to his name being included on a commercially available register without his consent, register sales have been suspended on the advice of the Electoral Commission. Revised Regulations addressing the question of the sale of registers are expected before the next annual registration canvass.

- 47 The Commission also has a statutory responsibility to promote public awareness of electoral matters and is undertaking its first promotional and advertising campaign in support of the local elections in May. The campaign will run under the banner 'Votes are Power' and is specifically targeted at 18-24 year olds to encourage them to register and vote. The campaign includes national radio advertisements, posters, postal voting leaflets in all Post Offices, an extensive PR campaign across the UK, a Voter Awareness Week (29th April to 3rd May) and TV and radio 'fillers' to promote rolling registration. This will be supplemented by local publicity as appropriate. The Commission is also seeking to develop relationships with other bodies including Royal Mail, the National Union of Students and various banks and utilities to deliver information on rolling registration and postal voting.

February 2002

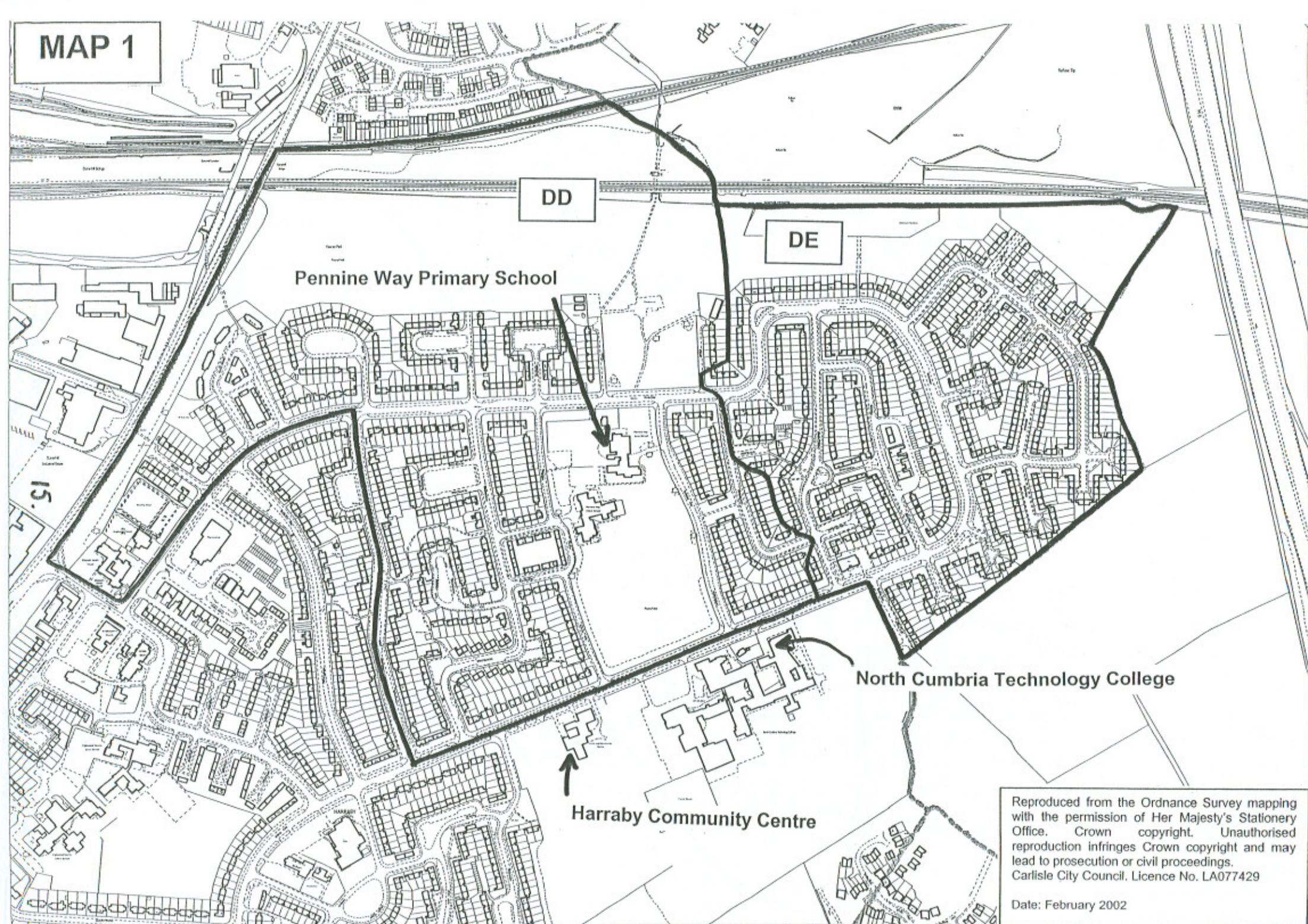
Polling Places – Urban Wards

WARD	POLLING PLACE	POLLING DISTRICT	ELECTORATE (December 2001)
Belah	Kingmoor Junior School	AA;AB	1959
	Belah Community Centre	AC	799
	Portacabin, Etterby Road	AD	1108
	Newfield Grange Hotel	AE	932
Stanwix Urban	Portacabin, Knowefield Avenue	BA; PBG	1163
	Stanwix Community Centre	BB; BC; PBJ	2456
	Belah School	BD	1100
