



## **Holborn – How Holborn (London) Residents Explored Creating a New Parish Council**

## Headlines:

- Holborn is an area of central London, currently administered by the London Borough of Camden. Historically there was a Metropolitan Borough of Holborn and even a Holborn ward.
- Until 2008, setting up a community council in a London borough was not permitted, with Queen's Park Community Council being the first civil parish to be created in Greater London in 2014. This provoked interest from Holborn residents into finding out more about the powers, duties and benefits of parish councils as a governance model.
- This case study tells the story of how the Holborn Community Association (HCA) drove a campaign to explore the benefits of creating a community council in the area – but had to work hard to gather more local evidence of whether residents wanted a Neighbourhood Plan first.
- The case study provides lessons for other campaign groups who are challenged with the question of when they should start a campaign for a new parish council – if they want to secure a Neighbourhood Plan past referendum stage first. In the end the campaign group decided they wanted to deliver a Neighbourhood Plan first and then create the new community council (using new Government regulations).

## Reason For Setting Up A New Council:

Community organisers believe that a Holborn Community Council will improve local democracy, giving residents more powers in determining what is right for their area at a time when the area is facing substantial growth. A community council would also allow the Holborn community to better administer its assets and tailor services to meet its needs, improving the socio-economic wellbeing of its residents. The main advantage to Holborn residents would be that the parish council could lead and manage the new Neighbourhood Plan (once this is secured past referendum stage). This would mean that residents were represented by a democratically elected and hyper-local body defending their interests on planning and related issues (both in dealings with Camden Council as the local planning authority and otherwise).

Residents at three public meetings in late 2015 organised by the Community Association expressed a clear interest in a parish council having a strong role in the local economy of Holborn. They were supportive of raising a precept (the parish form of council tax) and this being spent on local priorities such as street-lighting. Residents were also keen to pursue (in the medium term) once the parish council had been established after the Neighbourhood

Plan had been adopted – the parish council deriving 25% of receipts from the Community Infrastructure Levy. The Community Infrastructure Levy is a form of tax a developer pays to a planning authority to invest in community infrastructure when it is engaging in a large development. A new Holborn Community Council could then consult residents about how to spend these monies – ploughing them back into the community (this could be on any local asset ranging from bus shelters to war memorials which the parish council had the legal power to manage).

Further goals for a community council will be shaped during the process of setting up and delivering a neighbourhood plan through which residents and other stakeholders will have a chance to express their views on the changes needed in their community.

Holborn is a thriving area in central London with a large student and business population and a new community council will have powers to look after street-lighting, bus shelters, war memorials and grass verges / open spaces which Camden Council (with a shrinking budget) will struggle to retain. Residents at the three public meetings funded by grants from the NALC / DCLG New Councils' Programme in 2014-15 showed a definite interest in these service delivery and asset management powers for their area.

## **Metropolitan Borough of Holborn Ward Map (1952)**



Above: Map of the Metropolitan Borough of Holborn (1952) and its wards.

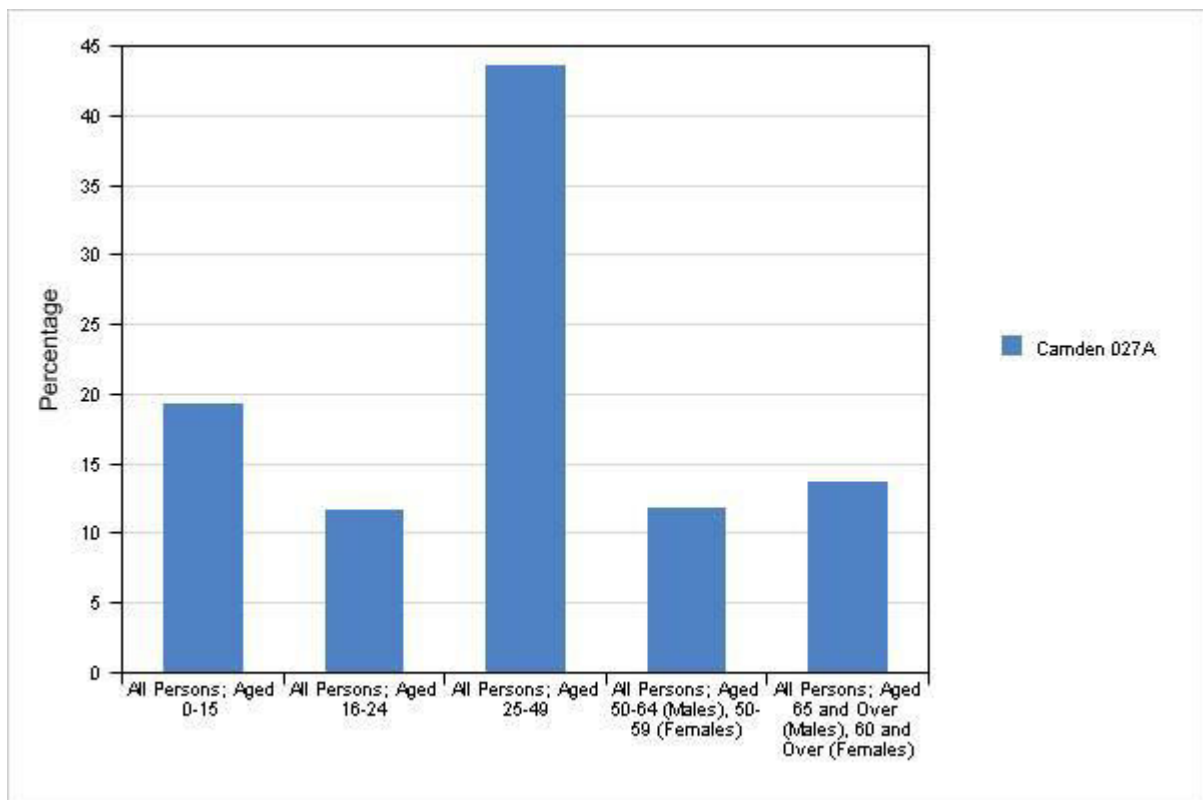
### **Background:**

Holborn is an area of central London, currently administered by the Borough of Camden. The population of Holborn is 13,000 approximately. As with many areas of central London, Holborn scores high on the living environment deprivation index, being ranked 16,853 out of

the 32,844 neighbourhoods in England according to the Index of Multiple Deprivation (Department for Communities and Local Government, 2015).

There is only 2.2sqm of public green space per capita in the neighbourhood. Post-war damage led to the development of several substantial social housing estates, and this is still the clear majority of local housing. There are few places where such development sits as closely with luxury flats and major businesses. Four Lower super output areas in the area fall within the 10% most deprived in England. 48.2% of people over 65 live alone (approximately 10% of households). 42.1% of children live in poverty and 73.5% of children are in the children's social care system.

Nevertheless, the area also has a significant population of professionals, predominantly in the 25-49 age band and there are nearly 100,000 individuals working in the wider area, bringing significant skills and experience with them.



Above; A histogram showing the percentage of people in each age band, based on 2011 data from the Office of National Statistics (the above figures relate to Camden residents and not specifically to Holborn).

## Who Are The Key Partners / Stakeholders Involved?:

The original driver behind the campaign for a Holborn Community Council is HCA, being supported by the National Association of Local Councils. Having received a grant under the Department for Communities and Local Government New Councils' Programme, Holborn community organisers hosted public meetings to promote the initiative, making sure that the right information was available to residents. In the coming months, the Holborn campaign will be closely liaising with Camden Council to establish a Neighbourhood Forum to develop a Neighbourhood Plan, providing the basis on which to progress with the Community Governance Review. This is a multi-year community-led plan with engagement at all stages.

Residents felt at the end of the three 2015 public campaign meetings that establishing a Neighbourhood Forum first to deliver a Neighbourhood Plan would achieve three things – it would create a natural long term campaign group for a community council after the Neighbourhood Plan had passed referendum stage; it would create the foundation for much of the work on planning and related issues to be undertaken by the new community council; and many Forum members could then stand for election to the community council. A community council with parish status will give Holborn residents a permanent voice whereas most Neighbourhood Forums currently have a shelf life of five years only.

## Progress With Campaign To Date:



Above: Exploring what Holborn residents want for their community at one of the three public meetings organised in Holborn late in 2015.

HCA started by organising door to door visits and public meetings to explore resident issues and whether there was enough support to establish a community council in Holborn. It was

recognised by HCA early on that many of the powers held by parish councils could deliver services to answer some of the social, economic and environmental concerns of residents. So it was natural for HCA to employ its Community Organiser to elicit both the community needs of residents and views on whether a community council was a potential solution to those problems – in the same door-knocking exercise.

With the help of volunteers and public meetings, information about a Holborn community council continues to spread in the local community. Residents have already expressed their preference for creating a community council not only during the public meetings but also through visits to nearly 300 residents at their homes. Such door to door engagement was undertaken by the Holborn Community Organiser during 2014 and 2015 and additional questions were asked of residents about the desirability of a community council and the services one could deliver.

Nevertheless, as a neighbourhood plan is a pressing issue for the Holborn community in times of rapid change Residents decided to establish a neighbourhood forum first, triggering a Community Governance Review (the process by which a new parish council is created) after the neighbourhood plan referendum (by making a Community Governance Application to Camden Council). This will also ensure there is a strong organisational basis, and more time to explore with Camden Council what the implications of creating a new Holborn Community Council are to all stakeholders, as Camden Council has a positive experience of Neighbourhood Planning, but not yet of community councils.

It was recognised after the three public meetings late in 2015 that a Neighbourhood Plan would only address some of the concerns of residents (on planning and development matters) for the area. But this was enough of an incentive for residents to campaign for now and it was agreed that the types of additional service and asset to be managed and delivered by a later Holborn Community Council could be elicited from ongoing neighbourhood engagement by the Neighbourhood Forum in due course.

#### **How Have Issues / Challenges Been Overcome?:**

Community organisers were worried due to the modest attendance at the first public meeting despite the positive response on the doorstep. Fortunately, residents' attendance increased gradually at the next two public meetings. With the help of volunteers the information about new powers and the need to engage continues to be discussed in the community. Advertising the meetings through leafleting as well as encouraging the first attendees to bring someone along to the next meeting worked well in encouraging more residents to attend the meetings. In addition, organising the meetings in the evening after working hours also encouraged attendance, given that many residents are professionals.

Another challenge encountered by the campaign was that although many people were supportive of its goal, not many people agreed to volunteer their time to progress the actions agreed during the public meetings. This is one of the reasons why it was felt that formalising boundaries and creating a Neighbourhood Forum first (with a formal membership) would help strengthen the community council campaign process. This is because in many areas Neighbourhood Forums who first deliver a Neighbourhood Plan – later campaign to have parish councils – and they want to sustain the life and delivery span of the Plan through the creation of a permanent and elected local body (a parish council) – so they are more committed at a later point – to campaigning for the parish council, and the Forum provides a natural campaign group for this.

This is one of the main challenges that campaign leaders need to address in the months to come. Without a dedicated community organiser and support for facilitation of meetings it would have been difficult to mobilise people to take their interest to the next level. Volunteering is key, but so is support to make it easy for people to become involved. This is why a Neighbourhood Forum in Holborn is needed first.

### Learning From The Campaign:

The main feedback from the extensive programme of door to door visits undertaken by the Community Organiser in Holborn during much of 2015 revealed that residents wanted more of a say in planning matters; a mechanism was needed to derive more income for the community from development; and not enough was seen or heard from ward councillors and Camden Council in the area in general (i.e. there was not enough engagement of residents by Camden Council). This learning was borne out in the three public campaign meetings held at the end of 2015.

The campaign group decided to engage more closely with Camden Council and ward councillors (who seemed to be promoting their own agenda on the Community Infrastructure Levy during the public meetings) to find more common ground and work together for the benefit of Holborn residents. It was universally agreed that the timings of certain campaign activities would be more or less effective at certain points during the campaign; but it was agreed that the new Neighbourhood Forum should engage with all stakeholders at this early stage including all residents and Camden Council – so that the campaign was flexible, responsive to local need and joined-up. The Holborn campaign group is seeking advice and guidance from the National Association of Local Councils and the only other parish council in London currently (Queens Park Community Council) – which the campaign group regard as critical.

Lukas Lehmann, campaign champion: *“We have learnt that when people are dedicated and passionate enough about making their community a better place to live to get involved, they*

*can find time even in busy lives. Our volunteers have been really inspiring, becoming community leaders and getting things done: helping write the Neighbourhood Forum Constitution, creating a website and carrying out conversations for a boundary survey and helping with outreach, organising meetings, reaching people at community festivals, and door to door visits. Not forgetting our skilled facilitator, Angela Koch from Imagine Places, who is supporting our public meetings, sharing experience from other areas (including linking us to experts e.g. from Queen's Park) and much more. Our current focus is to formalise our membership, boundaries and processes, and to make sure we engage all of the community including, e.g. businesses."*

### **What Have Been The Key Elements Of Success?:**

The success the campaign group has achieved can be summarised as below:

- Several hundred local people have been engaged;
- A draft Neighbourhood Forum Constitution Application has been completed and this hopefully will be finalised soon;
- A Holborn Neighbourhood Plan web-site is currently being developed;
- A draft online survey has been completed to involve more people and seek their views;
- A membership form is being created for people to sign up to the Neighbourhood Forum; &
- A draft proposal boundary map has been created to show Camden Council the proposed Holborn Neighbourhood boundary.

Once these are agreed an Annual General Meeting for the Neighbourhood Forum will take place and the Forum will officially register with Camden Council.

### **What has been learnt? Campaign Lessons to Share With Others:**

Setting up a community council is a long-term project. As the Holborn campaign has shown, it takes a lot of dedication and hard work to gain the necessary support from the local community. Therefore, campaigners need to pace their campaign based on the resources and the support that are available to them locally.

Residents plan to see through a full Neighbourhood Plan for Holborn first past referendum stage and then to use the new *Making It Easier* regulations to make a Community Governance application to Camden Council to trigger the review needed to create a Holborn Community Council.





The next six to twelve months will see the campaign group submit its Community Governance Application to Camden Council, secure a Neighbourhood Plan past referendum stage, launch its Neighbourhood Plan web-site, launch and complete its online resident survey, issue its Neighbourhood Forum membership form, and finalise its parish council boundary map. The group is confident of success soon after that period.

**Who Can I Contact?:**

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**Other Information:**

***To see template resources such as a media release, leaflet and poster, please click here:***  
<http://www.nalc.gov.uk/our-work/create-a-council> .

***To see case studies from other areas campaigning to set up new parish councils please click here*** <http://www.nalc.gov.uk/our-work/create-a-council> .

***Create A Council -*** <http://www.nalc.gov.uk/our-work/create-a-council> .

***Power To The People resource -*** <http://www.nalc.gov.uk/publications> .

***Holborn Community Association –*** [www.holborncommunity.co.uk](http://www.holborncommunity.co.uk) .

***Camden Council –*** [www.camden.gov.uk](http://www.camden.gov.uk) .

***Holborn Neighbourhood Forum -*** <http://www.holbornforum.org.uk/> .



**Welwyn Garden City Council: How A Petition Was Opened To Parish Welwyn  
Garden City, Hertfordshire**

### Headlines:

- Welwyn Garden City is part of the Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council, in the centre of Hertfordshire.
- The case study tells the story of how the Welwyn Garden City campaign group opened a petition to trigger a Community Governance Review (the process through which a parish council is created).
- The case study outlines the progress of the campaign, highlighting some of the institutional challenges that the campaign has encountered.
- Currently, the petition has gathered over half of the signatures required. In spite of this, due to opposition from a local membership body, the campaign has been struggling for some time now to get the minimum number of signatures required before it can be submitted to the Borough Council.
- Campaign leaders had to make the difficult decision that unless something is going to change, they will have to stop campaigning for the time being.

### Why A Council Is Wanted:

Welwyn Garden City is the only community within its borough that does not have its own local (parish or town) council. This means that the Welwyn community is under-represented in local government, with every decision about the town being taken by the Borough Council. The campaigners believe that the creation of a parish council will ensure residents of Welwyn Garden City are better represented, putting them in control of important community decisions and developments.

With parish councils being the cornerstone of the Government's localism programme, having the opportunity to take over more powers as part of the devolution agenda, campaign organisers consider the creation of a parish council would improve the economic, social and environmental well-being of the garden city. They would like to see the town council managing services, attracting more visitors and footfall by promoting the town's history and facilities, organising public festivities and lobbying on behalf of the residents on relevant Borough Council and County Council Committees. In a poll conducted by a local newspaper asking residents whether they feel they would benefit from the establishment of a local council, more than an overwhelming 50% of participants voted 'yes'.

In addition, Welwyn Garden City residents would like to develop and deliver a Neighbourhood Plan through the parish council. Residents want to take more control over planning and reduce the risk of fragmentation, as well as regenerate the town centre. In the absence of a parish council, the Town Centre Partnership has tried to manage the town

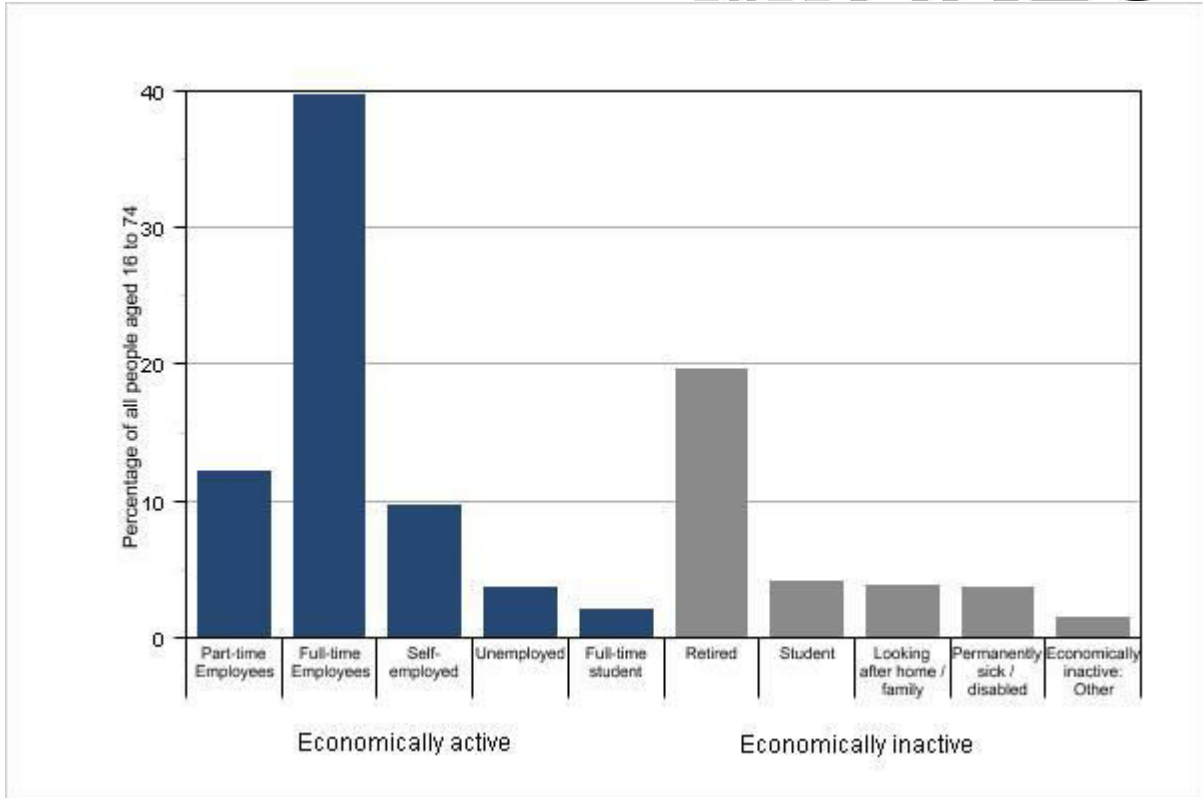
centre, however, with limited success. Campaign leaders believe that a parish council is much better suited for this role, as its budget would allow it to undertake one-off projects such as the renovation of the 'poster booths', as well as coordinate bigger initiatives such as the 'Supermarket Levy'. Nevertheless, the parish council could support the Town Centre Partnership in their bid to create a Business Improvement District (BID). It could also take on the management of public buildings such as the proposed Three Magnets Centre, and run these as a business from which the community profits.

### **Campaign Demographics:**

The town of Welwyn Garden City is part of the Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council area in Hertfordshire, with an electorate of 36,000. Envisioned by social reformer and town planning pioneer Sir Ebenezer Howard, Welwyn Garden City has developed into an international business centre, being Britain's second 'garden city'. The town's housing stock, neighbourhood shopping and green spaces were transferred to Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council in 1983.



*Above: The Parkway Fountain, Welwyn Garden City.*



Above: Economic activity in Welwyn Garden City based on March 2011 data from the Office of National Statistics.

Welwyn scores below the national average in the Indices of Deprivation, being ranked 19,031 out of 32,844 English neighbourhoods, where the most deprived neighbourhood has a rank of 1 (Department for Communities and Local Government, 2015). The average weekly household income has been estimated by the Office of National Statistics in 2008 at £860. This compares with £700 for the East of England region.



### Who Are The Key Partners / Stakeholders Involved?:

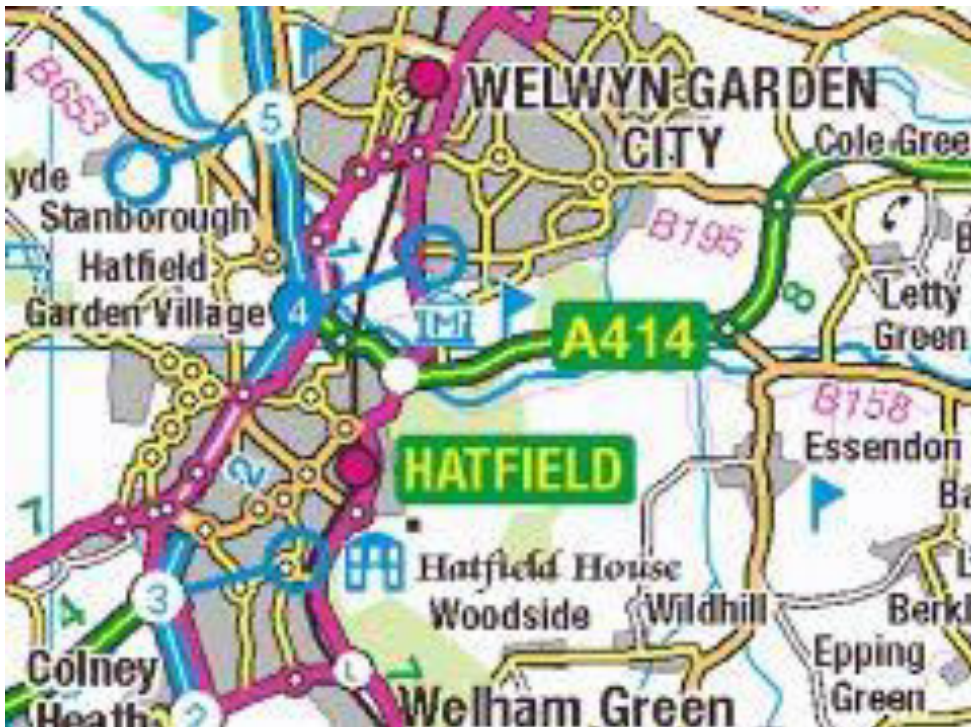
The campaign for the establishment of a Welwyn Garden City Council has been led by “Welwyn Garden City For Fs” (WGC4us) community group. The campaign organisers have been working closely with the Hertfordshire Association of Parish and Town Councils, as well as the National Association of Local Councils (NALC). WGC4us has also been liaising with Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council on matters related to triggering a community governance review (by submitting to it a valid petition). In addition, the WGC4us campaign has received the support of the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG), being awarded a grant under the New Councils’ Programme. This grant was used to pay for campaign newsletters, a campaign web-site (<http://www.wgc4us.org.uk/>) and leaflets, as well as public meetings.

### Progress With Campaign To Date:

In 2014, having received a grant from the Department for Communities and Local Government, WGC4us launched the campaign in earnest by opening a petition to request that Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council conducts a Community Governance Review of the area. Over the spring and summer of that year, the campaign group used some of the campaign monies to mass mail 21,000 households in the town to raise campaign awareness. This mailing was huge and was delivered by the Royal Mail to almost all households in the town. This mailshot was planned and had been included on the campaign plan approved by NALC before grant monies had been disbursed to WGC4us.

The campaign has been promoting the creation of a town council through information sent to households, a comprehensive website, as well as street canvassing and media coverage in the local paper. The petition is more than halfway to reaching the required number of signatures that will allow WGC4us to formally submit their request.

Unfortunately, due to opposition from a local membership body, which has actively worked against the WGC4us campaign, campaign leaders have been struggling to collect the minimum number of signatures required to trigger a Community Governance Review. As this has been going on for some time now, the campaign leaders had to make the difficult decision that unless something changes over the next couple of months, they will have to stop their campaign. The membership body’s opposition is sourced from an overlap between some of the activities the body carry out that traditionally a parish council would undertake



Above: Map of Welwyn Garden City area.

### How Have Issues / Challenges Been Overcome?:

Campaign leaders have successfully defended the importance of creating a parish council by pointing out that it has much more to offer than a membership organisation which has neither powers nor a democratic mandate. A parish council would give the Welwyn community power to take control of local services, either by taking over delivery or through closer scrutiny, transparency, and ensuring residents get value for money. It would also give residents a say in planning decisions, and, more generally, in all aspects that affect their local community. The residents of Welwyn Garden City need a body that will represent their interests as a community, as opposed to an organisation that will only represent its members.

As well as the support from DCLG, NALC and the Hertfordshire Association of Local Councils, the campaign received tremendous support from local media coverage where regular press releases on updates of the campaign were shared. On several occasions, local media reporters came to the campaign asking for such updates; having the local media positive about the creation of the council was something which helped the campaign greatly in its efforts to combat negative publicity by the local membership body.

Local residents were also extremely supportive of the campaign, with a direct mailing to signatories which urged them to encourage family, friends and neighbours to sign the electronic petition or a hard copy; with an attached petition in the mailing and a link made



available in the electronic mailing for those who signed the e-petition. The campaign found this method extremely effective as it helped emphasise the aim of the local council; bringing communities together and putting residents in control of a key decision.

