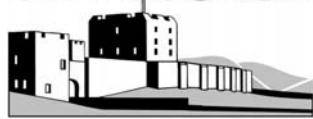


**CARLISLE
CITY COUNCIL**



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COMMUNITY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Committee Report

Public

Date of Meeting: 15th February 2007

Title: REVIEW OF POLLING ARRANGEMENTS

Report of: Director of Legal and Democratic Services

Report reference: LDS 19/07

Summary:

The Departmental Service Plan provides for an annual review of polling arrangements in the City. This Report presents the results of the latest review and makes recommendations for changes to existing arrangements as appropriate. It also summarises practical implications of recent changes in electoral law.

Recommendations:

(See over)

Contact Officer: David Mitchell

Ext: 7555

Recommendations:-

It is recommended that

- (1) Kingmoor Junior School continue to be the polling place for polling districts AA and AB but that the Returning Officer liaise with the school to explore possible options for location of the polling stations on the school site which might allow it to remain open (paragraph 21).
- (2) a portacabin on the east side of Kingstown Road be confirmed as the polling place for polling districts AE, P/BK and P/BN (paragraph 22).
- (3) no change be made to the polling arrangements in polling district JD (paragraph 26).
- (4) Bishop Harvey Goodwin School be designated as the polling place for polling district GB (paragraph 29).
- (5) Currock House Community Centre be designated as the polling place for polling district GC (paragraph 31).
- (6)
 - (a) that the boundary of the current polling district KD be amended to include Greenside Road, Mossrigg, Rashdall Road and Winscale Way (No. 48 onwards);
 - (b) that the number of polling districts in Morton ward be reduced from six to five by amalgamating the existing districts KA, KB and KC into two districts to be designated KA and KB with an approximately equal number of electors allocated to each;
 - (c) that the polling place for polling new districts KA and KB be St. Luke's Church Hall, Stonegarth;
 - (d) that the remaining three districts be redesignated as follows:

<u>Current district</u>	<u>New district</u>
KD	KC
KE	KD
KF	KE

- (e) that the Electoral Registration Officer take all necessary action to amend the electoral register accordingly.
(Paragraph 34)
- (7) the locations of all other polling places remain unchanged (paragraph 18).
- (8) 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 (paragraph 35).

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 regular polling review to be carried out.
- 2 Under the new Electoral Administration Act 2006, a full review of all polling places must be carried out by the end of this year. This will involve wider consultation with members of the public and other Returning Officers, and publication of the results of the review. It is proposed that this new statutory review be conducted after the local elections in May.
- 3 For the purposes of the current review, Councillors in wards having elections in May have been consulted on the polling arrangements in their particular wards. The current polling places are listed in the Appendix and these have been reviewed in the light of any representations received. Any agreed changes to polling districts and polling places will be implemented at the forthcoming City Council elections on 3rd May.

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 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 physical features of 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 where it has been practical to do so.

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, but no longer to former Council housing that has been transferred to Carlisle Housing Association.

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, 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

- 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 under increasing pressure to minimise the length of time their properties are vacant between lettings and are therefore no longer willing to let their properties be used for election purposes.

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. Of the 99 polling places in the Council's area, only 9 are now schools. 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.

Review of Polling Places and Polling Districts

- 18 Suggested changes in Belah, Castle, Currock and Morton 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	Great Corby & Geltsdale	St. Aidans
Brampton	Harraby	Stanwix Rural
Botcherby	Hayton	Stanwix Urban
Burgh	Irthing	Upperby
Dalston	Longtown & Rockcliffe	Yewdale
Denton Holme	Lyne	Wetheral

BELAH WARD

- 19 Kingmoor Junior School has been the polling place for the whole of Lowry Hill estate for many years (see Map 1). It accommodates two polling stations serving over 2000 electors. The school governors have requested that an alternative venue be found so that the school can remain open on polling day.
- 20 The only options would be St. Peter's Church Hall on Kingstown Road or a portacabin in the vicinity of the school. St. Peter's Church is much less convenient for the majority of electors, being situated outwith the estate on a busy main road. A portacabin is not considered to be a suitable alternative for the reasons given in paragraph 12 above, particularly having regard to the large number of voters using the two polling stations. Ward Councillors support the continued use of the school.
- 21 **It is recommended that Kingmoor Junior School continue to be the polling place for polling districts AA and AB but that the Returning Officer liaise with the school to explore possible options for location of the polling stations on the school site which might allow it to remain open.**
- 22 Newfield Grange Hotel was the polling place for the 949 electors in polling district AE and also for 145 and 154 electors in districts P/BK and P/BN in Stanwix Rural and Stanwix Urban wards respectively but the hotel closed prior to the elections in 2006. A portacabin sited near the Gosling Bridge was therefore used as the polling station instead last year (see Map 2). In the absence of alternative permanent accommodation in the area, **it is recommended that a portacabin on the east side of Kingstown Road be confirmed as the polling place for polling districts AE, P/BK and P/BN.**