St. Aidans	St. Aidan's Church Hall	CA	1144
	Norman Street School	CB	1447
	St. Cuthbert's Court, Myddleton St.	CC	407
	Greystone Community Centre	CD	1570
Botcherby	Botcherby Community Centre	DA	1300
	Portacabin, Borland Avenue	DB	643
	Portacabin, Cumrew Close	DC	797
	Pennine Way School	DD; DE	1730
Harraby	The Pinegrove Hotel, London Road	EA	1060
	Inglewood Infant School	EB	1084
	Harraby Catholic Club	EC	1173
	Harraby Methodist Church Hall	ED	1230
Upperby	St. Margaret Mary's Social Club	FA	840
	Upperby Junior School	FB	859
	St. John's Ambulance, Scalegate Rd.	FC	1066
	Former Housing Office, Lightfoot Dr.	FD	560
Currock	Petteril Bank Community Centre	FE	742
	Currock Community Centre	GA	1033
	Beacon Hall, Beaconsfield Street	GB	1328
	Currock Methodist Church Hall	GC	931
	St. Herbert's Church Hall	GD	1132
Denton	Methodist Church Hall, Wigton Road	HA	361
Holme	Denton Holme Community Centre	HB; HC	1891
	St. James Church Hall	HD	803
	Portacabin, Longsowerby	HE	1137
	Portacabin, Lorne Crescent	HF	386
Castle	Newtown School	JA	920
	Ukrainian Club, Silloth Street	JB	710
	Methodist Church Hall, Wigton Road	JC	1342
	Carlisle College, Victoria Place	JD	808
	St. Cuthbert's Court, Myddleton St.	JE	568
Morton	Morton Primary School	KA; KB; KC	2482
	St. Edmunds Chapel, Newlaithes Ave.	KD	1052
	Portacabin, Borrowdale Road	KE	736
	Portacabin, Scawfell Road	KF	599
Yewdale	Yewdale Community Centre	LA; LB	2467
	Portacabin, Whernside	LC	1210
	Portacabin, Nairn Way/Egerton Grove	LD	1188
Belle Vue	Belle Vue Junior School	MA; MB	2095
	Newtown School	MC	960
	St. Bedes School	MD	757
	Portacabin, Hawthorn Grove	ME	474

