

## Minutes of Council

9 December 2025 at 6.27pm at Sandwell Council House, Oldbury

**Present:** The Worshipful Mayor, Councillor Melia (Chair);

Councillors K Allcock, Bhamra, Carmichael, Cotterill, Davies, Dhariwal, Dhatt, Elizabeth Giles, J Giles, Elaine Giles, S Gill, W Gill, Hackett, Hartwell, Hemingway, Hinchliff, Hughes, Hussain, Iqbal, Jalil, Jeffcoat, Johnston, Kalebe-Nyamongo, Kaur, Khan, Khatun, Kordala, Lewis, Loan, Maycock, Muflihi, Owen, Pall, Piper, Rahman, Randhawa, Shaeen, A Singh, J Singh, Smith, Taylor, Tromans, Trumpeter, Uddin, Williams and Younis.

**Apologies:** Councillors M Allcock, Ashraf, Bhullar, Chidley, Choudhry, Crompton, Dunn, Fenton, Fitzgerald, Gavan, Luke Giles, Horton, Mayo, Millard, Millar, Moore, Preece, Uppal, Webb, Weston and Wilkes.

**Also present:** Shokat Lal – Chief Executive; Mike Jones – Monitoring Officer and Service Director Governance; Suky Suthi-Nagra – Democratic Services and Member Services Manager; Connor Robinson - Democratic Services Officer; Kennedy Brown – Sergeant at Arms.

64/25 **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

65/25 **Minutes**

**Resolved** that the minutes of the meeting of Council held on 18 November 2025 are approved as a correct record.

66/25 **Announcements from the Mayor, Leader of the Council and the Chief Executive Officer**

The Chief Executive announced that Children's Services in Sandwell had been rated "Good" following a recent inspection by Ofsted. This represented a major milestone and gratitude was expressed to members who had played a major part in the improvements made. Members were reminded that for more than decade, children's services in Sandwell had been rated inadequate. The Council, in collaboration with Sandwell Children's Trust had worked tirelessly to ensure that the children and families of Sandwell received the support they required.

It was noted that inspectors had recognised the progress made since 2022 and highlighted that children received help and protection when they needed it the most. Further points raised by Ofsted inspectors stated that governance arrangements were robust and a clear line of sight to frontline practice was in place which was supported by sound scrutiny.

The Chief Executive highlighted the hard work carried out by the Cabinet Member for Children and Families, Cllr Jalal Uddin as well as his immediate predecessor, Councillor Simon Hackett as well as the Chief Executive of Sandwell Children's Trust, Emma Taylor, and the Chair of Sandwell Children's Trust, Graham Archer. Council staff were also congratulated on their hard work in supporting the ambitions of Sandwell's children and young people. It was re-iterated that the achievement provided a stable foundation for even greater progress and that the Council and its partners now aimed to achieve an "Outstanding" rating in the future.

The Chief Executive was also pleased to announce that Bart Shirm, from the Council's regeneration team, had won the regional Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI) Young Planner of the Year Award for Planning Excellence 2025. The award recognised the brightest and most outstanding planners who could demonstrate significant career achievements. Bart had been successful in securing funding for the Tipton Town Centre Regeneration project and unlocking housing delivery on brownfield sites. This had been the second time in three years that a member of the Council's Planning Team had won Young Planner of the Year which highlighted the Council's motivation to transform the borough for the better to enable Sandwell to be a thriving place to live and work.

67/25 **Public Speaking Time**

No written statements had been submitted by the public in accordance with Part 2.2 of the Council's Constitution.

68/25 **Member's Question Time**

In response to Councillor Kordala's question requesting the total number of households in Sandwell that were in Council Tax arrears and the total value of those arrears by ward in the last financial year, the Leader reported that the Council was not able to provide that level of data but would investigate ways in which the data could be obtained and published.

Following a question from Councillor Trumpeter seeking the total number of households in Sandwell that had subscribed to the paid green waste garden collection in 2025, the Cabinet Member for Environment and Highways confirmed that 37,871 households had subscribed to the service, which represented a 7% reduction when compared to the previous year. It was stated that the reduction was likely attributed to dry conditions in 2025.

Councillor Kordala asked - Council's 2026/27 budget includes a £19 million funding gap, and one of the key measures to address it is a 4.99% council tax rise, can the Cabinet Member confirm exactly which frontline services will be cut or scaled back (for example, weekly bin collections, as already proposed), and justify why this tax rise is the only viable option rather than deeper efficiency savings or better use of reserves?

The Leader responded that details of efficiency proposals for 2026/27 were contained in the proposed Medium Term Financial Strategy. Following a public consultation exercise the Cabinet would review consultation funding before recommending a final programme of efficiencies. It was highlighted that use of reserves was only a short-term measure.

Councillor William Gill asked - In May 2024, the Department for Transport announced that Dudley Port would receive Access for All funding. Can the Cabinet Member clarify what work is being done between West Midlands Railway, Network Rail, and Transport for West Midlands and us as the local authority to ensure that we are making this train station accessible for local people?

The Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Infrastructure responded that Network Rail had commenced a feasibility study using the Access for All funding. It was not possible to provide step free access to the platform with the station's current layout. West Midlands Rail Executive and Transport for West Midlands would be co-sponsoring, along with Network Rail, the next phase of development work which included proposals to improve access and the Council would continue to work with all partners to secure funding for the vital station upgrades.

69/25

### **Submission of Petitions**

No petitions were received.

70/25

### **Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme 2026-2027**

Council Tax Reduction Schemes were introduced by the Local Government Finance Act 2012. It placed a duty on billing authorities to create a local scheme for all working age applicants. Each year, the Council was required to review its Council Tax Reduction Scheme and either maintain it or replace it with a new one.

The Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme provided council tax support to some of the lowest income households in the borough. The scheme provided one of the most significant means of financial support from the Council, and over 27000 households in Sandwell received the support which totalled to £14.9m.

The existing scheme was deemed affordable again for the 2026/27 year and as such, it was determined that the existing Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme remain unchanged for the 2026/27 financial year.

Maintaining the scheme meant that Sandwell still had a generous scheme when compared to the majority of other English local authorities. It was noted that the policy would have its income bands updated for 2026/27 once the Department for Work and Pensions published the new income rates to be applied from April 2026.

**Resolved** that the existing Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme (LTRS) is unchanged and is approved to continue to provide support throughout the 2026/2027 financial year.

71/25

### **The Review of Council Housing Rents and Housing Related Property Charges**

It was noted that Council tenants, leaseholders and other residents were notified on a yearly basis of rent and other related housing charges. The Council was required to achieve the right balance between supporting tenants to mitigate the cost of living pressures and protecting the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) to ensure it could continue to provide affordable social housing for residents. Rents were charged for Council tenant properties, properties managed by Riverside Housing, travellers pitches and a small number of properties that sat outside of the HRA.

At its meeting held on 4 December 2024, Cabinet approved that rent and housing related charges would be set in line with the Rent Standard and Policy Statement on Rents for Social Housing for at least five years from 1 April 2026. On June 2025, the government announced a 10 year social housing rent settlement from April 2026 at Consumer Price Inflation (CPI) +1%. It was also noted that a Rent Convergence Consultation had been carried out by government who had sought views on plans to increase rent each year by £1 or £2 over and above CPI+1% limit and the length of time of convergence. Details were expected to be announced in January 2026.

Members were minded to increase house related charges by CPI+1% which was equivalent to a 4.8% increase.

The Council applied two differing methods when calculating rents on its housing stock. Social Housing Rents (Formula), considered various attributes such as post code area, the type of property, local earnings and the number of bedrooms. This ensured that similar rents were charged for similar properties. The second method, "Affordable Rent", was set at 80% of the market rent.

It was highlighted that 75.8% of tenants were in receipt of full or partial benefits with the remaining 24.2% paying their rent in full. As a result of the proposed increase, customers who paid their rent in full and those on partial benefits would be impacted by the increase however, 50% of tenants, who had received full benefits would be unaffected.

Rental income was vital to the financial well-being of the HRA. Rental income offset operational costs and financial charges, and the surplus was used to invest in capital improvements to the housing stock. HRA funds were essential in enabling the Council to respond to regulatory requirements of the Building Safety Act 2022 and Decency Standards provisions to fund the Council's affordable homes new build scheme. The additional income generated from the increase would contribute to the upkeep of the Council's existing stock as well as enabling it to build more high-quality housing to meet the needs of residents.

**Resolved:-**

- 1) that the Executive Director – Place, is authorised to adjust council rents and housing related charges with effect from 6 April 2026;
- 2) that Housing rents are increased by CPI+1%, which is equivalent to a 4.8% increase;
- 3) that where required, the maximum Rent Convergence, as set by Government from 6 April 2026 and subsequent years, until formula rent is achieved, is implemented;
- 4) that Housing service charges are increased by CPI+1%, which is equivalent to a 4.8% increase;
- 5) that fees at the travellers pitch, Hill View, Tipton, are increased at CPI (announced in the month preceding variation notice being issued), in consultation with residents of the site, in line with the Pitch Fees Act 2023;
- 6) that rent and service charges on properties that sit outside the Housing Revenue Account, including service tenants for Parks, Sandwell Valley and Caretaking are increased by CPI+1%;
- 7) that the Leaseholder Annual Management fee is increased by CPI+1% from £167.13 to £175.15;
- 8) that the Executive Director – Place, is authorised to implement the maximum rent convergence for the next rent period, and all subsequent years, until formula rent is achieved.

72/25

**Polling District and Polling Places Review 2025**

Under the Representation of the People Act 1983, the Council had a duty to divide its area into polling districts and to designate a polling place for each district. Following the conclusion of the Local Government Boundary Commission for England's (LGBCE) review of electoral arrangements, the Council was required to review all polling districts and polling places within its area. The purpose of the polling district and polling place review was to ensure that polling districts were proportionate and coterminous to the new ward boundaries.

The Notice of Review was published on 5 September 2025. The consultation period was from 5 September 2025 until 13 October 2025. All elected members, Members of Parliament (MP's), local political parties and local disability and community groups were invited to respond to the consultation directly. The review was also promoted on the Council's website and via social media channels. Two engagement sessions and five drop-in sessions were also held for members to facilitate discussion around the proposed changes.

During the review, all polling places and polling district boundaries were reviewed. The focus was to ensure that all polling places identified were the most convenient and easily accessible buildings to all voters in the polling district.

Polling district boundaries were also assessed and re-drawn where necessary. This was to ensure that voters would not be passing another polling place on the way to their designated polling place; the designated polling place had a clear route to it from all parts of the polling district, avoiding having to cross main roads, canals, railway tracks and similar wherever possible; as well as ensuring that each polling district encompasses a proportionate number of electors.

All households that were affected by the changes made to polling districts and polling places would be notified.

The Council's Constitution identified the determination of polling district reviews as a matter reserved for Full Council following recommendations from the Governance and Constitution Committee. In certain situations, it was highlighted that it may not have been practicable to await formal approval from Full Council to designate a polling place ahead of the local elections in May 2026. For example, a building may have become unavailable at short notice due to unforeseen circumstances.

As such, it was proposed that for any unforeseen reason, should there have been a need to change any polling places or polling stations prior to elections in May 2026, authority be delegated to the Returning Officer to authorise any such changes, following consultation with relevant Ward members.

**Resolved :-**

- 1) that changes to the polling districts and associated polling places, as set out at Appendix A, are approved to take effect at all elections from 7 May 2026;
- 2) that if, for any unforeseen reason, there should be a need to change any further polling places or polling stations prior to elections on 7 May 2026, authority is delegated to the Returning Officer to authorise any such changes, following consultation with relevant Ward Members.

73/25 **Revisions to Appointments to Committees, Boards and Other Bodies**

Council considered revisions to appointments to committees, boards and other bodies.

**Resolved** that the revisions to appointments to committees, boards and other bodies, as set out in Appendix B, are approved with immediate effect.

74/25 **Notices of Motions**

The Council considered the following motions:

74/25(a) **Motion – Making Sandwell a Safe Borough for Women and Girls by Councillor Sahdaish Kaur Pall**

It was moved by Councillor Pall and seconded by Councillor J Singh:-

“Council notes that every year from 25 November to 10 December 2025, communities across the world will mark the 16 Days of Action against Gender-Based Violence, beginning on the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women and girls, and ending on Human Rights Day.

Council recognises that violence against women and girls (VAWG) remains a pervasive issue across the UK, affecting one in four women during their lifetime.

Council further notes that this violence takes many forms, including domestic abuse, sexual assault, stalking, harassment, honour-based abuse, forced marriage, coercive control, and inter-caste relationship abuse and it cuts across all communities, faiths, and backgrounds.