In spite of this, the negative publicity from the membership-only society opposing the campaign, as well as the limited resources available, have had a negative affect on the campaign, namely due to the principal authority not accepting the electronic signatures that the campaign groups gathered, of great disappointment to the residents and individuals who worked tirelessly on the campaign.

Carina Helmn, County Officer at Hertfordshire Association of Parish and Town Councils:

*“The task for the Welwyn Garden City campaign group was enormous given the large size of the electorate. From the start we knew that gathering the signatures required to trigger a Community Governance Review was going to be a challenging task, especially since the principal authority made it clear that it would not accept electronic signatures. I know other campaigns across England had the same problem as well. I wish principal authorities would be more receptive to this new form of petitioning. Today you can do almost everything online – having the possibility to gather signatures through an online petition would make it a lot easier for campaigners to reach residents and collect the required signatures.”*

### **Learning From The Campaign:**

Campaign leaders have made the right decision to halt campaign activities unless local attitudes change. Leading a campaign where there is limited local support can be a very lengthy and resource-consuming process.

However, this is not unusual as there was a similar conflict in Letchworth Garden City some years ago between a local heritage body and the City Council there at the time. The lessons learnt from this campaign have been to work with such heritage membership bodies from the outset – on both the timing of and types of campaign run – to at least neutralise early opposition where it can be found.

Anthony Fisher, campaign champion talks about what lessons he learned from the campaign, that may be useful to others looking to create parish councils in their areas: *“I don’t think that our campaign group has made any great mistake, though we have learnt some lessons along the way, in what has been a principled campaign. When we started, we were new – unlike the Welwyn Garden City Society [the membership body that posed challenges for the campaign], we did not have an established profile within the community and therefore, people were circumspect. I know that other campaign groups have opted to be under the umbrella of a civic society – I would definitely recommend this as an already established group is usually well known to residents and has the capability to engage with the community. Unfortunately, we did not have this option – the Welwyn Garden City Society has been and continues to be opposed to the creation of a city council.*





*I also believe that having a good team is essential: the bigger the electorate, the bigger the team you are going to need to service the electorate. Welwyn Garden City has an electorate of 36,000 and from the beginning we knew that collecting the minimum required signatures was going to be challenging. The campaign group got off to an excellent start with a good number of residents showing interest in getting actively involved in the campaign; however, the number of volunteers has dropped over time and now we are left with a handful of people.*

*Perhaps this has to do with the general apathy of the electorate. People are busy and the little time they have, they would rather spend in ways other than campaigning. Nonetheless, campaigning itself – collecting signatures, door knocking, canvassing etc. – may not be everyone’s cup of tea. I was disappointed when one resident asked why we wanted more bureaucracy. I told him we want more democracy not more bureaucracy. We want better representation, and for the community to be able to take control of the place where they live, it's their town. The borough council works within its borough remit, but in my view this is undoubtedly holding our town back.*

*I respect the borough, but love the town. Welwyn Garden City is a beautiful place and has so much untapped potential. The town needs a body that can maximise its potential and make the most of the Garden City's rich heritage. I believe this is the role for a City Council and not the borough council, whose main purpose is to manage the borough and not every individual area. I hope that over time, residents will come to see this the same way.*

*Both the National Association of Local Councils and the Hertfordshire Association of Parish and Town Councils agree that campaign leaders have done everything within their power to lead a successful campaign. Had the same campaign been led under different circumstances, without doubt, it would have been successful. Unfortunately, some elements are beyond our control. Perhaps in a few years’ time Welwyn Garden City will be ready to have its own city council.”*

### **How Was Progress Made So Far?:**

The Welwyn Garden City campaign prides itself with a group of dedicated volunteers who have worked hard to keep the campaign going. Together they have promoted the benefits of having a parish council, talking to residents, sending information to households, putting together a comprehensive website and actively engaging with the opposing membership-only society in local media.

Although the campaign might not reach its goal, WGC4us volunteers have raised awareness in their local community that could have more say about the issues affecting their community and be better represented in local government, should they decide to support the creation of a parish council.

### **Campaign Lessons To Share With Others:**

When starting a campaign to set up a local council campaigners should be prepared to face some opposition. The WGC4us campaign provides a good example of tactfully dealing with opposition in a public debate. The campaign group has defended its position through the local newspaper, the *Welwyn Hatfield Times*, by stating the advantages that the creation of the city council would bring to the area. As stated by the campaigners, local councils are the backbone of democracy and no other body can take their place in representing the residents of the area, given the democratic mandate that local councils hold as elected public bodies.

Carina Helmn, County Officer at the Hertfordshire Association of Parish and Town Councils: *“What every new campaign should realise is that the process of establishing a town or parish council requires sustained effort from volunteers over a long period of time. Volunteers have no obligation to support the campaign from beginning to end and many of them will drop out along the way. The challenge is to identify what brings volunteers together, what feeds their enthusiasm, and to keep momentum going.”*

### **Who Can I Contact?:**

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### **Other Information:**

More information on creating a Council: The NALC ‘Create a Council’ web page:

<http://www.nalc.gov.uk/our-work/create-a-council> .

To see template resources such as a media release, leaflet and poster, please click here:

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**Create A Council - <http://www.nalc.gov.uk/our-work/create-a-council> .**

**Power to the People resource - <http://www.nalc.gov.uk/publications> .**

**Welwyn Garden City for us campaign - <http://www.wgc4us.org.uk/> .**

**Hertfordshire Association of Parish and Town Councils -**

<http://www.haptc.org.uk/contact-and-find-us.html> .



**Thornton Community Council: Petitioning For A New Parish Council in  
Thornton, Yorkshire**



### Headlines:

- The village of Thornton is located in the city of Bradford, in the county of West Yorkshire.
- This case study outlines how the Thornton campaign group responded to feedback from the National and Yorkshire Associations of Local Councils in late 2015 and developed a strong campaign plan which was aimed at leading to submission of a campaign petition for a new Thornton Community Council to Bradford Metropolitan District Council (BMDC).
- The story is told of how issues between the Thornton campaign group and BMDC were overcome by building relationships, communicating regularly and following campaign advice from the Yorkshire and National Associations of Local Councils.
- Currently the Thornton campaign group is finalising the numbers of signatures on its petition to ensure that the relevant threshold for submission is met pre-submission at Bradford Council (which is not accepting an e-petition from the campaign group).
- The lessons learnt so far from this campaign are that it is important to focus and have a clear and sustainable campaign plan from the start of the process of gathering petitionary signatures, working around the needs of a principal local authority where an e-petition will not be accepted.

### Why a Council is Wanted:

The campaign for a Thornton Community Council was funded by the National Association of Local Councils and the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) in 2014-15 as part of their New Councils' Programme. Currently Thornton's campaign has opened a petition to gather signatures from local government electors in its prospective parish council area - in order to then trigger the relevant Community Governance Review (the process through which a parish council is created). Depending on the population size of an area there are different thresholds of signatures required by a campaign group to obtain on a petition before such a petition can be submitted. The electorate of Thornton is about 13,700 so the campaign group will need to secure at least 1000 signatures on its hard copy petition.

Residents in Thornton wanted a new community council to give its area a stronger voice for and also to deliver new funding from the Community Infrastructure Levy which would enhance services residents wanted (the Community Infrastructure Levy [CIL] is a fee agreed between a developer, a community and a planning authority with a CIL scheme – which the developer agrees to pay when it undertakes a large development – to benefit the community the development is taking place in).



Clive Richardson, Vice Chair of the Thornton campaign group:

*“Community Infrastructure Levy is topical as we’ve learnt Bradford Council holds over £140,000 in section 106 monies, for the ward, in part dating back to 2007. Thornton makes up 42% of the ward by population. Also Thornton is due to get 700 new houses in the next 13 years. We very much want a parish council for Thornton to drive some new income for resident based services for the area moving forward”.*

Thornton residents wanted to work with Bradford Council in their dealings as a village – but to derive their own public income to spend on projects important to Thornton residents – based on strategic decisions made on behalf of only Thornton residents – by an accountable body elected to do this. This was within the gift of a Thornton Community Council. Parish councils are statutory, and almost always permanent, democratically elected bodies – so this added to the existing attraction of the model to Thornton’s residents.

*“A Thornton Parish Council will give residents many advantages they do not currently enjoy. One of our campaign newsletters concentrated on recreation, open spaces, litter, cleansing, sport, and the environment in line with potential running down of these services by Bradford Council in its 2016-17 budgets.”*

– Clive Richardson,  
Vice Chairman, Thornton Campaign Group.

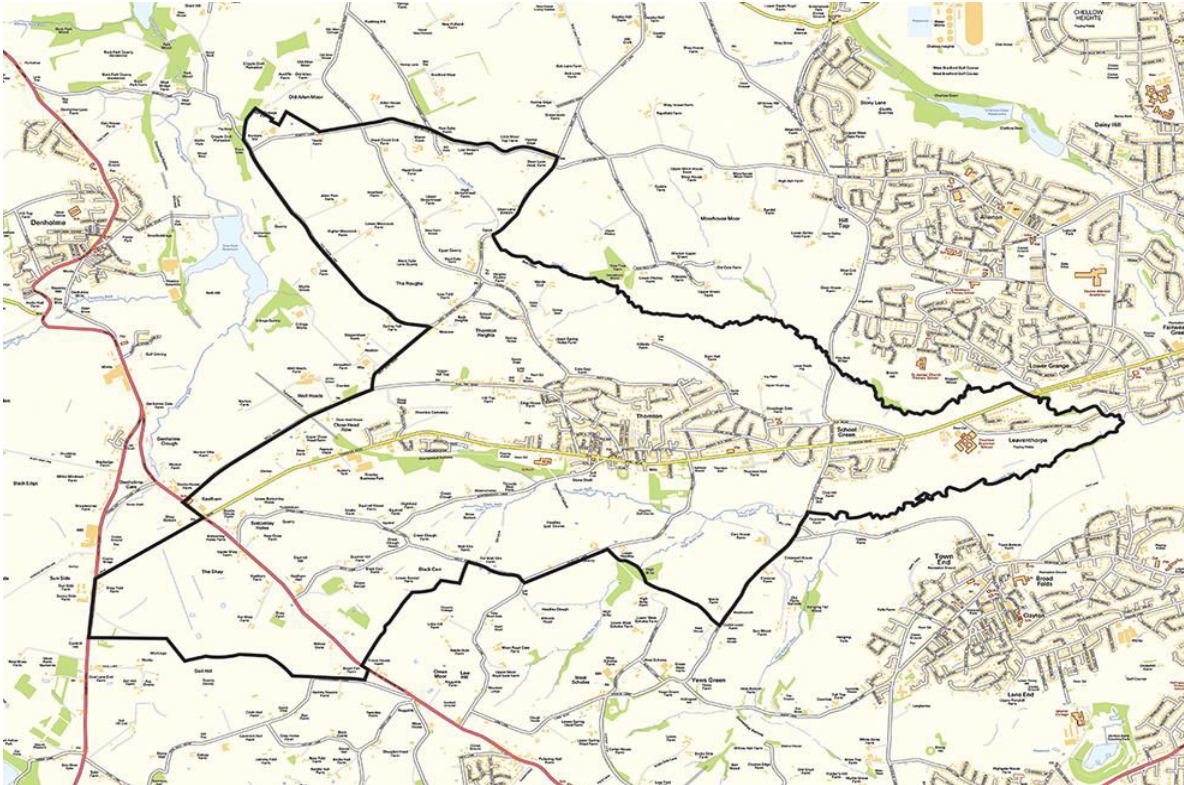
At three public meetings in 2015 it became clear that residents were broadly supportive of creating a Thornton Community Council. They were attracted to the idea of the Community Council’s powers to create a Neighbourhood Plan, support local groups through grants and publicity, develop tourism and regeneration strategies – and deliver them, create health and well-being initiatives, run public assets, organise community transport schemes, fund Christmas lights, take on and manage markets, and establish a community energy scheme, and set up and manage an up to date village website detailing activities and issues in the community.

### **Generating Campaign Support:**

Once the Thornton campaign group has gathered the 1000+ signatures on its campaign petition it will submit the petition to Bradford Council. The petition will then be vetted and if the relevant number of acceptable signatures have been obtained, the green light will be given for a Community Governance Review (the process through which Bradford Council will decide whether to create Thornton Community Council or not). Recently, permission was given by Bradford Council for the creation of a new parish council in Bingley.

The campaign group in Thornton has always focussed on using every opportunity available to secure more signatures on its hard copy petition. It created a web-site (details at the end of this document) to publicise 3 public meetings in 2015 where residents could hear the benefits of a Thornton Community Council and then sign the petition. It used the web-site

to clearly promote the benefits of creating a Thornton Community Council, the powers and duties of parish councils, how much a Thornton Community Council might cost residents and the intended geographical boundary of any new Thornton Community Council.



Above – map of the proposed Thornton Community Council boundary.

The campaign group also drew up a detailed campaign plan in mid-2015 which it implemented and will continue to implement to the end of the first campaign phase, when the hard copy petition is submitted. Leaflets were also distributed in June 2015 to all Thornton residents promoting three public meetings which took place later that year – in an effort to ensure enough foot-fall to sign the campaign petition at those events. So all campaign activity has centred around the web-site and leaflets driving residents to public meetings where the hard copy petition can be signed - and so far this has been effective.

### **Who Are The Key Partners Involved?:**

The main campaign group to create a new parish council in Thornton has been the Thornton Community Council Group. Without the Thornton Community Council Group there would simply have been no campaign to create a new parish council in the village since 2014-15. The Yorkshire Local Councils' Associations accessed Department of Communities and Local Government funding during 2015-16 from the National Association of Local Councils which helped to progress campaign activity with the production of newsletters and the holding of public meetings.



The National Association of Local Councils campaign-funded the Yorkshire Local Councils' Associations and the Thornton Community Council Group and it is fair to say that this funding was instrumental in both sustaining the gathering of signatures and helping to communicate the benefits of a parish council to Thornton residents.

### **What Are The Key Issues / Challenges?:**

The Thornton Community Council Group has effectively sustained the campaign to create a new community council in Thornton, as there have been some challenges to the campaign so far. It is the body which gathers the petitionary signatures and it will be the body which submits the final petition to Bradford Council. The Yorkshire Local Councils' Associations (YLCA) were seminal in advising the campaign group during every stage of the campaign. YLCA and the National Association of Local Councils both advised on technical issues around the gathering of petitionary signatures and codifying a campaign plan. This advice was listened to by the campaign group which is now implementing its blended approach of leafleting, holding public meetings and sustaining campaign momentum from its web-site (<http://www.thorntonccc.org.uk/>). Earlier in 2015 it had been clear that the campaign was losing momentum as there was no coherent campaign plan in place, despite effective campaign materials produced.

*“When Thornton Community Council Group wanted to apply for more grant monies from NALC later in 2015, both Associations felt there was a need for real focus and a campaign plan for the duration of the petitionary phase of the campaign and beyond. The group received a vital grant of £1000 which has achieved just that.”*

– Chris Pilkington, Yorkshire Local Councils' Associations

### **How Have The Issues / Challenges Been Overcome?:**

Thornton Community Campaign Group produced a focussed campaign plan in November, 2015 in its final funding bid to NALC for £1,000 of grant funding. Three newsletters were funded and the holding of two more public meetings for the campaign group to hold with residents. The monies as a result of the plan were awarded and the meetings and newsletters have helped greatly to promote the benefits of creating a new parish council in Thornton as well as to re-cast to residents what services could be sustained in the area as Bradford Council starts an ongoing programme of cuts.

The leaflets produced by the campaign group promoted the benefits of creating a Thornton Community Council and sign-posted residents to the relevant public meetings to sign the petition. The meetings were a very effective way of explaining to residents the powers and duties of parish councils and to elicit suggestions about the types of service and asset residents might want from Thornton Community Council (please see

<http://www.nalc.gov.uk/our-work/create-a-council> for templates of the type of leaflet the Thornton campaign group were adapting for this purpose).



Above: a leaflet promoting one of the public meetings in Thornton.

Of the 3 newsletters the first concentrated on some planning aspects of local councils – the need to be consulted, the Community Infrastructure Levy, and Neighbourhood Development Plans. The Community Infrastructure Levy proved topical at the public meetings as the campaign group learnt Bradford Council holds over £140,000 in section 106 monies for the Thornton ward, in part dating back to 2007. Thornton makes up 42% of the ward by population. Also Thornton is due to have 700 new houses built in the next 13 years, so there is a real opportunity to derive more community benefit from such monies for Thornton residents.

The second newsletter concentrated on recreation, open spaces, litter, cleansing, sport and the environment in line with potential running down of these services by Bradford Council in future budgets.

The third leaflet contained a summary of the benefits of creating new local councils. Accompanying was a letter stating that the campaign group would be calling at residents' homes on specified dates and times, such as morning or afternoon to ask residents to sign the campaign petition.



## **Outcomes – Learning From The Campaign:**

The Thornton campaign group have been using the £1,000 they were awarded by NALC in November 2015 to produce three newsletters based on:

- The Community Infrastructure Levy income which a parish council with a Neighbourhood Plan could yield in Thornton;
- Recreation, open spaces, litter, cleansing, sport, and the environment in line with potential running down of these services by Bradford Council in its future budgets; &
- More widely, on the benefits of creating a community council in Thornton.

Learning from the campaign was also shared with Thornton residents during two public meetings to March, 2016 and with YLCA, NALC and DCLG through the submission of quarterly campaign reports.



Above; The village of Thornton, West Yorkshire.

## **Campaign Strengths So Far:**

The Thornton Community Council Group and YLCA have both been successful in sustaining the campaign for a new parish council in Thornton during 2015 when there was at one point a slight malaise in resident interest. The key test will now be whether the campaign group can submit the petition with the relevant number of signatures needed and trigger the Community Governance Review required.

## **Campaign Lessons to Share With Others:**

Campaigners recognise that regular communication with Thornton residents through as any media platforms as possible is vital to the success of a campaign. Where there are access problems, such as loose dogs or flats without letter boxes - the Thornton campaign group has still undertaken to post the newsletters. In addition newsletters to isolated dwellings and most farms have been posted (Thornton is a semi-rural area).



Monitoring the endgame of submitting the hard copy petition has been and remains the top priority of the Thornton campaign group. Many campaigners work full time and due to the early lack of a coherent campaign plan the requisite number of signatures have not yet been obtained. However, the campaign group is still determined to complete a valid petition – especially since Bradford Council refused an e-petition – which now means that the hard copy petition is the only route for residents to pursue. This approach and continuous promotion of the benefits of a Thornton Community Council to residents will hopefully yield this campaign the positive results the campaign group deserves.

#### **Who Can I Contact?:**

**Campaign Champion: Christine Rowland 01274 833990 / 07941 030331 / [Cmrow13@gmail.com](mailto:Cmrow13@gmail.com) .**

**Chris Pilkington of YLCA: 01904 436622/ [Chris.Pilkington@yorkshirelca.gov.uk](mailto:Chris.Pilkington@yorkshirelca.gov.uk) .**

#### **Other Information:**

**More information on creating a Council: The NALC 'Create a Council' web page:  
<http://www.nalc.gov.uk/our-work/create-a-council> .**

**To see template resources such as a media release, leaflet and poster, please click here:  
<http://www.nalc.gov.uk/our-work/create-a-council> .**

**To see case studies from other areas campaigning to set up new parish councils please click here <http://www.nalc.gov.uk/our-work/create-a-council> .**

**The NALC 'Power to the People' resource:  
<http://www.nalc.gov.uk/publications> .**

**Thornton Community Council Group:  
<http://www.thorntonccc.org.uk/> .**

**Yorkshire Local Councils' Associations:  
[http://www.yorkshirelca.gov.uk/YLCA-Web/Welcome\\_3247.aspx](http://www.yorkshirelca.gov.uk/YLCA-Web/Welcome_3247.aspx) .**



## Case study on a Community Governance Review

### **AFFPUDDLE & TURNERSPUDDLE PARISH COUNCIL (DORSET)**

#### **The context**

This case study describes a Community Governance Review which considered two neighbouring parishes. Its outcome was to combine the parishes of Affpuddle and Turnerspuddle, removing the boundary between them. The new Affpuddle & Turnerspuddle Parish Council came into effect in 2010.

The population of the combined parish is no more than 450 and the former Turnerspuddle Parish had been particularly small. These two parishes had been jointly run as a 'grouped parish council' since 1954, under a Grouping Order made by Dorset County Council. There were nine Councillors, seven elected by Affpuddle and two elected by Turnerspuddle.

Their formal merger was proposed by some local councillors and residents once before, when Purbeck District Council consulted all of its local councils to ask about possible boundary changes. However, nothing further happened at that stage, because some of the changes put forward (elsewhere) were seen as contentious.

Affpuddle & Turnerspuddle is a very rural parish which lies in the north-west corner of the Purbeck District Council area. It could be described as a mix of woodland, heathland and water meadow. Despite the name, its largest settlement is the village of Briantspuddle. It contains the cottage which was the last home of Lawrence of Arabia, now managed by the National Trust, and the Bovington tank training area is nearby.

#### **What happened in the review**

The wish to see Affpuddle and Turnerspuddle parishes formally combined continued to be felt and at a more recent annual parish meeting a resolution was passed, which again asked for the creation of a single parish.

On a technical level, in terms of how the parish council was run, it could have been argued that such a merger would make little difference. However, the settlements along this river

valley held a common sense of identity and local councillors could point to their shared history. This included both parishes having been part of a model estate which was established in 1914 by the drapery entrepreneur, Sir Ernest Debenham.

Moreover, because the grouped council covered two parishes, seven of the nine Councillors had to be elected by Affpuddle and the other two had to be elected by Turnerspudde. This made little sense to local people and it felt like an unnecessary division within the council. How far did Councillors in one parish feel able to speak out about issues arising in the other?

*“It just seemed logical to get rid of this anomaly. We have always considered this community to be Affpuddle and Turnerspudde.”* – Parish Council Chairman

The result of this resolution was that Purbeck District Council agreed to a review of the arrangements. In doing so they had the support of their relevant Ward member. It is also notable that new legislation had just come into force, putting it within the gift of the District Council to undertake a Community Governance Review of the area and to implement any changes that were subsequently agreed.

*“With the 2007 Act the process is a lot more straightforward. The local authority could see no good reason not to remove it [the boundary], especially as it was straightforward to do.”* – Purbeck District Council officer

Conducting a review during 2009 also worked well in the sense that it didn't interfere with the usual cycle of parish elections. The next set of parish council elections were due to take place in 2010.

Terms of reference for the Review were drawn up by the District Council, in liaison with the Parish Clerk and the Ward member. These were approved by the District Council in January 2009 and published shortly after. Electors were given until April to make representations about the scope of the Review, though none were received (perhaps reflecting the straightforward nature of the issue).

In June 2009 Purbeck District Council then approved a set of draft proposals for consultation. These were publicised on the Parish website, in the Parish magazine and through locally posted notices. The relevant interested parties were also contacted.

**Draft proposals:** these recommended that an Order be made to:

- Remove the internal boundary between the parishes, so as to create a single Parish of Affpuddle & Turnerspudde;
- Create a single Parish Council of 9 members for the reorganised parish, to be elected initially on 6<sup>th</sup> May 2010; and

- Revoke the County of Dorset (Parishes of Affpiddle and Tonerspiddle) Grouping Order 1954 (sic).

Again there were no formal comments sent in by local residents. None of the main organisations involved were particularly surprised by this. The planned change no doubt appeared to be a technicality. However, at the very least the District Council could feel confident there was no obvious opposition. Given that the proposals were backed by the grouped Parish Council and by their own Ward member, they had no hesitation in putting them to the Council in October 2009 as a final set of proposals for approval.

The Reorganisation Order, which gave effect to their approval, was issued in February 2010 to coincide with the announcement of local council precepts for the next financial year. There was no need for any interim arrangements; existing grouped Parish Councillors remained in their role until elections in May 2010 completed the process, by creating Councillors for the single parish of Affpuddle & Turnerspuddle.

There were no consequential issues arising from this Community Governance Review for related changes to District Ward or County Division boundaries.

## **Lessons from the review**

### **Timescale**

As Community Governance Reviews go, this can be seen as a very straightforward example. Given the right circumstances a Review can now be conducted with minimal bureaucracy and modest input from the main parties with an interest. It was a partial review (covering part of the principal local authority's area) to make a simple parish boundary change. It had the backing of all the main parties and was evidently uncontentious among local residents.

Nonetheless, it is notable that this Review process took approximately eleven months to conduct. Given the different stages of a Review, the need to fit key decisions around District Council meetings and the importance of offering local people a full consultation opportunity, it is unlikely that this timescale could have been greatly reduced.

### **Local councils sector involvement**

This Community Governance Review was very clearly managed and undertaken by Purbeck District Council, once the decision was taken to go-ahead with it. The level of involvement of the grouped Parish Council was modest, though there was liaison and they were kept well

informed of progress. This seems perfectly acceptable given that this particular case was so uncomplicated and given that the local council was content with its role.

*“It [the Review] was a long time coming, but very straightforward.”* – Parish Clerk

Dorset Association of Parish & Town Councils (the county association) was made aware of the Review and was contacted for its views. They take the view that if a Review is requested by a local council they are generally there to support that line. The principal local authority says that it would probably have turned to the county association for more guidance had this Review been a complicated one. The county association, for its part, can cite greater involvement in reviews elsewhere in Dorset where there were issues.

### **Principal local authority support**

One notable feature is that both officers and councillors at Purbeck District Council were supportive of the case for change put forward by the grouped Parish Council. The Review was greatly assisted by the fact that the District Councillor for Winfrith Ward (which includes Affpuddle & Turnerspuddle) had built up a strong working relationship with the Parish Council. The District Councillor regularly attended Parish Council meetings and was fully appraised of the local wish for a single parish. This meant there was an influential voice in favour when the case was discussed by Purbeck District Council at key decision-making points during the Review. Having such obvious backing from the relevant Ward Councillor smoothed the passage of the Review.

