

REPORT TO: FULL COUNCIL

DATE: 3 FEBRUARY 2022

TITLE: INTERIM REVIEW OF POLLING DISTRICTS AND PLACES – NETTESWELL WARD

LEAD OFFICER: BRIAN KEANE, CHIEF EXECUTIVE
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RECOMMENDED that:

- A. The following changes to the Polling Districts and Places will take place with effect from 18 February 2022:
- i) Creation of two polling districts and two polling places in the Netteswell ward
 - GA – Netteswell North – Our Lady of Fatima Church Hall to be designated as the polling place for all elections; and
 - GB – Netteswell South – YCT House to be designated as the polling place for all elections.

BACKGROUND

1. The Electoral Administration Act 2006 introduced a statutory requirement for councils to conduct a review of polling places every four years but also at any other time if a building becomes unavailable or if any changes are identified following an election.
2. The current building used as a polling station in GA – Netteswell (David Livingstone URC) is no longer available and so alternatives are required to be found and reviewed in accordance with the legislation and guidance.
3. Following the Interim polling station review which took place in October 2021 it was decided that a further consultation was needed for the Netteswell Ward.
4. The Council began this interim review on 13 December 2021 and gave everyone the opportunity to make a representation until 17 January 2022.

5. A notice of the review was published on the Council's website. A copy was also sent to all local Councillors, relevant polling places, other interested organisations and social media. A summary of the responses are attached as Appendix C.
6. The Council is required by law to divide its area into polling districts for the purpose of Parliamentary Elections and to designate polling places for those districts. The current list of polling districts and places is attached as Appendix A to the report
7. Consideration must be given to the law and the Electoral Commission's Guidance. This means that the Council must:
 - a) Seek to ensure that all electors in the constituency have such reasonable facilities for voting as practicable in the circumstances;
 - b) Seek to ensure that so far as is reasonable and practicable, the polling places they are responsible for are accessible to all electors, including those who are disabled, and when considering the designation of a polling place, must have regard to the accessibility needs of disabled persons;
 - c) The polling place must be within the polling district (and therefore ward) unless special circumstances make it desirable to designate an area wholly or partly outside the district (for example, if no accessible parking can be identified in the district).

ISSUES/PROPOSALS

8. The (Acting) Returning Officer has considered the following factors, in addition to those set out in paragraph 7 above:
 - a) Central or convenient location for the maximum number of electors in the ward;
 - b) Physical accessibility, especially for those with mobility difficulties;
 - c) Guaranteed availability;
 - d) Consistent availability;
 - e) Venue is well known to electors;
 - f) Cost;
 - g) Condition of building and facilities; and
 - h) Impartial and ethical use of the building/location.
9. The (Acting) Returning Officer's comments on representations received and any subsequent recommendations are below:

- a) The current David Livingstone URC building is no longer in use, and we are unable to use it therefore an alternative is needed. It is also too small and has insufficient parking and disabled access.
- b) Following UK Government advice received in 2021 we are trying not to use schools as a polling station so as not to disrupt the education of the children therefore it would be unfair to continue to use Freshwaters academy.
- c) The proposed Polling Districts have been drawn up using the main roads as a dividing line however we accept that using the cycle track is a good demarcation and so have amended the dividing line to incorporate this in part. Although this looks like the electorate is more uneven, it takes into consideration the new housing developments at Edinburgh Way, with 375 properties yet to be finished and occupied. Please see Appendix D for the map showing the new divide and appendix E for the Street lists and current property/elector totals in each new area.
- d) We would be using the Our Lady of Fatima church hall, not the main Church which is a separate building (as shown in appendix F) therefore would not be seen as religious building or intimidating for voters. We use six other churches as a polling station in the District of Harlow. It is in a prominent place, well seen from the road, well known by voters and there are plenty of places for signage.
- e) Furthermore the church hall is well used by the community with regular groups using it such as bowls group, slimming world, ballroom dancing and it is hired for meetings, parties and events. We appreciate that it is on the far side of the district but it is still in a prominent position, well seen from the road and there are no suitable venues located in the centre of the new polling district.
- f) The church hall is a large size hall with excellent facilities, ample parking and good access, with 2 pedestrian crossings and bus stops on First Avenue. Only a small proportion (approximately 26 percent) of the electorate in GA would need to cross the main road, First Avenue.
- g) The church hall has good disabled access with a ramped entrance and all level access inside. There is also disabled parking right by the entrance.
- h) Following the voter turnout survey at the end of 2021 a lot of voters are put off voting because of the parking difficulties and the church can overcome these difficulties.
- i) The YCT House was used in May 2021 and no issues were identified and although a smaller hall it would be able to cope with the smaller electorate. It is in a good location and parking is available on the street with no restrictions.
- j) The other suggested venues are unfortunately not in a good position, too small, do not have good parking or access (particularly disabled access) and

also could cause distress and upset to the current users of the buildings such as the Leah Manning Centre which is regularly used by the elderly and vulnerable residents of Harlow.