CASTLE WARD

- 23 The polling place for polling district JD is Carlisle College and at recent elections the polling station has been located in the College's premises at No. 1 Chatsworth Square while the main building was being redeveloped. The polling district serves the centre of the city and extends from West Walls in the west to Lismore Street in the east (see Map 3).
- 24 A ward Councillor has suggested that as electors in the Castle Street/West Walls/Fisher Street area are some distance from the College, an additional polling station should be provided in this part of the ward. There are currently some 215 electors living to the west of Lowther Street who would benefit from a new polling station; the 530 to the east of Lowther Street are better served by the College. While there are likely to be premises that could be used as a polling station in the city centre, including the Civic Centre itself, it is considered that the number of electors involved does not justify the provision of an extra station. It is

accepted that a more central location would be more convenient for electors in the Castle Street/West Walls area but the distance to their current polling station is no greater than for many electors in other urban wards.

- 25 It has been suggested that a new polling station could be more easily justified if the number of electors allocated to it were increased. This could be achieved by transferring properties in Bridge Lane and Willowholme (the Old Brewery Residences, Caldew Maltings, Willowbank and Willow Court) on the eastern extremity of polling district JB to district JD and would have the effect of increasing the number who could vote at the new polling venue from 215 to 483. The number of electors in district JB who vote at the Ukrainian Club in Silloth Street would decrease from 669 to 401. The polling station in Silloth Street off Wigton Road, however, is no further from Bridge Lane than a city centre venue would be and is much more accessible for those in this area going to vote by car.
- 26 **It is recommended that no change be made to the polling arrangements in polling district JD.**

CURROCK WARD

- 27 Bishop Harvey Goodwin School was the polling place for polling district GB before it was relocated to Beacon Hall on Beaconsfield Street some years ago so that the school could remain open on polling days (see Map 4). The Hall, however, has been demolished and the site redeveloped for housing so alternative provision for the 1339 electors in the district must therefore be made. Although the Hall was probably slightly more convenient than the school for the majority of electors and another centrally located building would be ideal, it is considered that the school is the only suitable polling venue in the area. This view is supported by the ward councillors.
- 28 The school site now has a nursery in a separate building from the main school and this could accommodate the polling station to allow the rest of the school to function normally on election days. The school is agreeable to this arrangement.
- 29 **It is recommended that Bishop Harvey Goodwin School be designated as the polling place for polling district GB.**
- 30 Currock Methodist Church Hall was the polling place for the 971 electors in polling district GC but it has closed and is no longer available as a polling venue (see Map 5). There are, however, few other suitable premises in the area – the only options would appear to be Currock Villa on Currock Road or Currock House Community Centre which is already used as the polling place for electors on the west side of the ward (polling district GA). On balance, it is considered that the Community Centre would be the preferred option because it has better access, is large

enough to accommodate two polling stations and, as long as it is Council owned, will always be available.

- 31 **It is recommended that Currock House Community Centre be designated as the polling place for polling district GC.**

MORTON WARD

- 32 Morton Park Primary School was for many years the polling place for over 2500 electors in polling districts KA, KB and KC (see Map 6) but it has closed and the premises can no longer be used for election purposes. An alternative venue, or venues, must therefore be found to accommodate a large number of potential voters.
- 33 Various options have been considered, including church premises near the shops on Newlaithes Avenue, Morton Court, Newlaithes School and Morton Community Centre but the most suitable is considered to be St. Luke's Church Hall on Stonegarth. It is large enough for three polling stations, has satisfactory access from its own car park and is reasonably convenient for the majority of electors. Those, however, living in the south of districts KB and KC, particularly in the Greenside Road/Rashdall Road area would be closer to the polling station for district KD at St. Edmund's Chapel on Newlaithes Avenue than to the proposed venue at St. Luke's. It is therefore suggested that the boundary between districts KB, KC and KD be adjusted to transfer 63 electors from KB to KD and 307 electors from KC to KD, as shown on Map 7. The resulting allocation of electors would be as follows:

	<u>Existing polling districts</u>	<u>Altered polling districts</u>
KA	786	786
KB	881	818
KC	877	570
KD	990	1360

- 34 The total number of electors, however, in the revised polling districts KA, KB and KC would be 2174 compared with 2544 in the current districts and it is suggested that this lesser number of electors could be accommodated in two polling stations instead of three. **It is therefore recommended that:**

- (a) the boundary of the current polling district KD be amended as shown on Map 7 to include Greenside Road, Mossrigg, Rashdall Road and Winscale Way (No. 48 onwards);**
- (b) the number of polling districts in Morton ward be reduced from six to five by amalgamating the existing districts KA, KB and KC into two districts to be designated KA and KB with an approximately equal number of electors allocated to each;**

- (c) the polling place for polling new districts KA and KB be St. Luke's Church Hall, Stonegarth;
- (d) the other three districts be redesignated as follows:

<u>Current district</u>	<u>New district</u>
KD	KC
KE	KD
KF	KE

- (e) the Electoral Registration Officer take all necessary action to amend the electoral register accordingly.

OTHER POLLING PLACES

- 35 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.**

Electoral Administration Act 2006

36 In addition to the requirement to undertake a comprehensive review of polling arrangements, referred to in paragraph 2 above, the other main provisions of the Act and associated Regulations are summarised as follows for Members information:

- lowering of minimum age of election candidates from 21 to 18
- absent voting
 - all those who wish to vote by post or proxy to provide 'personal identifiers' in the form of their date of birth and signature;
 - when voting by post, electors to provide their identifiers on a security statement to accompany their ballot paper (security statements no longer requires witness signature);
 - identifiers to be checked on at least 20% of postal voting security statements;
 - marked postal voters list showing those who returned their postal votes to be produced; fee for supply to be the same as statutory rate for sale of the electoral register
- applications to register allowed up to 11 working days before polling day
- poll cards to be sent to postal voters
- framework for establishment of CORE (Co-ordinated Online Register of Electors)
- anonymous registration to be introduced from mid-2007
- power for Returning Officers and Electoral Registration Officers to promote participation – limited government funding to be provided in 2007/08

February 2006

Polling Places – Urban Wards

APPENDIX

WARD	POLLING PLACE	POLLING DISTRICT	ELECTORATE (December 2006)
Belah	Kingmoor Junior School	AA;AB	1957
	Belah Community Centre	AC	772
	Portacabin, Etterby Road	AD	1101
	Portacabin,east side Kingstown Road	AE	949
Stanwix Urban	Portacabin, Knowefield Avenue	BA; PBG	1208
	Stanwix Community Centre	BB; BC; PBJ	2294
	Belah School	BD	1097
	Portacabin,east side Kingstown Road	PBN	154
St. Aidans	St. Aidan's Church Hall	CA	1104
	Norman Street School	CB	1403
	St. Cuthbert's Court, Myddleton St.	CC	482
	Greystone Community Centre	CD	1573
Botcherby	Botcherby Community Centre	DA	1347
	Botcherby Family Centre	DB	672
	Portacabin, Cumrew Close	DC	783
	Harraby Community Centre	DD; DE	1718
Harraby	The Pinegrove Hotel, London Road	EA	1132
	St. Elisabeth's Church Hall	EB	1114
	Harraby Catholic Club	EC	1111
	Harraby Methodist Church Hall	ED	1199
	Creighton Rugby Club	EE	258
Upperby	St. Margaret Mary's Social Club	FA	889
	CDC Building adj. Upperby School	FB	840
	St. John's Ambulance, Scalegate Rd.	FC	1028
	Petteril Bank Community Centre	FD; FE	1348
Currock	Currock Community Centre	GA	1097
	Beacon Hall, Beaconsfield Street	GB	1339
	Currock Methodist Church Hall	GC	971
	St. Herbert's Church Hall	GD	1134
	Methodist Church Hall, Wigton Road	HA	352
Denton Holme	Denton Holme Community Centre	HB; HC	1878
	St. James Parish Centre	HD	822
	Portacabin, Longsowerby	HE	1175
	Portacabin, Lorne Crescent	HF	370
Castle	Newtown School	JA	901
	Ukrainian Club, Silloth Street	JB	669
	Methodist Church Hall, Wigton Road	JC	1321
	Carlisle College, Victoria Place	JD	743
	St. Cuthbert's Court, Myddleton St.	JE	460
Morton	Morton Park Primary School	KA; KB; KC	2544
	St. Edmunds Chapel, Newlaithes Ave.	KD	990
	Portacabin, Borrowdale Road	KE	732
	Portacabin, Scawfell Road	KF	573
Yewdale	Yewdale Community Centre	LA; LB	2362