### **The importance of community identity**

This example also demonstrates the importance of communities’ own sense of place – something which tends to be more strongly felt in smaller settlements and which, in this instance, was a shared sense of place between neighbouring settlements. Both the geography and the history of the area contribute to its local identity. If this Review were looked at simply in technical terms it would be easy to dismiss it as ‘not worth the effort’, since the grouped Parish Council had been in operation for decades. However, it clearly mattered to local people and was something which they had been requesting over a period of time. It is to the credit of the principal local authority that it recognised this and took action.

## **Concluding comments**

Whilst modest, this Community Governance Review can be considered a success. The process went according to plan and it has addressed the issues that were of local concern. Merging (grouped) parishes also simplifies a couple of important procedural tasks for local

councils, since it removes the need to hold separate annual parish meetings and to show separate (parish) financial accounts.

*“We certainly now feel more of a united [parish] Council.”* – Parish Council chairman

In this case it can certainly be claimed that the 2007 legislation, which delegated Reviews to principal local authorities, was a prompt. A supportive principal local authority felt more obviously inclined to proceed with a Review because the process had become easier and was now placed within its powers to undertake.

As this was a straightforward example, it raises some interesting questions about the Community Governance Review process, which depend on local and pragmatic decisions. To what extent should local councils expect to be involved in a review of their area? How simple and rapid can the review process be made, whilst sticking within the legislation (and the spirit of central government guidance)? In particular, how formally and how often do local residents need to be consulted when the issues are so basic?

*Community website sponsored by Affpuddle & Turnerspuddle Parish Council:*

[www.briantspuddle.info](http://www.briantspuddle.info)

*Affpuddle & Turnerspuddle Parish Council page on the ‘Dorset for you’ website:*

<http://www.dorsetforyou.com/388970>

***This document was written for the National Association of Local Councils (NALC) by Brian Wilson Associates and David Atkinson Consulting.***

*Particular thanks are due to Affpuddle & Turnerspuddle Parish Council, Purbeck District Council and the Dorset Association of Parish & Town Councils for their timely input to this case study. It should be noted that this document does not necessarily represent their views and any errors are the author’s.*

**May 2011**



## Case study on a Community Governance Review

### HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL (CAMBRIDGESHIRE)

#### The context

This case study describes a Community Governance Review which considered all the parish boundaries in the district of Huntingdonshire. Its outcome was to make changes to a total of 28 local (town and parish) councils, including the abolition of two and the creation of four new ones. These changes came into effect in 2010.

A Review in Huntingdonshire was needed because the last full parish boundary review had taken place in 1980. It was known that changes to the infrastructure, together with the growth and movement of population, meant there were imbalances between parishes. Some boundaries were also anomalous or inconsistent, where they split land, settlements or properties. These needed re-aligning and adjusting.

Huntingdonshire retains a three-tier governance structure. It forms one of four districts in the county of Cambridgeshire and it is entirely parished. In total, there are 84 local councils in the district, which include larger parishes for the main towns of Huntingdon, Ramsey, St Ives and St Neots.

The District had a population of 165,200 in 2008. Almost half of this is concentrated in the four market towns. Huntingdonshire covers an area of over approximately 350 square miles and a large proportion is rural, with village settlements providing the main focus for community facilities outside the market towns.

#### What happened in the review

This Review followed a previous electoral review that started in 2001 and completed in 2002, looking at all the ward boundaries in Huntingdonshire, reducing the number of wards from 34 to 29 and changing local council electoral arrangements.

However, there had not been a parish review for some time. The decision to hold one was made by Huntingdonshire District Council alone. It was not prompted by a petition or any



other external factors, though some parish councils had contacted the District Council about anomalous or illogical boundaries.

*“It had been over 20 years since the last full review and there had been a lot of changes to the district, so a new review of the parishes was needed.” –*

Huntingdonshire District Council

The Review formally began when the Terms of Reference were published in 2006. Because this was a full boundary review, covering all parishes in the district, every local council and the county association were contacted about participating in it. The Terms of Reference were advertised in local newspapers, in public buildings and on the District Council’s website.

Proposals were published later in 2006 and were underpinned by the District Council’s aim that governance should better reflect community identities. All parish councils, as well as groups and individuals who had expressed an interest in the Review, were sent the draft proposals for comment.

In total, 28 parishes were affected. The main changes can be summarised as follows:

<b>Abolition</b>	<b>Creation</b>	<b>Alteration</b>
The abolition of the two parishes of : <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Eynesbury Hardwicke;</li> <li>• St Neots Rural.</li> </ul>	The constitution of four new parishes of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hamerton and Steeple Gidding;</li> <li>• Offord Cluny and Offord D’Arcy;</li> <li>• Waresley-cum-Tetworth;</li> <li>• Wyton-on-the-Hill.</li> </ul>	Alterations were proposed to a further 22 parishes, involving the transfer of small parcels of land between adjacent parishes.

There was a healthy response to the draft proposals although, unsurprisingly, the largest responses came from the areas most affected by the proposed changes. This included the St Neots and Abbotsley parishes, which contained the main proposals for transfer.

There was one contentious boundary change between the parishes of Ramsey and Bury. This had to be revisited and revised because the initial proposal was objected to strongly by the residents of the affected properties.

Following the draft proposal stage, Huntingdonshire’s Elections Panel oversaw the production of a final set of proposals which were put before a meeting of the full council and agreed by it in December 2007.

However, by this stage the Local Government & Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 had

changed the system for reviewing local governance arrangements, delegating review decisions from central government to principal authorities. Transitional arrangements had been devised by the Department for Communities & Local Government (CLG) to deal with outstanding review recommendations submitted prior to the 2007 Act coming into force.

As a result the District Council was asked by CLG whether it wished their Secretary of State to implement its recommendations or would prefer to undertake this work itself. It asked the Secretary of State to implement the changes. CLG completed the process by issuing the Huntingdonshire (Parishes) Order in July 2009, which formally took effect on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2010.

## Lessons from the review

### Successful outcomes

The outcomes of this Review seem to have been universally welcomed. The county association, Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Association of Local Councils (CPALC), have commented that the decisions have led to fewer illogical and anomalous boundaries and that many parishes now better reflect the population patterns across the district. There is also evidence of a positive effect on local democracy.

*“The decision to split Wyton-on-the Hill away from the rest of Houghton & Wyton made a lot of sense. Wyton was almost a self-contained community around the RAF base and felt very different from the other parts of the parish down the hill. When both areas were part of one parish it was very difficult to recruit councillors for Wyton. Since the split Wyton has become very active and now lots of people have come forward to represent that area.” – Houghton & Wyton Parish Council*

### Timescale and new legislation

However, the Review actually took much longer than expected and Huntingdonshire District Council was involved in more sustained activity than it originally envisaged. The scale of the Review, in terms of the number of boundary alterations rather than the number of representations or contentious proposals, clearly had an impact on this. On the whole, the proposals were well received, but the number of changes meant there was a significant time investment needed to map and test the many detailed boundary amendments, as well as the merging and disaggregation of local councils into new ones.

In addition, and more significantly, the final parishes order was delayed because of the introduction of the 2007 Act and the repeal of the earlier legislation. The Huntingdonshire Review was effectively stuck in the middle and issues needed to be resolved about whether

or not the Order was signed by the Secretary of State; or, indeed, whether parts of the Review should be re-done to comply with new guidelines.

The combined effect on these factors on the Review process is a point emphasised by some of the local councils directly impacted by the review.

*“There was not much communication from Huntingdon soon after the decisions had been taken and there was some confusion about when the Order was to come into effect. The whole process seemed to take a long time.”* – Houghton & Wyton Parish Council

### **Value of the guidance**

Huntingdonshire District Council finds that the Community Governance Review guidance which accompanied the 2007 Act is reasonably helpful, though in reality it came too late to influence this Review. Instead, Huntingdonshire drew on earlier guidance and, in particular, on its own extensive experience of electoral reviews to ensure the process was a success.

### **Local councils sector involvement**

The county association, CPALC, was involved in the Review in only a minor way. Whilst it responded to the consultation and was broadly happy with the outcome, CPALC feels that the Review could have taken a more strategic approach to the parish boundaries in Huntingdonshire. CPALC argues that the draft proposals were more about ‘tidying up’ boundary problems and some limited action on mergers and disaggregation. Consequently, the consultation was felt to be presenting a developed set of proposals, rather than seeking views on what should happen.

*“From our perspective, the Review was a missed opportunity to both fundamentally review the make up of parish councils in the district, and to build better and stronger relationships with the local councils sector.”* – Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Association of Local Councils

## **Concluding comments**

The scale and timing of this Review meant that it was not straightforward. The process became subject to delays associated with the new legislation and, to a lesser extent, the number of changes proposed. Ironically, the introduction of a streamlined review process just happened to delay this particular Review.

There have been some minor issues (now resolved) about implementing the Order at local level – for instance, about dividing the finances and responsibility for assets from some of the disaggregated or abolished parishes. For Huntingdonshire District Council, there was also the sizeable task of managing the consequential electoral changes for each of the 28 local councils.

The outcomes of the review have been well received. Though there were some calls for a much more fundamental review, the clear consensus is that the boundaries of the local councils affected are now much more logical and practical, and the evidence is that they have improved local democracy.

*Huntingdonshire District Council parish review pages:*

<http://www.huntingdonshire.gov.uk/Councils%20and%20Democracy/Council/Pages/Parish%20Boundaries.aspx>

*Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Association of Local Councils:* <http://www.cpalc.org.uk/>

*Houghton & Wyton Parish Council website:* <http://www.houghtonwytonpc.org.uk/>

***This document was written for the National Association of Local Councils (NALC) by Brian Wilson Associates and David Atkinson Consulting.***

*Particular thanks are due to Huntingdonshire District Council, the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Association of Local Councils and Houghton & Wyton Parish Council. It should be noted that this document does not necessarily represent their views and any errors are the author's.*

**May 2011**



## Case study on a Community Governance Review

### LICKEY END PARISH COUNCIL (WORCESTERSHIRE)

#### The context

This case study describes a Community Governance Review undertaken by Bromsgrove District Council, the outcome of which was the abolition of Lickey End Parish Council. The former parish reverted to an unparished area from January 2011.

Historically, Lickey End was an unparished area in a mainly parished district. In November 1999 Lickey End residents held a public meeting at which the creation of a Parish Council was proposed. A consultation exercise took place in the following July where 61% of the electorate were in favour of a new parish and 38% were against, from a turnout of 38% of the total electorate of 2,159. Bromsgrove District Council concluded that there was insufficient support to justify the establishment of a new Parish. Nevertheless, following a petitioner's request, the Secretary of State gave support to the setting up of a Parish Council at Lickey End and so Bromsgrove District Council was required to recommend that the area be parished.

The parish is a small settlement north of Bromsgrove in the north-eastern part of Worcestershire. It comprises two wards, South Marlbrook and Lickey End, divided by the M42 motorway. The main population of the parish lives in the Lickey End ward, south of the motorway. It had consisted largely of ribbon development along the Old Birmingham Road until the completion of a larger development of housing in the 1990s.

#### What happened in the review

The decision to create the council was contentious. It was not supported by the principal authority and there was opposition by residents even at the time of vesting. The opposition was focused on the additional layer of bureaucracy and the possibility of double taxation through the precept. The first election for the new Parish Council took place in June 2001. Anti-parish council candidates stood against pro-council candidates for the 10 seats and won them all. Following this, Lickey End Parish Council submitted a formal request to Bromsgrove District Council for its own dissolution.

A consultation process began in July 2002 and a draft proposal was forwarded by the District Council to the Secretary of State in December, recommending that the parish should be abolished. That decision was delayed until after the elections in May 2003 (when the 10 anti-parish candidates were re-elected). Nevertheless, in September 2003 the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister rejected the District Council's recommendation on the grounds that there was no overwhelming support for abolition. It considered that the review showed support was quite evenly balanced, notwithstanding the fact that anti-parish council candidates had been elected twice.

In May 2007, 10 anti-parish candidates again stood for the 10 vacancies and were elected, this time unopposed.

*"I think that by 2007 the pro-council campaign was beginning to lose heart!"* – former Lickey End parish clerk

The Parish Council, consistent with its abolitionist stance, undertook only those duties that were required by legislation (essentially, holding four meetings per year) and did not develop services, plans or activities. Nor did it join the local County Association of Local Councils (CALC).

A further request was received from the Parish Council that Bromsgrove should review the Parish with a view to its abolition. By this time new legislation (the Local Government & Public Involvement in Health Act 2007) had delegated responsibility for Community Governance Reviews (CGRs) to principal authorities. So in November 2007, the Electoral Matters Committee of the District Council recommended that a review should be undertaken. The Review was confined to Lickey End, with no impact on any other parish councils or wards.

That Review began in April 2010, with full terms of reference agreed and published that June. It contained only one consultation question, "Should the present parish of Lickey End be abolished and the parish council be dissolved?"

*"We followed the CGR guidance, though we had been petitioned for abolition not creation, which is the more usual type of review undertaken."* – Bromsgrove District Council officer

The Review team in the Electoral Services Department produced a publicity leaflet, which was distributed to every local government elector in the parish. All parish, and relevant district and county councillors were consulted directly. The survey results showed a strong majority in favour of abolition:

Total responses	In favour of abolition	Against abolition
758	625 (82.4%)	120 (15.8%)
Electorate: 2,178; Turnout: 34.8% (includes 13 rejected responses)		

Worcestershire County Association of Local Councils (WCALC) was also consulted and kept informed of progress, though it didn't make a formal submission to the review because Lickey End Parish Council was not in membership. In fact, only one written submission was received, from the Lickey End County Councillor, who supported abolition.

Bromsgrove District's full council considered the findings of its Electoral Matters Committee in July 2010 and recommended that:

- The Parish of Lickey End be abolished; and
- Lickey End should not continue to have a parish council.

Final proposals were published in October 2010 with responses sought during the next month. None were received and the Lickey End Parish Council Dissolution/Abolition Order was made in December 2010. It came into effect on 1<sup>st</sup> January 2011. The two electoral wards which made up the former Lickey End Parish Council were returned to unparished areas. No boundaries were affected.

## Lessons from the review

### Change in legislation

Bromsgrove was able to take advantage of the change in legislation in 2007 which delegated responsibility for Community Governance Reviews to the principal authority. This put the decision-making tools in the hands of Bromsgrove and streamlined the review process. WCALC have argued that the legislation and subsequent guidance is flawed, because it does not build in independent scrutiny or provide for decisions to be challenged. The only option available would be a full judicial review. WCALC feel that this weakens the Review process.

### County association involvement

WCALC had no involvement at all in the process. This was not because they were not consulted, but because they had no locus to intervene. The Parish Council had never joined the county association. Indeed, the Council had not carried out any activities at all beyond the legal minimum requirement. The sole aim of the councillors was to abolish the Council.

For this reason, WCALC considered that its position was difficult. It actively promotes local

councils as examples of good democracy, community engagement and local action, but it could not point to Lickey End as an example of those things.

*“Lickey End was not an active council, so the community never had the opportunity to experience the difference a good council can make.” – Worcestershire County Association of Local Councils*

### **Community representation**

The District Council considered the effective and convenient community governance of Lickey End, as Community Governance Reviews are supposed to do. It concluded that: the area would continue to be effectively represented by two district councillors and two Worcestershire County Councillors; services were already effectively delivered to the area; and community cohesion would not be impacted upon. This view was supported by the opposition lobby, who argued that external pressures against the abolition campaign had actually brought many in the community together. High profile articles in support of parish councils, in for instance in the Guardian newspaper, had simply reinforced many residents’ desire to see the demise of the Parish Council.

### **Advice and support**

Putting on one side the contentious nature of Lickey End’s creation and subsequent abolition, it is accepted that the final Review was managed as a thorough and open process. Bromsgrove District Council sought advice from neighbouring councils on running a review, notably Telford & Wrekin Borough Council. It also approached authorities which were undertaking reviews to consider abolition (including Portsmouth City Council and Southsea Town Council). These contacts all proved to be useful.

### **Using the guidance**

The District Council found the Community Governance Review guidance, produced by the Department for Communities & Local Government and the Local Government Boundary Commission for England, to be useful and clear, though it had not been written with abolition in mind, so there were some gaps. But Bromsgrove was very clear that they needed an open and transparent process to resolve the issue, particularly as the Secretary of State had earlier rejected a request for abolition.

## **Concluding comments**

The vast majority of Reviews result in the creation of new or the amendment of existing



parishes. Abolition forms a very small minority of Review outcomes.

This case study highlights two different processes spanning the pre- and post-2007 legislative situations. It is notable that the review process moved faster under the post-2007 process of delegated Community Governance Reviews. However, it also appeared to make it simpler to abolish a local council.

There is one unresolved issue, which concerns the precept initially raised by the District Council for the incoming parish council, at its formation in 2000. The Parish Council refused to spend it (consistent with the mandate of its abolitionist councillors). This sum of £5,000 was returned to the District Council on abolition and a decision is still awaited about what to do with these public resources.

The final Review was thorough, completed in time and it adhered to the guidance. The outcome was also seen as a success by the main parties and the majority of residents. Even WCALC recognises that a parish council which does not want to do anything should not continue. Their regret is that a parish council was created which was not fully thought through and was never given a chance to act on behalf of its community.

Lickey End Parish Council website:

<http://www.bromsgrove.gov.uk/cms/council-and-democracy/elected-representatives/parish-and-town-councils/lickey-end-parish-council.aspx>

***This document was written for the National Association of Local Councils (NALC) by Brian Wilson Associates and David Atkinson Consulting.***

*Particular thanks are due to Bromsgrove District Council, the Worcestershire County Association of Local Councils and the former clerk of Lickey End Parish Council for their timely input to this case study. It should be noted that this document does not necessarily represent their views and any errors are the author's.*

**May 2011**



## Case study on a Community Governance Review

### **MORECAMBE TOWN COUNCIL (LANCASHIRE)**

#### **The context**

This case study describes a Community Governance Review which led to the creation of a new town council in a previously unparished area. Morecambe Town Council, in Lancashire, was formed in 2009.

During the major reorganisation of local government which took place in 1974 the municipal borough of Morecambe & Heysham was abolished and Morecambe became a part of the Lancaster City Council area. This was unpopular in some circles and there was one unsuccessful attempt to press for a town council towards the end of the 1990s.

The desire to win back some decision-making powers for the town did not go away. This was fed by Morecambe's declining fortunes, as its seaside tourism struggled. People started asking whether the City Council should be doing more to reverse the decline. In particular, there was a growing sense of unfairness and a view that Council Tax paid by Morecambe residents was not coming back into the town. A group called the Morecambe Bay Independents was formed, led by some Ward Councillors on the City Council.

Morecambe is a seaside town, with a population of about 45,000 (or 51,000 if the adjoining port of Heysham is included). Its promenade, from where there are panoramic views across Morecambe Bay, has recently undergone refurbishment. This included the erection of a statue to its most famous son, the late comedian Eric Morecambe.

#### **What happened in the review**

The campaign for a town council was started by the Morecambe Bay Independents group on the City Council, led then by Evelyn Archer who had lived in the town all her life.

A public meeting was called in the town hall and a fact sheet was produced to let people know what steps would have to be taken if the idea for a town council was to get off the

ground. Given local circumstances, considerable care was taken to make clear that this was not about breaking away from Lancaster City Council.

The next step was to define some geographical boundaries for the town council. Initially the campaigners thought it might cover the five Morecambe wards. However, at a second public meeting someone pointed out that part of an adjoining ward in Heysham was also unparished, so this was added to the proposed area.

City Councillors and campaigners set up a stall within the local shopping centre to collect signatures for a petition. They were there on-and-off for the best part of a year, until – with some additional signatures gathered on doorsteps – the threshold of 10% of local electors was passed. This included a good spread of signatories from across the wards. The petition was submitted to the City Council in January 2007.

It should be noted that all this happened at a time when decisions about creating new local councils still resided with central government. Following procedures of the time, Lancaster City Council invited and considered representations from local people about the town council proposals. As a result of the petition and representations it decided to lend its support and in April it submitted the petition to the Secretary of State for Communities & Local Government stating its backing.

*“It [the decision] hinged on the petition to be honest; that was what influenced the councillors.”* – Lancaster City Council officer

In July 2007 the City Council consulted local people about electoral arrangements. Proposals for there to be 26 town councillors – between 3 and 5 per Ward, depending on their population size – were then submitted to the Electoral Commission for its agreement.

It was at this stage that new legislation came into force (the Local Government & Public Involvement in Health Act 2007), altering the review process and delegating responsibility for such decisions from central to local government. In 2008 Lancaster City Council agreed to take back the case and to make the decision about Morecambe themselves. In doing so they were advised by central government to treat the earlier petition recommendations as if they were recommendations resulting from a Community Governance Review.

Things now moved quickly. At a meeting in December 2008 the City Council agreed, in principle, to the establishment of a Morecambe Town Council. A Working Group was formed from relevant Ward Councillors to consider an appropriate first year budget and precept. This proposed a budget of £220,000 – a sum designed to give the new local council scope to ‘add value’.

**Draft proposals:** in summary, they recommended that an Order be made to:

- Create a new local council, with 26 Councillors, for a parish of Morecambe;
- Hold parish elections in 2009, 2011 and then every four years;
- Divide the parish into six wards, each with a specified number of councillors; and
- Transfer some allotments from the City Council to the new parish council.

Note that technically the principal local authority can only create a “parish council” and it is that local council, when it first meets, which can change the name to a “town council”, “community council”, “village council” or “neighbourhood council”.

At a meeting in February 2009 Lancaster City Council approved the Reorganisation Order to create a local council in Morecambe. It also approved the first year precept and decided to retain the Working Group to provide some continuity.

When the Order came into effect in April 2009 that Working Group was reconstituted as a ‘shadow parish council’, still consisting of the relevant Ward Councillors. The first elections then took place in May, with Morecambe Bay Independents winning almost all of the seats.

## Lessons from the review

### Timescale and process

The Review process for Morecambe was rather unique, being a hybrid between the pre- and post-2007 approaches. This helps explain why two years passed between the City Council seeking representations and issuing the Reorganisation Order. Things speeded-up once the post-2007 approach came into play. However, the timescale doesn’t appear to have caused much frustration among local campaigners.

*“The set up was very straightforward. At the end of the day it was a good process.”* – current Leader of the Morecambe Bay Independents

The advice from central government, when the case was transferred back to the City Council, is interesting. The implication is that central government was content the petition and the City Council seeking representations about it constituted sufficient public consultation. No more was expected under the streamlined post-2007 review process.

### Involvement of local campaigners

This case illustrates some advantages of there being a campaign and petition prior to the Review. Local Morecambe people were deeply involved in the process, sounding out local

opinion, drawing up draft recommendations for a town council and proposing its boundaries. The significant effort required of the campaigners must not be overlooked. However, the benefits of such grass roots activism included more debate among the local community, more thought as to what they wanted from a local council and a better chance of identifying people willing to stand subsequently as councillors.

It is interesting that many of the campaigners were (and some still are) City Councillors. During the campaign and review those links with the City Council appear to have been used to advantage. Morecambe Bay Independents were in dialogue with other City Councillors encouraging their support for the proposed town council.

### **Principal local authority and other support**

It is widely recognised that Lancaster City Council offered much practical support during the Review. Advice was freely given to the campaign about the processes it needed to follow with the petition and when defining proposed boundaries.

The City Council then provided resources to support the Working Group. It also laid on two information and training sessions for residents who may be thinking of standing for election.

*“It [the Review] was done extremely well for them.”* – County association of local councils

Two views have been heard about the Working Group. One is that, since it could call on City Council resources, it could have gone further in assisting the set-up of the town council e.g. drafting standing orders. The other is that the Group should have held back, leaving as much as possible to the town council when it commenced with a proper electoral mandate.

Other sources of support at this stage were Lancashire Association of Local Councils (the county association), who helped campaigners to understand the range of things a local council could do, and other established town councils, including Weston-super-Mare Town Council which was looked at because it was a seaside town of a similar size.

### **Geographic scope of the review**

This was a partial review (covering part of the Lancaster City Council area). For the most part defining the town council boundaries was simple, since five wards were historically recognised as making up Morecambe. The more complex question was whether or not to include the unparished part of the adjoining Heysham North Ward. Decisions about new local councils must take account of community’s identity and their sense of place.

Various options for Heysham North were considered by the City Council, though each had disadvantages. Extra consultation was undertaken with residents in that ward, but the results proved rather inconclusive, with no obvious desire being voiced for their own parish council. So the earlier view expressed by residents, that Heysham North should be included within the Morecambe town council petition area, was allowed to go forward. That decision, however finely balanced at the time, no longer appears to be a particular issue.

## Concluding comments

The Community Governance Review for Morecambe was clearly unusual, in that it started under one legislative system and was completed under another. It seems likely that central government would have agreed to the formation of the town council, but the change meant that decision had the advantage of being a locally-owned one.

It has given the community in Morecambe the scope to take more decisions about their own locality, using their own precept, and in that sense it addresses the issues which ignited the town council campaign. The hope is that it also brings greater community engagement.

*“I’ve always believed that if people feel part of something they’re more likely to join in.”* – former Town Council Chair

The life of Morecambe Town Council since 2009 has not been without its controversies. However, local Councillors remain positive about the fact that they now have a town council and can point to tangible benefits. These include a police community support officer in each ward, grants awarded to various local charities and increased support for local events. The ‘Light and Water Festival’ is being brought back into the town and the Town Council is promoting festivals throughout the summer months – the ‘Morecambe Top 20’ – in order to attract more visitors, which should assist the local economy.

Morecambe Town Council website: <http://www.morecambe.gov.uk/>

***This document was written for the National Association of Local Councils (NALC) by Brian Wilson Associates and David Atkinson Consulting.***

*Particular thanks are due to Morecambe Town Council, Lancaster City Council and the Lancashire Association of Local Councils for their timely input to this case study. It should be noted that this document does not necessarily represent their views and any errors are the author’s.*

**May 2011**



## Case study on a Community Governance Review

### **SOUTHSEA TOWN COUNCIL (PORTSMOUTH)**

#### **The context**

This case study describes a Community Governance Review undertaken by Portsmouth City Council, which resulted in the abolition of Southsea Town Council. The former parish reverted to an unparished area in January 2011.