- i) We also need to consider any covid implications to using a building which affects not just polling day but the day(s) before and after and any other users of the building. Both the Church hall and the YCT are Covid safe and compliant.
- k) The new proposal would increase election costs but will make voting more accessible and increase voter turnout.
- l) We will ensure sufficient publication of the new locations with social media posts, a message on the poll cards and notices in the area.
- m) The polling districts and places will be reviewed again in 2023 following local boundary review and it is likely a comprehensive survey of voters will be carried out.

Changes to a Polling Place Before the Next Statutory Review

- 10. If a polling station becomes unavailable the (Acting) Returning Officer will first consider whether it is feasible to use a different room or area within a designated polling place.
- 11. If a polling place is or will become unavailable and sufficient time permits, a review will take place and a decision on a replacement polling place will be made by Full Council.
- 12. However, in an urgent situation where it is not feasible to make alternative arrangements within a designated polling place, such as the building was destroyed by fire or unsafe, the Council's Scheme of Delegation to Officers would apply whereby the Chief Executive, or another designated Officer in their absence, would identify and designate an alternative polling place taking into account paragraphs 7 and 8 above.

IMPLICATIONS

Strategic Growth and Regeneration

None specific.

Author: Andrew Bramidge, director of Strategic Growth and Regeneration

Finance

There may be some additional costs incurred where buildings other than schools are used. These costs can be met from within existing budgets.

Author: Simon Freeman, Deputy to the Chief Executive and Director of Finance

Housing

None specific.

Author: Andrew Murray, Director of Housing

Communities and Environment

Appropriate bodies have been consulted over access needs.

Author: Jane Greer, Director of Communities and Environment

Governance and Corporate Services

As contained within the report.

Author: Simon Hill, Director of Governance and Corporate Services

Appendices

Appendix A – Current List of Polling Districts

Appendix B – (Acting) Returning Officer's representation

Appendix C – Summary of Responses received

Appendix D – Map of the new polling districts

Appendix E – Street Lists and current property and elector total

Appendix F – Ariel map of Our Lady of Fatima Church hall

Background Papers

None.

Glossary of terms/abbreviations used

None.