Council also notes with concern the recent racially motivated attacks that have shaken community confidence, recognising that women are increasingly facing not only gender-based violence but also rising levels of hate crime and racial abuse, a double burden of fear and discrimination that demands urgent action and solidarity across all communities.

Council acknowledges that experiences of violence and abuse are often shaped by multiple and intersecting inequalities, including race, ethnicity, disability, sexuality, age, faith, and socio-economic background. An intersectional approach is therefore essential to ensure that all women and girls, especially those most marginalised, are seen, heard, and supported.

Council further recognises the importance of male allyship in ending gender-based violence and calls on all men to take responsibility for challenging misogyny, promoting respect, and speaking out against harmful behaviours.

Council commends the vital work of survivors, activists, and local organisations who continue to provide life-saving support, often under great pressure.

Council further commends the ongoing work of Black Country Womens Aid and other organisations for their ongoing work in raising awareness and tackling this key issue for our communities.

Council commits to continue to publicly support the 16 Days of Action and promote community-wide engagement throughout Sandwell and in addition to the domestic abuse awareness training agreed last year, ensure that all councillors and senior officers also attend other Violence against women and girls' awareness training, with a specific focus on intersectional and cultural competency.

Council therefore calls on the Leader and Cabinet to –

1. ensure that all councillors and senior officers receive training in tackling violence against women and girls;
2. develop and promote a Male Allyship Charter for councillors, staff, and community leaders to pledge their commitment to gender equality and respect;
3. work with local schools, faith groups, and community partners to deliver education on healthy relationships, consent, and respect;
4. reaffirm Sandwell's commitment to being a White Ribbon Borough and to embedding its principles of zero tolerance for violence and harassment across all council policies and practices;
5. share and amplify information about local helplines, community campaigns, throughout the year, to ensure visibility and engagement across all wards."

On being put to the vote, the motion was carried.

74/25(b) **Motion – Phlebotomy Services in Wednesbury by Councillor Nicola Maycock**

It was moved by Councillor Maycock and seconded by Councillor Hughes:-

“Council notes significant patient demand for phlebotomy (blood-taking) services in the Wednesbury area, particularly from residents in the Wednesbury North ward and surrounding areas.

Council further notes that many Wednesbury residents currently face long travel times, often relying on inconvenient public transport or expensive private transport, to access essential blood testing at centralized hospital sites, such as those outside of Wednesbury. The increased pressure this centralization places on hospital phlebotomy departments, leading to extended waiting times and overcrowding, which can be detrimental to the patient experience and clinical flow.

Council believes that localised health services are key to improving patient access, promoting preventative care, and reducing health inequalities across the borough. Providing phlebotomy services closer to home in Wednesbury would significantly improve patient convenience, especially for the elderly, disabled, and those with long-term conditions.

Council believes that its role as a key partner in the local health and social care system includes responsibility advocate strongly for improved primary care provision for its residents.

Council requests the relevant Scrutiny Board investigate and review the current commissioning arrangements for phlebotomy services affecting Wednesbury residents, with a view to making recommendations for improved local access.

Council therefore calls on the Leader and Cabinet Member Adult Social Care, Health and Wellbeing to -

1. write to the Black Country Integrated Care Board (ICB), expressing the Council's strong support for the urgent establishment of localised, community-based phlebotomy services within the town of Wednesbury;
2. commit to working with local GPs, community providers, and the ICB to identify and support suitable locations within Wednesbury for the sustainable delivery of a patient-friendly, local phlebotomy service."

On being put to the vote, the motion was carried.

74/25(c)

**Motion – Supporting Residents on Universal Credit by Councillor Justyna Kordala**

It was moved by Councillor Kordala and seconded by Councillor Dunn:-

“Council notes that residents who receive Universal Credit can sometimes see their Council Tax liability recalculated during the year. Whilst this system is largely a requirement of data processing from the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), this can be confusing and cause anxiety especially for our most vulnerable residents particularly those with long-term sickness, mental health challenges, chronic disabilities, single parents and low-income households.

Council further notes that recent changes required by the DWP restrict how the Council can use and share information. This is because much of the work undertaken by Council officers for Universal Credit entitlements is data processing on behalf of the DWP. How that data may then be used and shared within the Council can be limited even in circumstances when it may allow the Council to better help our residents.

Council recognises the excellent work of the Revenues and Benefits Team who continue to face additional demands for support for local welfare

provision support reflecting the impacts of the ongoing cost of living crisis. Council therefore calls on the Leader and Cabinet to:-

1. endorse ongoing work by officers to develop and agree a new Memorandum of Understanding with the DWP to allow enhanced sharing of data within the Council, enabling frontline staff to support our most vulnerable residents and communities, with the aim of reaching agreement with the DWP within the next three months;
- 2.
3. explore options to simplify the Council Tax customer contact system, which could include • A shorter, more accessible telephone menu, • A priority route for vulnerable residents, • Improved call answering times, • A monitored service standard for email and postal correspondence.”

The motion was put to the vote and carried.

74/25(d) **Motion – Supporting Small Businesses in Sandwell by Councillor William Gill**

It was moved by Councillor W Gill and seconded by Councillor Jeffcoat:-

“Council notes the annual successes of Small Business Saturday and thanks all local people and businesses that took part in last years event.

Council recognises that it is important to continue supporting and promoting small businesses in Sandwell and encouraging people to shop local all year round. Small Business Saturday has grown into a significant event – with over £1 billion spent at small businesses on this day alone in recent years.

Council further recognises this is an excellent opportunity to promote small businesses in Sandwell and to celebrate the contribution smaller businesses make to our towns across the Borough. Small Businesses are the heart and soul of our local high streets. They help give Sandwell its character and employ thousands of local people. It is only by supporting our local independent businesses that we can also help our local high streets thrive.

Council therefore calls on the Leader and Cabinet to:-

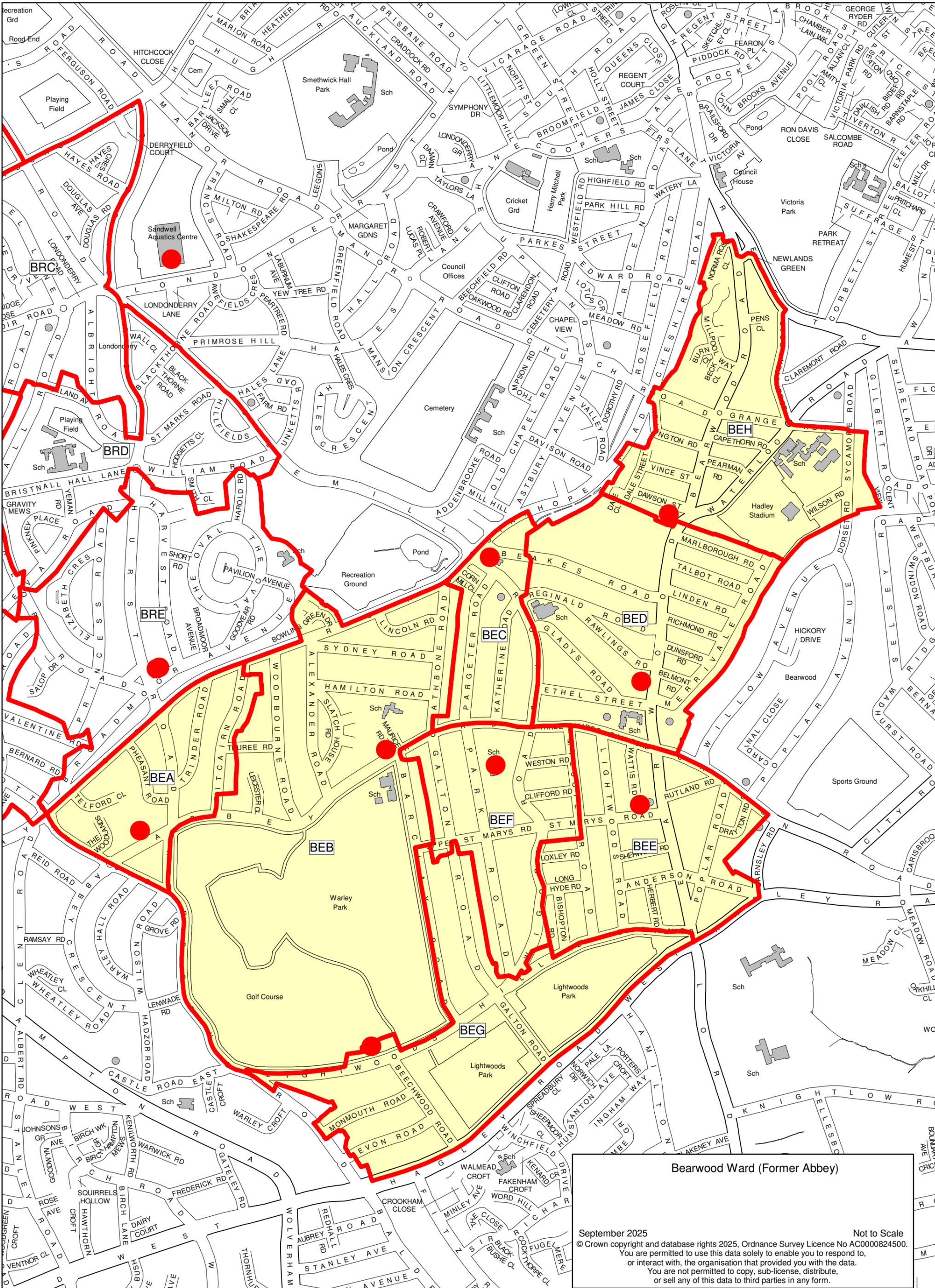
1. instruct the Chief Executive and Heads of Service to ensure that the Council participates fully in Small Business Saturday annually moving forward;
2. request that officers work closely with local business organisations and smaller enterprises across Sandwell to make them aware of the day and encourage them to sign up;
3. ensure that Small Business Saturday is promoted thoroughly and prominently on the Council’s website, social media channels and other external communications;

4. develop a year-round communications plan to continue promoting local small businesses and encouraging residents in Sandwell to shop small and shop local all year round;
5. investigate further ways to increase shopper numbers in the lead up to Christmas and beyond – such as free weekend parking into the town centre to accommodate busy shopping days – and establish a regular programme of measures to support small businesses all year round.”

The motion was put to the vote and was carried.