Polling Places – Rural Wards

Ward	Polling Place	Polling District	Electorate (December 2001)
Brampton	Moot Hall, Brampton	PK	2212
	Brampton Community Centre	PKA	1179
	Milton Village Hall	PL	123
Burgh	Beaumont Parish Hall	NA	369
	Village Hall, Burgh-by-Sands	NB	594
	Ash House, Thurstonfield	NC	328
	Village Hall, Great Orton	ND	323
Dalston	Victory Hall, Dalston	OA	1785
	Primrose Hall, Gaitsgill	OB	303
	Embassy Ballroom, Cummersdale	OC	387
	Portacabin, Carleton	OD	566
	Wreay Village Hall	OE	335
	6 Low Moor Avenue, Blackwell	OF	463
	Portacabin, Black Lion, Durdar	OG	309
	Watson Hall, Castle Carrock	PP1	230
	Helme Farm, Cumrew	PR1; PR2	91
	Cumwhitton Public Hall	PS	261
Great Corby and Geltsdale	Heads Nook Village Hall	PAB2	273
	Talkin Village Hall	PAC	117
	Great Corby Village Hall	PBB	358
	Downagate Community Centre	PBC	320
	Hayton School	PAA	556
	Heads Nook Village Hall	PAB1	305
	Methodist Church Hall, Corby Hill	PAD	820
Irthing	Lees Hill School	PG1; PG2	189
	Roadhead Public Hall	PH2	43
	Cricket Pavilion, Lanercost	PO1; PO2	180
	Taylor Institute, Low Row	PW	261
	Gilsland School	PX1; PX2; PX3	189
	Lacy Thompson Hall, Hallbankgate	PY1; PY2	563
	Walton Village Hall	PAX	239
Longtown and Rockcliffe	Longtown Community Centre	PE1- PE4	2125
	Moat Village Centre	PF1; PF2	148
	Park House Hotel, Kingstown	PAG2	196
	Rockcliffe Community Centre	PAM	436
Lyne	Blackford School	PAY	283
	Roadhead Public Hall	PH1	335
	Hethersgill Parish Hall	PAE	307
	Fir Ends School, Smithfield	PAJ	299
	Nicholforest Hall	PAK	318
	Westfield House, Roweltown	PAS	143
	Stapleton Public Hall	PAW	177
Stanwix Urban <i>Rural</i>	Village Hall, Newtown, Irthington	PAF	522
	Park House Hotel, Kingstown	PAG1	75
	The Four Oaks, Cargo	PAH	234
	Scaleby Village Hall	PAR	276
	Crosby Parish Hall	PAT1; PAT2	397
	Houghton Village Hall	PAU1; PAU2	1421
	Women's Institute Hall, Linstock	PAV	246
	Newfield Grange Hotel, Newfield Drive	PBK	79
	Cotehill Village Hall	PAZ	506
	Cumwhinton Village Hall	PBA	328
	Parish Centre, Scotby	PBD	1012
	Memorial Hall, Warwick-on-Eden	PBE	173
Wetheral	Wetheral Village Hall	PBF	1026
	Portacabin, Aglionby	PBH	229
	Portacabin, Cumrew Close	PBL	69

