

CARLISLE CITY COUNCIL

Report to:- Carlisle City Council

Date of Meeting:- 4th March 2008

21(VIII)

Agenda Item No:-

Public

Title:- **REVIEW OF POLLING ARRANGEMENTS**

Report of:- **Director of Legal and Democratic Services**

Report reference:- **LDS 22/08**

Summary:-

This Report presents the results of the annual review of polling arrangements and makes recommendations for changes to existing arrangements as appropriate.

The Report was considered by the Executive on 18th February and the relevant minute extract is attached. The suggestions regarding the use of Morton School and the Reading Room in Hayton as polling stations in the Yewdale and Hayton wards respectively have now been investigated as requested and revised recommendations have been made.

Recommendation:-

(see over)

Contact Officer: David Mitchell

Ext: 7555

Recommendations:-

It is recommended to Council that

- (1) a portacabin on the east side of Kingstown Road continue to be the polling place for polling districts AE, PBK and PBN (paragraph 23);
- (2) Thurstonfield Methodist Chapel be designated as the polling place for polling district NC (paragraph 25);
- (3) Inglewood Infant School be designated as the polling place for district EB (paragraph 29);
- (4) Harraby Catholic Club be designated as the polling place for district ED (paragraph 29);
- (5) the polling arrangements for district CB remain unchanged (paragraph 33);
- (6) the polling arrangements for district PAU2 remain unchanged (paragraph 35);
- (7) Morton School be designated as the polling place for polling district LD (paragraph 38);
- (8) the Reading Room, Hayton be designated as the polling place for polling district PAA (paragraph 40);
- (9) the locations of all other polling places remain unchanged (paragraph 20);
- (10) the Returning Officer be given authority, after consultation with relevant Ward Councillors and Portfolio Holder, to change polling place locations at the City Council elections if the usual premises prove to be unavailable due to unforeseen circumstances (paragraph 41).

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 an annual polling review to be carried out and it has been the practice to review the arrangements each year in those wards having local elections in the following May.
- 2 Under the Electoral Administration Act 2006, a full review of all parliamentary polling districts and polling places in the Council's area must be carried out during 2007 and every four years thereafter. Particular polling districts or places may be reviewed at any time. As the same polling places are used at local elections, any changes arising from the review will be implemented at the next local or parliamentary election in the ward concerned, whichever is the earlier.
- 3 Notice of the review was published in the press and on the Council's website in September 2007 and representations invited by 26th October. All City Councillors have been consulted on the polling arrangements in their particular wards. The Returning Officer of every parliamentary constituency in the Council's area must also be consulted. The Returning Officer for the Penrith and the Border constituency, which currently includes all rural wards except Burgh and Dalston, had no comments to make. The current polling places are listed in the Appendix and these have been reviewed in the light of any representations received.

Statutory Provisions

- 4 In exercising its duty to keep polling districts and places under review, the 1983 Act requires Councils to seek to ensure that all electors have "*such reasonable facilities for voting as are practicable in the circumstances*". Each parish should be a separate polling district. '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 must "*seek to ensure that so far as is reasonable and practicable every polling place is 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 Under the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 it is unlawful for a service provider to discriminate against a disabled person. Discrimination includes refusing to provide any service to disabled people that it provides to non-disabled members of the public or providing a worse standard of service to disabled people than it provides to non-disabled people. Service providers have had to change practices, policies and procedures that make it impossible or unreasonably difficult for disabled people to use a service. Since October 2004 service providers have had to make reasonable adjustments to their buildings to overcome physical barriers to access.
- 7 With the exception of portacabins, the majority of polling places are accessible to disabled voters and where there have been particular difficulties, temporary access ramps have been installed. Polling compartments specifically designed for voters in wheelchairs have also been provided. In addition, any disabled voter is entitled to assistance from the Presiding Officer or may be helped by a companion. Large versions of ballot papers are displayed in every polling station and devices are provided to assist blind or partially sighted voters cast their own vote. The Carlisle Access Group is being consulted on the current arrangements for disabled voters.

Free use of rooms

- 8 In addition to free use of school premises, described in paragraph 15 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

- 9 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

- 10 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, have been taken into account at previous reviews:
 - ◆ 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
 - ◆ proximity to public transport
 - ◆ cost (where there is a choice between similar premises)
- 11 The suitability of polling places are 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

- 12 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, can 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 but continuity of supply is important, particularly in the event of a parliamentary election at short notice.

Use of Houses

- 13 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.

- 14 Empty Council houses have been used at previous elections in a number of wards and this practice continued following the transfer of the housing stock to Carlisle Housing Association, although they were under no statutory obligation to make their properties available. The Association, however, is no longer able to let their properties be used for election purposes due to the need to minimise the length of time properties are vacant between lettings.

Use of Schools

- 15 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.
- 16 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.
- 17 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. Only 9 schools in the Council's area are now used as polling venues. For the reasons given in paragraph 12 above, portacabins are not considered to be viable alternatives to school premises. A recommendation is made below, however, to use an additional school this year because no other suitable premises are available in the area concerned (paragraph 27).
- 18 Belah School is the polling place for some 1100 electors in the BD district of Stanwix Urban ward. While the school will be available this year, alternative arrangements will need to be made following its closure in August 2008.