Meeting ended at 7.55pm

Appendix 1: Ward Maps with new polling districts and polling places



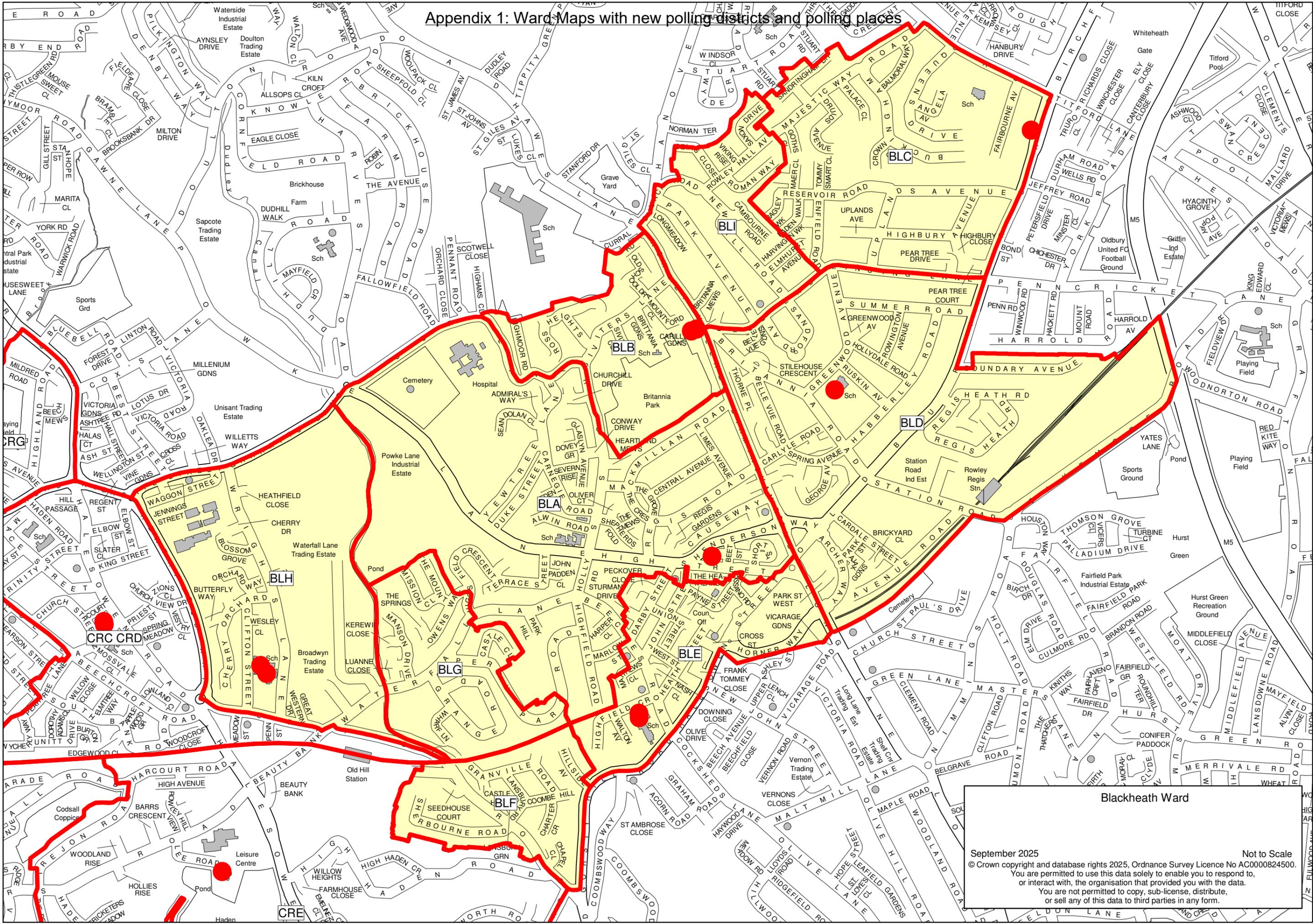
**Bearwood Ward (Former Abbey)**

September 2025

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**Blackheath Ward**

September 2025

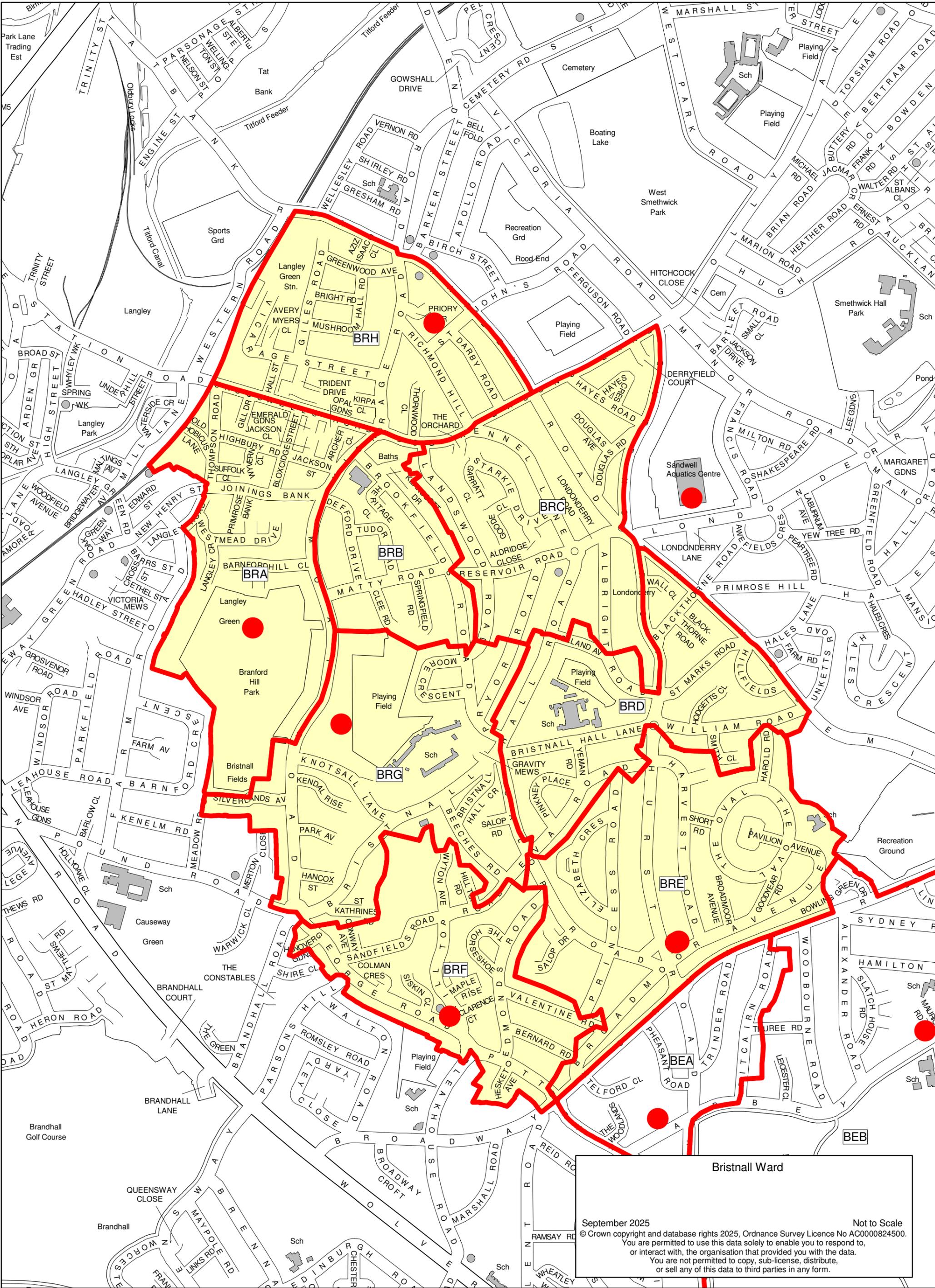
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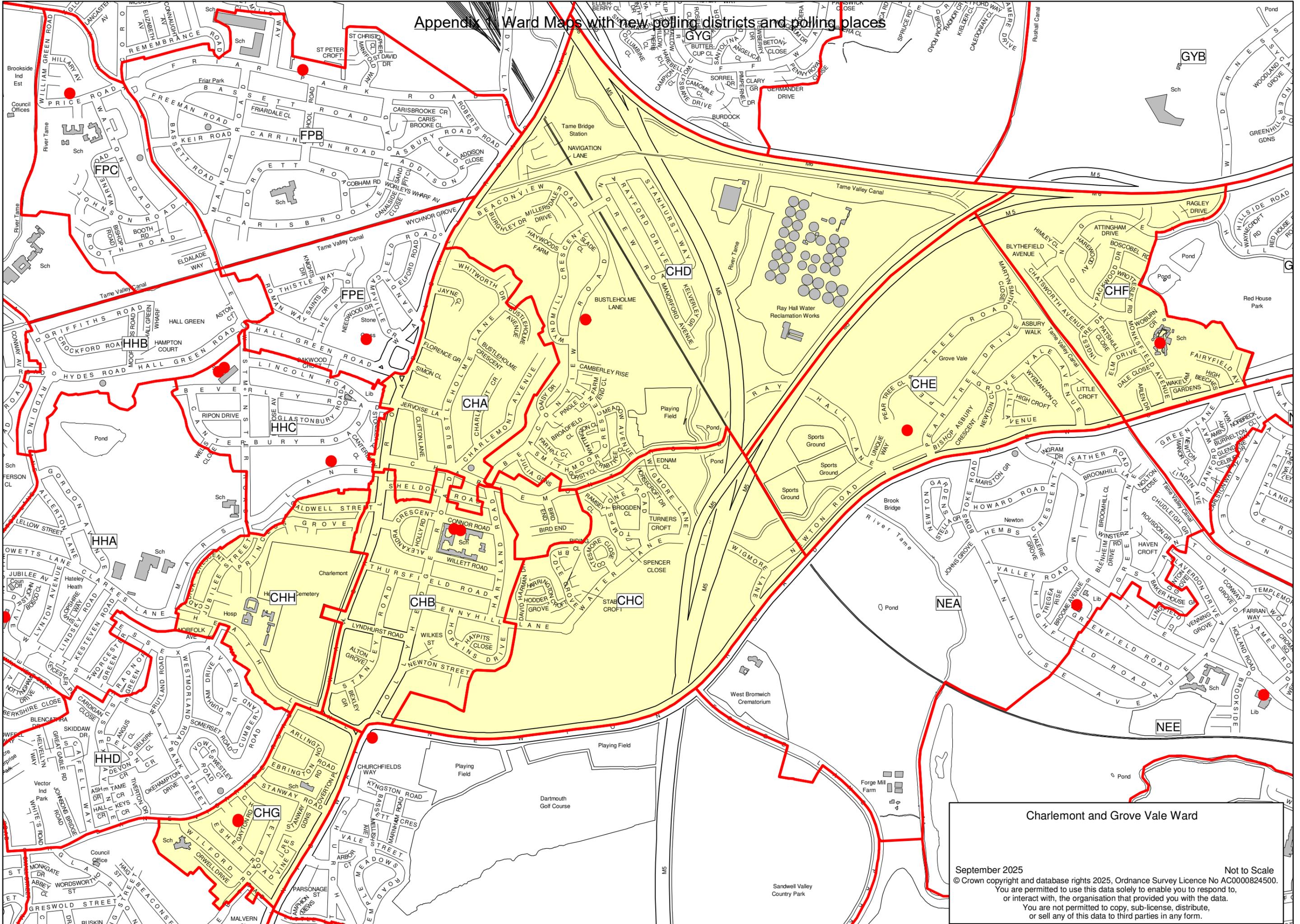
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**Bristnall Ward**

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# Appendix 1 Ward Maps with new polling districts and polling places