Appendix A

Harlow Electoral Areas and Polling Stations

Parliamentary	County Division	District Ward	Polling District	Polling Station	Address	Postcode
Harlow Harlow	Harlow South East Harlow South East	Bush Fair	AA Bush Fair East AB Bush Fair West	New Life Christian Fellowship St Stephens Church	Purford Green The Rectory Tawney Road	Harlow Harlow CM18 6HP CM18 6QR
Harlow Harlow	Harlow South East Harlow South East	Church Langley *only at Parliamentary Elections/Referendums	BA Church Langley East BB Church Langley West	Church Langley Community Centre Church Langley Community Centre Henry Moore Primary School*	Church Langley Way Church Langley Way Kiln Lane	Harlow Harlow Harlow CM17 9TG CM17 9TG CM17 9LW
Harlow Harlow	Harlow West Harlow West	Great Pamdon	CA Great Pamdon East CB Great Pamdon West	Great Pamdon Community Association Katherines Common Room	Abercrombie Way Katherines Hatch Brookside	Harlow Harlow CM18 6YJ CM19 5NJ
Harlow Harlow	Harlow South East Harlow West	Harlow Common	DA Harlow Common East DB Harlow Common West	Potter Street Baptist Church The Royal British Legion	Church Lane Radburn Pavilion Potter Street Lutton Commor	Harlow Harlow Harlow CM17 9AW CM18 7GY
Harlow Harlow Harlow	Harlow West Harlow West Harlow West	Little Pamdon & Hare Street	EA Little Pamdon & Hare Street East EB Little Pamdon & Hare Street South EC Little Pamdon & Hare Street West	Pemberley Academy Harlow Youth Centre St Thomas More Church Hall	Hodings Road Hare Street Hodings Road	Harlow Harlow Harlow CM20 1NW CM19 4AY CM20 1TN
Harlow Harlow	Harlow North Harlow North	Mark Hall	FA Mark Hall North FB Mark Hall South	Harlow Museum Harefield Church	Muskham Road Burgoyne Hatch	Harlow Harlow CM20 2LF CM18 3EH
Harlow	Harlow North	Netteswell *only at Parliamentary Elections / Referendums	GA Netteswell	David Livingstone URC Freshwaters Primary Academy*	Church Hall Freshwater Maddox Road	Harlow Harlow CM20 3RL CM20 3QA
Harlow Harlow Harlow	Harlow North Harlow North Harlow North	Old Harlow	HA Old Harlow East HB Old Harlow West HC Old Harlow South	St Mary's Church Centre The ABC Centre Newhall Primary Academy	Churchgate Street Garden Terrace Road Roundhouse Way	Harlow Harlow Harlow CM17 0JR CM17 0AT CM17 9SF
Harlow Harlow	Harlow West Harlow West	Staple Tye	JA Staple Tye East JB Staple Tye West	Griffin Suite Longwood Primary School	Latton Bush Centre Paringdon Road Southern Way	Harlow Harlow CM18 7BL CM18 7RQ
Harlow Harlow	Harlow West Harlow West	Sumners & Kingsmoor	KA Sumners & Kingsmoor East KB Sumners & Kingsmoor West	Kingsmoor Christian Centre Xperience Centre	Pamdon Wood Road Broadley Road	Harlow Harlow CM19 4SE CM19 5RD
Harlow Harlow Harlow	Harlow West Harlow West Harlow West	Toddbrook	LA Toddbrook North LB Toddbrook East LC Toddbrook West	Harlow Playhouse St Mark's West Essex Catholic School Salvation Army Centre	Playhouse Square Tipton Road Tending Road	Harlow Harlow Harlow CM20 1LS CM18 6AA CM18 6RN

Appendix B**(Acting) Returning Officer's Representation**

Current Polling District	Current Polling Place	(Acting) Returning Officer's Proposal	Reasons for change
GA – Netteswell	David Livingstone URC for local elections Freshwaters Primary Academy for Parliamentary Elections	Create 2 polling districts in the Netteswell Ward and 2 polling places: YCT house and Our Lady of Fatima Church Hall as represented on the attached map.	<p>The church is no longer able to accommodate us. Also, the room is extremely small and struggles to accommodate the large electorate in the polling district.</p> <p>The school have previously petitioned for us not to use their building as it will disrupt the education of the pupils plus the access and parking is not suitable.</p> <p>Netteswell ward only has one polling district making it one of the largest polling districts in Harlow with its electorate spread over a wide area. Creating 2 polling districts will allow better access to a polling place for more voters.</p> <p>YCT House was used in May 2021 with no major issues.</p> <p>The Church has a good size hall with good parking and access, it is also on a bus route. It is a prominent building with links to the community.</p>

Brian Keane
(Acting) Returning Officer
Dated: December 2021

Appendix C – Summary of All Comments Received

Comments from Cllr Simon Carter received 15 December 2021

- Cllr Carter proposed a new divide using the cycle track as a more of a natural and identifiable border.
- TCT appears to be sustainable for smaller numbers but other options are possible for the other polling station. In the south it should be possible to use the Heart and Club public house.
- The scout hut (snows Farm) is another potential site.
- Our Lady of Fatima is a bit isolated, stuck right on the eastern edge of the ward.