	Portacabin, Richmond Green	LC	1173
	Portacabin, Nairn Way/Egerton Grove	LD	1415
Belle Vue	Belle Vue Infant School	MA; MB	2115
	Newtown School	MC	939
	St. Bedes School	MD	691
	Portacabin, Hawthorn Grove	ME	619

Polling Places – Rural Wards

Ward	Polling Place	Polling District	Electorate (December 2006)
Brampton	Moot Hall, Brampton	PK	2196
	Brampton Community Centre	PKA	1175
	Milton Village Hall	PL	107
Burgh	Beaumont Parish Hall	NA	380
	Village Hall, Burgh-by-Sands	NB	646
	Ash House, Thurstonfield	NC	353
	Village Hall, Great Orton	ND	341
Dalston	Victory Hall, Dalston	OA	1779
	Primrose Hall, Gaitsgill	OB	314
	Embassy Ballroom, Cummersdale	OC	391
	Portacabin, Carleton	OD	248
	Wreay Village Hall	OE	307
	6 Low Moor Avenue, Blackwell	OF	486
	Portacabin, Black Lion, Durdar	OG	316
	Creighton Rugby Club	OH	988
	Watson Hall, Castle Carrock	PP1	267
	Helme Farm, Cumrew	PR1; PR2	97
Great Corby and Geltsdale	Cumwhitton Public Hall	PS	279
	Heads Nook Village Hall	PAB2	280
	Talkin Village Hall	PAC	124
	Great Corby Village Hall	PBB	366
	Downagate Community Centre	PBC	340
	Hayton W.I. Hall	PAA	575
	Heads Nook Village Hall	PAB1	311
Hayton	Methodist Church Hall, Corby Hill	PAD	792
	Lees Hill School	PG1; PG2	184
	Roadhead Public Hall	PH2	36
Irthing	Cricket Pavilion, Lanercost	PO1; PO2	164
	Taylor Institute, Low Row	PW	260
	Methodist Church Hall, Gilsland	PX1; PX2; PX3	192
	Lacy Thompson Hall, Hallbankgate	PY1; PY2	575
	Walton Village Hall	PAX	233
	Longtown Community Centre	PE1- PE4	2251
	Moat Village Centre	PF1; PF2	172
Rockcliffe	Conservatory Centre, Harker	PAG2	197
	Rockcliffe Community Centre	PAM	426
	Blackford School	PAY	308

Lyne	Roadhead Public Hall	PH1	329
	Hethersgill Parish Hall	PAE	312
	Fir Ends School, Smithfield	PAJ	309
	Nicholforest Hall	PAK	323
	Westfield House, Roweltown	PAS	142
	Stapleton Public Hall	PAW	195
Stanwix	Village Hall, Newtown, Irthington	PAF	561
Rural	Conservatory Centre, Harker	PAG1; PAG3	148
	The Four Oaks, Cargo	PAH	345
	Scaleby Village Hall	PAR	277
	Crosby Parish Hall	PAT1; PAT2	410
	Houghton Village Hall	PAU1; PAU2	1387
	Women's Institute Hall, Linstock	PAV	321
	Portacabin, east side Kingstown Road	PBK	145
	Cotehill Village Hall	PAZ	517
Wetheral	Cumwhinton Village Hall	PBA	379
	Parish Centre, Scotby	PBD	1090
	Memorial Hall, Warwick-on-Eden	PBE	188
	Wetheral Village Hall	PBF	1014
	Portacabin, Aglionby	PBH	223
	Portacabin, Cumrew Close	PBL	129
	Creighton Rugby Club	PBM	203