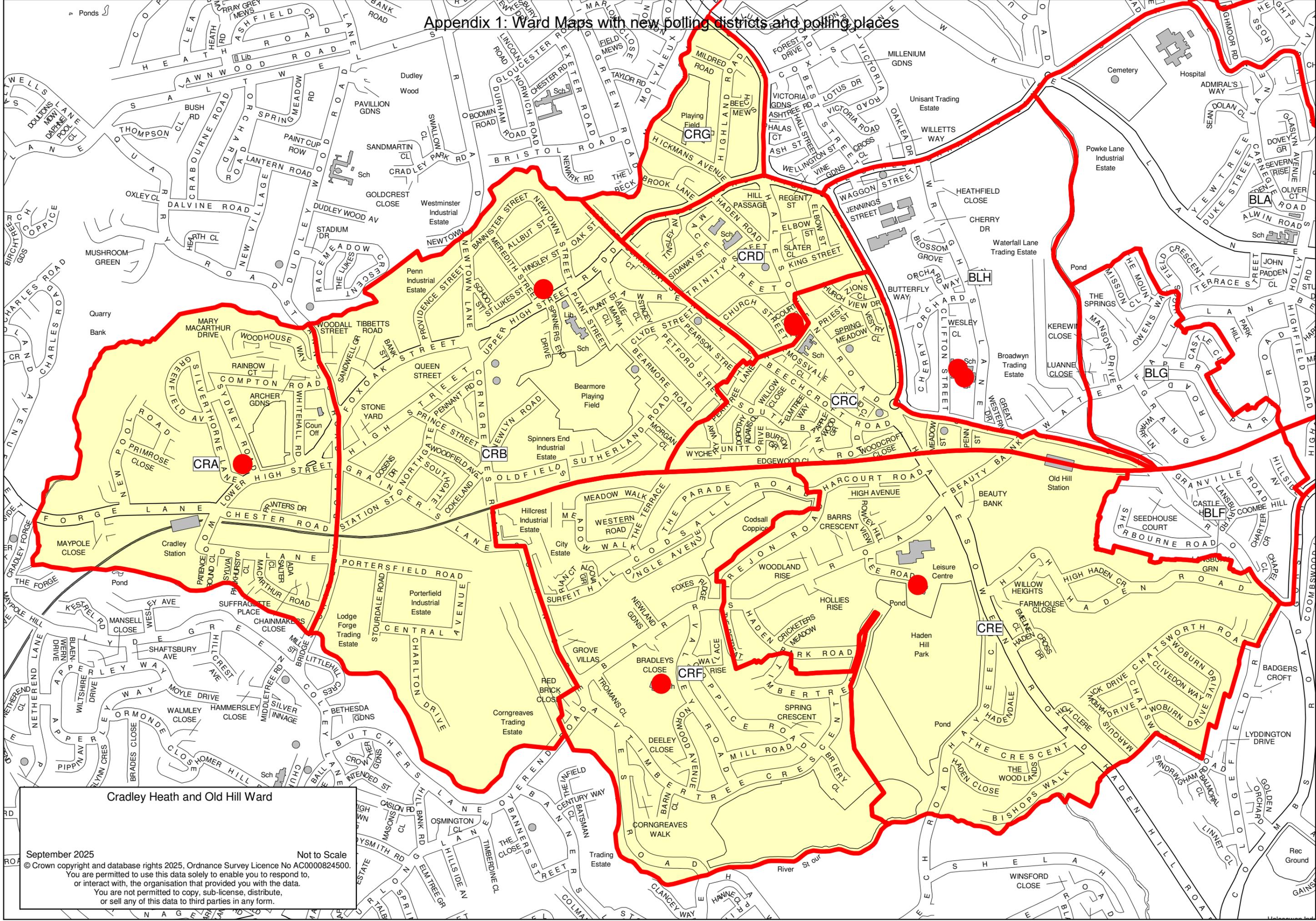


**Charlemont and Grove Vale Ward**

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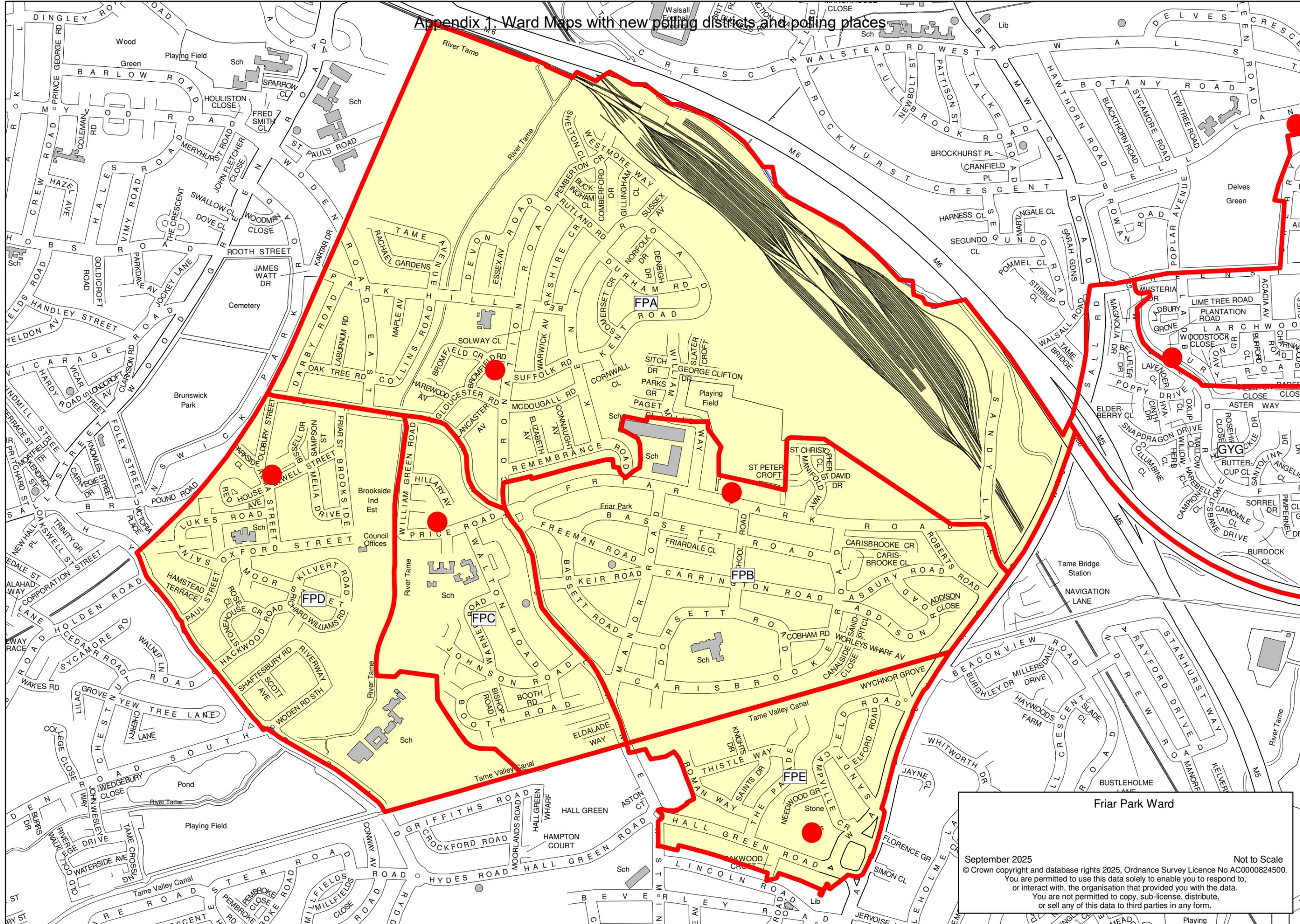


Cradley Heath and Old Hill Ward

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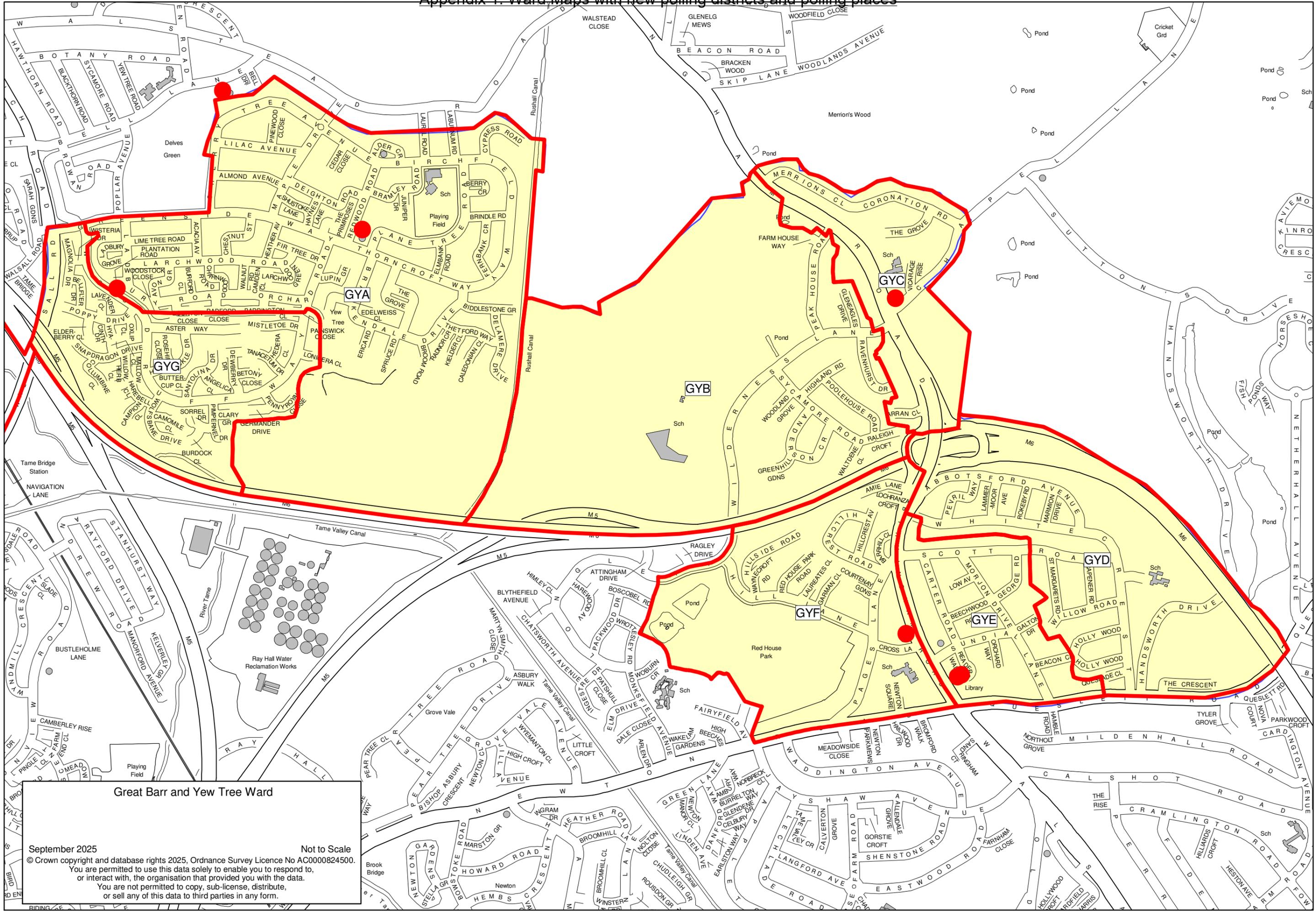
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**Friar Park Ward**

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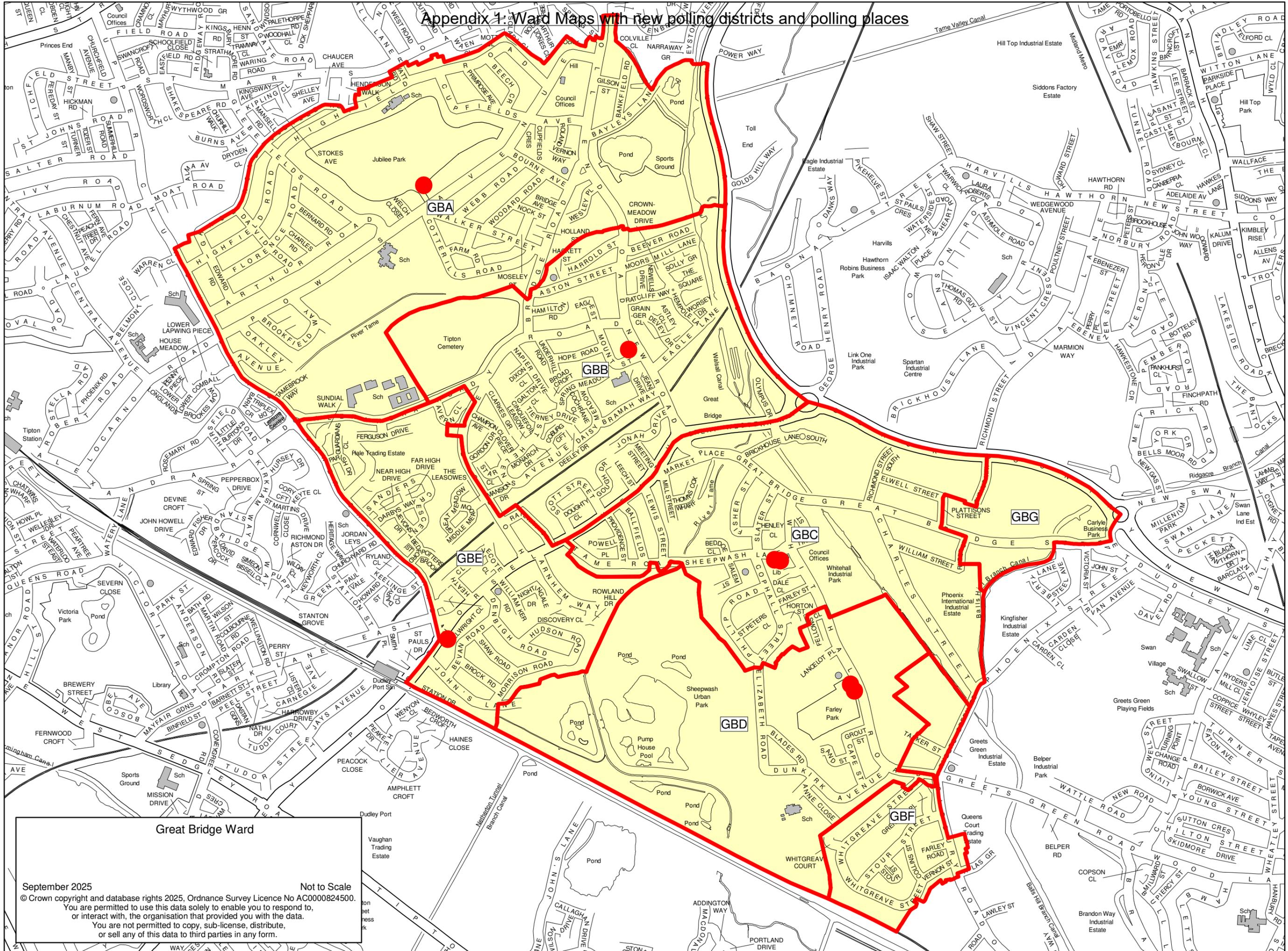
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Great Barr and Yew Tree Ward