Review of Polling Places and Polling Districts

- 19 The large majority of polling places are satisfactory and have remained unchanged for many years. Choice of suitable buildings is limited and in most cases there is no alternative to the present arrangements. Change is therefore only proposed where the current premises are no longer available or satisfactory or representations have been received in respect of particular buildings.

- 20 Suggested changes in Belah, Burgh, Harraby, Hayton, St. Aidans, Stanwix Rural and Yewdale wards are discussed below. In the absence of representations in respect of any other wards, **it is recommended that the polling arrangements in the following wards remain unchanged:**

Belle Vue	Dalston	Morton
Brampton	Great Corby & Geltsdale	Stanwix Urban
Botcherby	Irthing	Morton
Castle	Longtown & Rockcliffe	Upperby
Currock	Lyne	Wetheral

BELAH WARD

- 21 A portacabin sited near the Gosling Bridge has been used as the polling station for polling district AE (Belah ward), PBK (Stanwix Rural) and PBN (Stanwix Urban) since the closure of Newfield Grange Hotel in 2006 (see Map 1). A ward Councillor has suggested that Morrisons supermarket might be a possible alternative to this portacabin.
- 22 While there would be advantages in terms of space and facilities in using a permanent building instead of a portacabin, it is considered that in this case they are outweighed by the drawbacks. The Gosling Bridge site is more conveniently situated for the majority of electors using this polling station, being within Belah ward itself and adjacent to Windsor Way which leads directly to districts PBN and PBK. Even if separate accommodation were made available within the premises, siting a polling station in a busy supermarket is likely to cause some confusion among those shoppers who were not entitled to vote there to the detriment to the smooth running of the poll.
- 23 On balance, **it is recommended that a portacabin on the east side of Kingstown Road continue to be the polling place for polling districts AE, PBK and PBN.**

BURGH WARD

- 24 Ash House at Thurstonfield has been the polling place for the 352 electors in the Thurstonfield portion of Burgh Ward for a number of years (polling district NC – see Map 2). This private dwelling has recently changed hands and is no longer available for election use.
- 25 The local Methodist Church Council has offered the use of its Chapel, which is located beside the small development at Chapel Field. The building is large enough to accommodate a polling station, has level access and a small adjacent car park. In the absence of other alternative premises in the village, **it is recommended that Thurstonfield Methodist Chapel be designated as the polling place for polling district NC.**

HARRABY WARD

- 26 Both St. Elisabeth's Church Hall on Mayfield Avenue and Harraby Methodist Church Hall on Cumwhinton Road, the polling places for districts EB and ED respectively, have closed and are no longer available for election purposes (see Maps 3 and 4).
- 27 St. Elisabeth's Church Hall was first used as a polling venue in 2002. Prior to that date, the polling place for district EB was Inglewood Infant School and, in the absence of any other suitable buildings in the locality, it is suggested that the school should once again be used as a polling station (see Map 3). The option of a portacabin is not recommended for the reasons set out in paragraph 12 above.
- 28 There is no other building in district ED that could accommodate a polling station in place of Harraby Methodist Church Hall. (The Church itself might have been a possible option but it too has closed.) The most convenient alternative would be Harraby Catholic Club which is already used as the polling place for district EC (see Map 4). Although it is further away than the Methodist Church Hall for most electors concerned, a portacabin is not considered to be the better option, even if a more conveniently located site could be identified.
- 29 **It is recommended:**
- (a) **that Inglewood Infant School be designated as the polling place for district EB;**
 - (b) **that Harraby Catholic Club be designated as the polling place for district ED.**

ST. AIDANS WARD

- 30 The polling place for the 1446 electors in polling district CB has been Norman Street School for many years (see Map 5). A representation has been received from the MP for Carlisle on behalf of a local resident that the polling station should be moved from the school so that it could remain open on election day. It is suggested that the electors concerned should transfer to Greystone Community Centre, which is already used as the polling place for district CD.
- 31 While it is recognised that there are concerns about the closure of schools for the reasons given in paragraph 16 above, the convenience of the majority of electors in the area concerned is a major consideration when determining polling arrangements. It is considered that it would be less convenient for most electors in district CB, particularly those in the northern part of the ward (the Brunton Avenue/ Brunton Crescent/ Riverside Way area), if their polling station were moved to the Community Centre.

- 32 There are currently 1634 electors in district CD allocated to the Community Centre. The addition of those who vote at the school would increase the total electorate at the Centre to over 3000 and put extra pressure on the Centre's facilities.
- 33 **It is recommended that the polling arrangements for district CB remain unchanged .**

STANWIX RURAL WARD

- 34 Residents of Brunstock currently vote at the village hall in Houghton (polling district PAU2 – see Map 6) which is also the polling place for Houghton itself. A ward Councillor has suggested that the proximity of the Houghton Hall Garden Centre might afford the opportunity to provide a more convenient polling station for Brunstock electors. The garden centre is certainly closer to the village than Houghton but the distance to the current polling station is no greater than for many other electors in the rural part of the City. It is considered that the number of electors concerned does not justify a separate polling station for Brunstock and that the existing facilities are reasonable.
- 35 **It is therefore recommended that the polling arrangements for district PAU2 remain unchanged.**

YEWDAL

- 36 A portacabin sited on the paved area between Nairn Way and Egerton Grove is the polling place for the 1400 electors in polling district LD (see Map 7). This polling district includes the new development at the Beeches off Wigton Road and a ward Councillor has suggested that, as this estate is some distance from the current polling station, separate provision should be made for the electors concerned and proposed Morton School as a possible venue. This would not only provide a more convenient polling station for residents of the Beeches but would reduce the number voting at the portacabin.
- 37 While it is accepted that the estate is geographically detached from the rest of the polling district, it is considered that the 305 electors currently resident there are insufficient to merit their own polling station – it would be the smallest separate polling station in the urban area. Even if all electors to the south of Queensway were included, being those who may find the school slightly more convenient than the portacabin, there would only be 448 allocated to the new polling station which is still considered to be too few to justify extra provision.