Southsea Town Council was created in 1999 following a successful submission to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM), under the previous (Local Government & Rating Act 1997) system for local governance changes, on the basis of a 2,169 signature petition. Residents had become concerned about how planning and licensing decisions were made locally and sought greater influence over those processes by setting up a local council.

In its submission to Government, Portsmouth City Council said that it was not convinced of the need for a parish council or that its creation would secure more convenient or effective local government for the area. It doubted the level of local support, particularly for funding that would be raised through a precept on the Council Tax. It also argued that the proposed boundaries were artificial. Nevertheless, ODPM agreed to establish the new local council and it was set up in May 1999.

Southsea Town Council contained five electoral wards and it was represented by 15 councillors, each serving a term of four years.

Until the creation of this Town Council no part of Portsmouth had been parished. The Parish area lay within Southsea, a part of Portsmouth that contains a stretch of its seafront and two of the City's retail areas.

#### **What happened in the review**

The existence of the Town Council was controversial from the outset. The opposition lobby considered that Southsea was an anomaly, because it was the only local council within the City and that such councils did not suit an urban setting. Also, that the boundaries did not

reflect well what many regarded as the town of Southsea.

But there was always a strong political dimension to the debate. Liberal Democrat Councillors, the majority group on Portsmouth City Council, were largely in favour of abolition, whereas Conservative Councillors by and large favoured retention. Latterly it was Liberal Democrats who held most of the seats on the Town Council.

The Town Council raised a precept in its earlier years, but in its later years no precept was made and there was fairly limited use of its powers. It campaigned on local issues, seeking to influence the City Council. It awarded grants to local causes and funded small infrastructure improvements in the local area. It had an office in a former retail and restaurant unit in Southsea town centre, which was open to the public until 2007.

As early as 2003/04 the City Council established a panel to review the existence of the Town Council. A 2005 poll of residents showed that 56% of those who had voted were in favour of abolition. This result formed the basis of a December 2005 submission to the Department for Communities & Local Government (CLG) for abolition. Portsmouth City Council's submission recognised findings from their own advisory panel, that views about abolition were polarized and strongly held.

CLG rejected that submission in November 2006. Its reasons were that:

- The proportion of total electors voting in 2006 for abolition (11.7%) was lower than the proportion who had voted for the council's creation in 1998 (12.8%);
- They had received a significant number of representations in favour of the council and noted that Southsea had recently achieved Quality Status; and
- There was little evidence of other forms of devolved arrangements for residents in the absence of the Town Council.

A further proposal for abolition was rejected by the City Council on a technicality in 2008. Following this, Portsmouth decided to undertake its own Community Governance Review, which it could then do under new legislation delegating this responsibility to principal authorities (the Local Government & Public Involvement in Health Act 2007).

This Review commenced in July 2009 with the publication of the terms of reference. For the consultation with electors the City Council decided on a postal vote rather than a poll at the ballot box. It was considered that this would produce a higher turnout.

The consultation was advertised in three local newspapers and in public buildings, such as libraries and community centres. Letters were sent to businesses and their employees, and written invitations to participate were sent to all households within the Town Council's area. Responses were received from a range of organisations representing the local councils



sector and from parish council clerks. There were 132 representations received from local people. The review considered the following points which had been raised:

<b>For abolition</b>	<b>Against abolition</b>
It was an unwanted extra layer of bureaucracy that duplicated powers held by the City Council	The Town Council could focus upon local issues better than the City Council and could better lobby for local people
Town Councillors provided little or no community benefit that could not be provided in another way	It had an important local democratic function; all national political parties support them (in urban and rural areas)
Existing methods of consultation e.g. Area Forums, worked well and were sufficient	The Town Council was a guardian of local facilities; its involvement in planning was important and complemented the City Council
Residents were open to a greater potential Council Tax liability	The Town Council had Quality Status, but frequent reviews had not given it a fair chance to settle in
The Town Council precept paid wholly for facilities that were used by residents from across the city	The Town Council's town centre office was a valuable local service in itself
The Town Council's role in planning and licensing were only advisory and lacked real powers	The extra tax (precept) involved was a price worth paying
There was no effective oversight of the Town Council	The distinct character of Southsea could be better preserved and enhanced by a Town Council

The postal vote closed in February 2010 by when a total of 3,391 (24%) acceptable votes had been returned from a Town Council electorate of 14,137. Of these, there was a two-to-one majority of votes cast against Southsea Town Council continuing to exist.

The City's Chief Executive took a decision paper to the full Council in March. That paper made no formal recommendation for either abolition or continuation, but rather it set out the arguments based on the Review findings. Councillors were also given a copy of the central government guidance about Reviews, to help inform their discussions and ensure they were aware of all the considerations.

The Council decided to abolish the council on the basis of: "representations made as part of the review, including the views of parish councillors and the non-binding poll of electors and the City Council being satisfied that there are satisfactory arrangements in place to engage local communities following the abolition of the Town Council." Southsea Town Council was formally abolished on 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2010 with its assets reverting to Portsmouth City Council.

## **Lessons from the review**

### **Change in legislation**

Changes brought about by the 2007 Act, which delegated responsibility for Community Governance Reviews to principal authorities, made it easier to create new local councils. But the opposite is also true; the changes made it easier to abolish them. Opponents of the new system have argued that it is weak, because it contains no right of appeal against Review decisions and this can lead to a situation swayed by local politics. However, in the end no Councillors actually voted to retain the Town Council at the City Council meeting. All Liberal Democrat and some Conservative members voted for abolition, while thirteen Conservatives abstained.

### **Consultation**

The Review process followed the national guidance closely. It was thorough in the way that it consulted with the electors of Southsea Town Council and with other interested parties. The decision to conduct a postal vote on residents' views (termed an advisory poll by Portsmouth City Council) was taken in order to try and achieve a higher turnout. Although there were a number of ineligible votes, Portsmouth City Council considers that this was better than the alternatives. It also received a healthy number of individual representations at this stage of the Review.

### **Effective and convenient governance**

When putting the decision before Councillors, officers at the City Council were very careful to balance the advisory poll results with considerations about local democracy, community engagement and service delivery – issues cited in the national guidance. Given the history and high-profile debate about Southsea Town Council, the decision paper was very clear in setting out the arguments in full and in as neutral a way as possible. This position was reinforced by providing Councillors with a full copy of the national guidance about reviews.

However, this case study shows just how contentious Community Governance Reviews can become. Some argue that the abolition movement was politically motivated from the moment Southsea Town Council was established and that the Town Council never had a proper chance to show if it could enhance effective and convenient government.

### **The national guidance**

The national guidance on Community Governance Reviews was broadly seen by Portsmouth City Council as helpful. However, it notes that the language tends to assume local councils are being created rather than abolished, so it was not as valuable as it might have been on points of detail. Despite the Town Council being debated for years, the final Review – delegated to the City Council – was completed rapidly. Its 7 months time-span was well within the one year limit suggested by the national guidance. It helped that many in the City

Council were by then familiar with aspects of the process from the earlier reviews.

## Concluding comments

There is no doubt that the short history of Southsea Town Council was shaped by a bitter and divisive debate about its existence. Many supporters of the Town Council still feel that this undermined attempts to make it a success.

But leaving that aside, it is also fair to see the Review which ultimately led to its abolition as being a full, transparent and consultative process. The result of the advisory poll is also undisputable and the City Council says there are no calls now for the Town Council to be re-instated.

*“Setting up Southsea Town Council was always contentious and there have been arguments for and against since. But now that it has gone, people have moved on.”*

– Portsmouth City Council officer

There are very few legacy issues. Some assets of the former Town Council have reverted to Portsmouth City Council in the form of unspent money raised through the precept. These are being spent by the City Council in compliance with previously agreed budgets.

Portsmouth City Council website: <http://www.portsmouth.gov.uk/yourcouncil/16961.html>

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*Particular thanks are due to Portsmouth City Council and others for their timely input to this case study. It should be noted that this document does not necessarily represent their views and any errors are the author’s.*

**May 2011**



**Funtley Parish Council: How a Community Governance Review Was Triggered  
in Funtley, Hampshire**

## Headlines:

- The village of Funtley is in the Borough of Fareham, in the county of Hampshire.
- Funtley Village Society triggered a Community Governance Review in Fareham Borough by collecting signatures for their residents on a petition and submitting it to the Borough Council.
- The Borough Council were initially unaware of the legal changes relating to a Community Governance Review (the process by which a new parish council is created) which caused tension between the Village Society and Fareham Borough Council.
- On 24<sup>th</sup> May 2016 the campaign group was informed that Fareham Borough Council may reject their request to create a parish council in Funtley, recommending that the status quo should be maintained. The Borough Council did finally reject the creation of a new Funtley Parish Council on 28 July, 2016 citing the creation of an additional burden to residents of an uncapped precept as the main reason.
- This is a study revealing the difficulty in persuading principal authority councillors that a new parish council will be beneficial for residents when such councillors may feel that their traditional mandate will be undermined by such a new governance model in an area unused to creating new parish councils. It also reveals that the Community Governance Review process needs to be changed again to ensure that mandatory resident referenda are introduced the outcomes of which are binding.

## Why A Council Is Wanted:

Having gathered over 300 signatures, the Funtley Village Society submitted its petition to Fareham Borough Council triggering a Community Governance Review (the process by which it hoped the Borough Council will ultimately agree to the creation of a new parish council in Funtley).

Residents in Funtley wanted a new Parish Council to give their area a stronger voice. They no longer wanted to be powerless in their dealings with by Fareham Borough Council as a small village with no voice. Parish councils are statutory, and almost always permanent, democratically elected bodies – so this model was a further attraction to Funtley. The initiative of local communities in Sutton Coldfield, Bingley and Kidderminster (albeit bigger geographical areas) who successfully established parish councils in their area also inspired the residents of Funtley to follow their steps with a view to having more of a say in local decision making, neighbourhood planning and service provision. As the Borough Council has to address the issues of so many local communities within its area, the Funtley Village Society strongly believes that a parish council would help address local issues much quicker,

being better equipped for meeting residents' needs (for instance parish councils have a range of powers they can use relating to maintaining streetlights and very much more).

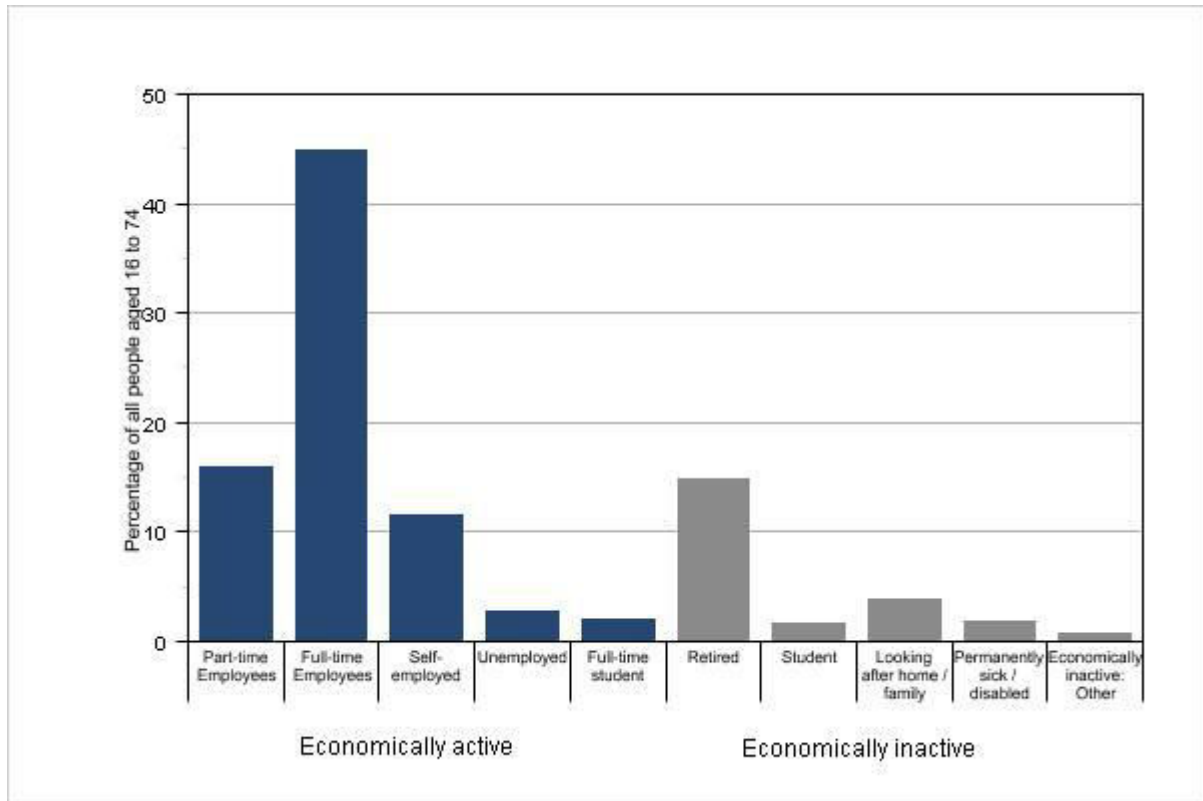
### **Demographics and Possible New Service Areas:**

Funtley is a small but historic rural community. The village is located on the River Meon in rural Hampshire and its community thrives on the railway next to which it is located. It is an industrial hamlet built on clay reserves. With a population of approximately 568 people, Funtley has a predominantly young demographic, with the majority of its residents being in full-time employment<sup>1</sup>. The village is considered affluent, ranking 30,380 out of 32,844 according to the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD), where 1 is the most deprived (Department of Communities and Local Government, 2016).

The Funtley Village Society have traditionally fought inappropriate development and ineffective planning decisions affecting Funtley residents. However, the Funtley Village Society considers that its own powers to combat such inappropriate developments are limited as it does not have to be consulted on local planning decisions and applications by the local planning authority (in this case Fareham Borough Council again). The Village Society recognise that a parish council has the statutory right to be notified of developments in its area and so is more likely to be consulted by the local planning authority on given planning applications and developments than a village society. Hence its keenness to drive and lead the campaign to create a new parish council and protect the small rural village of Funtley from otherwise inappropriate development on its fringes.

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<sup>1</sup> Neighbourhood Statistics, Office for National Statistics:  
<http://www.neighbourhood.statistics.gov.uk/dissemination/NeighbourhoodSummary.do?width=2048&a=7&r=1&i=1001&m=0&s=1465823459535&enc=1&profileSearchText=PO175EE&searchProfiles=&nsjs=true&nsck=false&nssvg=false&nswid=1600>



Above; A histogram showing the percentage of people in each age band, based on 2011 data from the Office of National Statistics, of Fareham residents. Most residents are in full time employment.

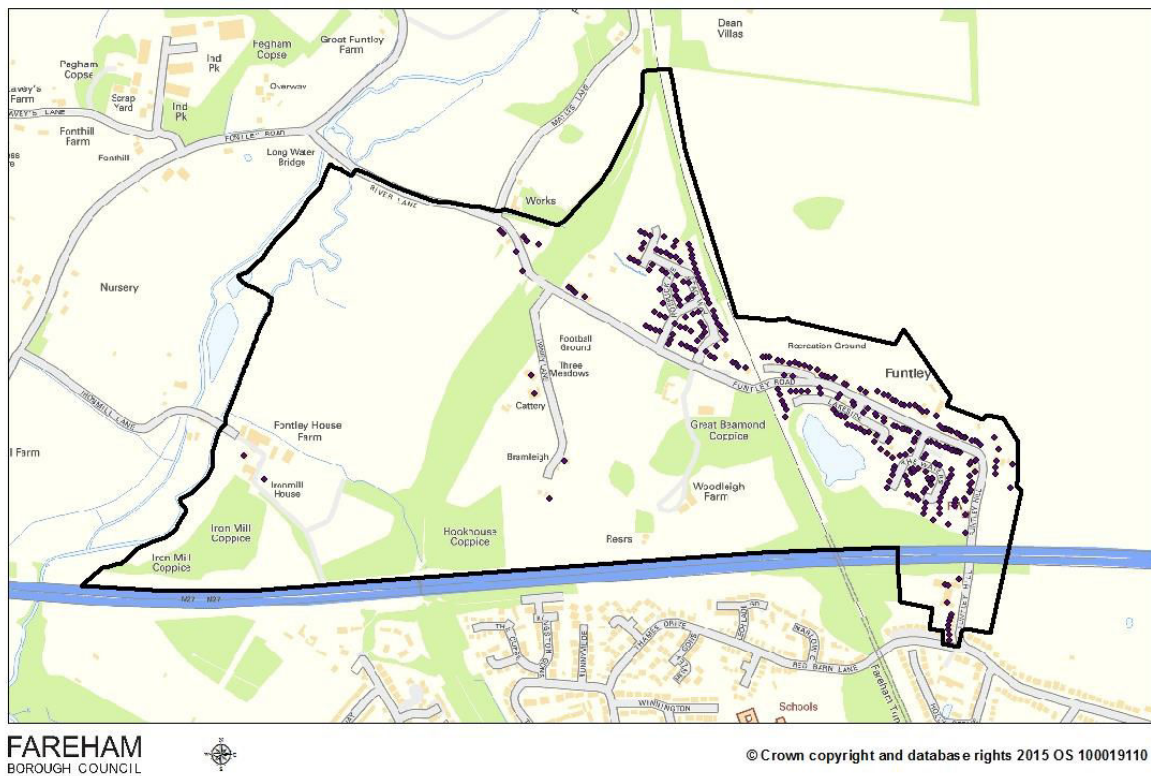
### Who Are The Key Partners / Stakeholders Involved?:

The main campaign group to create a new Parish Council in Funtley has been the Funtley Village Society. The Village Society is the central and only real organisation in Funtley which had the capacity to resource to lead the campaign to both secure enough signatures on the petition and to campaign throughout the Community Governance Review, lobbying Fareham Borough Council over a 12 month period. The Village Society used its own membership, contacts and web-site to both promote campaign activity and energise all campaigners to gather signatures and sustain all related campaign activity over an almost two year period. Given that a population of 568 is not a huge resource from which volunteers will be forthcoming huge credit is due to the campaign group for completing the campaign journey to the end of the campaign. The campaign group rightly deserves to be recognised for having triggered a Community Governance Review in a borough area unused to the concept of parish councils (there are not many parish councils in Fareham).

The Hampshire Association of Local Councils was the other main local stakeholder which offered constant advice and local political assistance to the campaign group. The Association accessed Government funding from the Department of Communities and Local Government during 2015-16 from the National Association of Local Councils which helped

to progress campaign activity with the production of leaflets and the holding of public meetings. The Village Society used its highly effective web-site (details at the end of this case study) to promote all public gatherings (such as public meetings) and events which were designed initially to secure enough signatures on the campaign petition. The same web-site then provided news updates on progress with the campaign and re-stated the reasons for setting up the parish council (for instance giving residents more of a say on traffic matters in their area and accessing grant monies that parish councils as incorporated bodies can access for the community which the Village Society cannot). The National Association of Local Councils has also continuously provided technical advice regarding the campaign – in particular on the Community Governance Review – to the campaign group.

Map of Proposed Boundary of Funtley Parish



Above; boundary map of the proposed parish of Funtley.

### What Are The Key Campaign Issues / Challenges?:

The Funtley Village Society has been the driving force in the campaign to create a new Parish Council in Funtley. It was the body which gathered the petitionary signatures and submitted the petition to Fareham Borough Council in 2015. The Hampshire Association of Local Councils were instrumental in advising the Society during every stage of the campaign. The Hampshire Association of Local Councils and the National Association of Local Councils



both advised on technical issues around the Community Governance Review and the campaign group's relationship with Fareham Borough Council.

In spite of the best efforts of the campaign group, the principal authority is against the creation of a parish council arguing that the status quo needs to be maintained. This comes as a surprise, especially since the consultation during the Community Governance Review showed that 74.5% of respondents were in favour of a parish council. The campaign group therefore decided to submit a formal complaint against the principal authority to the Secretary of State, Rt Hon Greg Clark MP.

Fareham Borough Council reached a final decision in July 2016 – formally rejecting the campaign by 19 votes to 5 in Full Council. The campaign group also organised a separate meeting for residents and ward councillors on 28 July, 2016 (the same date as the final full council decision) to engage one last time on the promotion of the benefits of creating a new parish council – before the end of the Community Governance Review phase. The main reasons cited by the Council Leader for rejection of the campaign were that there was apparently diminishing support for a parish council and that it was too small to run effectively, that it would add a level of bureaucracy, that the cost outweighed the benefits of having a parish council, and that community cohesion would not be enhanced (these were all arguments the campaign group had lobbied against during the Community Governance Review phase of the campaign).

It is also fair to say that then relevant department at Fareham Borough Council required guidance at the start of the Review as to the length of the Review – hoping as it did to be able to conduct it in a period of over a year. After some clarification from the National Association of Local Councils the final decision was agreed to be reached a year after the petition was submitted to the council meaning that law and regulation would be satisfied.

Ed Morell, Campaign Champion from the Funtley campaign said; *“We feel we have done extremely well to trigger the Funtley Community Governance Review in Fareham Borough as we are only a small village of 568 people, gathering 322 signatures over 6 weekends in February / March 2015. We have got the impression that whilst Fareham Borough Council have fulfilled their minimum legal obligations in initiating the Review, they have lacked certainty as to their responsibilities in undertaking a Community Governance Review – we will however continue to work constructively with them.”*

### **How Have These Issues / Challenges Been Overcome?:**

The initial challenge the campaign faced was Fareham Borough Council not being aware that the law in regards to the Community Governance Review had changed in March, 2015 which gives the principal authority a year from the date a petition is submitted to complete its

review. Fareham Borough Council was unaware of this change and had to work alongside relevant parties to complete the Community Governance Review within a year. This challenge was overcome through regular communication and negotiation between the relevant parties. The Hampshire Association of Local Councils and the National Association of Local Councils steered the Funtley Village Society towards holding workshops and engaging in regular communication with Fareham Borough Council as well as local residents during the Community Governance Review phase. The Village Society again used its highly effective web-site to keep residents updated on progress with the Review (especially latterly when it appeared that councillors were opposed to the idea of creating a new parish councils (see <http://funtlevillagesociety.org.uk/parish%20council%20campaign.html> ). The campaign group used all means at its disposal to communicate both with residents and councillors for the whole of the campaign. It is clear that residents overwhelmingly supported the creation of a parish council, but that for party political reasons a principal local authority has rejected the creation of a parish council, apparently suborning the wishes of residents.

#### **Outcomes – Learning From The Campaign:**

The Funtley campaign group held a series of workshops for residents in March 2016 which again promoted the benefits of creating parish councils. Residents of Funtley would have benefitted from the creation of a parish Council as a parish council would have been able to choose the services the precept was spent on to benefit residents of Funtley alone. Leaflets have regularly communicated this back to residents, as well as via the Village Society newsletter

(<http://funtlevillagesociety.org.uk/onewebmedia/Funtley%20Newsletter%20Parish%20Special%20June%202016.pdf> ) and its web-site

(<http://funtlevillagesociety.org.uk/parish%20council%20campaign.html> ).

*“If we have a Parish Council, we will have more say about what happens in Funtley. For example, if we want to improve the footpaths or adopt traffic calming measures we don’t have to wait for Fareham Borough Council to prioritise it along with all the other requests they get in the Borough.*

*Parish Councils are legally recognised bodies and as such, they hold more weight when consulted about decisions such as planning applications.*

*If we have a Funtley Parish Council, it also gives us the right to apply for numerous types of grants in order to do the things we want, to improve our village.*

*Having a parish council will allow us to maintain separation and our own identity as a village, now we know that the Welborne Plan is going ahead.”*

(Funtley Village Society web-site, 2016)



Above: Campaigners campaigning for a new Funtley Parish Council.

### **How The Campaign Group Succeeded At The Petition Phase:**

The Village Society were responsible for driving the campaign to secure resident signatures in addition to meeting with Fareham Borough Council and organising workshops and public meetings during 2015-16 to promote the benefits of a parish council for the village. Resident buy-in was secured through regular leaflet communications on the benefits, also. It proved to be an advantage in one crucial respect (that the village was so small) – as everyone knew what was happening and planned for the campaign very quickly. This proved powerful and explains why the campaign group was so easily able to secure 322 petition signatures over six weekends in early 2015.

### **Campaign Lessons To Share With Others:**

Campaigners recognise that attending the two New Councils' Briefings (09/15 and 01/16), organised by the National Association of Local Councils, to network with other campaigners was the main way in which literature and feedback was shared from the Funtley campaign. Campaign leaders also consider that seeking guidance at an earlier stage would have further benefitted their campaign.



The campaign group could not in the end persuade the Borough Council that the establishment of a parish council was the best governance model for the village. Campaign leaders hoped to achieve this through further negotiation and with the help and support of the local community, the majority of which was in favour of a parish council. However, it seems the majority group on the council feared the potential loss of influence they might incur with the borough if the new parish council was created.

Unfortunately, campaign groups across the country have different experiences in their relationship with their principal authority, ranging from the principal authority being very helpful, to not being supportive at all. If the relationship with a campaign group's principal authority is difficult, campaign groups are advised to seek guidance from their county association of local councils, who based on previous experience with other campaigns, will be able to assist.

If it is found that the principal authority has acted unfairly or unlawfully during the Community Governance Review, then the Department for Communities and Local Government should be informed as there are strict regulations and laws surrounding the conduct by principal authorities, for Community Governance Reviews. In any case, the Government's guidance on Community Governance Reviews does need to be updated to ensure that resident referenda are made mandatory during such Reviews, and binding.