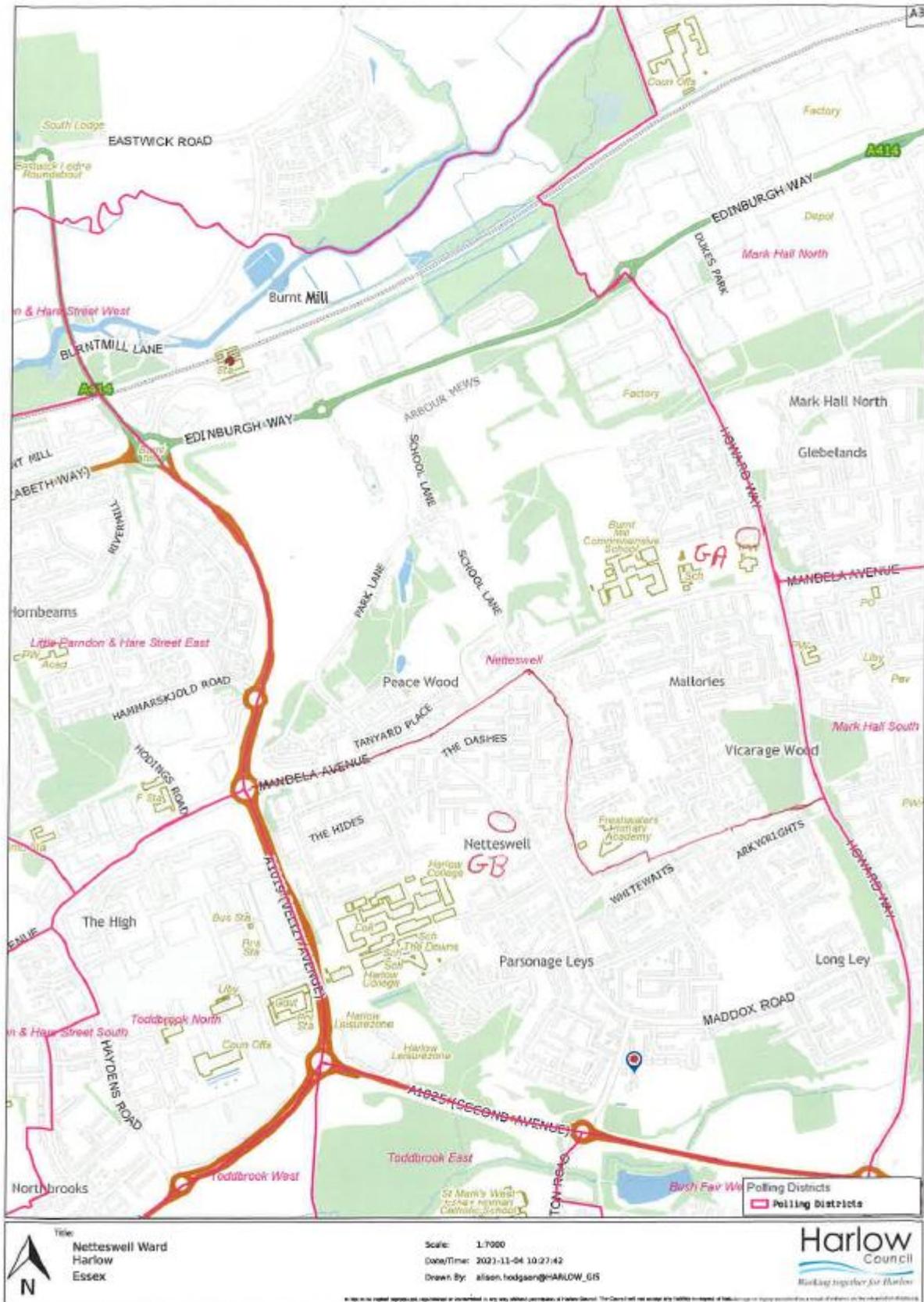
Comments from Cllr Mike Danvers received 12 January 2022

- Opposed to this suggestion.
- It is remote for most Netteswell electors.
- There is an alternative of either Leah Manning Centre of the Essex Youth hub at the Dashes

Comments from Cllr Coleen Morrison received 17 January 2022

- Supports the proposed creation of two polling districts for the Netteswell ward.
- Supports the proposal for YTS house to be the polling place for Netteswell south, as long as it is well publicised that it is located in The Dashes Common Room or community centre, which is what many residents in Netteswell still believe it to be.
- Do not support Our Lady of Fatima as the polling place for Netteswell North due to poor access, lack of local familiarity.
- Do not support Cllr Danver's proposal of the Leah Manning Centre as this is too remote and a proportion of residents will not know of the centre or where it is.
- Understands the difficulty of finding appropriate locations, during the pandemic in particular.
- Will Reluctantly agree to Our Lady of Fatima but only if there are no better alternatives and as long as the hall and its location are well publicised.