- 38 Further residential development, however, is taking place near the Beeches at Suttle House and it has been suggested that some electors are deterred from voting at the portacabin due to restricted parking provision. There may therefore be some merit in relocating the polling station for all electors in polling district LD. The school can make accessible accommodation available at the front of the school which would offer much improved facilities when compared with a portacabin and would also allow the school to function normally on polling day. **It is therefore recommended that Morton School be designated as the polling place for district LD.**

HAYTON WARD

- 39 The polling place for the Hayton portion of Hayton ward has been the Womens' Institute Hall in the village since 2001 (polling district PAA - see Map 8), the school having been used before then. The Hall, however, has now closed and is no longer available for election use. The alternative venues are the school or the Reading Room, which is owned by the Parish Council and used regularly by the local playgroup. The school is more centrally located but, in order to avoid the need for its closure on polling day, the Reading Room is considered to be a suitable option.
- 40 **It is recommended that the Reading Room, Hayton be designated as the polling place for polling district PAA.**

OTHER POLLING PLACES

- 41 Although the usual booking requests have been sent in respect of polling stations to be used at the City Council elections in May, confirmation of availability has not yet been received for all premises. In order to ensure that polling stations are provided for all electors, **it is recommended that the Returning Officer be given authority, after consultation with relevant Ward Councillors and Portfolio Holder, to change polling place locations at the City Council elections if the usual premises prove to be unavailable due unforeseen circumstances.**

Polling Places – Urban Wards

APPENDIX

WARD	POLLING PLACE	POLLING DISTRICT	ELECTORATE (December 2007)
Belah	Kingmoor Junior School	AA;AB	2019
	Belah Community Centre	AC	767
	Portacabin, Etterby Road	AD	1080
	Portacabin, east side Kingstown Road	AE	946
Stanwix Urban	Portacabin, Knowefield Avenue	BA; PBG	1221
	Stanwix Community Centre	BB; BC; PBJ	2311
	Belah School	BD	1087
St. Aidans	Portacabin, east side Kingstown Road	PBN	156
	St. Aidan's Church Hall	CA	1060
	Norman Street School	CB	1446
	St. Cuthbert's Court, Myddleton St.	CC	494
Botcherby	Greystone Community Centre	CD	1634
	Botcherby Community Centre	DA	1378
	Botcherby Family Centre	DB	709
	Portacabin, Cumrew Close	DC	792
Harraby	Harraby Community Centre	DD; DE	1739
	The Pinegrove Hotel, London Road	EA	1107
	St. Elisabeth's Church Hall ¹	EB	1138
	Harraby Catholic Club	EC	1148
	Harraby Methodist Church Hall ¹	ED	1214
Upperby	Creighton Rugby Club	EE	251
	St. Margaret Mary's Social Club	FA	916
	CDC Building adj. Upperby School	FB	848
	St. John's Ambulance, Scalegate Rd.	FC	1046
Currock	Petteril Bank Community Centre	FD; FE	1351
	Currock Community Centre	GA	1084
	Bishop Harvey Goodwin School	GB	1366
	Currock Community Centre	GC	941
	St. Herbert's Church Hall	GD	1135
Denton Holme	Methodist Church Hall, Wigton Road	HA	350
	Denton Holme Community Centre	HB; HC	1966
	St. James Parish Centre	HD	829
	Portacabin, Longsowerby	HE	1201
Castle	Portacabin, Lorne Crescent	HF	408
	Newtown School	JA	939
	Ukrainian Club, Silloth Street	JB	755
	Methodist Church Hall, Wigton Road	JC	1366
	1 Chatsworth Square	JD	746
Morton	St. Cuthbert's Court, Myddleton St.	JE	520
	St. Luke's Church Hall	KA; KB	2166
	St. Edmunds Chapel, Newlathes Ave.	KC	1337
	Portacabin, Borrowdale Road	KD	753
Yewdale	Portacabin, Scawfell Road	KE	580
	Yewdale Community Centre	LA; LB	2360
	Portacabin, Richmond Green	LC	1179

	Portacabin, Nairn Way/Egerton Grove	LD	1400
Belle Vue	Belle Vue Infant School	MA; MB	2140
	Newtown School	MC	1070
	St. Bedes School	MD	697
	Portacabin, Hawthorn Grove	ME	659