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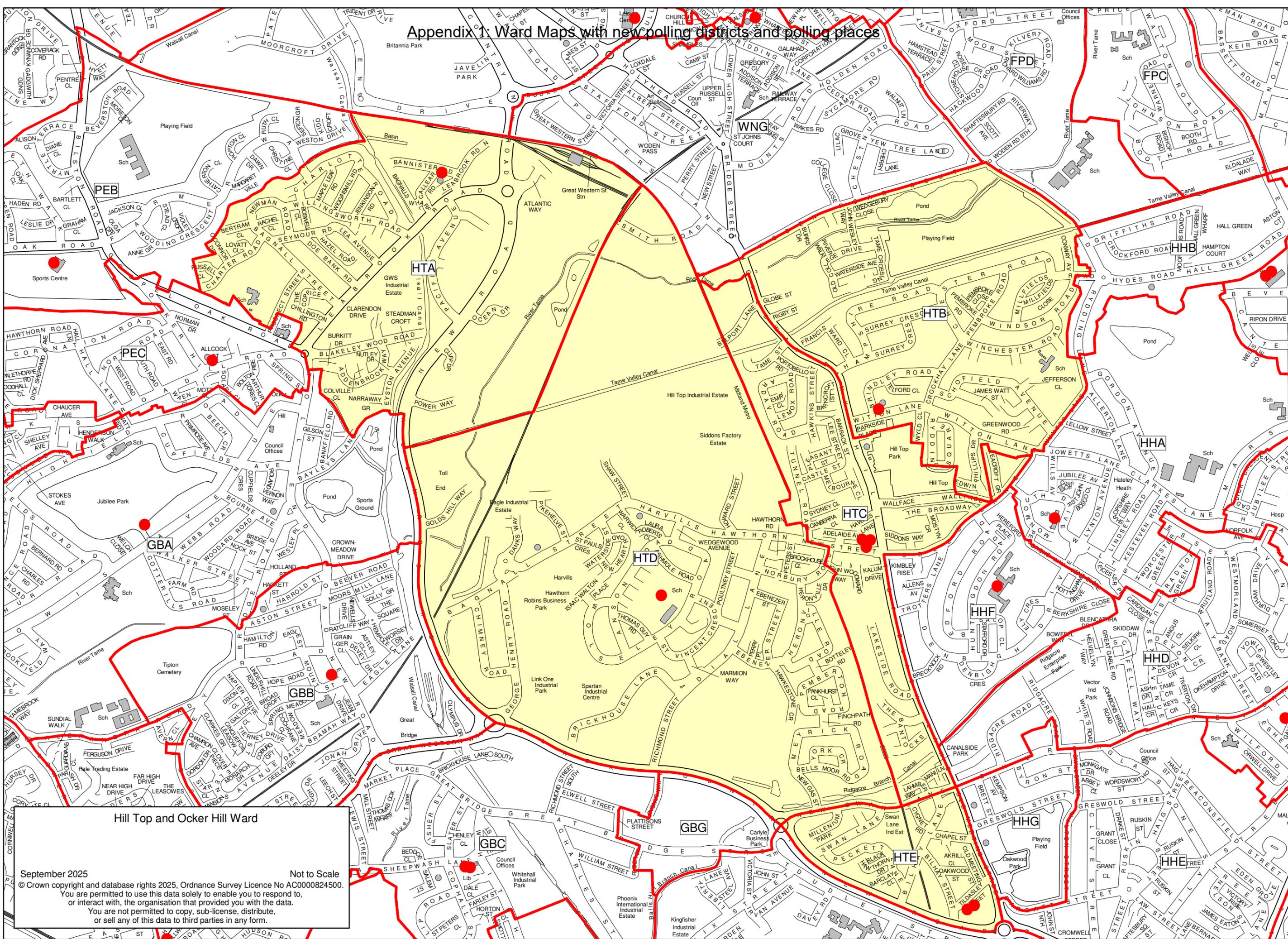
Great Bridge Ward

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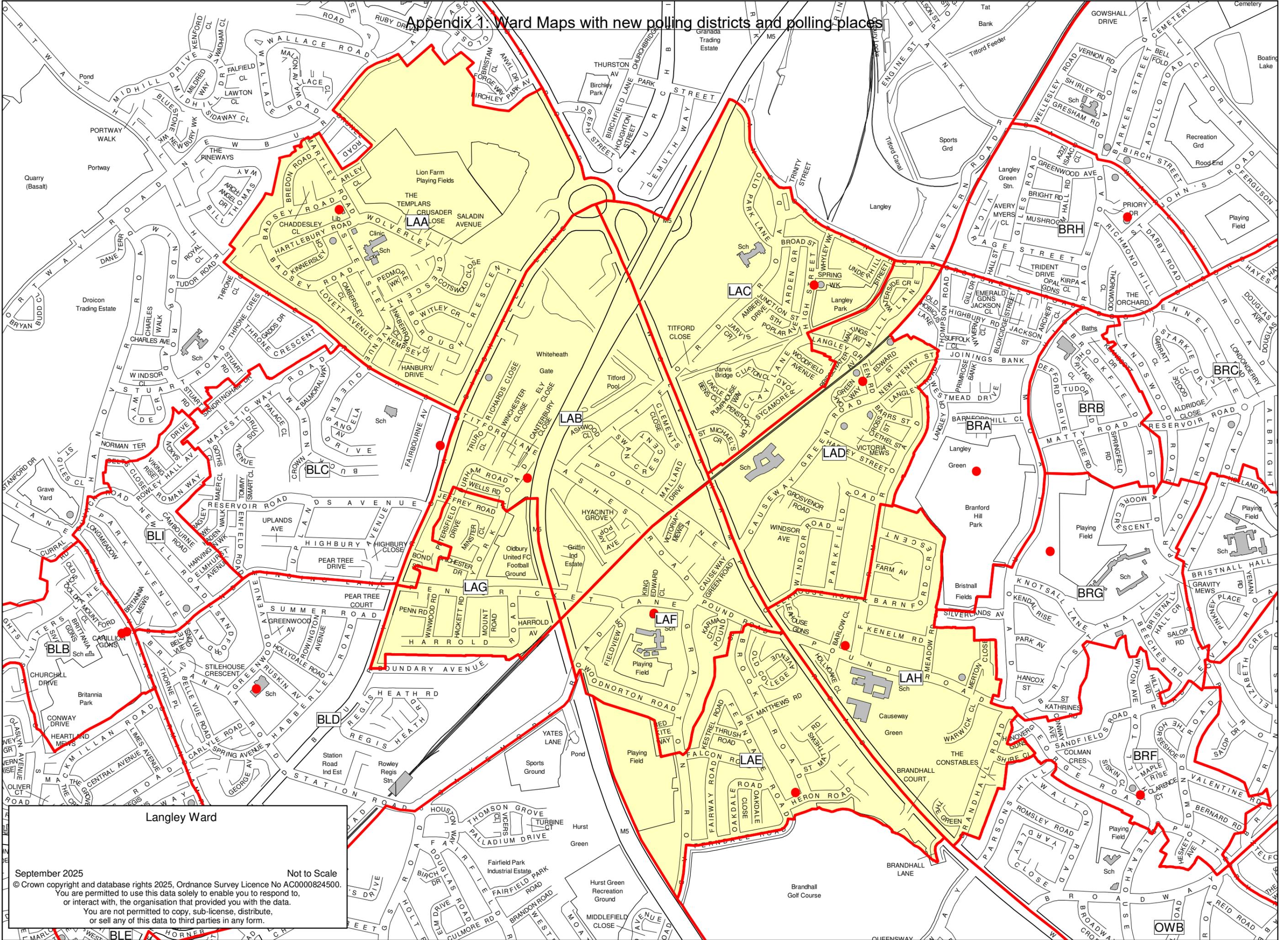


Hill Top and Ocker Hill Ward

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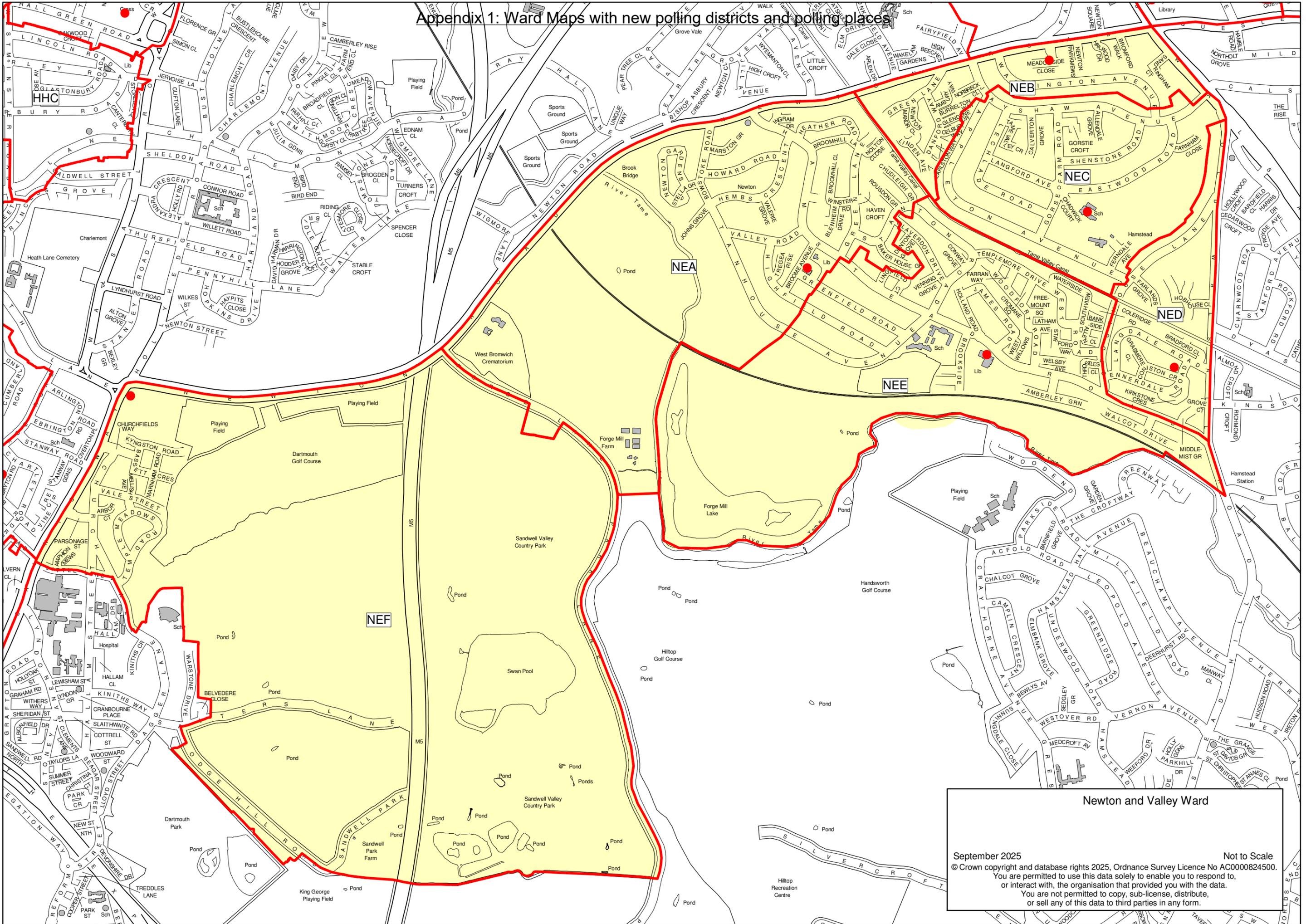