#### **Who Can I Contact?:**

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#### **Other Information:**

**More information on creating a Council: The NALC 'Create a Council' web page:**

**<http://www.nalc.gov.uk/our-work/create-a-council> .**

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**NALC Power To The People publication here - <http://www.nalc.gov.uk/publications> .**

**Funtley Village Society - [www.funtleyvillagesociety.org.uk](http://www.funtleyvillagesociety.org.uk) .**

**Hampshire Association of Local Councils - <http://www.hampshirealc.org.uk/> .**



**Pelton Fell Parish Council: How a Community Governance Review Was  
Triggered In Pelton Fell, Durham**

## Headlines:

- The village of Pelton Fell is in the county of Durham, in the North East of England.
- This case study tells the story of how the Pelton Fell Community Partnership in Durham triggered a Community Governance Review (the process by which a new parish council is created) to create a new community council in its village.
- Pelton Fell Community Partnership gathered the required 250 signatures from local government electors in the Pelton Fell area, submitting the petition to the Durham County Unitary Council which subsequently triggered the Review.
- Outlined in this case study is how issues between the Pelton Fell Community Partnership and Durham County Unitary Council were overcome by building relationships through communicating with one another regularly, alongside regular advice from the County Durham and the National Associations of Local Councils (NALC).
- Currently (June, 2016) the Pelton Fell Community Partnership is awaiting the outcome of the process of the principal authority collating its feedback from residents; this process should conclude by June, 2016. A decision should be made by the end of June, 2016 By Durham Council as to whether a new community council can be created in Pelton Fell.
- The lessons learnt so far from this campaign are that principal local authorities should be held to account at all times during a Community Governance Review and that persuading enough residents and principal authority councillors of the benefits of creating a new local council are difficult to achieve and sustain.

Colin Reynolds, Campaign Champion from the Pelton Fell campaign said;

*“At the end of 2014, there were 842 houses for rating purposes and 1,241 electors in Pelton Fell. Its population was estimated as 1,613 in mid-2013. Existing facilities in the village include: a general store with post office; two doctor’s surgeries; pharmacy; community centre; war memorial park with tennis courts and bowling-green. At a time of huge county council cuts, a parish council could sustain many of these vital services in the village.”*

## Why A Council Is Wanted:

The campaign to create a new parish council in Pelton Fell began in 2014 when the Pelton Fell Community Partnership discovered the extent of cuts to public spending on local services from Durham Council in the Pelton Fell area. The Pelton Fell Community Partnership did not want residents in the village to suffer into the medium to longer term as a result of such cuts and so started to investigate other models of local governance which could provide sustainable delivery mechanisms for delivering such services and a parish council (of which there are already several in Durham) – met with much local support as a

concept early on. Existing facilities in Pelton Fell include: a general store with post office; two doctor's surgeries; pharmacy; community centre; a war memorial, a park with tennis courts and a bowling green. It was logical that a parish council would be campaigned for with the Pelton Fell Community Partnership leading the campaign as a parish council could manage the war memorial, the park, bowling-green and tennis courts and if needed take on the management of the Brockley Community Centre where the Partnership was based. These incentives initially persuaded enough residents to sign the campaign petition.

The campaign also coincided with the delivery of a national programme delivered with Department of Communities and Local Government funds by the National and County Associations of Local Councils (including County Durham Association of Local Councils). The programme promoted the creation of new parish councils in previously un-parished areas on England. The Community Partnership applied for a campaign grant later in 2014-15 to assist with campaign activities in the village to persuade residents of the benefits of creating a new parish council.

Residents in Pelton Fell also wanted a new parish council to give the area a stronger voice for their small village. They no longer wanted to feel powerless in discussions with Durham County Unitary Council in terms of future service cuts to Pelton Fell as a village. Also the creation of a parish council could bring further un-planned for benefits such as the adoption of new assets which could no longer be managed by Durham Council and the delivery of services formerly delivered by Durham Council (it had the legal power to deliver) again in the face of public spending cuts. Parish councils are statutory, and usually permanent, democratically elected bodies –so the creation of a new parish council in Pelton Fell would also lend sustainability to new and ongoing service delivery in the village. Recently, new parish councils have been formed in Sutton Coldfield, Bingley and Kidderminster – all communities of a different size – and campaigners from Pelton Fell had the opportunity to network with these other campaign groups at events organised by the National Association of Local Councils in 2015-16.

*“Community councils have a huge range of powers to deliver services and manage assets in their areas. For Pelton Fell, this model will work well to: develop and continue good relationships with local businesses; manage open spaces and campaign for and deliver better local services and facilities such as the Brockwell community centre, War Memorial Park and Congburn Wood; and ensure local peoples' priorities are considered by government and other appropriate organisations.”*

– Colin Reynolds, Pelton Fell Campaign Champion.

### **Demographics and Next Steps With The Campaign:**

Until 2009, Pelton Fell had been a ward in the Chester le District Council approximated by the Lower Super Output Area referenced as County Durham 011F. In electoral terms it is

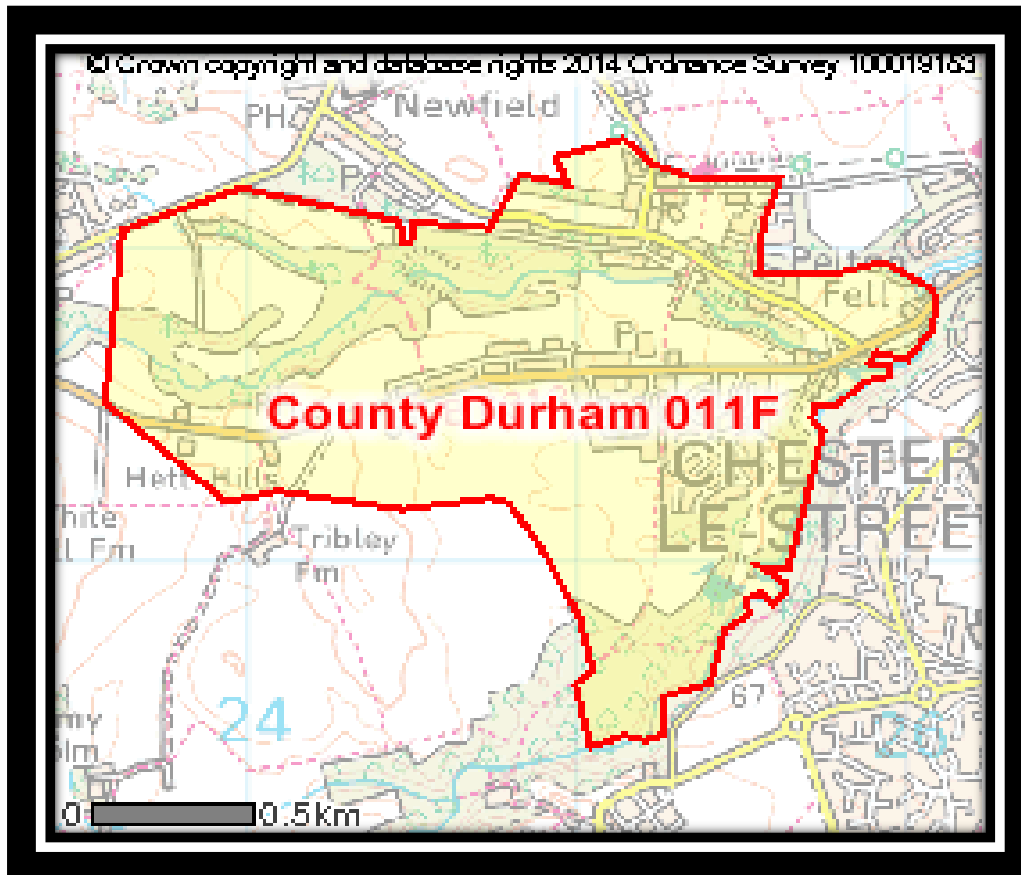


now part of the Chester le Street West and Central ward of the Durham County Council, a Unitary Authority formed in 2009.

Once a Community Governance Review has ended – and resulted in the principal authority agreeing the creation of a new parish council – an election date is then set. A temporary or shadow council is usually then set up to agree reporting and a first budget with the principal authority which can be agreed at the first Full Council meeting of the parish council. The Pelton Fell Community Governance Review needs to end legally by September, 2016.

Pelton Fell is a village in County Durham, England. It is situated a short distance to the north-west of Chester-le-Street. The village is a post-industrial colliery settlement. There is a history in the village of residents feeling un-empowered and not consulted enough by developers or Durham Council during housing developments. A council sponsored redevelopment of the village began in 2004, with a significant number of council houses, and a small number of private houses, demolished to make way for more modern accommodation, which is to be a mix of social housing and private housing (see: [http://peltonfell.org.uk/pelton\\_fell\\_history.php?page\\_id=3&id=107](http://peltonfell.org.uk/pelton_fell_history.php?page_id=3&id=107) ). Residents and the Community Partnership felt angered at the lack of consultation before the houses formerly on the new housing site had been demolished. This experience has been a major reason why residents and the Community Partnership have sought a new and different style of governance in their community as they are aware that the Community Partnership itself cannot access some funding a parish council can and does not have the statutory right to be notified of planning applications as does a parish council. So it was hoped that a parish council would prevent repeats of such lack of consultation by Durham Council during similar development applications again in the future.





Above: a boundary map of the proposed area of a new Pelton Fell Community Council.

### Who Are The Key Partners / Stakeholders Involved?:

The main campaign group to create a new parish council in Pelton Fell has been the Pelton Fell Community Partnership. The Community Partnership delivered the below campaign activity in the village during 2014-15;

- Creation of a Community Council Leaflet – revised in April 2014 and March 2015;
- Drafted the proposal for a community council - a consultation document was circulated in 2015 (and then published as a double-sided Z folded pamphlet – printed externally);
- Creation of a petition form;
- Drafted and issued a letter to Durham County Council;
- Drafted and issued a Community Governance Review update to all residents of Pelton Fell which was issued in Autumn, 2014; &
- Drafted and issued a letter to petition supporters.

The County Durham Association of Local Councils accessed DCLG funding during 2015 from the NALC which helped to progress campaign activity with the production of campaign leaflets, Pelton Fell Community Partnership newsletters and a campaign Facebook page.

The National Association of Local Councils campaign funded the County Durham Association of Local Councils and the Pelton Fell Community Partnership; this funding was instrumental in both triggering the Community Governance Review and helping to communicate the benefits of a parish council to Pelton Fells residents. The Department for Communities and Local Government assisted by providing the funding via the National Association to disburse to both the Durham Association (top cover officer time) as well as the Pelton Fell Community Partnership (for the production of leaflets and similar materials).

## **Progress With The Campaign To Date:**

The Pelton Fell Community Partnership has delivered so far an effective campaign to create a new parish council in Pelton Fell. It was the body which gathered the petitionary signatures and it was the body in 2015 which submitted the petition to County Durham Unitary Council. The County Durham Association of Local Councils (CDALC) was of great assistance in helping advise the Community Partnership during every stage of the campaign. Both the County Durham Association of Local Councils and the National Association of Local Councils advised on technical issues around the Community Governance Review (in particular when it appeared as though the campaign would not result favourably for the campaign group). Advice was also given as to how to navigate the political minefield with Durham County Unitary Council during the different phases of the Review (in particular during the final referendum stage in 2016)

However, despite Durham County Council's receptive policy of creating parish councils, in a time of austerity the councillors on Durham County Council increasingly began to question whether the creation of another layer of local government was the right model at the time. And yet - with the help of the Government funding issued by the National Association, the campaign group were able to overcome this through using various communications tools (detailed below) in helping both the community and County Council understand why the establishment of a new council was indeed the best option to take.



Above: an aerial view of the village of Pelton Fell, Durham.

## Overcoming Political Challenges:

The initial challenge of Pelton Fell until 2009 being a ward in the Chester le District Council – was overcome with the creation of the new Durham County Unitary Council in the same year. In electoral terms, it is now part of the Chester le Street West and Central Ward of the Durham County Council – a Unitary Authority formed in 2009. This has undoubtedly helped the community define its own locality, laying solid foundations for the creation of a local council by giving the area a strong local identity on a ward basis

The Community Partnership revised its Creation of a Community Council leaflet in both April 2014 and March 2015. This was followed by a proposal for a Community Council - Consultation document circulated in 2015. These communications helped to define the parish boundary of the intended parish council for the village. The Pelton Fell campaign group then issued a petition form and then a further letter to Durham County Council. The Community Governance Review leaflet was issued in early October, 2015, followed by a further letter to petition supporters. These funded communications continuously drove home to both Durham Council and residents the benefits for all concerned of the creation of a new community council for Pelton Fell. Once the benefits were understood by residents this made the job of selling the defined parish boundary much easier. However, it does seem that the first phase of the campaign – gathering petition signatures – was much easier for the campaign group – than the latter (more difficult) phase of persuading Durham Council to create a new parish council.

*“DCLG funding through NALC was critical in allowing the Community Partnership to produce leaflets, hold public meetings and communicate to residents the need for a new community council and the associated benefits.”*

– Steve Ragg, County Durham Association of Local Councils.



Caption: The Brockwell Centre, home of Pelton Fell Community Partnership.

### **How Was Progress Made So Far?:**

The Pelton Fell Community Partnership was responsible for driving the campaign to secure resident signatures in addition to triggering the Community Governance Review in Durham. Resident buy-in was secured through regular leaflet communications on the benefits, also. This constant information flow was largely also due to the County Durham Association of Local Councils' regular two way communication with the National Association of Local Councils and the accessing of funding for the Community Partnership.

The campaign group was successful in securing coverage of the campaign in the local online press

([http://m.chesterlestreetadvertiser.co.uk/news/13803927.Proposals\\_for\\_community\\_council\\_for\\_Pelton\\_Fell\\_takes\\_a\\_step\\_forward/](http://m.chesterlestreetadvertiser.co.uk/news/13803927.Proposals_for_community_council_for_Pelton_Fell_takes_a_step_forward/)) and this gave residents across the Durham area a better idea also of the advantages of the creation of a new local council.

The campaign group was led by the Pelton Fell Community Partnership which had some resource for the campaign and was also able to access the central government funding cited above. Using its resource the campaign group was able to progress the campaign in the below ways;

- By submitting the application by PFCP to Durham County Council for a Community Governance Review;
- By securing Durham Council's agreement to, and a programme for the Review – June/September 2016; &
- By confirming that the council would make the final decision on its Review by July 2016.

### **Recommendations For Other Campaign Groups Based On Learning:**

Campaigners recognise that it is one thing to submit a petition, but quite another to steer a successful campaign through a principal authority (even one with a pro-parish creation policy such as Durham Council), during the second phase of a Community Governance Review. The Pelton Fell campaign group also shared their lessons learnt during a presentation given at a National Association of Local Councils event in Sutton Coldfield in January, 2016. The main recommendation the campaign group for other campaign groups based on their experience is to have a long term campaign plan and to have a communications plan in place for the Community Governance Review phase of a campaign.



**Who Can I Contact?:**

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**Steve Ragg of CDALC:** [cdalc@durham.gov.uk](mailto:cdalc@durham.gov.uk) / 03000 269 921.

**Other Information:**

**More information on creating a Council: The NALC 'Create a Council' web page:**

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**The NALC's Power To The People resource here -** <http://www.nalc.gov.uk/publications> .

**Pelton Fell Community Partnership -**

[http://peltonfell.org.uk/pelton\\_fell\\_history.php?page\\_id=3&id=107](http://peltonfell.org.uk/pelton_fell_history.php?page_id=3&id=107) .

**County Durham Association of Local Councils -** <http://www.cdalc.info/Pages/Home.aspx> .



**Rochester Town Council – The Campaign To Create A New Town Council In  
Rochester, Kent**

### Headlines:

- The town of Rochester is the historic heart of the unitary authority of Medway in Kent, England.
- This case study provides readers with an update on the technical challenges faced by a group campaigning for a new town council and how the non-acceptance of an e-petition by Medway District Council did not deter the campaign group from securing the requisite number of hard copy signatures before re-submitting the final petition in May, 2016.
- The campaign group had originally been informed by its principal authority that an e-petition would be acceptable as a form of petition. However, after intervention from principal authority councillors this decision was revoked and the campaign group had to make up the shortfall of signatures by door-knocking which delayed the submission of the final petition by several months until May, 2016.
- Medway Council also asked the campaign group to secure additional signatures as there had apparently been a shortfall in the original number of valid hard copy signatures (due to the death of residents or people moving out of the area and not informing the principal local authority). This was also stringently acted on by the campaign group who in addition to collating the shortfall signatures to compensate for the invalid e-petition, collected far more new resident signatures. The final petition was then submitted in May, 2016 (with far more resident signatures than actually needed).

### Reasons For A Town Council:

Rochester has a democratic deficit: along with the other Medway Towns, Rochester is unparished and is therefore only served by just one tier of local governance: the unitary authority. The creation of a town council in Rochester would mean that an additional 15 non-party political elected councillors could be representing Rochester in their relationship with the upper tier of unitary governance, putting residents in control of their community. Furthermore, residents during the campaign felt that Rochester was in danger of losing its historic identity and that (especially in heritage terms) Medway Council does not have as much of a vested interest as Rochester residents in preserving this historic identity. The campaign group therefore considered that a town council representing the direct needs of Rochester residents – would be best placed to manage much of the town's heritage services.

Furthermore, campaign leaders consider that the creation of a town council will put Rochester back on the political map through the creation of a statutory body; hopefully also led by an officially recognised mayor. It was felt by residents that a town mayor for Rochester would be the best way of symbolically resurrecting the town's historic identity



and a new Rochester parish council could if created at its first full council meeting agree to formally adopt the style of a town council and have a town mayor. This possibility was distinctly attractive to both the campaign group and Rochester residents.

The town council will be granted the necessary powers to address local issues, having the possibility to take over services and assets, as well as lead on local initiatives such as neighbourhood planning, youth clubs, cleaning up public spaces, improving footpaths and green spaces. Rochester residents made it clear to the campaign group during the gathering of petition signatures that they were dissatisfied with some elements of service delivery and asset management from Medway Council in the town of Rochester. Campaign leaders hope that the town council will give local people a greater say in how public funds are invested in their town and since a town council in Rochester would have the powers to address these problems (those around neighbourhood planning, youth clubs, cleaning up public spaces, as well as improving footpaths and green spaces) – this governance model was the answer to many local issues. A town council will have the power to apply for grants and raise local funds to invest in initiatives that directly benefit the people it represents. The town council in Rochester will also be able to raise its own precept (a form of council tax) to spend on the above mentioned services in ways and specific locations that residents tell it they want.

These motives set out by the campaign leaders clearly resonated within the community. The petition calling for the creation of a town council in Rochester was originally submitted on 7<sup>th</sup> October 2015 but unfortunately Medway Council found a number of signatures were not valid. Medway Council also reversed its previous decision on accepting online petitions. The campaign group, though initially disheartened by this unexpected turn of events, took stock and focused on collecting the additional signatures required to trigger the Community Governance Review. The final petition was submitted to Medway Council in mid-May, 2016 (after the Police Commissioner elections) and the campaign group is grateful to Medway Council for its flexibility in agreeing to accept this final petition.

### **Background:**

Rochester is a town and historic city in the unitary authority of Medway in Kent, England. Together with its neighbouring towns, Strood, Chatham, Gillingham and Rainham, it forms a single large urban area known as the Medway Towns.

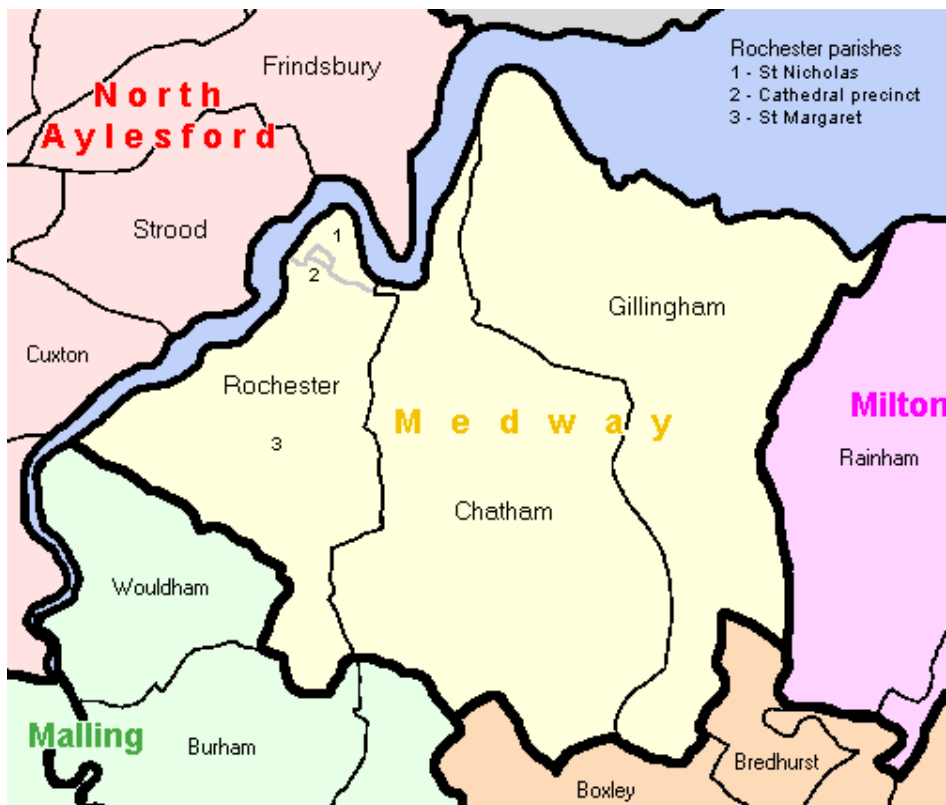
The town has a rich heritage. Like many of the mediaeval towns of England, Rochester had civic Freemen whose historic duties and rights were abolished by the Municipal Corporations Act, 1835. Restoration of the post of civic freeman is just another one of the tasks that a new Rochester Town Council could deliver if it was created – again linked to preserving the critical historic identity of the town.



The UK's decline in naval power and shipbuilding competitiveness led to the government decommissioning the RN Dockyard at Chatham in 1984. Rochester and its neighbouring communities were hit hard, experiencing a painful adjustment to the post-industrial economy.

In 2007-2008 the average weekly total household income in the Medway was estimated at £670. This compares with £800 for the South East region. The unemployment rate in Medway is slightly higher than the average unemployment rate in England: according to the office of National Statistics, in March 2013, Medway had an unemployment rate of 9.5%, in comparison to 7.8% an average unemployment rate across England. So another crucial role of any new Rochester town council would be to act as a lynchpin in the local economy and to use tourism and promotion of the historic legacy of Rochester to attract visitor footfall to the town and ensure that local businesses thrive and that residents benefit from increased interest in their town (for instance visits to Rochester Castle).

Economic activity is predominantly focusing on retail and professional, scientific and technical services. The creation of a town council for Rochester would, critically, also help switch the emphasis from the traditional local reliance on white-collar service income derivation to one of local income generated through more tourism and interest in the town's rich local heritage.



Above; boundary map of Rochester, Kent.



### **Who Are The Key Partners / Stakeholders Involved?:**

The Rochester campaign was sponsored by the City of Rochester Society, being led by a group of volunteers, all of whom are active in a range of civic groups in Rochester. Together they played an instrumental role in managing the campaign, as well as liaising with Medway District Council. Roles and responsibilities have ranged from organising public meetings, to obtaining petition signatures, issuing leaflets and setting up a campaign website. All of the tasks have been crucial in the delivery of the campaign and every member of the campaign group has been critical to the sustainability of the campaign.

The Kent Association of Local Councils and the National Association of Local Councils have also been strong supporters of the Rochester campaign. In addition, the campaign received funding from the Department of Communities and Local Government under the New Councils' Programme, a government initiative to support the creation of new town and parish councils.

### **Progress With Campaign To Date:**

With the help of dedicated volunteers and the support of the National Association of Local Councils and the Kent Association of Local Councils, the Rochester campaign has been working hard to raise awareness about the establishment of a Rochester Town Council and sustaining campaign momentum.

The Rochester campaign has benefitted from the recent legislative changes which lowered the community threshold for instigating a Community Governance Review (the process by which a new parish council is created) having to raise 500 signatures less than it was estimated at the beginning of the campaign.

The Rochester campaign group submitted its petition on 7 October 2015 to trigger a Community Governance Review. However, in December 2015 Medway Council confirmed that it had validated 92% of the paper signatures. The campaign group then worked towards re-submitting the signatures gathered (through the online petition), which Medway Council requested to be resubmitted in ink and obtaining some additional signatures to ensure that the campaign group triggered the Community Governance Review. The petition was resubmitted to Medway Council on 12 May 2016. The campaign group worked very hard to gain these final signatures and it very much appreciated Medway Council's advice and support around technicalities surrounding the final petition.

### **Challenges Faced By The Campaign:**

As no campaign is the same, Rochester campaign leaders have found that some campaign methods worked better than others, encountering some challenges along the way. When



starting their campaign, it was decided to outsource leaflet deliveries informing residents in the area about the campaign. However, it was discovered that this was not an efficient method of dispersing information: leaflets were not distributed evenly, with some neighbourhoods not receiving any leaflets at all.

### **Overcoming Campaign Hurdles:**

Campaigners therefore decided to take matters into their own hands and deliver the leaflets themselves. This also provided an opportunity to speak to residents and gain a better understanding about the issues that matter to them, which can be addressed through the creation of a town council. So the campaign group leafleted every house in the area intended to be represented by the new parish council, which was time consuming but very effective.

In trying to attract additional support, campaign leaders also approached and met with political parties to explain the benefits of having a town council for Rochester. However, they also needed to avoid the creation of a town council becoming a political matter (as some campaigns elsewhere in the country have been de-railed by political parties during the Community Governance Review phase).

### **What Would The Rochester Campaign Recommend?:**

The campaign also considered engaging other unparished areas in the Medway Towns. This proved to be a difficult and lengthy process, delaying the Rochester campaign. It also made the drawing of the town council boundary more difficult. Campaign groups must always be aware of the critical need for campaign momentum. Therefore, it was decided to limit the boundaries of the campaign. The Rochester campaign group therefore recommends to other campaign groups that they should keep their campaigns simple and practical and should agree and know the boundaries of the area they want the new council to represent from the start.

One challenge was when Medway Council changed its mind and decided not to accept the signatures from the online petition, asking for these to be submitted in ink. Volunteers contacted everyone who signed the online petition and sent them a new petition form along with a return address envelope. So before opening an online petition, the Rochester campaign group advise other campaign groups to ask their principal authority to confirm in writing whether they accept the signatures gathered through an online petition (or not).