Polling Places – Rural Wards

Ward	Polling Place	Polling District	Electorate (December 2007)
Brampton	Moot Hall, Brampton	PK	2229
	Brampton Community Centre	PKA	1210
	Milton Village Hall	PL	109
Burgh	Beaumont Parish Hall	NA	368
	Village Hall, Burgh-by-Sands	NB	639
	Ash House, Thurstonfield ¹	NC	352
	Village Hall, Great Orton	ND	339
Dalston	Victory Hall, Dalston	OA	1801
	Primrose Hall, Gaitsgill	OB	321
	Embassy Ballroom, Cummersdale	OC	392
	Portacabin, Carleton	OD	255
	Wreay Village Hall	OE	320
	6 Low Moor Avenue, Blackwell	OF	489
	Portacabin, Black Lion, Durdar	OG	326
	Creighton Rugby Club	OH	1006
	Watson Hall, Castle Carrock	PP1	269
Great Corby and Geltsdale	Helme Farm, Cumrew	PR1; PR2	98
	Cumwhitton Public Hall	PS	272
	Heads Nook Village Hall	PAB2	275
	Talkin Village Hall	PAC	125
	Great Corby Village Hall	PBB	356
	Downagate Community Centre	PBC	352
Hayton	Hayton W.I. Hall ¹	PAA	560
	Heads Nook Village Hall	PAB1	319
	Methodist Church Hall, Corby Hill	PAD	806
Irthing	Lees Hill School	PG1; PG2	177
	Roadhead Public Hall	PH2	35
	Cricket Pavilion, Lanercost	PO1; PO2	172
	Taylor Institute, Low Row	PW	258
	Methodist Church Hall, Gilsland	PX1; PX2; PX3	185
	Lacy Thompson Hall, Hallbankgate	PY1; PY2	554
	Walton Village Hall	PAX	233
	Longtown Community Centre	PE1- PE4	2252
Longtown and Rockcliffe	Moat Village Centre	PF1; PF2	172
	Former Conservatory Centre, Harker	PAG2	193
	Rockcliffe Community Centre	PAM	446
	Blackford School	PAY	325
Lyne	Roadhead Public Hall	PH1	340
	Hethersgill Parish Hall	PAE	320
	Fir Ends School, Smithfield	PAJ	310

	Nicholforest Hall	PAK	316
	Westfield House, Roweltown	PAS	144
	Stapleton Public Hall	PAW	192
Stanwix	Village Hall, Newtown, Irthington	PAF	566
Rural	Former Conservatory Centre, Harker	PAG1; PAG3	144
	The Four Oaks, Cargo	PAH	386
	Scaleby Village Hall	PAR	298
	Crosby Parish Hall	PAT1; PAT2	410
	Houghton Village Hall	PAU1; PAU2	1411
	Women's Institute Hall, Linstock	PAV	313
	Portacabin, east side Kingstown Road	PBK	153
Wetheral	Cotehill Village Hall	PAZ	505
	Cumwhinton Village Hall	PBA	377
	Parish Centre, Scotby	PBD	1124
	Memorial Hall, Warwick-on-Eden	PBE	198
	Wetheral Village Hall	PBF	1038
	Portacabin, Aglionby	PBH	231
	Portacabin, Cumrew Close	PBL	125
	Creighton Rugby Club	PBM	204