MAP 1

St. Peter's Church Hall

Kingmoor Junior School

AA

AB

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MAP 2

AE

Former Newfield Grange Hotel

BELAH WARD

STANWIX RURAL WARD

Polling District PBK

Gosling Bridge

Polling District PBN

STANWIX URBAN WARD

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MAP 3

No. 1 Chatsworth Square

JD

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MAP 4

GB

Former Beacon Hall

Bishop Harvey Goodwin School

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MAP 5

GA

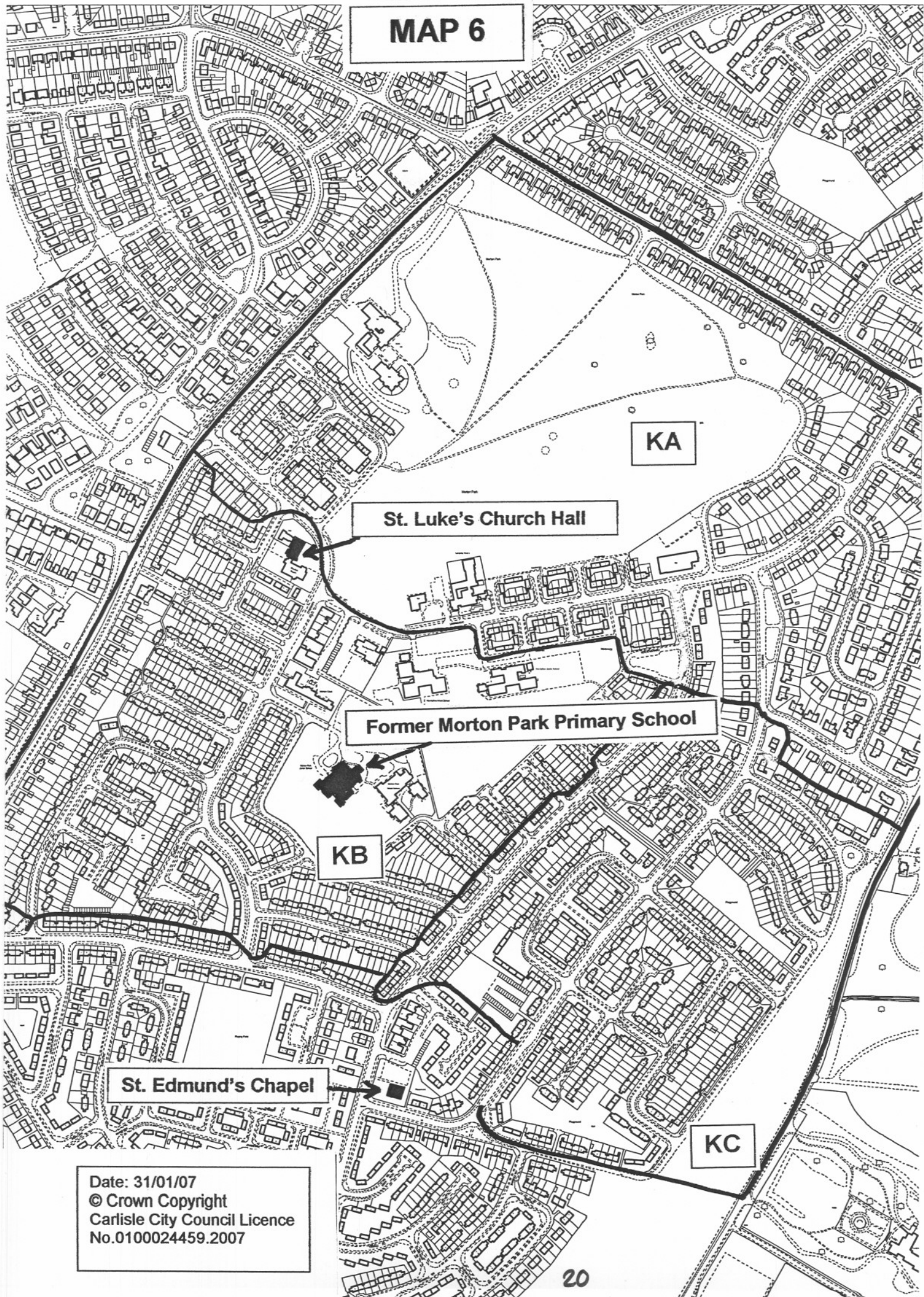
Former Methodist Church Hall

Currock House Community Centre

GC

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MAP 6



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MAP 7

KB

KC

St. Edmund's Chapel

KD

Proposed Polling District Boundary

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BM 48.76m

21

Boro Const. ED & Ward Bdy
Co Const Bdy
Sub Sta