## Outcomes - Learning From The Campaign:

The Rochester campaign found that engaging residents through social and traditional media worked very effectively. The campaign group managed to raise most of its signatures by actively promoting the campaign through local media appearances and publications, but also through the town crier, street canvassing in Rochester High Street and in residential areas; and information packs sent to 11,000 households, as well as through the campaign website, where residents of Rochester are able to sign the petition initially online. The campaign group issued regular e-updates to residents signing up online to support the campaign; and it used its Twitter and Facebook account to drive interest in local campaign events and canvassing sessions to gather signatures from amongst residents.



Above: the campaign group submitting its petition to Medway Council.

## What Have Been The Key Elements Of Success?:

One of the lessons that can be taken from the Rochester campaign is the importance of making the campaign visible to the community the campaign group is aiming to represent. The campaign leaders have been investing a substantial amount of the campaign budget in sending all 25,000 Residents in Rochester letters and petitions explaining why Rochester needs a town council. Also - advertising the campaign in the local newspaper, the Kent Messenger, and promoting the campaign through the Town Crier (thus capitalising on the rich heritage of Rochester) – worked very effectively.

## Campaign Lessons To Share With Others:

When collecting signatures it was found that street canvassing was highly effective, with volunteers managing to collect almost 100 signatures in one day. In addition, sending petition forms to households in the area ensured that the campaign also reached out to



those who may not find online petitions accessible. Campaign leaders also recommend that campaign groups deliver promotional leaflets using members of their own teams, as opposed to contracting a provider, as the campaign group is focussed on the outcome of its campaign for the area. In Rochester, volunteers were more efficient than the contractors at targeting those areas that had not returned many signatures, helping show that there is broad support for a town council from across the community.

#### **Who Can I Contact?:**

***Catherine Stephenson – Campaign Champion***

***Email: [Convey766@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:Convey766@yahoo.co.uk)***

***Terry Martin – Chief Executive Kent Association of Local Councils***

***Email: [chief.executive@kentalc.gov.uk](mailto:chief.executive@kentalc.gov.uk)***

***Telephone: 01304 820 173***

#### **Other Information:**

***To see template resources such as a media release, leaflet and poster, please click here:***

***<http://www.nalc.gov.uk/our-work/create-a-council> .***

***To see case studies from other areas campaigning to set up new parish councils please***

***click here <http://www.nalc.gov.uk/our-work/create-a-council> .***

***NALC Create A Council web page: <http://www.nalc.gov.uk/our-work/create-a-council> .***

***NALC Power To The People resource: <http://www.nalc.gov.uk/publications> .***

***Rochester Town Council Campaign: <http://www.rochestertowncouncil.org.uk/> .***

***City of Rochester Society: <http://www.city-of-rochester.org.uk/> .***

***Kent Association of Local Councils: <http://www.kentalc.gov.uk/> .***

## **DEMOCRACY FOR BEXHILL: HOW A CAMPAIGN WAS TRIGGERED TO CREATE A NEW TOWN COUNCIL IN BEXHILL, EAST SUSSEX**

### **Introduction**

Bexhill is the only area in the Rother district not to have any form of direct democracy in the form of a parish or town council. It did have its own borough council from 1902 but this disappeared in the reorganisation of 1974. The people of Bexhill want to have more of a voice for the town. Volunteers from the community stepped forward and created an all-party group called Democracy4Bexhill (D4B), and this led the campaign for Bexhill to have a town council. This followed a petition for a community governance review which gained over 4,000 signatures, and Rother District Council was then obliged to launch a Community Governance Review (CGR). D4B ran an extensive campaign to engage with the public. Through their hard work and initiative, a record 9,227 residents (around 24% of the electorate) responded to the CGR with 93.5% of these respondents supporting the formation of a town council in Bexhill: 8,631 votes. Only 3.9% wanted “no change”. However, no change is what they got. This poses the question, is it time to reform the absolute powers of district councils to reject major efforts by their residents to increase local governance. Is it time to change the law?

### **Headlines**

- Bexhill is in East Sussex and falls under Rother District Council
- Rother District Council was obliged to hold a CGR on receipt of 4,000 signatures from residents.
- The CGR gained 8,631 responses in favour of a town council in Bexhill and Rother District Council had to decide on whether Bexhill should have a town council
- The Full Council voted for no change to the governance of Bexhill. (although only 3.9% of responses had asked for no change)
- This case study will outline what D4B did to gain such a large response and what challenges they faced during their campaign

## **Theme - Carrying out a community governance review**

Principal councils have the power to carry out a community governance review and put in place or make changes to local community (parish) governance arrangements. A review can consider a number of issues, including whether to create a new parish council, or an area committee, whether to alter the boundary of an existing parish council or whether to group a number of parishes together in a grouped parish council. Reviews can be triggered by local people petitioning to their principal authority to undertake a community governance review.

### **Contextual Issues**

NALC would like every area in England to be parished. Currently there are around 10,000 town and parish councils in England, usually found in rural and coastal areas. Since 1997 there has been an increase in the number of town and parish councils created. Currently there is no legislation for principal authorities to obligate them to pass changes that are called for in a CGR. The judgement of a decision to pass changes called for is solely down to the principal authority who is carrying out the CGR. Bexhill Town Council would have become one of the biggest town councils in the country covering an area which has the population of 43,478.

### **Who are the partners / stakeholders involved?**

D4B led the campaign to gain votes in favour of a town council to represent the community in Bexhill. D4B is a non-party-political group made up of passionate volunteers from the community chaired by an independent Rother District councillors. They were formed to campaign for the creation of a town council in Bexhill.

Surrey and Sussex Association of Local Councils (SSALC) and National Association of Local Councils (NALC) have also been providing support and guidance to D4B throughout the campaign.

### **What were the key issues / challenges?**

Although very much a community, Bexhill is a large area with a population of around 43,500, which made it a difficult task to publicise and make everyone in the area aware about the community governance review. When Rother launched its consultation under the CGR, it was assumed that they would contact every resident to ensure their participation at every stage, and after lobbying, in Stage One they did indeed enclose with tax bills, a brief flyer with some information

about the consultation. However in Stage Two Rother District Council decided not to write to every household on financial grounds. This was despite D4B offering to organise volunteers for a massive distribution free of charge of Rother's own literature about the Review. D4B then took on this task themselves.

About 900 people took part in the first phase of the consultation. In the second phase, over 9,000 did. In the consultation, Rother offered residents four options – no change; a parish council to be termed a town council; an area committee; and four new parish councils. Rother initially insisted that the only way in which residents could respond was online. If people wanted to respond in another way, they had to obtain a specific postcard produced by Rother but they had to go to the town hall or three other un-publicised collection points to get it, or ask their councillor who had only been allocated a handful. D4B made a legal challenge, and Rother then agreed that any communication would be valid.

It was made clear to D4B that Rother District Council would only respond positively to the desire for a town council if the numbers supporting it were “overwhelming”. D4B set about producing leaflets for every household, listing all four options, and inviting people to respond online or by returning an enclosed postcard to Rother.

From the outset of the consultation, the Leader of RDC and some of his colleagues indicated the CGR was a distraction and made unfounded accusations that D4B was a subversive plot by political parties, or that “revolutionary socialist Momentum is on a seditious, stealthy path in Bexhill”. (where the Conservative majority is 22,000!). Residents saw through these allegations and responded overwhelmingly to a consultation response for change.

### **How were these issues / challenges overcome?**

D4B had just over a year to engage as many voters as possible and meet these challenges. They used a number of imaginative engagement techniques to engage the public.

Their poster campaign visually highlighted that Bexhill was the only un-parished area in the Rother district by highlighting the area in yellow. “See that yellow bit? It's Bexhill. The only part of Rother where the residents do not have a town or parish council”). The posters were found everywhere in Bexhill and highlighted exactly how residents





could respond if they wanted a town council to represent their area.

D4B had a professional & talented communications team who galvanised massive local awareness & support, through posters, leaflets, clear signage, videos, press coverage, social media, personal canvassing and anything which would gain greater visibility. They also took seriously the challenge that a large proportion of people in Bexhill do not use internet, partly because of their age, and organised and addressed meetings in self-managed housing for people who were less mobile, or for groups and organisations. They also held a number of events which saw hundreds of people attending to hear what a town council could do for the community.



They ran a Twitter campaign which encouraged people who were in favour of a town council to shout it loud and tweet it, from which the D4B Twitter account would retweet. They also held a countdown to the final days left to vote, which constantly reminded people about voting (see left).

For those not on social media they also visited places where they knew there would be a lot of people such as a queue for a flu jab, mother and toddler groups, as well as roadshows at public events such as markets, the Sea festival and Bexhill100 car festival.

They also even managed to secure the support of local celebrity, Eddie Izzard who stated in a video his support for a town council to be formed in Bexhill. This picked up press attention and was included in the Bexhill Observer.

They acquired a shop in the town centre to act as an information centre during Phase One, had roadshows, linked up with BBC Sussex and BBC SouthEast Politics for live interviews, lobbied and wrote to all councillors several times to clarify certain points and provided detailed reasons why having a town council would be good not only for residents but also for Rother District Council itself. The D4B newsletter went out regularly to its database of the almost 2,000 people who had signed up to help, and 138 volunteers were coordinated to leaflet every residence. £3,500 was raised or donated for a fighting fund to cover costs. A member wrote, performed and videoed a song which was widely featured, and a rally outside the council on the night of the big decision was followed by live

streaming the council meeting to hundreds who could not gain access to the full chamber!

## **Result**

Despite the sheer number of responses received - being sixteen times the size of previous consultations and therefore a record in itself - and the 93.5% support for a town council as opposed to 3% for “no change”, Rother District Council could not support creating a town council. Rother District Council’s Leader referred to “the silent majority that haven’t voted because they’re happy with the status quo”. It should be noted that in some wards the proportion of people “voting” was higher than the proportion who had voted for Rother councillors themselves.

This is not the first time that Rother has resisted attempts to improve local governance in Bexhill, other attempts had been made led by independent councillors, involving a devolution working group in 2012-13 that met seven times and did detailed work, but it has been the first to engage with the public and elicit wide support.

## **Outcomes**

What have been the key elements of success in mobilising the population of Bexhill?

The campaign was driven by D4B and the group was key to the CGR receiving so many votes in favour of a town council for Bexhill. Having an anchor organisation/structure really helped during the campaign process and gave residents an identifiable group to support. They led a really effective campaign which targeted a variety of different audiences.

Although the campaign did not win, D4B will not go away and is currently continuing to canvass support for candidates of all parties who will stand in District Elections next year and who will support the desire for a Town Council. In February 2018 it held a public meeting to discuss the way forward. 140 people packed the hall for a very successful meeting, at which £480 was donated to D4B.

## **What has been learnt?**

D4B has shown that an eye-catching and consultative campaign is key in engaging the public. They went above and beyond to engage with every resident in Bexhill and it really paid off in securing votes in favour for the creation of a town council.

Keeping the message simple has also been a key figure in their campaign. They laid out exactly what a town council can do for residents, what it will cost the tax payer and how it will be run. Making it simple for the public to understand was really effective.

Despite 24% of the electorate in Bexhill responding to the consultation in favour of the creation of a town council, the District Council still rejected the notion. We argue this could show there is a need for a reform to the laws around CGR decision making. It is currently solely up to the District Council to make the decision on whether any changes to governance is made. D4B feels it is time to change this and for an independent appeals procedure to be reinstated, to give communities more voice.

### **Who can I contact?**

Democracy4Bexhill (Doug Oliver [dougoliver1@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:dougoliver1@hotmail.co.uk))

Surrey and Sussex Association of Local Councils (SSALC) (Trevor Leggo):  
[trevor.leggo@ssalc.co.uk](mailto:trevor.leggo@ssalc.co.uk)

National Association of Local Councils (NALC) (Ben Murray):  
[ben.murray@nalc.gov.uk](mailto:ben.murray@nalc.gov.uk)

### **Other Information**

CGR review from Rother District Council:  
<http://www.rother.gov.uk/CHttpHandler.ashx?id=29558&p=0>

NALC Officer Contact: Ben Murray; [ben.murray@nalc.gov.uk](mailto:ben.murray@nalc.gov.uk) ; T. 020 7290 0314.

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## Case study on the experience of newly established local (parish and town) councils

### ALWOODLEY PARISH COUNCIL (LEEDS)

#### Background

Alwoodley Parish Council was formally established in 2008 and contested elections were held in May of that year. It was the outcome of public meetings, great effort by a residents' steering group, a public petition and then a governance review conducted by Leeds City Council. What spurred the creation of this local council was a wish to develop more sense of community and to have a body which could represent the whole of that community.

Alwoodley is on the northern side of the city of Leeds. It is part suburban and part green belt. The area is one of the most prosperous in the city. It has an electorate of over 7,000 and is home to a large share of the city's Jewish population. Alwoodley is the first local council created inside the Leeds built-up area and its suburban nature means it often faces different issues to those in more rural parishes within the City Council boundary.

Indeed, being called a "parish council" initially caused difficulties. For some "parish" had a misleading rural feel. For members of the Jewish community, in particular, there was early confusion with parochial (or church) parishes. Had the governance review taken place a bit later, changes to national legislation would have allowed them to be a "community council".

#### Key areas of learning

##### *Finding out about local people's priorities*

Soon after being established the Parish Council conducted a survey of residents, to find out more about people's views of the area and where they wanted the Parish Council to assist. The Chair considers this to be, without doubt, one of the most important things they did.

Questionnaires were hand delivered to each of the area's 4,000 or so households, together with a postage paid envelope. This added to the cost, of course, but was felt to be worth doing. Alwoodley is a fairly spread out suburban area and they could not realistically expect

people to put completed questionnaires through their door. The result was that a fairly healthy 27% of households responded – more than they had been led to expect. Another survey form was targeted at young people and distributed via local secondary schools.

***Priorities identified by the residents' survey***

- Traffic issues, including poor parking, speeding and the state of roads
- Fear of crime and support for a neighbourhood watch scheme
- The state of some local footpaths and passageways (known locally as “ginnels”)
- Tidying up at certain locations, including litter and a rundown playground
- Flower planting and support for ‘Alwoodley in Bloom’
- Pedestrian issues, including overhanging trees and dog mess

The findings from the survey helped the Parish Council to focus quickly on certain actions which they knew would hold widespread support. One early piece of action was organising a public meeting in order to set up an ‘Alwoodley in Bloom’ group, an initiative which has since seen volunteers planting 13,500 bulbs along roadsides and footpaths. The survey also led the Parish Council to arrange a presentation by the Police and subsequently to support the setting up of neighbourhood watch schemes. Another outcome was the City Council resurfacing a road which was in particularly poor condition.

As a newly established local council they were able to demonstrate a sense of purpose, with Parish Councillors who have always had ideas for projects they wished to see progressed. This was strongly informed by the residents’ survey. Those ambitions have not diminished over time and as early projects have been achieved they have moved on to others. Once a year the Councillors have held an awayday, during which they revisit the findings from the residents’ survey, reviewing progress and reminding themselves what is outstanding.

A similar survey may well be repeated in 2011, after the next set of Parish elections.

***Developing the role of the parish council***

In its initial period, at least, Alwoodley Parish Council has not sought to play a major direct role in service delivery. Instead, it has seen itself more involved in facilitating and enabling local community action.

The exception is the lengthsman service, which was one response to the finding that people had concerns about the state of the local environment. A visit was made to a neighbouring parish (Shadwell) to learn about their lengthsman service. Mike, the lengthsman in Alwoodley, started work in March 2010 and has a contract with the Parish Council (rather than being its employee). His work is additional to the environmental maintenance carried out by Leeds City Council and, as such, it is paid for out of the parish precept. Flexibility is important, so tasks can be tackled when and where they occur. The Parish Council website

encourages residents to suggest things which need doing. Typical tasks are grass cutting, tree pruning, hedge trimming, footpath clearance, litter clearing and graffiti removal.

As noted above, one thing this Parish Council has facilitated is the setting up of the Alwoodley in Bloom group. Similarly, in 2009 it helped establish the Friends of Adel Woods. These woods, which adjoin the suburban area, are called “a local jewel ... but which need a bit of TLC.” The Friends are volunteers who have since improved the woodland environment, supported its wildlife and encouraged people to enjoy the facility. A further initiative which has been enabled is a local crime prevention panel, to help raise residents’ awareness and encourage them to reduce the risk of becoming a victim of crime.

The Parish Council operates an innovative small grants scheme, offering up to £250 to local groups or organisations, the basic rule being that applicants must say how they will be of benefit to the people of Alwoodley. Paperwork is minimal, though those awarded a grant must show proof of expenditure. Amongst other things, grants have paid for a ramp for the disabled at a local church, special equipment for the elderly at a bowls club, litter picking equipment for Adel Woods and for some local Girl Guides to attend World Guides Day. The scheme also provided start up funding to groups like Alwoodley in Bloom. It has proved popular and the Parish Council generally considers one or two applications at each meeting. According to the Chair this is about giving back to the community; showing them direct benefit from the precept.

### ***Employing a Parish Clerk***

After the Parish Council formed in May 2008 there was a relatively lengthy period where they did not have a permanent clerk. The post was advertised that Summer, but for various reasons it was November when the current clerk started in post. During those five or six months one of the Councillors acted as a temporary and unpaid clerk.

Everyone acknowledges that the appointment process took longer than intended. This was less than ideal and some momentum was lost. The various systems and processes required to run a local council were mostly put in place (including sound financial management systems) and thankfully nothing major was overlooked. Nonetheless, the incoming permanent clerk had quite a bit of work to do to put things on a stronger footing.

With the benefit of hindsight the role of the clerk was also initially under-estimated. It remains a part-time post, but the hours of employment have been increased to 45 per month as the size of the role became clearer. They now appreciate the volume of paperwork and financial management, not to mention the time that goes into contact and communication with local residents (including responding to e-mails). The clerk has been

provided with a laptop so she can work either from the Parish Council office – rented within the local community centre – or from home.

*“Until you get a clerk you don’t realise what one does ... we should have got one earlier”.*

The permanent post-holder had some prior knowledge of the parish clerk role. They were already a part-time clerk at a parish in Bradford and had been undertaking the Society of Local Council Clerks’ training course on ‘Working with your council’. As such, they did not arrive with specific training needs. The Chair believes it would have been a steep learning curve for anyone without some previous experience, though equally they value the fact that the clerk has been able to grow into the role as the Parish Council developed itself.

## Next steps

Alwoodley Parish Council considers that it took them around two years to get through their set up phase, but that period is now essentially over. More than that, they have a number of tangible achievements they can now point to.

They are in the process of developing a Strategic Plan. They thought about going through a more substantive process of working with their community to create a Parish Plan, but concluded they were not yet ready for that step. However, the Strategic Plan will map out where they want the parish council to be in a year’s time, in three years’ time and in five years’ time. It is hoped it will prove a useful document for future councillors.

This is relevant, as there will be another set of elections in May 2011. These will bring in new blood, since (for various reasons) some current Councillors will not be standing again. The parish council elections will take place on the same day as those for the City Council and will, in future, happen on the same four yearly cycle.

At a very practical level, Alwoodley Parish Council is now helping to establish an allotments association and is trying to help them find a suitable site. They also have the City Council working with them on plans to refurbish a local playground during 2011, a project into which they will invest around £5,000.

Web address for Alwoodley Parish Council: <http://www.alwoodleyparishcouncil.org/>

***This document was written for the National Association of Local Councils (NALC) and the Commission for Rural Communities (CRC) by Brian Wilson Associates, with David Atkinson Consulting and Ellie Stoneley.***

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**January 2011**





**Bingley Town Council:**

**New Community Council Created**

**How a new Town Council was created in the previously un-Parished area  
of Bingley, City of Bradford, West Yorkshire**

## Headlines:

- Bingley is a market town in the metropolitan borough of the City of Bradford, in West Yorkshire, England. It is situated on the River Aire and the Leeds and Liverpool Canal.
- Local travel links include Bingley railway station in the town centre and Leeds Bradford International Airport, which is located 10 miles from the city centre. The B6265 (Main Street), connecting Bingley to Keighley, runs through the town centre.
- Historically a part of the West Riding of Yorkshire, Bingley appears in the *Domesday Book* of 1086 as "Bingheleia".
- Residents clearly wanted their own local identity and felt that the City of Bradford Metropolitan District Council (CBMDC, the principal local authority) was becoming unresponsive to the needs of Bingley residents on key service and asset matters.
- The campaign to create a new Bingley Town Council has been one of the best run and well managed in the country, being delivered at astonishing speed.

Ros Dawson, Bingley Campaign Champion, said *“The campaign for a Town Council for Bingley was started because it was apparent that thousands of residents needed a “voice”. It felt like no one was “batting” for us when it came to cuts in public services and issues surrounding planning and development – and there was no clear plan for regeneration and investment. Without a regular forum for our communities to discuss issues that matter to us, there was little opportunity to be pro-active, not just react to events such as the closure of our public toilets and plans to close our swimming pool. After research, thought and consultation, it was clear that a Town Council will provide a basic and essential piece of “civic infrastructure” that will underpin and support our communities; provide a communications hub; enable local people to engage with national policies and address some challenges facing our area.”*

## What is the theme? - Why a Council is wanted:

The theme of this case study is the creation of a new town council in the locale of Bingley, Bradford. Using the NALC/ DCLG campaign pyramid - this is the phase at the summit of the journey a campaign group travels to after the principal local authority has given the green light to the creation of the new Parish Council during the relevant Community Governance Review phase.

The Bingley Community Council Group, comprising 15 local residents, campaigned for two years to create the new Town Council in Bingley in the belief that it would give residents a voice and the opportunity to deliver some services, after consultation with residents and if no longer provided by CBMDC. Residents will benefit from a Parish precept and their Town Councillors on their behalf will determine how it is best spent in Bingley.

## Contextual issues related to the theme:

Since 1974 (when the old Bingley Urban District Council was abolished with its civil Parish of Bingley) residents of Bingley have wanted a better deal on issues like planning, housing and town planning. Whilst the campaign group have recognised that though the General Power of Competence (GPC) is a power of first resort for Parish Councils – campaigners also know that Parish Councils are not planning authorities or highways authorities. However, the creation of one of the largest town Councils in Bradford District will do much to give residents a bigger say on these key policy issues.

Other recently formed Parish Councils have been achieved in areas such as Kidderminster, Finham, Pannal and Westgate. Elections for the new Town Council will take place on 5 May, 2016. There has been historic interest before in parishing the centre of Bradford – but other campaigns in Yorkshire are taking their lead from Bingley in areas such as Thornton and Stainland. Pannal and Burn Bridge Parish Council has also just been formed in Harrogate.

## Who are the key partners / stakeholders involved?

The key individuals involved in the campaign from the campaign group perspective were: Ros Dawson (Chairwoman), Edwina Simpson (Treasurer and Secretary) Terry Brown, John Findlay, Maureen Carney, John Burrill, Claire Holt, Norman Roper, James Hinchliffe, Alan Josephs, Gordon Hodgson, Philippa Gibbons, Helen Owen and Jackie Church (former Secretary). Securing support from some district ward councillors in the area to be parished and other CBMDC councillors proved a challenge. However, over 2000 signatures (meeting the requirement of 10% of the population of the area to be parished) were gathered in just two months.



*The launch of the petition for a new Bingley Town Council, November 2014*

The petition was on paper as CBMDC would not accept an online petition. Despite this, on the whole officers at CBMDC were, whilst impartial, generous with advice. The Deputy City Solicitor, Dermot Pearson, had been contacted in the early stages of the campaign in order to give plenty of notice. In addition, other helpful staff included Kathryn Jones, Strategy & Engagement Officer (Policy, Programmes and Change) and Susan Saunders, Electoral Services Manager, and her team.

The campaign group was grant funded with £17, 000 over three financial years to help stimulate and sustain resident interest through producing leaflets, organise public meetings, etc. . Such funding was provided by DCLG and accessed from the Yorkshire Local Councils' Associations via the National Association of Local Councils. This funding was regarded to have been crucial in the delivery of this – the largest new Town Council in Bradford.

## What are the key issues / challenges? Progress with campaign to date:

It took approximately two months to gather the relevant signatures required to trigger the Community Governance Review for the creation of the new Bingley Town Council. Apart from the large logistical challenge of gathering such signatures, only one of six district councillors serving the area covered by the proposed Bingley Town Council was in favour of the plan.



Throughout the campaign, there was no support the remaining five councillors (although one did eventually vote in favour) - and no support for the proposal from any political party. The local Conservative MP did not openly support or oppose the proposal but was willing to engage in discussion and took part in a public meeting.



*2 Throughout the campaign there was support from Jackie Church, pictured here with the petition of over 2,000 signatures at City Hall, Bradford, January 2015.*

After the Community Governance Review, the proposal managed to get through CBMDC's Audit and Governance Committee as it had been recommended for approval by officers. The final vote, by CBMDC's full council in October 2015, was a free vote. For some minutes, as the councillors' raised hands were counted it looked as though the campaign would fail. Thankfully, the final tally showed more councillors in favour than opposed, although some including two of the Bingley councillors abstained.

Chris Pilkington, of YLCA, said, *“Full marks are owed to Ros Dawson and the excellent support she has continuously received from her colleagues in the Bingley Community Council Group. Gathering the petitionary signatures proved to be the easy part of this process.*

*Getting through the Community Governance Review phase nearly dealt the campaign a fatal blow, but the campaign won out brilliantly.”*

## **How Have These Issues / Challenges Been Overcome?**

The £17,000 of DCLG funding since September, 2013 has helped the campaign group to massively overcome difficulties which may have proved insurmountable otherwise.



*3The campaign brand expressed as a logo and sticker*

The three main challenges were firstly, the campaign's group lack of experience of the process of creating a council and, secondly, communicating the proposal to residents in order to gather support, signatures on the petition and to encourage them to engage with and input into the Community Governance Review. Winning support from sufficient Bradford Councillors was also a challenge. The main solutions paid for by these monies were as below;

- Creating a strong brand for the campaign.
- Printing of newsletters, briefing leaflets and other informative and promotional literature.
- Hire of community halls for briefing events to gain support from voluntary and community organisations.
- Advice and support from experts at YLCA and NALC throughout the campaign. In particular, once the council had been created, access to NALC legal advice ensured allotments were not transferred to the new Town Council before it had elected representatives.
- Writing to every CBMDC councillor ahead of the final vote to lobby and explain why they should back the proposal for Bingley Town Council.
- Creating a survey, in early 2016, to establish local opinion on priority issues in the area – this also had the effect of raising awareness of the new Town Council.
- Holding public awareness events in early 2016, after the creation of Bingley Town Council had been agreed, to encourage residents to stand for council.