¹ Premises no longer available

MAP 1

AE

Former Newfield Grange Hotel

BELAH WARD

STANWIX RURAL WARD

Polling District PBK

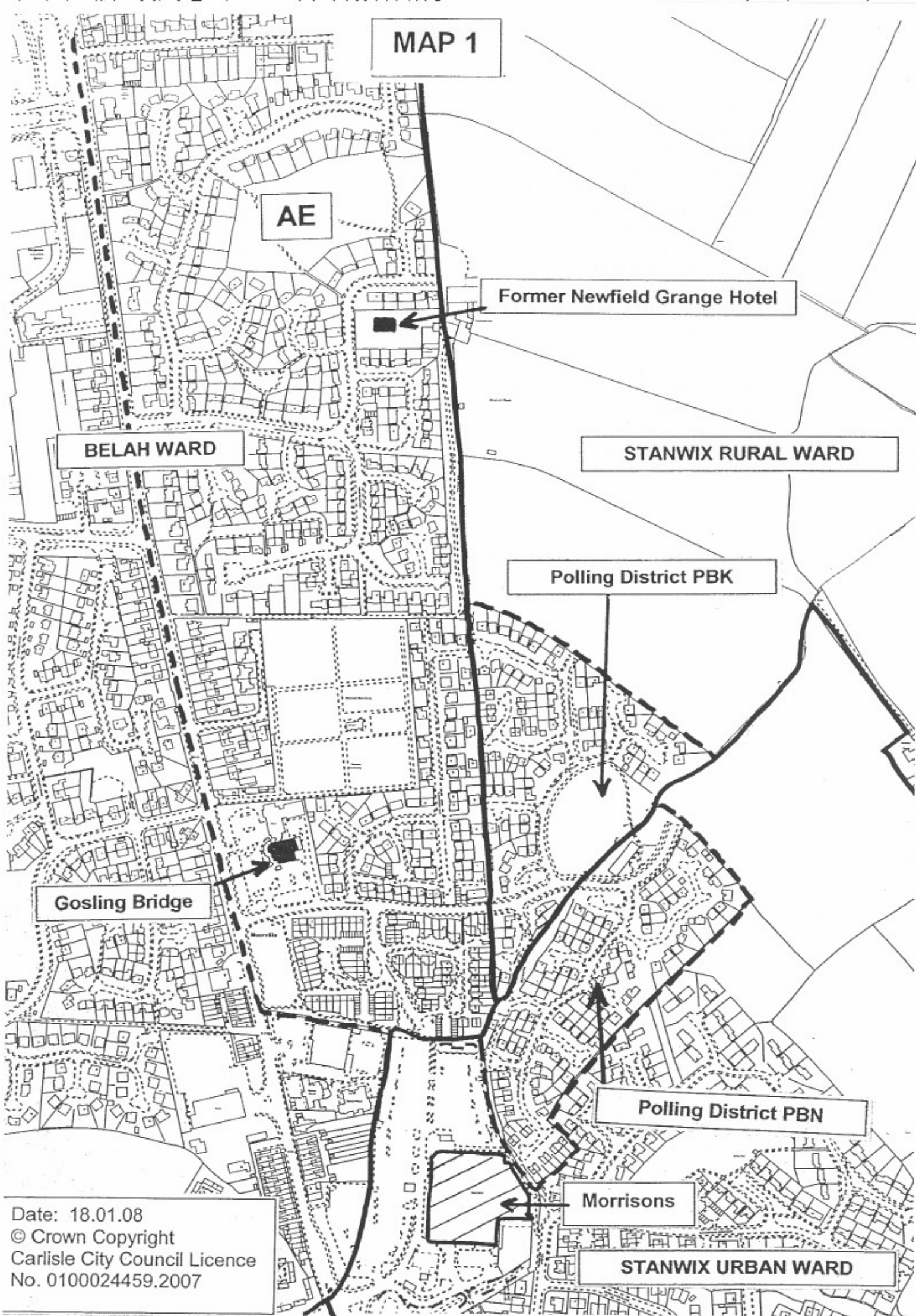
Gosling Bridge

Polling District PBN