Langley Ward

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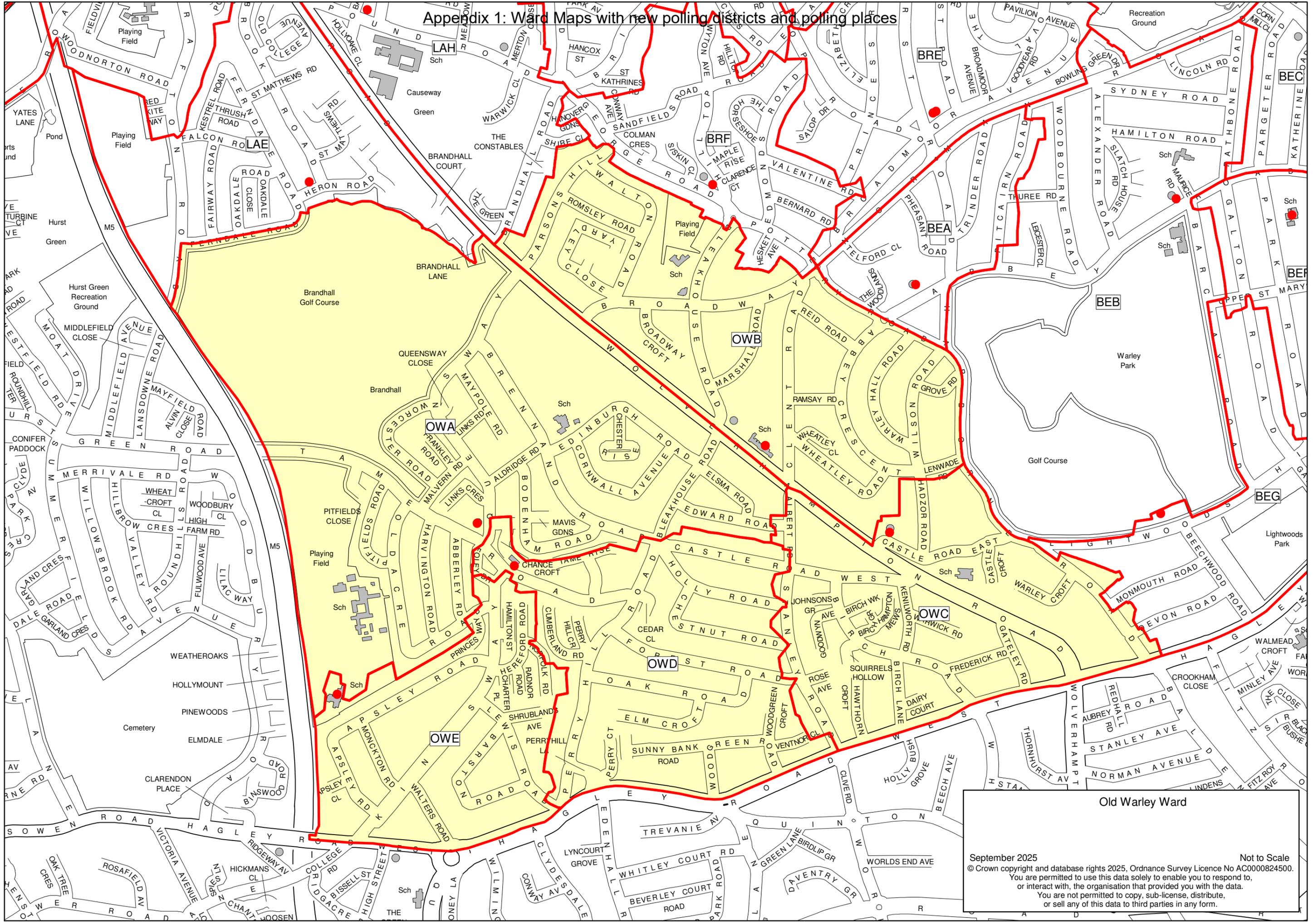
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**Newton and Valley Ward**

September 2025  
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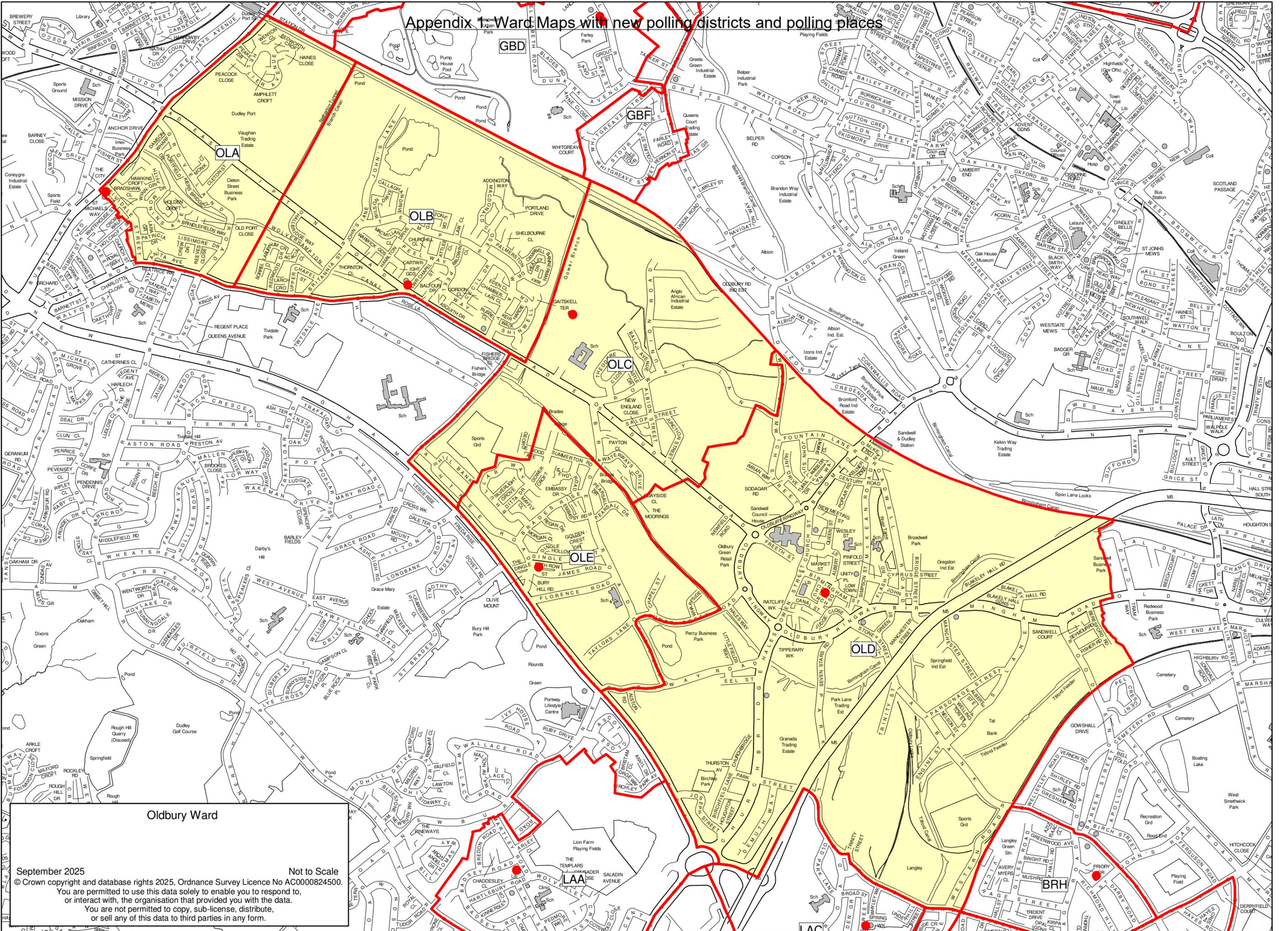


**Old Warley Ward**

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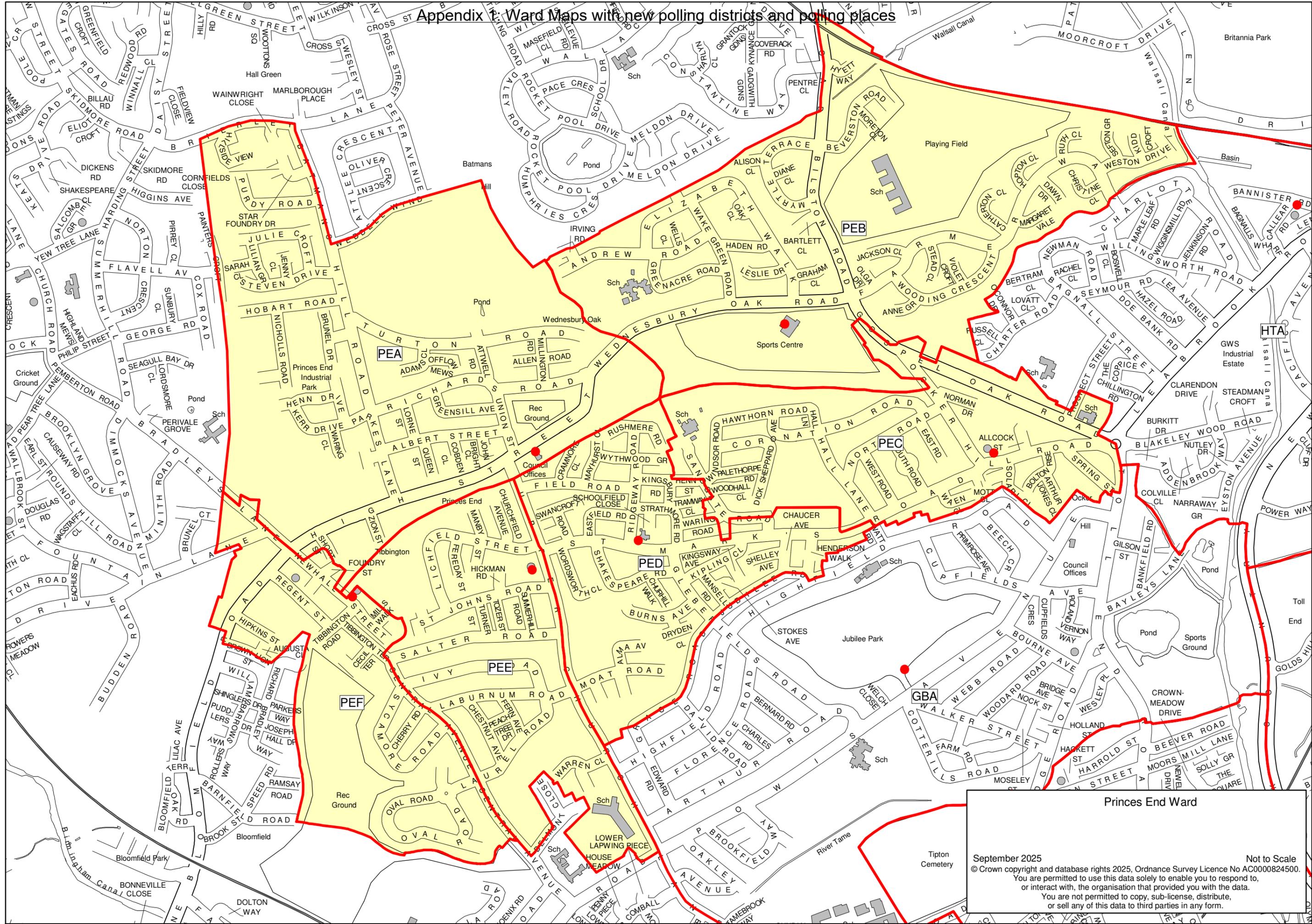
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Oldbury Ward

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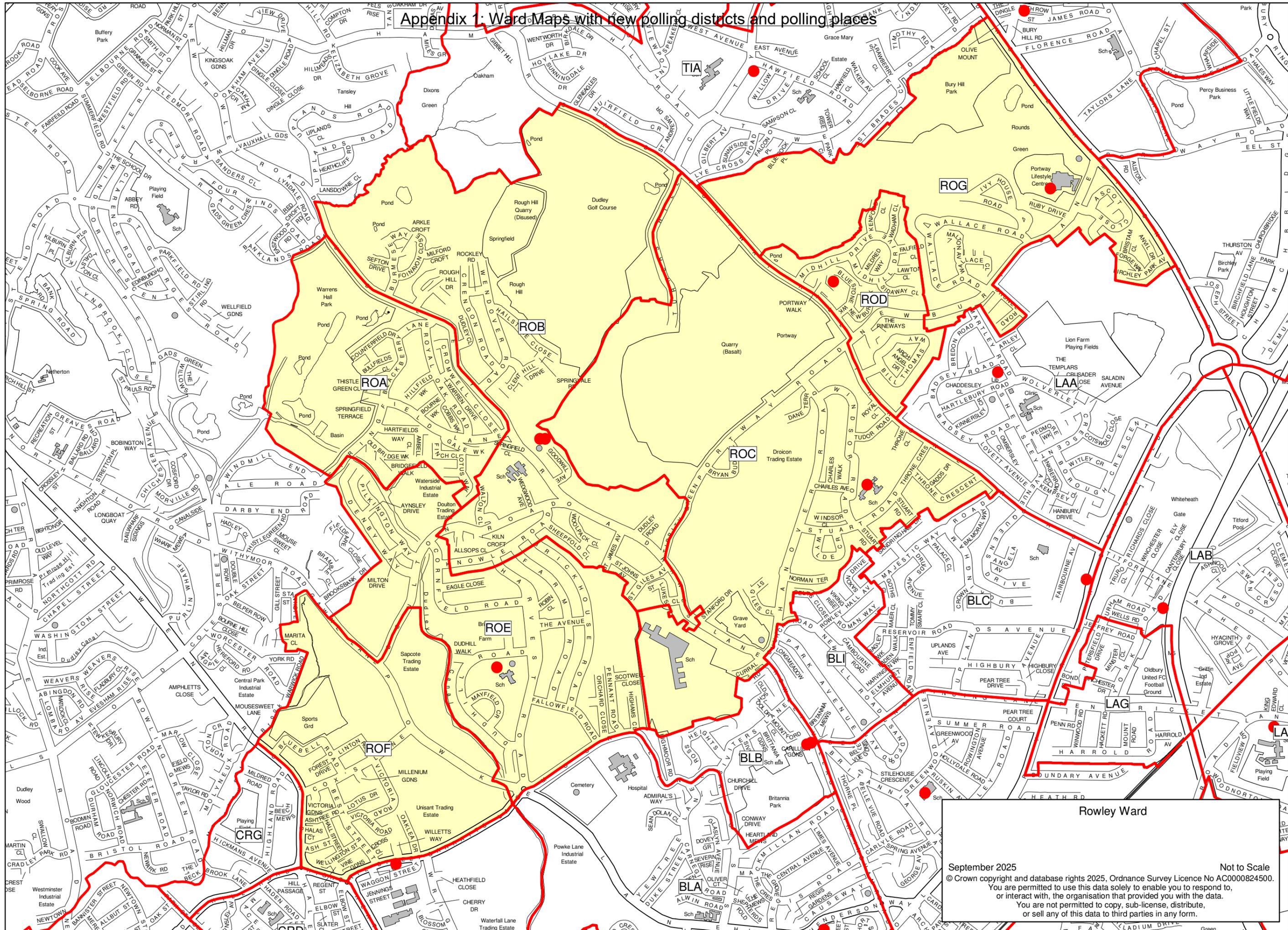