Ros Dawson outlines how she and her team overcame the challenges Bingley Council faced throughout the process:

*“It was nearly two years from the start of our campaign in 2013 to Bradford Metropolitan District Council’s decision to create a new Bingley Town Council. During that time we faced many challenges. As volunteers with no previous experience of Councils or how to form one we had to learn as we went along. We also had to find a lot of time in our busy lives to devote to the campaign. A first hurdle was Bradford Council’s insistence that the 1,843 signatures we needed to trigger a Community Governance Review were collected on a paper petition, rather than digitally online. Thanks to determined volunteers who staffed market stalls and local traders and churches hosting petitions we were able to meet our target in record time.*

*The mixed level of support from district Councillors connected to our area was a concern but this was overcome by gaining backing from two of them and from the many local societies and voluntary organisations in our area. They all saw the benefits of a local Council with democratically elected representatives, a range of discretionary powers and a budget, raised through the precept, with which to fund useful initiatives. In particular, the campaign initially got underway when Bingley Civic Trust and the town’s two Rotary clubs got behind it.*

*Councillors from Town and Parish Councils in Bradford district were also very generous with their time and advice. They helped to answer residents’ questions at public meetings and their experience informed our decisions. We are so grateful to them and also to support from NALC and Yorkshire Local Councils Associations. We were very fortunate that our campaign coincided with the #CreateACouncil initiative. There is no doubt that the funding from DCLG was vital to success. Our grant was spent on high quality information and publicity material, including a website, as well as holding public meetings and taking part in local events.*

*To sum up, we overcame difficulties by having a wide network of determined and enthusiastic supporters with different skillsets who were all prepared to roll up their sleeves and work hard. Funding and endorsement from central government was also crucial.”*

# **VOTE Bingley!**

Sign the petition **HERE**  
for a **NEW**  
**Bingley Town Council**

*to benefit*  
**Bingley**  
**Cottingley**  
**Crossflatts Eldwick**  
**Gilstead and Micklethwaite**



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**Together we can get a voice**

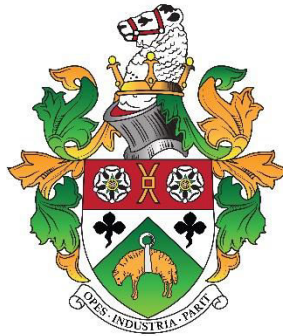
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More information at:  
**[www.bingleyccg.org.uk](http://www.bingleyccg.org.uk)**

 Bingley Council Group  @BingleyCCG

*4 The poster at locations hosting the petition*

## Outcomes - Learning from the campaign



*5 The Bingley Coat of Arms*

The main initial campaigning achievement was the securing of the relevant signatures required to trigger the Community Governance Review into the proposal to create a council. The second main achievement was to encourage sufficient numbers of residents to respond positively to the Community Governance Review. The third achievement was to secure majority support for the creation of the new town Council amongst Bradford Metropolitan District Councillors. Though the final full Council vote late in 2015 delivered a narrow victory for the campaign, it was all that the BCCG had hoped for.

The sharing of the learning has been both local – in the form of sharing campaign ideas with other local groups, often via the online hub – and national, through presentations by NALC and Bingley Community Council Group at events.

### **What have been the key elements of success?**

The vital element of success on a project of this scale was to persuade enough Bradford Councillors to support the creation of the new Town Council in the final Full Council vote late in 2015. Ultimately, no matter how many local residents backed the plan, the power to create the new parish – or not – lay with the principal authority. However, this was tackled with superb lobbying from BCCG and YLCA in the final weeks before the vote.

The second main achievement was to have gathered so many petitionary signatures in the first place (2,000) – in two months – an astonishing achievement.

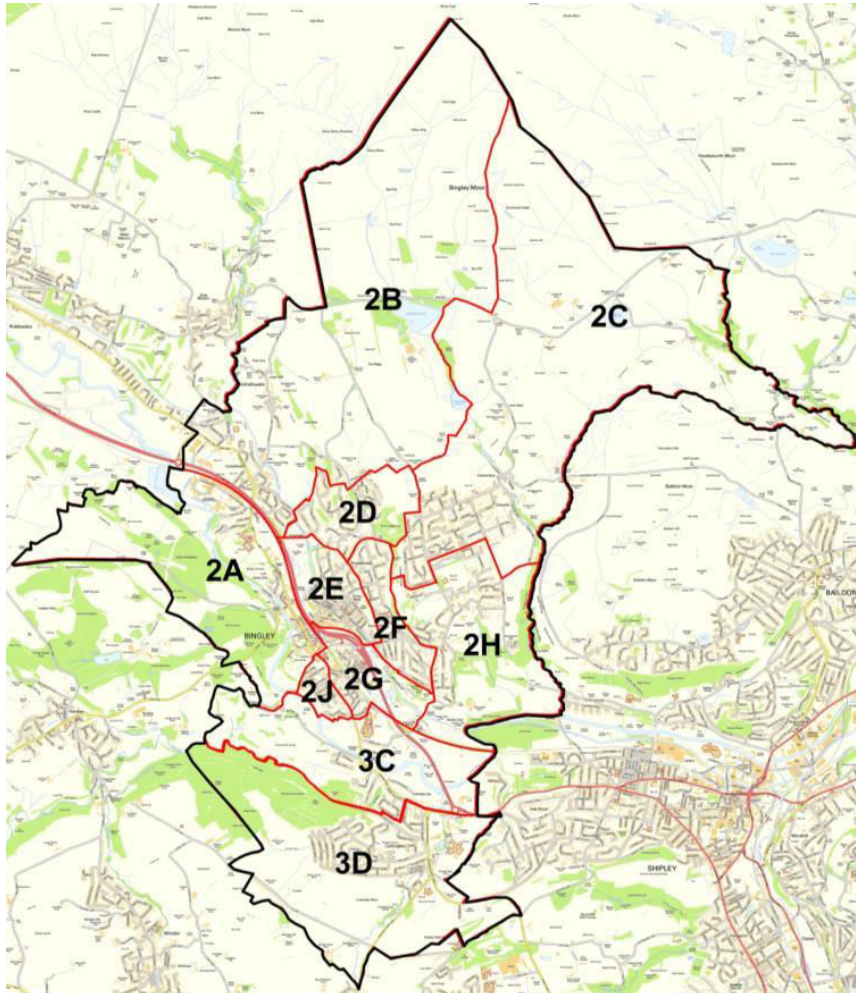
### **What has been learnt? Campaign lessons to share with others**

Bingley residents will benefit from a strong and permanent voice on several strategic policy issues such as housing, planning and town planning through the new Town Council – and through relationships with Bradford Metropolitan District Council.

As mentioned, residents will benefit in year one from revenue from a local precept which can be spent on services in Bingley. However, this precept has been set by CBMDC and is below the average for parish and town councils in the district.



The campaign group also recognises that sharing lessons on gathering petition signatures and how to lobby principal authority Councillors are critical. Engaging continuously also with residents throughout the campaign and particularly once a Community Governance Review has been triggered is also critical.



*OA new parish: Bingley Town Council*

The campaign group also recognise that once a re-organisation order has been issued by the principal authority – the entirely new set of challenges of creating the new Town Council (i.e. budget setting, vesting etc.) emerges – including the need for sufficient residents to stand for election to the new Town Council.

## Who Can I Contact?

**Campaign Champion: Ros Dawson - [chairman@bingleyccg.org.uk](mailto:chairman@bingleyccg.org.uk) / 07720 882512.**

**Yorkshire Local Councils' Association: Chris Pilkington – [chris.pilkington@yorkshirelca.gov.uk](mailto:chris.pilkington@yorkshirelca.gov.uk) / 01904 436622**

## Other information

*More information on how to create a new council: The NALC's 'Create a Council' page:*

<http://www.nalc.gov.uk/our-work/create-a-council>

*The NALC's 'Power to the people' resource:*

<http://www.nalc.gov.uk/publications>

*Bingley Community Council Campaign:*

<http://bingleyccg.org.uk> .

*Yorkshire Local Councils' Associations:*

<http://www.yorkshirelca.gov.uk> .



## Case study on the experience of newly established local (parish and town) councils

### CANVEY ISLAND TOWN COUNCIL (CASTLE POINT, ESSEX)

#### Background

Canvey Island Town Council was created in 2007, after a public petition which precipitated a decision by the Government to agree the designation of this new parish within the borough of Castle Point.

The campaign for a new town council for Canvey Island had been running for many years. Local campaigners saw the area as a distinct geographic entity, because the island is physically divided from mainland Essex by a channel of the Thames Estuary. Many people remembered when Canvey Island Urban District Council had been the local government body, before the major re-organisation of local government in 1974, and the campaign drew on the feeling that Castle Point Borough Council did not represent well the concerns of local residents.

Castle Point was opposed to its creation, partly because it would move forty per cent of the borough's electors into a single local council. This was unprecedented at the time and Essex Association of Local Councils had to establish with the relevant Whitehall department (then the Office of the Deputy-Prime Minister) that such a move would be constitutionally lawful. The order was made to create Canvey Island Town Council in 2006 and the first elections were contested on 3<sup>rd</sup> May 2007 for its eleven seats.

Canvey Island Town Council represents a population of over 40,000. The area has been extensively developed since the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century and the majority of the island is urbanised. However, the western side is dominated by gas storage facilities and oil refineries. Conservation and flood defences are two significant concerns for the Council. The whole island sits within the large-scale Thames Gateway regeneration initiative.

#### Key areas of learning

##### *Practical and logistical issues*

The early role played by the Essex Association of Local Councils (EALC) is an important part of the Canvey Island Town Council story. Since the year 2000 EALC had developed significant expertise in helping new local councils to become established across Essex. Pre-creation, EALC was the link between the campaign group and the principal local authority, helping with petitioning arrangements and consultation on the island.

Once the order to create the new council was made, EALC provided advice to Castle Point Borough Council about setting an initial budget and precept, and about what would be needed to establish the Council. This included estimating the costs of the establishment tasks. On that basis, Castle Point made available a grant to EALC of £7,500. This was used to employ a development worker (usually someone who knows the job well, such as a former parish or town clerk, or a clerk loaned from another council) to undertake many of the initial set up functions. It proved crucial in ensuring that the Town Council was prepared for elections and ready to do business immediately after them.

Based on previous experience, EALC's development worker prioritised bank accounts, payroll arrangements, insurance and the town clerk appointment process. Other important functions revolved around the operation of the Council, so early tasks included securing a venue for its meetings, clarifying the roles of Councillors, setting a schedule of meetings, preparing the first meeting agenda (including a code of conduct and declaration of interest issues), considering the committee structures and organising Councillor training.

These actions ensured a very smooth start to the Council's life. Nevertheless, there were some practical difficulties to overcome. For instance, there were no offices suitable as a base for the Council which could be met from its budget. The former Canvey Island UDC office and meeting rooms were vacant at the time. However, Castle Point Borough Council was reluctant to release them, because of plans to turn them into a health clinic. Currently, Canvey Island hires the community centre (owned by Castle Point) for their meetings and events.

There were also – and continue to be – problems accessing support for specific policies that the Town Council is required to have in place. For instance, following an inspection by the local fire service, Canvey Island Town Council was advised to write a full fire risk assessment and to develop a fire safety policy. Finding advice on this issue that addressed the specific needs of a local council was difficult and time consuming. It would have been helpful to have drawn on a template or some guidance. There was, though, some valuable information from NALC on employment and legal issues for local councils, which the town clerk has found helpful. Even so, often the detailed requirements of particular local councils go beyond what is readily available.

There have continued to be other small frustrations, all which have taken some sorting out. This includes finding – and affording – the right level of reliable IT support. The town clerk has found that a network of other clerks, established informally through training and conference events, continues to be valuable in sharing experience and practice on these and other council set up and development issues.

### ***Recruiting a town clerk***

Finding a suitable clerk to take the establishment of the council forward became an unexpectedly protracted process. There were no responses to the first recruitment advert placed in the local press. Subsequently, the post was re-advertised at a higher salary and was successfully recruited to. However, that town clerk was only in the role a short time before deciding to move on. The position was advertised for a third time and, once again, there were no applicants. At this point the Councillors looked closely at the role description and its remuneration, and they decided to re-advertise at a significantly higher rate with enhanced terms and conditions. This resulted in a successful appointment from among six good quality applicants.

The current town clerk feels that some potential applicants may have been put off the role because of difficulties getting on and off the island. Access is very difficult, particularly in the rush hour, as there is only one decent road crossing over the estuary. As a result, the role is more likely to appeal to local people and this means there is a smaller pool of potential applicants.

These recruitment issues led to some loss of impetus on the early strategic goals of the Council, together with inevitable delays around a range of practical establishment activities. Plus, of course, there were the additional recruitment costs. The experience has led to the Council absorbing some important lessons about developing an attractive job package, based on benchmarking and well targeted advertising.

### ***Communicating with local people***

Even though the Town Council came about as a result of a public petition, communication with local residents had initially been low-key. The successful petition was part of a well organised and focused lobby, which did not extend particularly widely across the island's population. There were 3,500 signatures from an island population of over 40,000. The town clerk reflects that this meant there was a surprisingly low awareness of the existence of the new Council and its role.

The Council has prioritised communications since its establishment and has been rewarded for doing so. Canvey Island has invested in a new website which provides up-to-date details

about the Council's business and organisation, together with extensive information about the local area, organisations, services, events and useful links. New notice boards are being well used and there is a full colour newsletter distributed throughout the island. The town clerk concedes that a remaining problem is some confusion among residents between the role of Canvey Island and that of the Borough Council. One thing they would like to see is more information about the Town Council and its role being placed on the Castle Point Borough Council website. It would also be easier to signpost residents to the right contacts for their queries if Canvey Island and Castle Point shared the same telephone switchboard, as happens in some places.

## Next steps

Having one town clerk in post full time from the date the Council was created would have helped with a swifter establishment after vesting. The town clerk accepts that some of those early delays mean the Council is not yet where it wants to be. Nevertheless, there has been some excellent progress.

The Council has in place a wide range of transparent policy and procedural arrangements (available on its website) and the budget position is conservatively healthy. It is now looking to build on these solid foundations and to deliver on ambitions detailed in its recently completed four-year plan. For instance, an Events Manager has recently been recruited who helped to organise an enthusiastically received Armed Forces Day on the island. The Council is also able to offer some grants to local community organisations and for community projects. It is looking forward to undertaking community led planning work and is actively considering becoming a Quality Town Council.

Canvey Island is also developing a stronger relationship with Castle Point. Initially the relationship struggled because Canvey Island was the only local council in the borough and there was no precedent for establishing support or communications channels. Those channels do now exist.

For a local council that is towards the larger end of the scale in population terms, Canvey Island has surprisingly few assets. Shortly after establishment the Council received the allotments as a permanent transfer and it has now taken over Canvey Lake on a 99 year lease. Negotiations are also underway for a tidal bathing pool. The town clerk would like to explore more asset transfer options with the principal local authority.

*Web address for Canvey Island Town Council: <http://www.canveyisland-tc.gov.uk>*

***This document was written for the National Association of Local Councils (NALC) and the Commission for Rural Communities (CRC) by Brian Wilson Associates, with David Atkinson Consulting and Ellie Stoneley.***

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***January 2011***



## Case study on the experience of newly established local (parish and town) councils

### CHESWICK GREEN PARISH COUNCIL (SOLIHULL)

#### Background

Cheswick Green is a village and civil parish within the Metropolitan Borough of Solihull, between Birmingham and Coventry. It was previously part of the civil parish of Hockley Heath, and lies approximately 3 miles south west of Solihull town centre. It is a planned settlement from the 1970s and is large enough to sustain six shops including a newsagent, post office and hairdresser, as well as a pub, village hall and school. There is also a recreation area, children's playground, open space and football pitch.

Cheswick Green is one the four new civic parishes formed on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2009 when the large parish of Hockley Heath was abolished. The precept was originally set at £50,000 but it has reduced in the second year to £45,000. It has almost 2,000 people on the electoral register and it has five elected councillors.

Former Hockley Heath Parish covered a diverse area with three clearly defined settlements, as well as a new development at Dickens Heath. This fourth community grew quickly and soon established its own identity, with facilities and a community association but no democratically elected body.

The initial request to set up a separate parish council for Dickens Heath came in 2005, in response to lobbying by local residents. The high precept that was being paid seemed disproportionate for Dickens Heath, as they didn't benefit from much of the green space and parkland maintained by Hockley Heath Parish Council. Initially, the Borough Council looked at creating three new parish councils in Dickens Heath, Tidbury Green and a single one for Hockley Heath and Cheswick Green. However, when the Borough surveyed local opinion residents in Cheswick Green and Hockley Heath felt they needed their own parishes. So four new parish councils were proposed and the Borough Council had to go back out to consult with the public again. Only 15 people attended the public meeting in Cheswick Green and, despite a few concerns over cost issues, there was little resistance.



Solihull deemed that a consistent approach to community governance, which followed the four village communities, would be appropriate and would meet with general acceptance. Members also felt that having separate parishes for each village would help to promote a sense of place and that the electorate for each could sustain a parish administration.

The Governance Committee considered representations that four smaller parish councils would lose economies of scale, but was of the view that they could be achieved by common arrangements between the new parishes.

In July 2008 the proposition was put forward that from April 2009 Hockley Heath Parish Council be abolished and four new parish councils created, with the authority for a Reorganisation Order being delegated to the Acting Chief Officer, in consultation with the Chair and Group Spokespersons of the Governance Committee. A Transition Council was established for the purpose of the reorganisation and Dickens Heath Parish Council – one of Cheswick Green's new neighbours – was named as the 'successor' council.

## **Key areas of learning**

### ***Recruitment and role of the clerk***

The Clerk was previously clerk at Kingshurst Parish Council and had years of experience of the sector and its issues. She came initially as a temporary clerk to all four new parishes and was formally appointed Clerk to the Transitional Council in the period running up to elections in June. She was supported by the Head of Democratic Services at Solihull and by Warwickshire Association of Local Councils (WALC). Six Borough councillors 'stood in' as temporary parish councillors (in the relevant wards) and regular meetings were held to deal with ongoing liabilities, the setting up of bank accounts, invoices which had to be paid, maintenance contracts and so on. The Project Officer put together a plan for dealing with the ongoing contracts (grounds maintenance, dog bins, litter picking, etc) and it was agreed these would continue for 12 months to provide some stability during the start up phase of the new parish councils.

The Clerk continued as temporary Clerk to both Dickens Heath and Cheswick Green until both the jobs were advertised later in 2009. She applied for both roles and was offered the role at Cheswick Green on a 12 hours a week part-time basis. Her experience as a clerk, CiLCA qualification and positive relationships with WALC and the Borough were tremendously helpful in terms of establishing the role (and that of the Parish Council).

During the transition period the clerk was paid by the Borough Council, who then invoiced the former Hockley Heath Parish Council. When they subsequently worked for both Dickens

Heath and Cheswick Green, they were paid by the Borough Council with the cost split evenly between the two new councils and charged to Dickens Heath as the successor council. For a while Tidbury Green and Hockley Heath Parish Councils employed locum Parish Clerks, who assisted their recruitment process for a permanent clerk.

### ***Managing finances and insurance***

The Transition Council and Project Officer put in place detailed plans for the financial transition, which led to the initial precept being set at £50,000 and the agreement of terms for ongoing contractual obligations. Funds from the former Hockley Heath Parish Council were made available to the Transition Council.

Election costs were covered by Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council where they were combined costs with its own elections (e.g. the polling station), but specific parish costs were charged locally (e.g. local ballot papers, parish postal vote packs and parish counting) again from allocated budgets agreed by the Transition Council and Project Officer.

Obtaining insurance was an issue, as that for the former Parish Council ran until June 2009. In order that cover was current in the transition period, arrangements were made for it to continue in the name of Dickens Heath on behalf of the four new parishes. Each of the new parishes has now negotiated their own insurance.

A major issue that the Clerk had to deal with was the opening of new bank accounts, which were needed not just for the four new parish councils (current and savings accounts), but also for Dickens Heath to hold funds from the former Hockley Heath plus another account for Tidbury Green Village Hall. There was a surplus from the village hall management committee which needed to be reallocated. That process became very convoluted with the signing of indemnities and so on, but was eventually resolved.

During this period the guidance (particularly on legal issues) from WALC and the appointed Project Officer was crucial and the Clerk wonders how a new clerk would get through if they personally didn't have experience of how the sector and its processes work.

### ***Communications and building local identity***

Good local communications have been crucial to the setting up of Cheswick Green (and the other 3 new parish councils). From the start letters were sent by the Borough Council to every household (twice, due to the change in legislation), public meetings were held and information was disseminated via the Borough Council website. After the formation of the new council, newsletters have gone out to the community and its own website has been launched. The last public meeting was attended by over 60 local residents and a recent

meeting about bus routes attracted 130 residents. The Clerk, who was introduced to the community by the Chairman at the public meetings, operates an open door policy whenever she is in the Parish Council office and welcomes in members of the public.

Cheswick Green Village Hall was built with money raised by the residents and with contributions from the Parish Council. There are currently a number of other open spaces throughout the village, maintained (via a locally negotiated contract) by the Parish Council including the archaeologically important remains of the Mount. These activities help to keep the public aware of the work of the Parish Council.

They have set up a website which they are able to manage and update themselves, at negligible cost, and the Chairman is looking to train the Clerk in how this is done to ensure its sustainability. They publish news, local information, council information, updates on issues (such as allotments) and have already started to receive enquiries through the website. It has been advertised, not just locally, but online, via Wikipedia, the local authority and other sites, and has been well tagged to ensure good search engine exposure. The Chairman recommends <http://www.parishcouncil.net> for their reliable, efficient and easily customised platform.

Communication with the Borough has also been maintained in a positive manner, following on from 'new parish council' meetings with its Head of Democratic Services. Cheswick Green Parish Council Clerk and Chairman both know that they can always pick up the phone for support and advice. The Clerk also feels that the encouragement and information available from WALC has been invaluable from both a personal and council perspective. Over the first year, the Borough Council held regular meetings with the four new Parish Council chairmen, and offered support and training on chairing meetings and understanding roles/processes. The communication channels developed during this process have helped ongoing relations with the Borough, particularly where it had been felt that Members hadn't always had a clear understanding of the role of local councils did and how they worked.

## Next steps

In response to requests from local residents, the Clerk is working with Royal Mail to resolve an issue with the local postal address. The address currently includes the place name of Shirley, rather than Cheswick Green. Whilst seeming a trivial issue, the Cheswick Green community has an increasing pride about its identity; as well as building the community brand, by addressing this issue the Parish Council has enhanced public perception about the value of its work.

With elections coming up in May 2011, the Councillors will be elected for a four year period,

which the Clerk says will mean that Cheswick Green Parish Council will be able to start working in earnest towards the Quality Parishes Scheme.

The Parish Council is also looking to take on the management of local allotments from the principal local authority. Their recent survey produced 40 requests for allotments from local residents. They are currently searching for a two acre site with a water supply and have identified four possible sites, though nothing has yet been resolved.

Cheswick Green is considering taking on other delegated services, but is keen to ensure that governance details and all 'operational' matters are dealt with first. For example, the Clerk's contract has just been finalised, and Freedom of Information documentation and financial regulations have been organised. With the Clerk working considerably over their allotted 12 weekly hours, there is still much to be done before Parish Planning and consideration of further delegations will take place.

Cheswick Green Parish Council supports the idea of parishing more of the unparished areas of Solihull, as many places only have one level of formal representation - resident's associations don't have the same legal status and public accountability. The Parish Chairman says that, "*Where reorganisation takes place, there should be uniformity of structure, this needs to be symmetrical across the Borough to ensure that the public (and local and Borough councillors) understand what is going on and the precept issue is resolved [double taxation]*". He hopes the experience from these four parish councils will help to further such understanding and lead to the formation of more new local councils.

<b><i>Some do's and don'ts according to Cheswick Green Parish Council</i></b>	
<p>Do realise that the set up process is a lot for one person, even in a smaller parish.</p> <p>Do encourage pro-active councillors, once roles and responsibilities are sorted.</p> <p>Do use your CALC for support, advice and guidance.</p> <p>Do keep talking to your public, the principal local authority and neighbouring councils.</p> <p>Do believe that you can do it!</p>	<p>Don't rush too far into policy and planning until you have sorted the governance.</p> <p>Don't ignore any local concerns about double taxation, given the current financial climate.</p>

Web address for Cheswick Green Parish Council: <http://www.cheswickgreen-pc.org.uk>

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**January 2011**



**Finham Parish Council — The Story Of How A New Parish Council Was Created In  
Finham, Coventry**

## Headlines:

- Finham is a suburb, south of the city of Coventry, in the West Midlands.
- This case study tells the story of how the Finham Residents' Association triggered a Community Governance Review and established a parish council.
- The case study explores the difficulties of holding a campaign group together (with residents with a range of different interests campaigning for the same goal) – over a long campaign period.
- The case study also examines the difficulties of sustaining a campaign over a longer period of time than expected (with the first elections being delayed until May, 2016).
- The main focus of this study is to show how a campaign group prevailed against some differences of approach amongst its ranks, and delays to the first parish elections in a city with virtually no other parish councils.

## Why A Council Is Wanted:

The development of a new housing estate raised concern among the residents of Finham, due to the increased volume of traffic, with roads being unable to accommodate the additional amount of vehicles, as well as the additional strain on schools and under-developed public transport. Although Finham Residents' Association opposed the developments, it was felt that residents would have more say in the development plans of the area through the creation of a parish council. In addition, residents felt they had less of an opportunity to make their voice heard on the traffic congestion issue through the Tenants' and Residents' Association as the council was not bound to consult with or listen to its views on traffic matters.