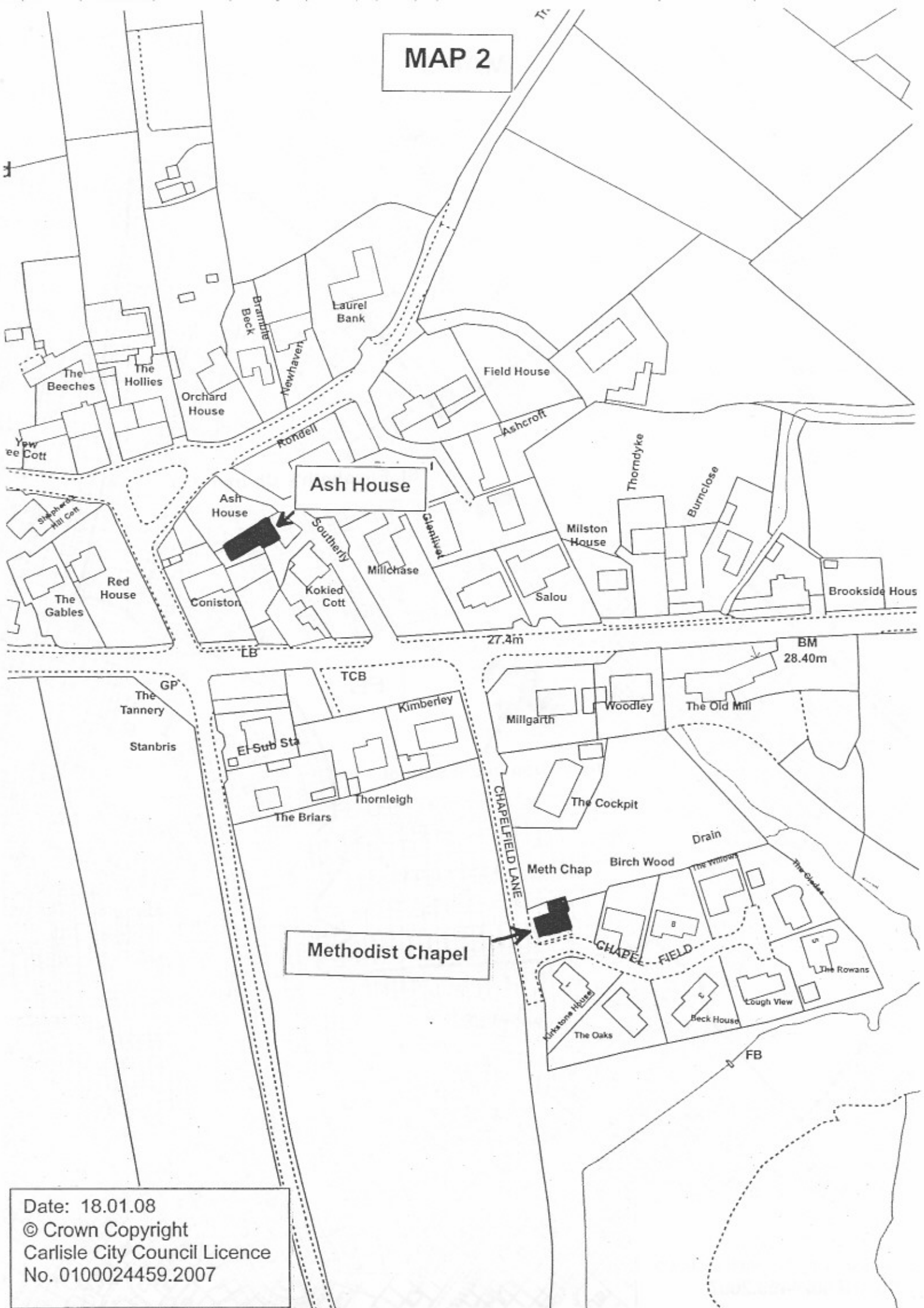
Morrisons

STANWIX URBAN WARD

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MAP 2



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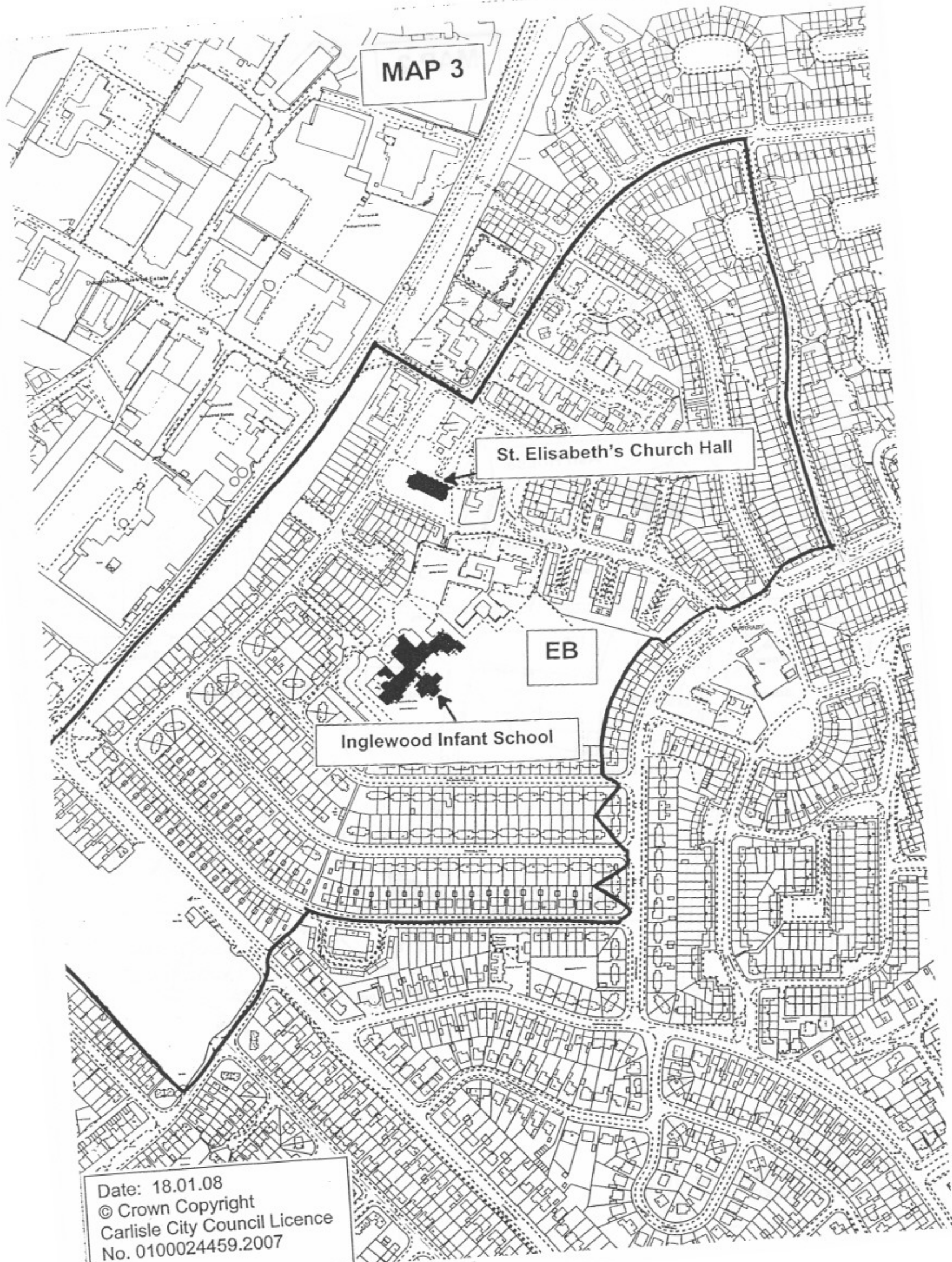
MAP 3