**Princes End Ward**

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Not to Scale

# Appendix 1: Ward Maps with new polling districts and polling places



**Rowley Ward**

September 2025

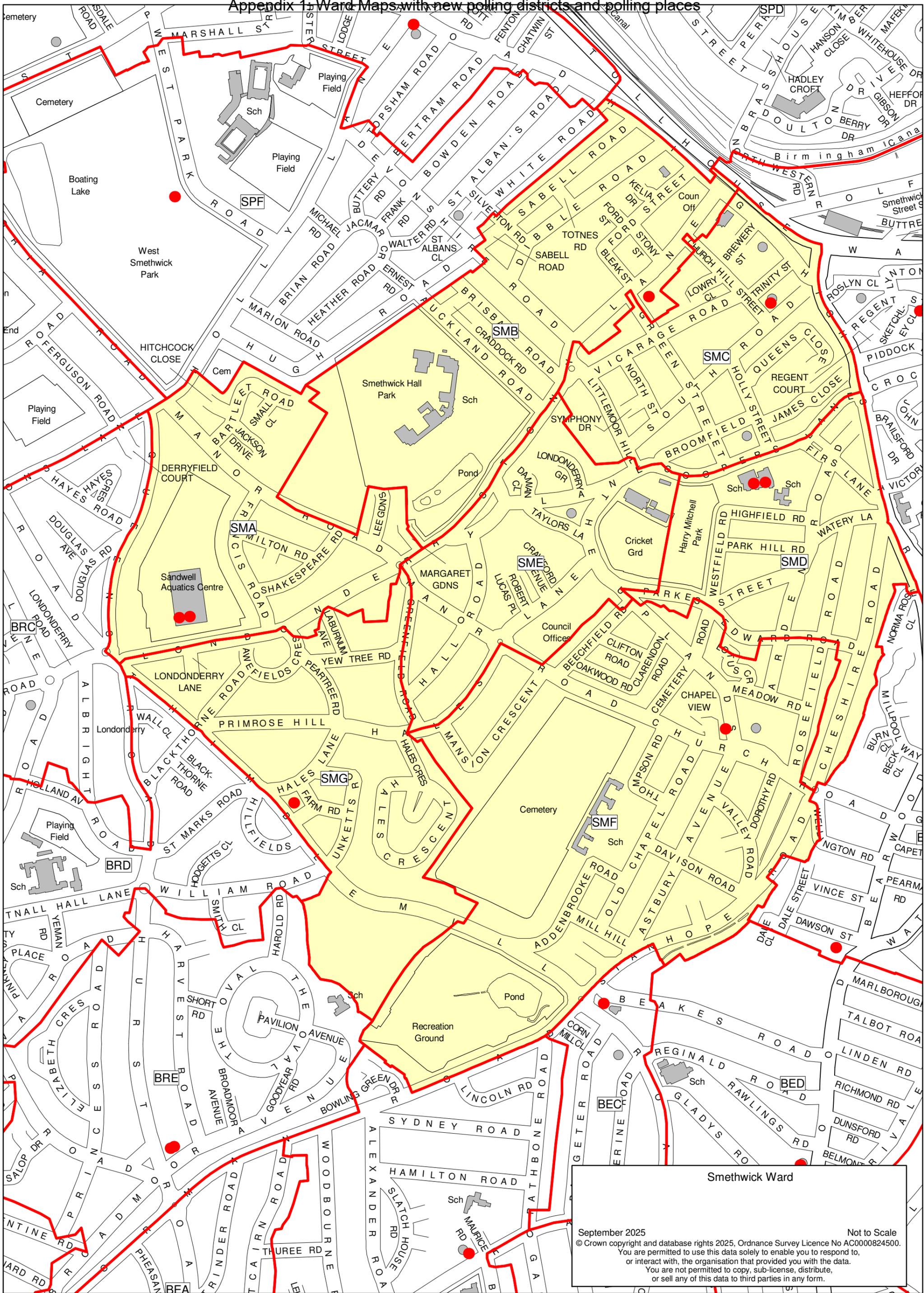
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Appendix 1: Ward Maps with new polling districts and polling places

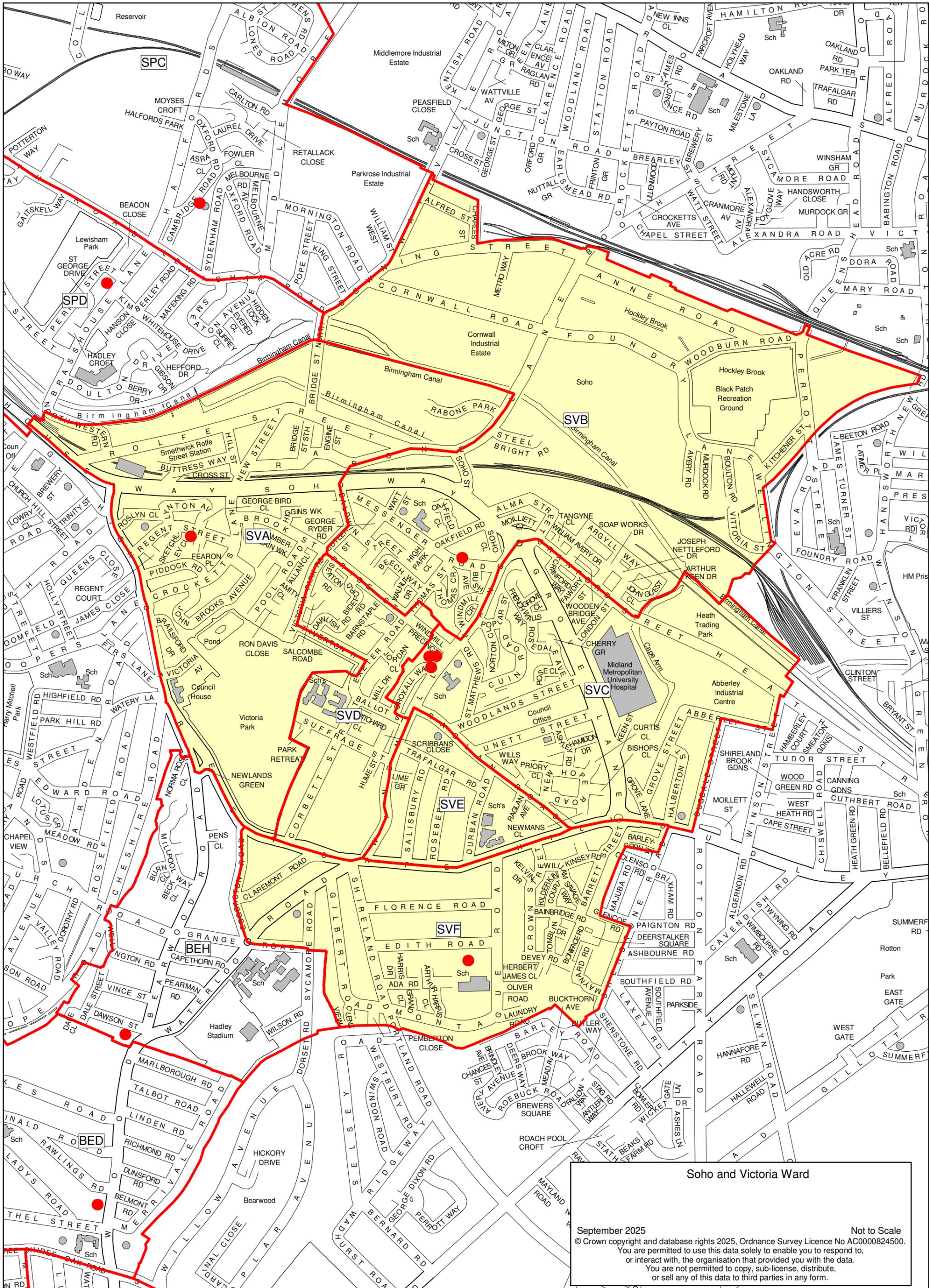


**Smethwick Ward**

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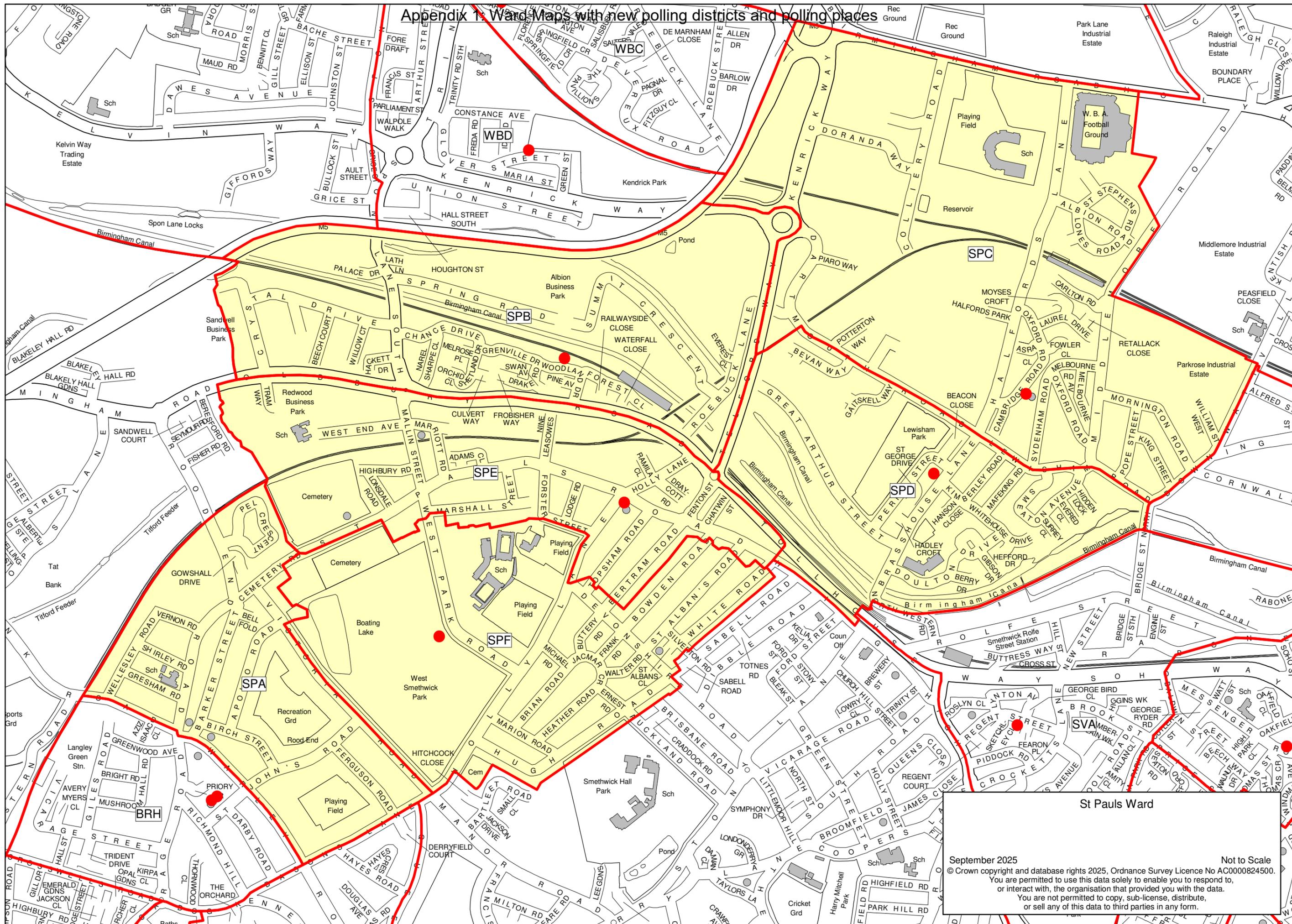
Appendix 1: Ward Maps with new polling districts and polling places