Appendix D – Map of Netteswell showing the new polling districts



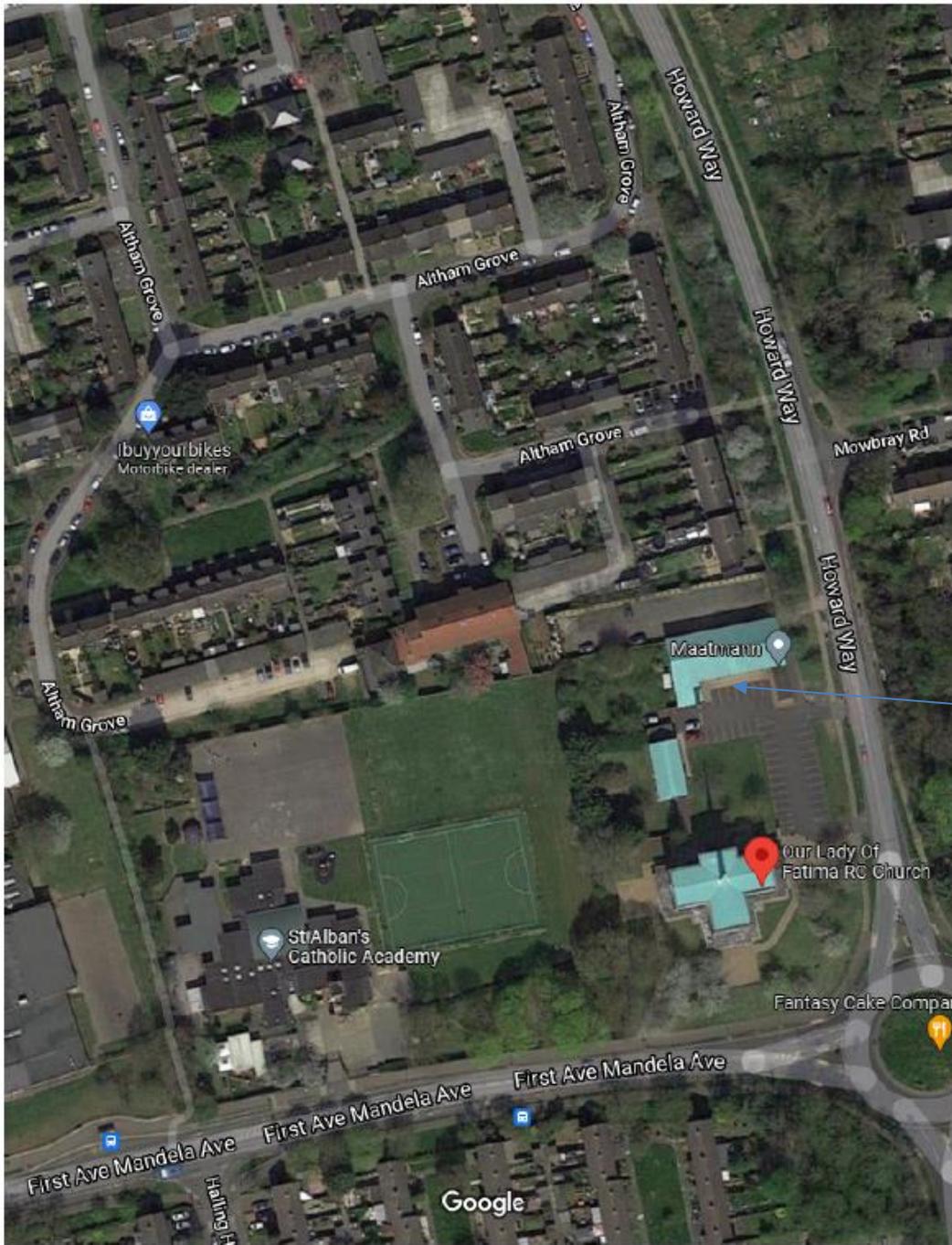
Appendix E – Street Lists and property and elector totals

GA and GB Property and Elector Totals by Street

StreetName	Properties	Electors
GA		
Altham Grove	207	326
Amberry Court	44	54
Arbour Mews	9	18
Burnt Mill Lane	13	16
Commonfields	24	46
Edinburgh Gate	699	361
Halling Hill	335	545
Howard Way	1	2
Lavender Close	37	66
Marshgate Farm	4	9
Netteswell Orchard	97	104
Oldhouse Croft	28	59
Park Court	68	85
Park Lane	30	51
Pittmans Field	192	359
School Lane	58	89
Tanyard Place	65	112
The Drive	23	42
	1934	2344
GB		
Arkwrights	267	436
Broadfield	145	211
Fishers Hatch	1	1
Freshwaters	41	76
Green Hills	116	174
Green Park	7	13
Home Close	34	86
Long Ley	228	403
Maddox Road	27	16
Manston Road	9	14
Monkswick Road	1	1
Parsonage Leys	201	330
School Lane	14	15
St Michaels Close	57	82
The Dashes	281	483
The Downs	201	354
The Hides	350	519
Whitewaits	126	206
	2106	3420

Appendix F – Ariel Map of Our Lady of Fatima Church Hall

Google Maps Our Lady Of Fatima R C Church



Church Hall