St. Elisabeth's Church Hall

EB

Inglewood Infant School

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MAP 4

Harraby Catholic Club

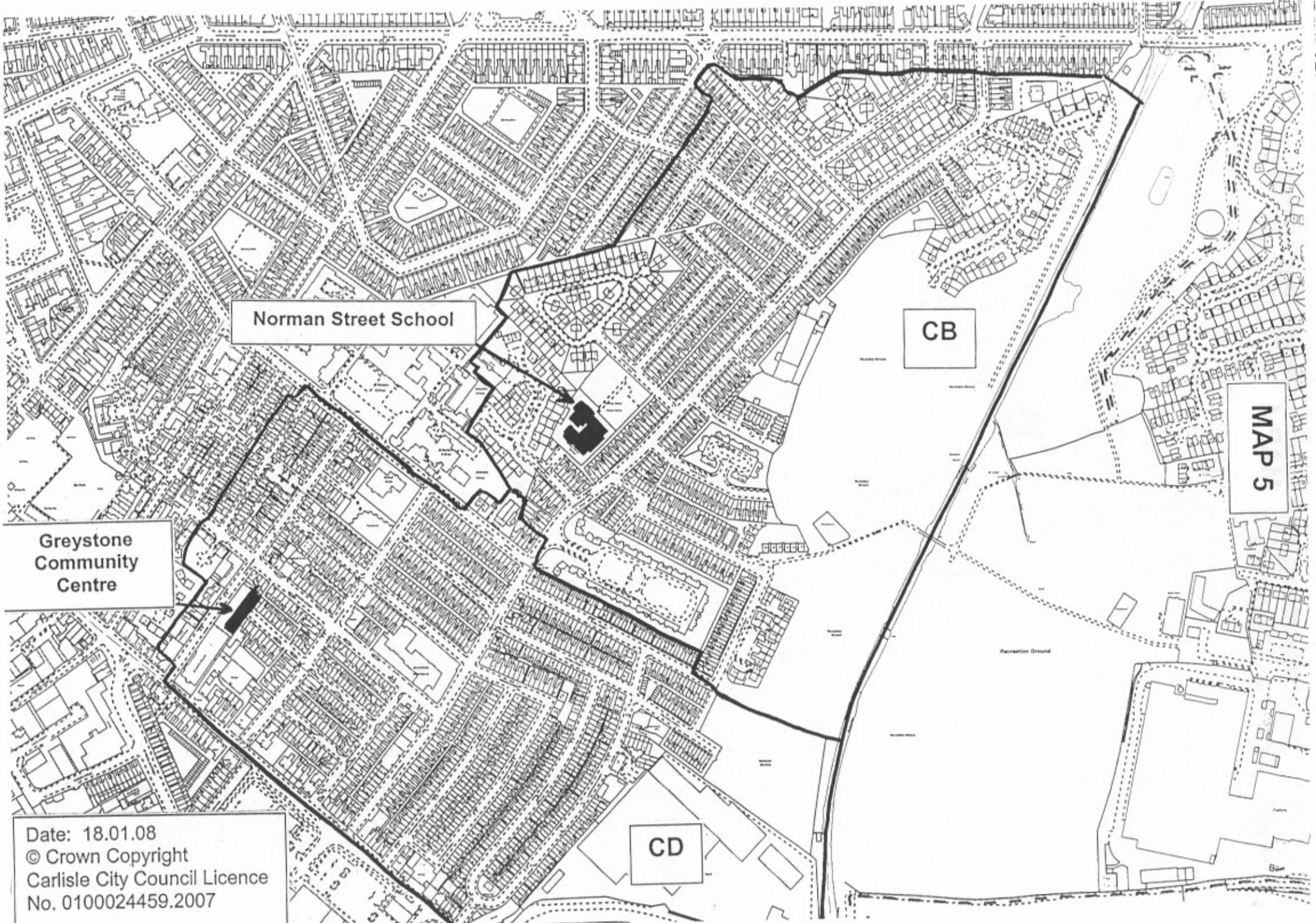
Harraby Methodist
Church Hall

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Norman Street School

CB

MAP 5

Greystone
Community
Centre

CD

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Houghton Village Hall