MAP 1



MAP 2

St. Elisabeth's Church Hall

Inglewood Infant School

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MAP 3

Suggested site for Portacabin

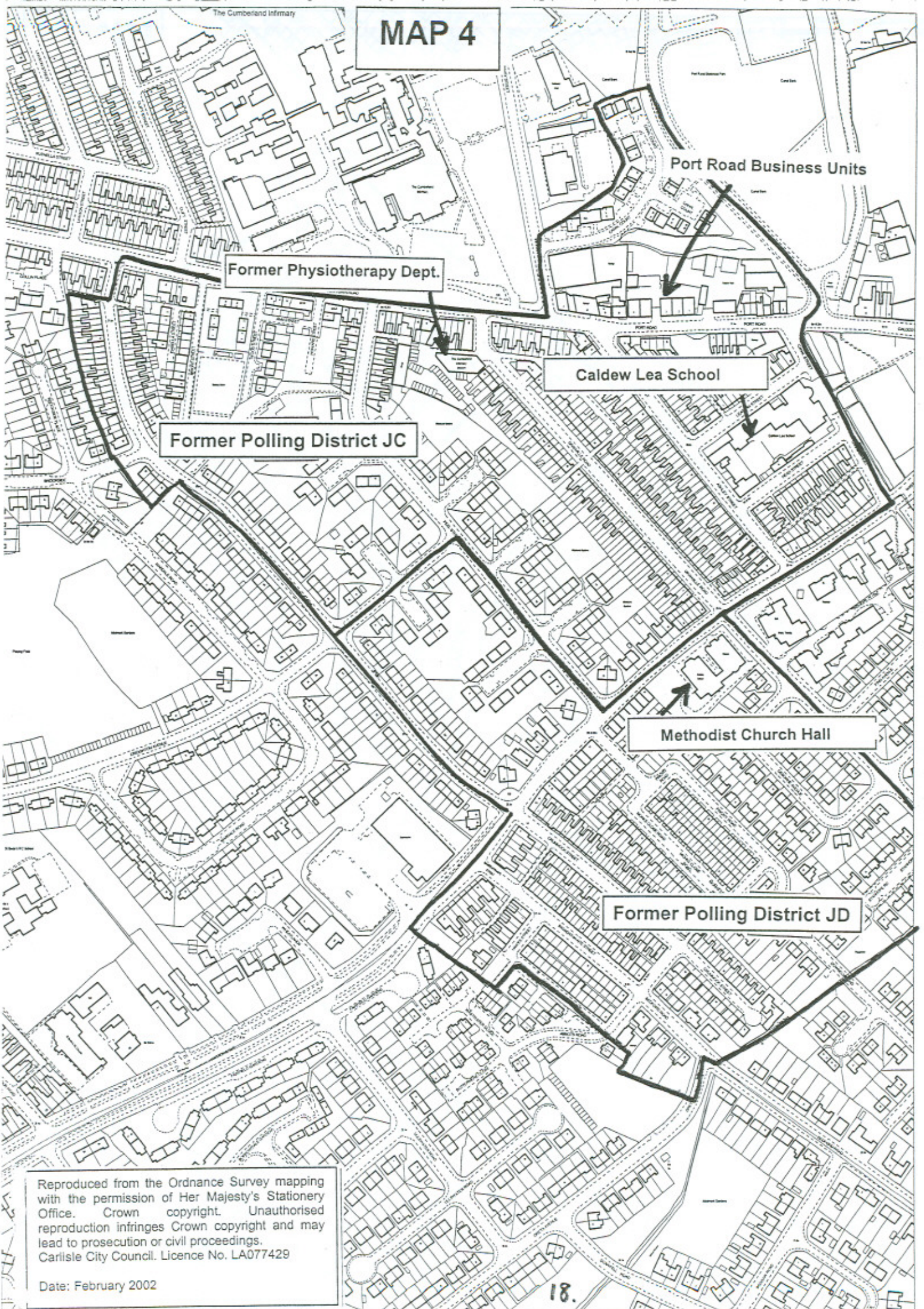
Former Housing Office

Petteril Bank Community Centre

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MAP 4



Former Physiotherapy Dept.

Port Road Business Units

Caldew Lea School

Former Polling District JC

Methodist Church Hall

Former Polling District JD

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MAP 5

HARRABY WARD

WETHERAL WARD

DALSTON WARD

Ward Boundary

Carleton Grange Estate

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MAP 6

Proposed new
Polling District EE

Proposed new Polling District OH

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MAP 7

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POLLING DISTRICT PAM

POLLING DISTRICT PAG2

Rockcliffe Community Centre

STANWIX RURAL WARD

Former Park House Hotel

POLLING DISTRICT PAG1

PARISH BOUNDARY

POLLING DISTRICT BOUNDARY