**Soho and Victoria Ward**

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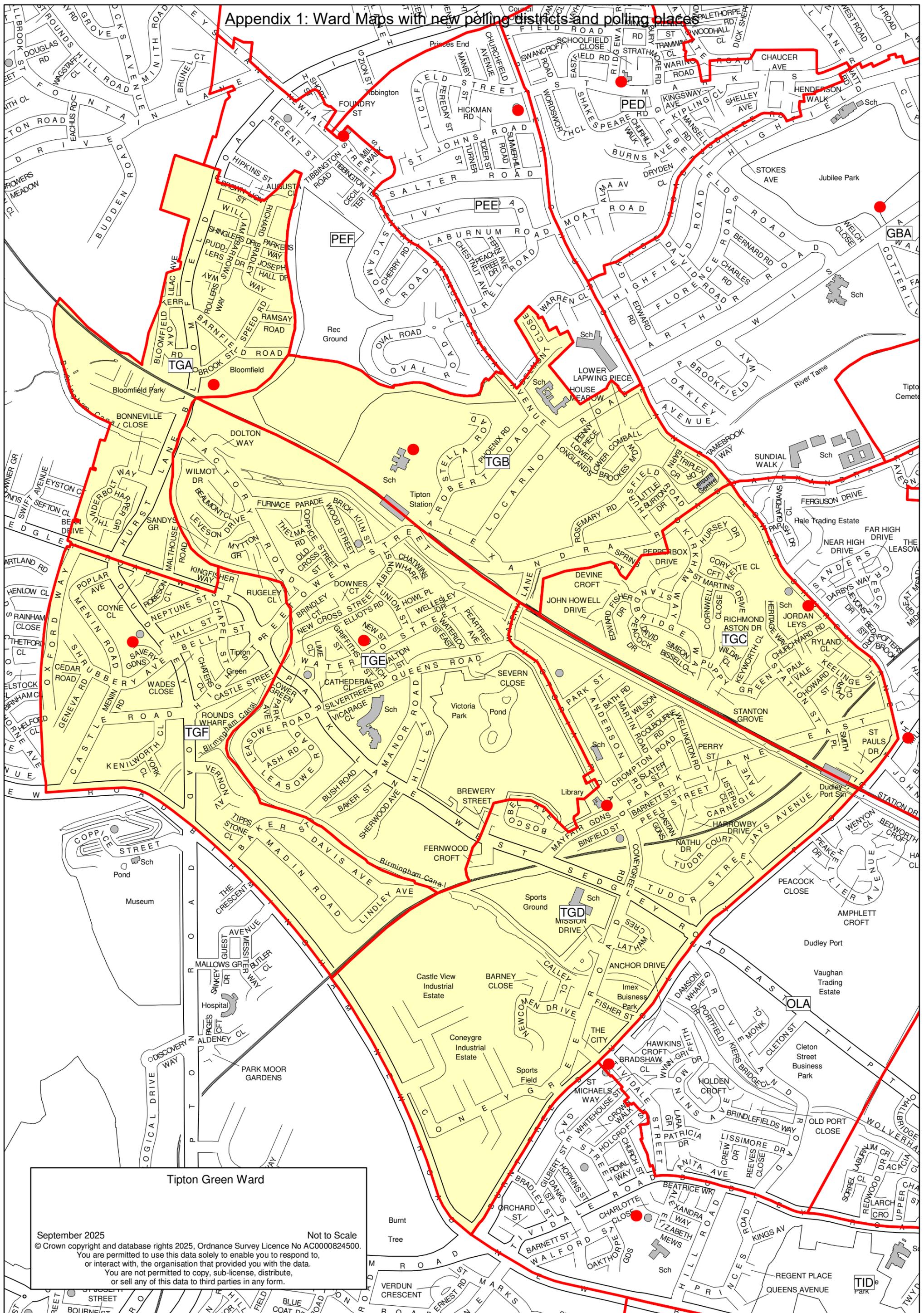
# Appendix 1: Ward Maps with new polling districts and polling places



## St Pauls Ward

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# Appendix 1: Ward Maps with new polling districts and polling places

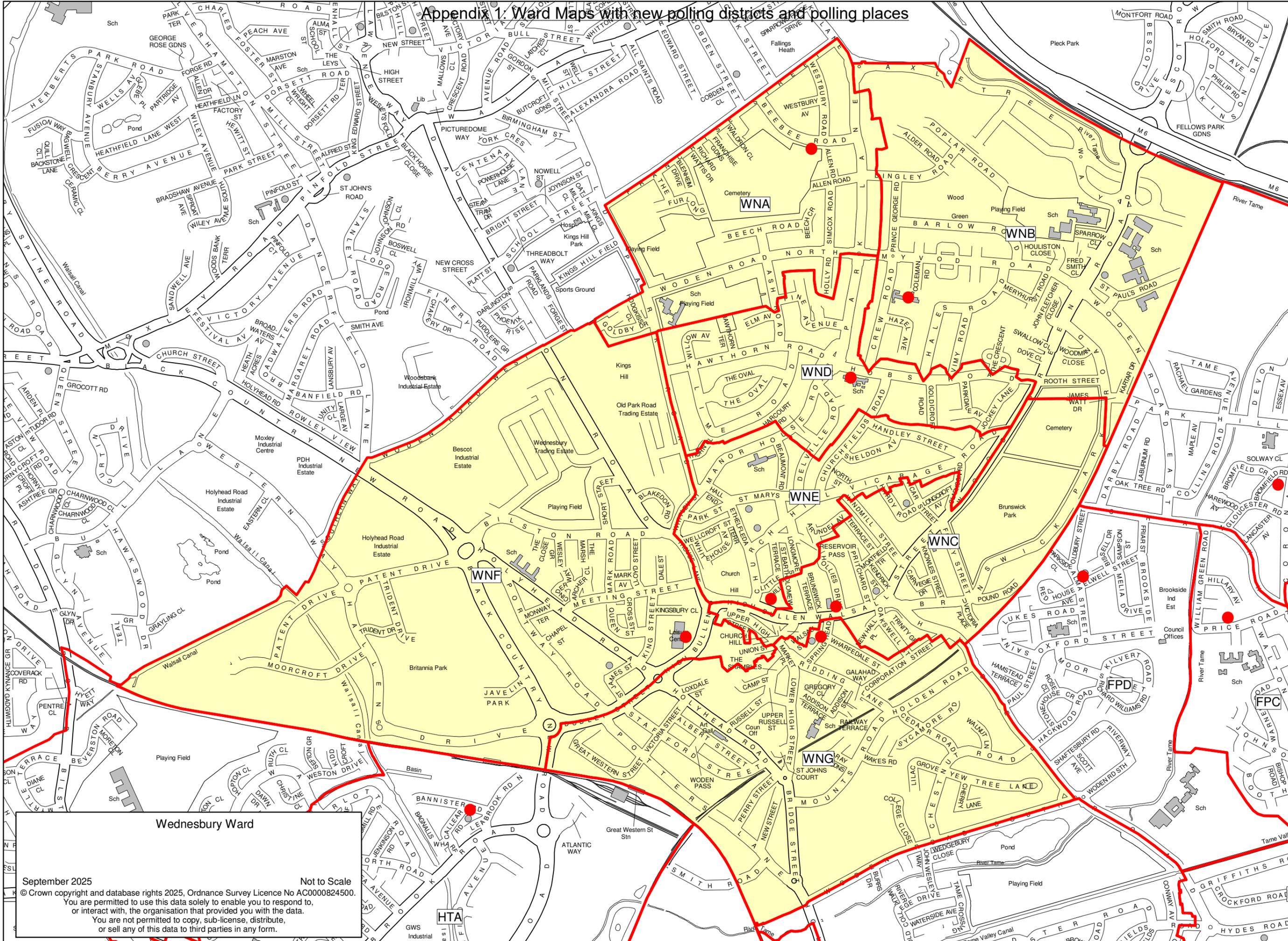


## Tipton Green Ward

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# Appendix 1. Ward Maps with new polling districts and polling places

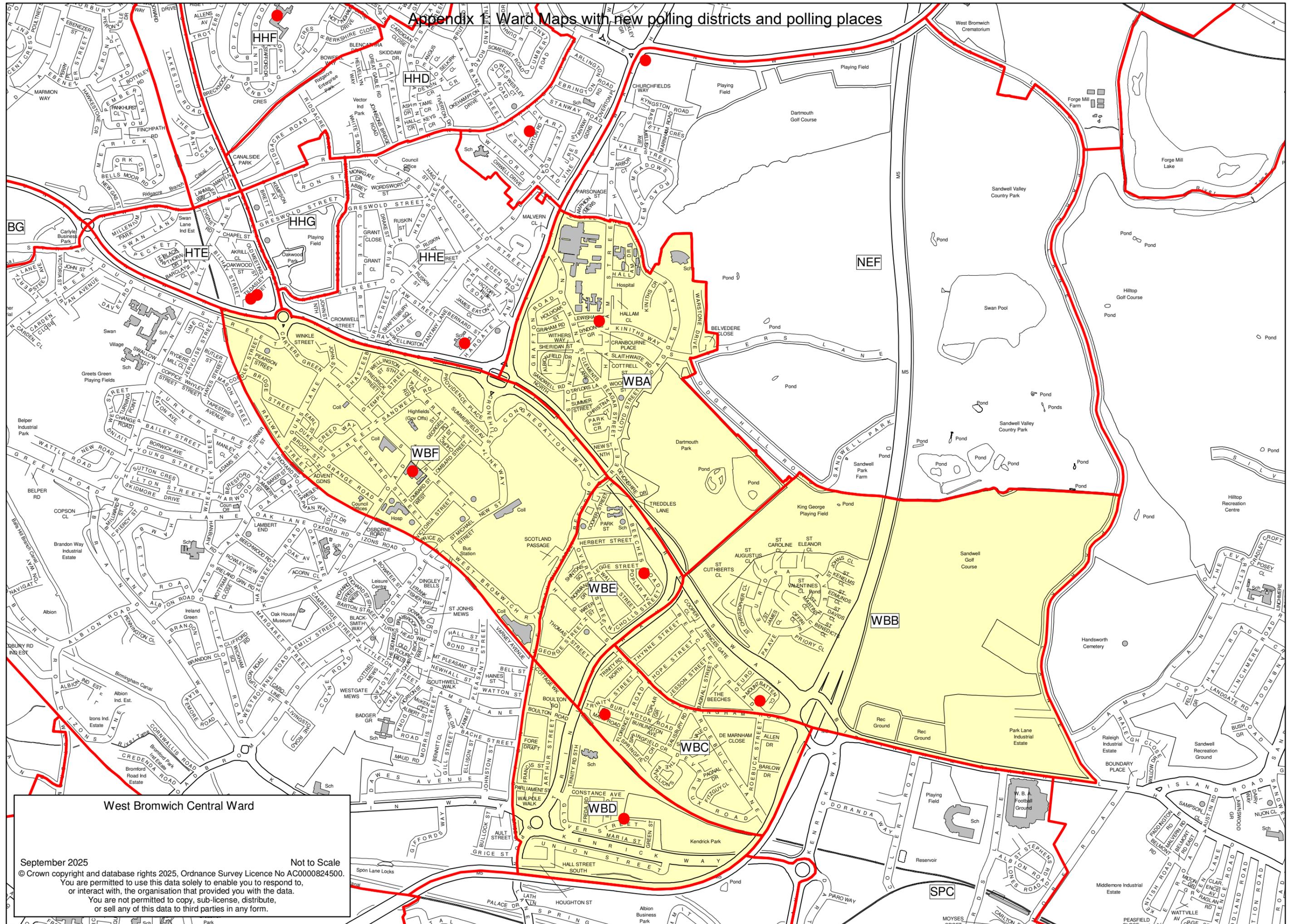


Wednesbury Ward

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# Appendix 1 Ward Maps with new polling districts and polling places



West Bromwich Central Ward

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## Appendix 2

<b>Committee/Board/Other Body</b>	<b>Revision/nomination</b>
Budget and Corporate Scrutiny Management Board	Councillor Kordala to replace Councillor William Gill
Children's Services and Education Scrutiny Board	Parent Governor Representatives to be appointed:-  Chinenye Maureen Okoro  Yvonne Ologbo
Ethical Standards and Member Development Committee	Councillor Randhawa to replace Councillor Fenton
Pensions Committee and Investment Advisory Sub-Committee	Councillor Kordala to be appointed as Substitute
Smethwick Partnership Board	Councillor Uddin to replace Councillor Peter Hughes
West Midlands Arts Trust	Councillor Johnston to replace Councillor Gavan
West Midlands Combined Authority Transport Delivery Overview and Scrutiny Committee	Councillor Bill Gavan to replace Councillor Danny Millard  Councillor Luke John Davies to be appointed as Vice-Chair