Houghton Hall

Brunstock

MAP 6

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MAP 7

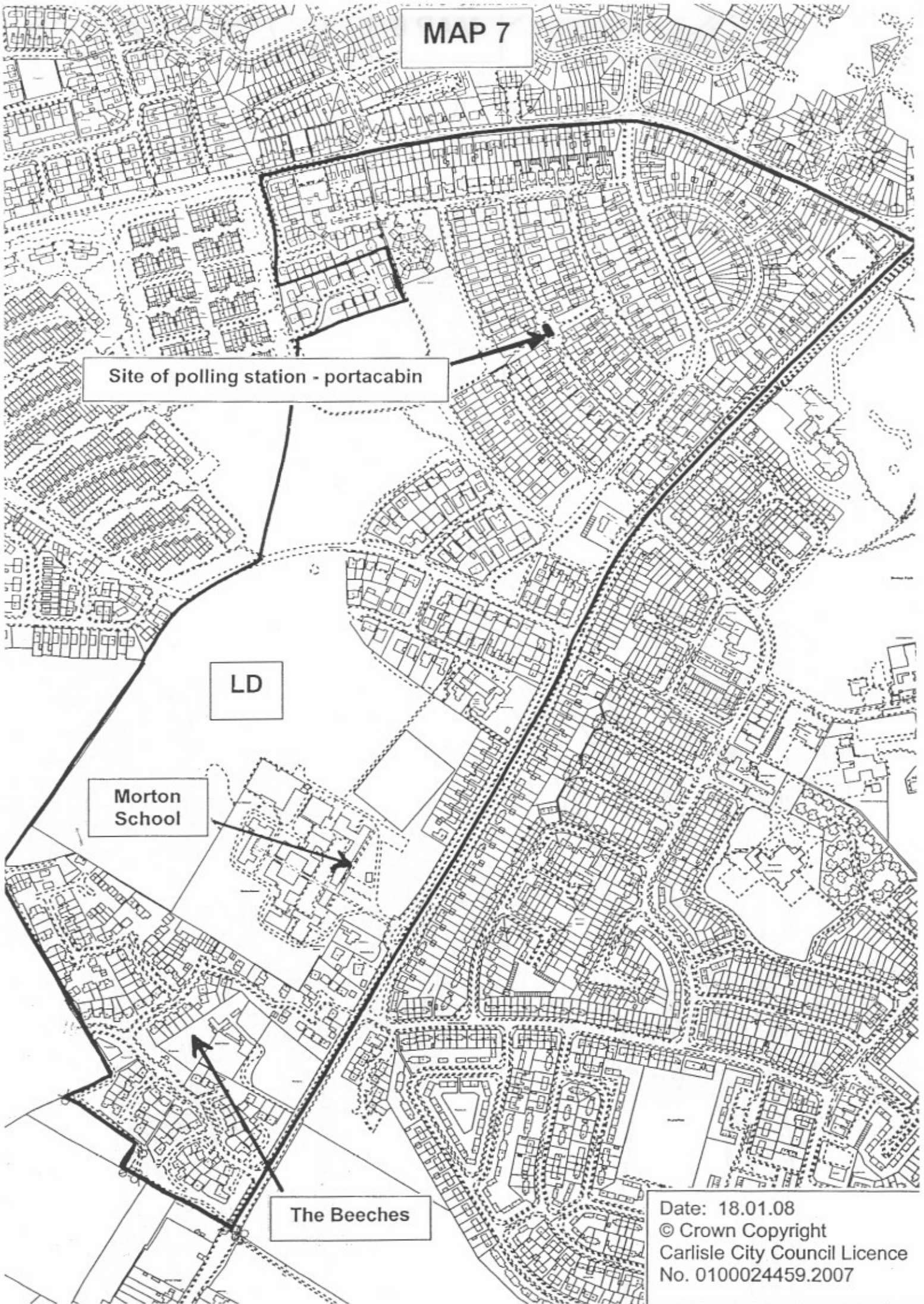
Site of polling station - portacabin

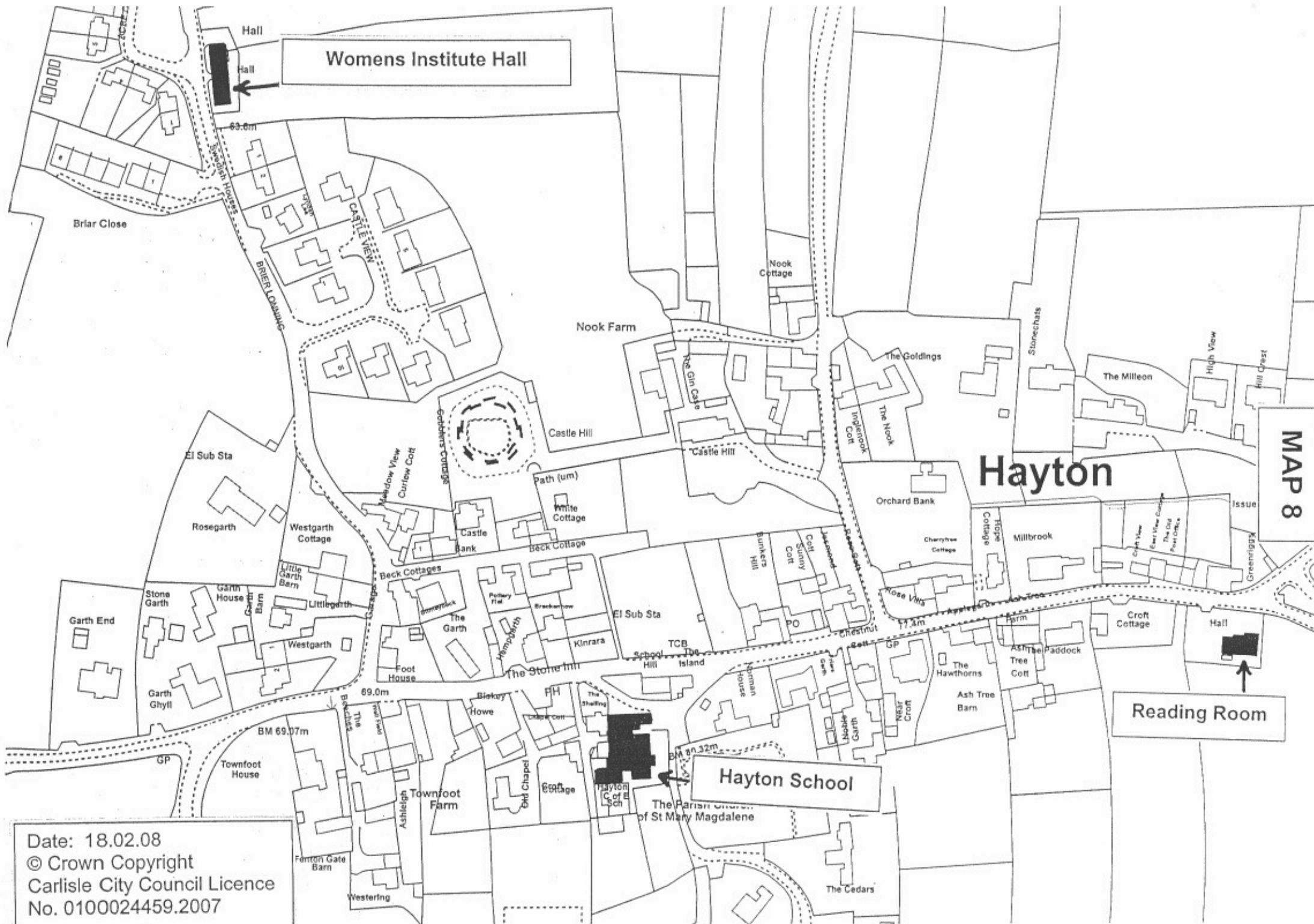
LD

Morton School

The Beeches

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Womens Institute Hall

Hayton

MAP 8

Hayton School

Reading Room

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