It was felt – given the traffic issues already suffered by Finham residents – that the creation of a statutory permanent voice for the area would combat future such experiences. A new Finham Parish Council could claim to legitimately and democratically represent the views of residents in its area on traffic matters as it would be elected and be far more likely to be listened to by the local highways authority (Coventry City Council). The possibility of having a body which could deliver this influence on the highly contentious local issue of traffic was therefore irresistible to residents who in principle backed the campaign very strongly.

Furthermore, the parish council could also undertake projects and schemes, working in partnership with other bodies and scrutinising the principal authority with the scope of improving service delivery and ensuring that the needs of residents are being met, improving their representation at the local government level. A Finham Parish Council would also be far more likely to consult with residents on traffic calming measures and then be able to make specific proposals back to Coventry City Council to resolve them for residents – on matters such as the routing of buses, the need to ensure sufficient buses are routed on *school runs* and how to avoid congestion at peak times of day

for traffic. A parish council could adopt and use the General Power of Competence to work in this way far more effectively with Coventry City Council. These are the main reasons Finham residents wanted a new parish council.

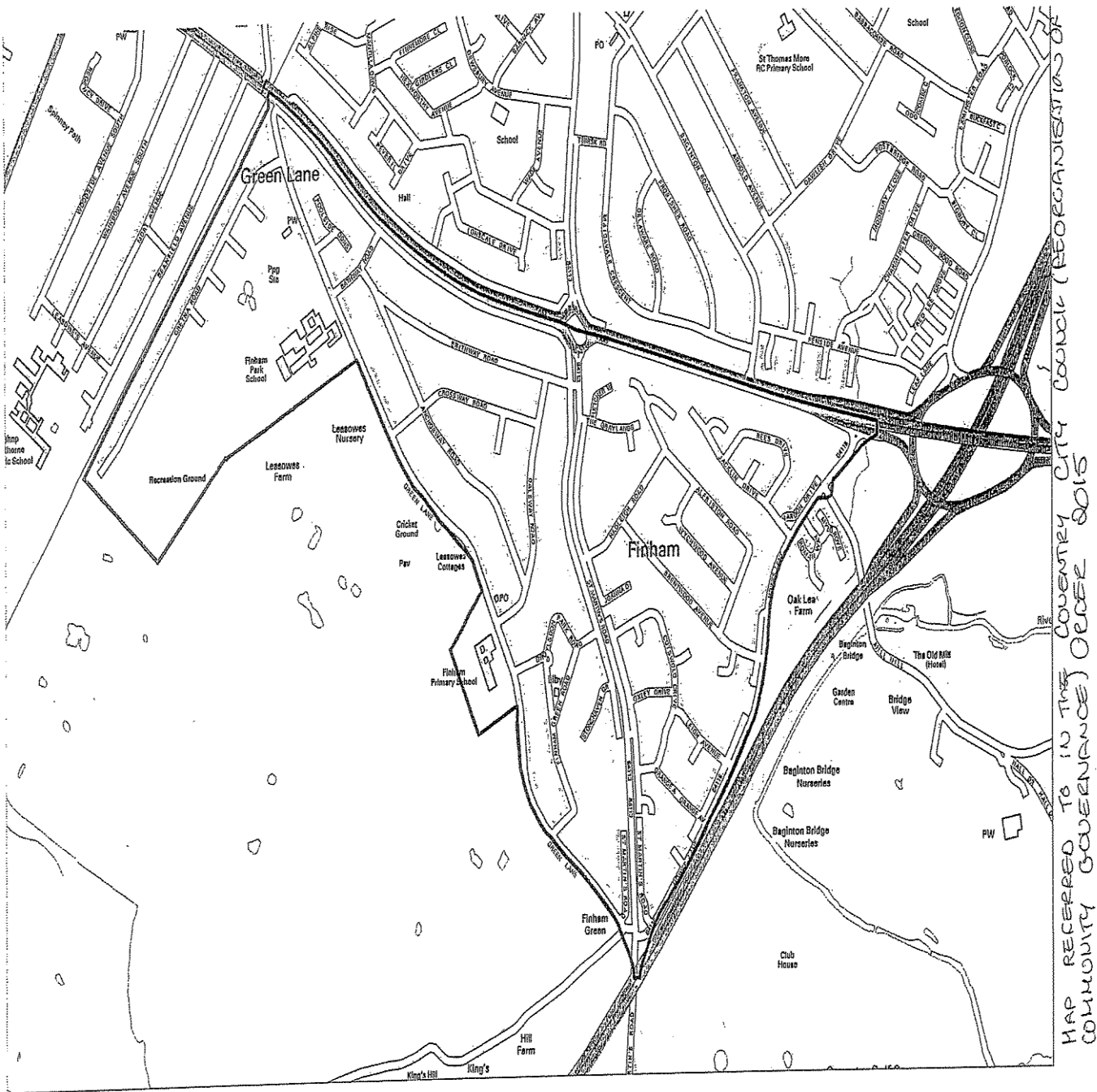
### **Campaign Area and General Campaign Approach:**

Finham is a suburb, south of the city of Coventry, in the West Midlands. It shares its northern boundary along the A45 with the suburb of Styvechale / Stivichall, and part of its south-eastern boundary is shared with the village of Baginton in Warwickshire. The suburb of Green Lane lies directly to the west and the hamlet of King's Hill lies within a mile of Finham at Coventry's southernmost point.



(Above) Map of Green Lane, Finham.





(Above) Map of boundary of Finham Parish Council area from Coventry City Council (boundary is marked by bold black line).



With a population of 3,851 local government electors, Finham offers various leisure and educational facilities, such as Finham Park School – a large comprehensive school built in 1970, as well as Finham Primary School - both are situated in Green Lane.

The campaign group issued 2200 leaflets to residents in Finham in November, 2014 and January, 2015. These were hand delivered by members of the Finham Tenants' and Residents' Association in two leaflet runs. This saved the cost of hiring a private company to deliver the leaflets for the campaign group, was a public show of the Resident Association's support for the campaign, and demonstrated to residents that the campaign group were prepared to work very hard to give the area a permanent new local voice with a parish council. The leaflets both promoted the benefits of a new parish council and highlighted the process for securing such a new council (through a Community Governance Review). It was felt by the campaign group that the leaflets were critical to raising awareness of the campaign and its objectives across the whole would-be parish council area.

Posters were also printed and posted up to promote the campaign across the intended parish area using money from the NALC / DCLG / CALC New Councils' Programme. The posters promoted the benefits of creating a new parish council and highlighted (like the leaflets) the crucial public meetings where more information could be heard and the petition signed. The posters were located at critical local hubs such as community centres and local shops in the area where footfall was highest.

Public meetings were held at local venues to both promote the benefits that parish councils in or near the Finham area (such as Keresley and Allesley) already had. Such benefits include the right to be notified of planning applications and to develop neighbourhood plans. A Finham Parish Council might also adopt responsibility for cutting grass verges, looking after local footpaths and clear gullies. And a Finham Parish Council could also be given a say on and even responsibilities for street lighting, parking, road safety and street cleaning.

The Residents' Association drove the campaign and used the leaflets to drive residents also to the public meetings at local community venues in Finham. At the end of the public meetings residents were asked to sign the campaign petition once they heard of the benefits of a new parish council. This direct face to face contact was the reason in large numbers why the campaign group was able to promote the benefits so widely of a new parish council to Finham residents, so securing broader support from residents for the campaign and more petition signatures.

This approach between 2014 and 2015 worked as 711 of 3,851 people living in the area signed a petition requesting the establishment of a parish council in the Finham area. Later during the Community Governance Review a total of 1,461 Finham residents then voted on the issue with 73 per cent of resident respondents saying they would support the creation of a parish council.

The Finham Residents' Association drove the campaign and used every opportunity at their own meetings and events (including stalls) to promote the concept of a Finham Parish Council to as wide a range of residents as possible. Without the Residents' Association the campaign would probably not have succeeded.

### Who Are The Key Partners / Stakeholders Involved?:

The campaign for setting up a parish council in Finham has been led by the Finham Residents' Association, which worked closely with the Warwickshire and West Midlands Association of Local Councils, and the National Association of Local Councils. The Finham Residents' Association has also been liaising throughout the campaign with Coventry City Council, working towards triggering a Community Governance Review (the process through which a new parish council is created). Though the council was helpful, it had only been involved in setting up two parish councils in its area before (Keresley and Allesley) so it did not have a huge experience of going through a Community Governance Review process procedurally - which proved a challenge for the campaign group.

The campaign also received the support of the Department for Communities and Local Government, being offered a grant under the New Councils' Programme, which the campaign leaders used to promote awareness about the benefits of having a parish council and to mobilise residents in the area. Campaigners have openly said that the grant helped the campaign to complete the Community Governance Review process in the ways described above.



Above; St Martins-in-the-Fields Church, Finham – whose hall was used for some campaign activity.

The petition opened by the Finham Residents' Association collected 711 signatures, more than the minimum required to initiate a Community Governance Review, by December 2013, when it was formally submitted to Coventry City Council. The Community Governance Review commenced the following year, in June 2014. This six month wait was very difficult for the campaign group as maintaining campaigner enthusiasm can be challenging through long periods of apparent inactivity. However, as the Residents' Association was a standing presence in the area, it was able to grasp the campaign mantle again at the start of the Review, from June, 2014.

Although Coventry City Council was due to reach a decision in December 2014, due to a technicality the final Full Council decision was postponed further until January 2015. The Conservative opposition on Coventry City Council had been campaigning for the creation of a parish council in Finham and a decision on whether to form the parish council was due at the last full council meeting of 2014. But, following a technical change, the controlling Labour Group voted to delay the decision until 13 January, 2015.

The campaign group strived to avoid party politics becoming involved in the campaign – but its involvement was unavoidable and delayed the date of the final full council vote by several weeks. This meant that the campaign group had to constantly amend its campaign plan during the Community Governance phase. However, the campaign group were flexible in their approach. Timings with leaflet deliveries and public meetings were amended to work around the delay with the final full council vote – and the timely new councils' grant from NALC / DCLG was used to pay for leaflets raising ongoing awareness about the campaign and a meeting venue for a meeting with Coventry City Councillors to promote the overall benefits of a new parish council for Finham.

In spite of these challenges, the establishment of a parish council in Finham has been approved. Coventry City Council found that the population of Finham is large enough to sustain a parish, particularly if it were to take over services from the City Council. The first elections for the new Finham Parish Council took place in May, 2016. This is testament to the very hard work of the campaign group and its determination to sustain an ongoing dialogue with both councillors and officers from Coventry City Council.

### **Partnership Working:**

The creation of a parish council for Finham encountered some opposition from the principal authority. Coventry City Council initially allowed a very short period of time for the consultation, which was extended subsequently, with a prevailing need for some Council clarification on the need for the consultation. However, the campaign group worked very effectively with the City Council to promote the consultation and its purposes (as mentioned in earlier sections this was through public meetings and leaflets) and its crucial importance in delivering a new Finham Parish Council. Such joint partnership working and dialogue between Finham Residents' Association and Coventry City

Council ensured the Community Governance process broadly worked smoothly and, with the support of the National and Warwickshire and West Midlands Associations of Local Councils, the principal authority approved the creation of a Finham Parish Council on 13 January, 2015.

### Learning From The Campaign:

The Finham campaign has run smoothly, overcoming any obstacles along the way, due to its dedicated group of volunteers from the Finham Residents' Association, who worked closely with the Warwickshire and West Midlands Association of Local Councils (WALC). However, with three significant periods of delay along the way (including a sixteen month wait between the Coventry City Council permission for the new council and the first parish elections for Finham on 5 May, 2016) – regular communication between the Residents' Association, WALC and other residents was always going to be critical (but not easy) to maintain campaign momentum.

Although satisfied with the outcome, John Crossling, County Secretary at Warwickshire and West Midlands Association of Local Councils (WALC), would have done some things differently. Though the Residents' Association did what it could to drive communication between itself and the council, other agencies such as residents and WALC would have benefitted from more dedicated briefing sessions: *“WALC believes that communications should have been improved. Regular monthly progress meetings between Coventry City Council, the Residents' Association and WALC should have been put in place. We might have been able to get the interim Council established more than 1 month before the election which would have been a significant benefit.”*

### Why This Campaign Succeeded:

Once a given principal authority has reached a decision, although marking the end of perhaps the more difficult part of the process of establishing a new parish council, it is important for campaign groups to keep momentum until the elections. It is also a good time to start setting up the “infrastructure” of the new council, as WALC have pointed out (such as setting up an interim temporary or shadow council). To this end, having a good clerk (the chief officer of a parish council) is key. A local association is able to advise and provide support about recruiting a good clerk, as well as for other essential steps that are needed to take place during the interim period, before the first elections.

As such the main focus of this study has been to show how a campaign group won out against the odds to create a parish council in a city with very few other parish councils. Whilst the machinery of gaining petition signatures worked well for the campaign group in Finham – there did need to be better and more joined up holistic communications between the campaign group and some other agencies like WALC in the latter stages of the Community Governance phase. However, as below – for most of the campaign, residents were kept fully updated and involved.

*"The success of the campaign depended very much on the well-established communication links between the FRA and the local and wider community. Using its website, email system, meetings and leaflet drops we made sure that everyone was kept informed. Following the successful outcome the FRA met with officers from the CCC who advised them on how to proceed. The FRA has appreciated the valuable help received from WALC during the latter stages of this campaign" - Bob Fryer, President of the Finham Residents' Association and campaign champion.*

John Crossling, County Secretary at Warwickshire and West Midlands Association of Local Councils, believes that appointing an interim clerk has been very beneficial for the new council (such as drafting standing orders and an interim and initial council budget). The interim clerk recruited by the new council has been instrumental in helping to set up much of the infrastructure the new council will need to adopt and use: *"WALC have been concerned about the need to have an interim clerk in place to help put in place the key infrastructure ready for the new council. To that end WALC granted the Finham Residents' Association £1500 to employ a clerk temporarily. This has also enabled local publicity to be generated."*

### **Campaign Lessons To Share With Others:**

Finham Residents' Association (FRA) has shown that a campaign can be successful in spite of political opposition. Being at the heart of a political debate makes campaigning for a local council more difficult, not only due to opposition but also due to the way that the press covers an initiative, portraying it not as a struggle for democracy, but as a struggle for political interests.

Nevertheless, campaign leaders in Finham were very quick to respond to the different challenges, defending the campaign through the media and making sure all residents were correctly informed, by distributing information material and organising public meetings. Engaging with a County Association of Local Councils at an early stage is also very beneficial, as a local association can help with advice, information, support and guidance, as well as accessing specific grants to help lead a successful campaign.

Bob Fryer, President of the Finham Residents' Association and campaign champion: *"The main advice we would like to pass onto others campaigning for the establishment of a parish council would be to establish a strong communication and dialogue with the local residents. The people of Finham knew the FRA and what it stood for over many years, for example campaigning for a better bus service and fighting planning applications that adversely affected the local area. Therefore they were willing to listen and support us when we explained our desire to establish a parish council that would add a stronger layer of local democracy. Now we hope to move forward with a very successful Finham Parish Council. Good luck to all campaigners and if we can advise, please contact us."*

**Who Can I Contact?:**

**Bob Fryer – Campaign Champion:**

**Email: [bob.fryer123@btinternet.com](mailto:bob.fryer123@btinternet.com)**

**Telephone: 0204 76412 609**

**John Crossling – County Secretary at Warwickshire and West Midlands Association of Local Councils**

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**Telephone: 01789 472617**

**Other Information:**

**More information on creating a Council: The NALC ‘Create a Council’ web page:**

**<http://www.nalc.gov.uk/our-work/create-a-council> .**

**To see template resources such as a media release, leaflet and poster, please click here:**

**<http://www.nalc.gov.uk/our-work/create-a-council> .**

**To see case studies from other areas campaigning to set up new parish councils please click here**

**<http://www.nalc.gov.uk/our-work/create-a-council> .**

**Power to the People resource - <http://www.nalc.gov.uk/publications> .**

**Finham Residents’ Association - <http://www.finham.org.uk/> .**

**Finham Parish Council - <http://www.finhamparishcouncil.btck.co.uk/> .**

**Warwickshire and West Midlands Association of Local Councils - <http://www.walc.org.uk/about> .**



## Case study on the experience of newly established local (parish and town) councils

### HEXTABLE PARISH COUNCIL (SEVENOAKS, KENT)

#### Background

Hextable Parish Council was created on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2008.

Hextable is a rural village with a population of 4,400 in north-west Kent, in the district of Sevenoaks. It was granted parish status after a public petition which led to a Governance Review, following a 3 year village campaign. Previously, Hextable formed a significant part of the larger Swanley Town Council.

The campaign for a local council for Hextable was co-ordinated by the village residents association. It wanted to establish a smaller parish council focussed just on the village. Hextable is geographically separated from Swanley by an area of Green belt land. The residents association felt that Swanley business dominated the deliberations of Swanley Town Council and that Hextable's issues and concerns were often not given sufficient priority.

The residents association lobbied Sevenoaks District Council. Councillors representing Hextable on Swanley Town Council were Independents, among a Labour majority, and this helped to create a feeling of separateness and to maintain the profile of the lobby. Eventually, a Governance Review was undertaken, which recommended splitting Hextable away from Swanley to establish a new local council.

The first elections took place at the start of May 2008 for the nine seats. All of the Hextable seats were taken by the Independent candidates from the residents association.

#### Key areas of learning

##### *Role of the principal local authority*



Sevenoaks District Council played a key role in the creation and early establishment of Hextable Parish Council. Following the Governance Review, the residents association became, in effect, the shadow body for the new local council. An officer from Sevenoaks was appointed the task of liaising between the principal local authority, Swanley Town Council and the residents association, to ensure the successful set up of the new council. This was a challenging role for two key reasons:

- First, Swanley Town Council had concerns about the creation of Hextable Parish Council, primarily because of the significant impact it would have on their tax base; and
- Second, there were a number of formal duties required of Sevenoaks because of the way that Hextable would be created from an existing parished, rather than unparished, area. In effect, it was a disaggregation of Swanley Town Council. Sevenoaks had not gone through such a process before and found itself on a steep learning curve.

After seeking legal advice from Counsel, Sevenoaks District Council became aware that its role was more significant than had initially been anticipated.

Its responsibilities included electoral arrangements, initial council meetings, premises identification, and asset and staff transfer. In addition, the decision to split the Town Council area was somewhat controversial. This meant an additional role for Sevenoaks was to arbitrate between the existing Town Council and the new local council over issues such as budget and precept setting, ensuring that tensions at a political level did not derail the process.

Specific duties undertaken by Sevenoaks during the set up phase included:

- Organising and overseeing the first contested election in May 2008, after the council was established in April that year;
- Managing the council's business, after its creation, through the first elections and until a Clerk was appointed. This meant running the first three Parish Council meetings and it involved a legal arrangement whereby the Hextable ward members from Swanley Town Council acted as consultees for the new Hextable Parish Council, though they had no decision making authority.

There was sometimes confusion and lack of clarity around division of responsibility and control between the three concerned parties. Sevenoaks have commented that being able to look at previous cases where parish council areas had been split, rather than being created in unparished areas, would have helped considerably. Knowing where to go for good practice, support and ideas might have eased the transition process and helped Sevenoaks prepare for their role.

The principal local authority was able to step back very quickly once the new Parish Council had recruited a clerk. This was a situation which suited both parties. One legacy of the vesting process is that there is still a good relationship between Sevenoaks and Hextable councils. Indeed, Sevenoaks can claim effective and professional working relationships with all the parishes in the district.

### ***Transferring staff and assets***

The separation of Hextable from Swanley involved the transfer of three staff, two groundsmen and one part-time administrative officer, to Hextable Parish Council, together with playing fields, some buildings and a heritage centre.

Transferring the assets that were within the Hextable area was relatively straightforward. More contentious were proceeds from a hotel and land sale outside Hextable by Swanley Town Council. Hextable Parish Council was disappointed with a ruling that it would not gain a portion of the proceeds, as it was technically still part of Swanley when they were realised. The allocation of any proceeds from asset sales is something for new local councils to consider where they are being created out of existing councils.

Agreeing the appropriate staffing numbers that should transfer was initially a delicate issue. It relied heavily on time-consuming and complex TUPE arrangements, under which the transferring body (Swanley Town Council) had to identify and justify the staff who were to transfer.

One piece of good practice emerged from this stage of the process. Sevenoaks was able to recruit a local field manager, who had excellent local knowledge and had undertaken some parish and town clerk management courses. This post was crucial in establishing the effective governance and operation of the council right from the start. The manager was employed initially by Sevenoaks District Council, though they transferred to Hextable Parish Council upon its vesting. He was able to sort out many of the practical arrangements, such as insurance, health and safety, and helping to set up the new council office (e.g. installing telephones, IT and a payroll system).

This manager eventually became the first parish clerk. Kent Association of Local Councils (KALC) were involved closely in the recruitment of the clerk and provided timely advice to both Sevenoaks and the newly vested Hextable Parish Council. KALC also sat alongside the new Hextable Councillors to help them with the selection process. Sevenoaks set up that recruitment process, but they stepped back when it came to interviews and confirmation of appointment. This was rightly seen as the sole responsibility of the Parish Council.

## ***Setting a budget***

One other key area in which Sevenoaks District Council played a role was in the negotiations about the first budget and precept for Hextable. Both Swanley Town Council and the residents association (representing the shadow Hextable Parish Council) developed draft budgets and associated precept levels for the first full financial year. Their initial positions were a long way apart. Each had practical and financial reasons which underpinned their budget calculations, based on local circumstances. But it was clear that the positions were not going to meet and Sevenoaks was required to arbitrate between them. Sevenoaks, instituted a compromise precept of about £120,000 which was, in effect, roughly the halfway point between the two positions.

One useful fallback which Sevenoaks introduced was a £25,000 contingency loan fund. In setting the first annual precept, Sevenoaks decided to make available this fund in case either of the new local councils was unable to balance its budget at the end of the year. Both councils greatly appreciated having this insurance, though neither of them ultimately needed to draw upon that fund. Hextable Parish Council was even able to put an amount through to establish parish council reserves at the end of the first year.

## **Next steps**

The Parish Council is now emerging from its set up phase. The last few months have been a period of consolidation, with the development and implementation of various necessary policies and procedures, including health and safety, staff welfare and staff appraisal.

There is a new parish clerk in post and there are plans to increase the local impact of the Council's services. Hextable is a small, tightly knit community and the move to create the council is seen locally as a success. Because the pressure for a new parish council came from residents, there has always been good local engagement. This is something the clerk is keen to build upon. A new website has recently been launched, which provides better information about Council meetings and local decisions, and the regular Parish newsletters have always been well received.

The Council is keen to make best use of the assets which were transferred from Swanley, including the Heritage Centre where the Council has its office. This includes promoting the Heritage Society based in the Centre and marketing some of the rooms as venues for birthday parties, meetings and training sessions.

*Web address for Hextable Parish Council: <http://hextableparishcouncil.com>*

***This document was written for the National Association of Local Councils (NALC) and the Commission for Rural Communities (CRC) by Brian Wilson Associates, with David Atkinson Consulting and Ellie Stoneley.***

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***January 2011***

## **MACCLESFIELD TOWN COUNCIL: HOW A NEW TOWN COUNCIL WAS CREATED IN MACCLESFIELD, CHESHIRE**

### **Introduction**

In 2012, Macclesfield Civic Society, which has long advocated the creation of a Town Council for Macclesfield renewed its campaign as Macclesfield and Crewe were the only areas under the Cheshire East Borough that didn't have a form of local democracy.

Macclesfield Civic Society felt strongly that residents in Macclesfield should have more of a local voice and have more control over decisions that affect their community.

With this in mind, Macclesfield Civic Society reminded the public of a previous petition which gained several thousand signatures and, together with others sought to persuade Cheshire East Council into launching a community governance review for Macclesfield and Crewe. The community governance led to over 6400 of the possible 40,000 voting in the community governance review. That meant 16.15% of the electorate turned out to vote. Over 12% of the electorate (4907) voted in favour of the area being parished. With this Cheshire East Council decided to form a town council in Macclesfield and the council was set up in May 2015.

### **Headlines**

- Macclesfield is located in Cheshire and falls under Cheshire East Council
- Macclesfield and Crewe were the only areas that were unparished in 2012
- Macclesfield Civic Society had previously launched a petition to pressure Cheshire East Council into undertaking a community governance review for the area
- From this Cheshire East Council launched a community governance review to gauge the desire from residents in Macclesfield for a town council to be formed
- After a series of consultation stages took place, Macclesfield Town Council was formed

## **Theme - Carrying out a community governance review**

Principal councils have the power to carry out a community governance review and put in place or make changes to local community (parish) governance arrangements. A review can consider a number of issues, including whether to create a new parish council, whether to alter the boundary of an existing parish council or whether to group a number of parishes together in a grouped parish council. Reviews can be triggered by local people petitioning to their principal authority to undertake a community governance review.

### **Contextual Issues**

NALC would like every area in England to be parished. Currently there are around 10,000 town and parish councils in England, usually found in rural and coastal areas. Since 1997 there has been an increase in the number of town and parish councils created.

Macclesfield is one of the newer local councils to be created and covers an area which has a population of 52,044. This means Macclesfield Town Council is one of the larger town councils and may have a larger precept than many others. This could have been a factor when residents voted on the community governance review.

### **Who Are The Partners / Stakeholders Involved?**

Macclesfield Civic Society was a key group driving the campaign for a town council in Macclesfield. Cheshire East Council also played their part by hosting a number of consultations which determined if the community wanted a town council to represent them. Cheshire Association of Local Councils (CHALC) and National Association of Local Councils (NALC) also provided legal and technical support to Macclesfield Civic Society throughout the campaign.

### **What Are The Key Issues / Challenges?**

Fortunately throughout the petition and CGR stages, Cheshire East Council was quite receptive to the possibility of a town council being formed in Macclesfield. The main challenge for the civic society was to convince enough residents that having a town council was a good thing for the community. This challenge was made even bigger by the fact Macclesfield has a population of 52,044. This made it difficult for the civic society to reach every resident in Macclesfield.

## **How Have These Issues / Challenges Been Overcome?**

Cheshire East Council ran thorough consultations during the CGR which reached a large number of Macclesfield residents. They firstly set up a community governance review sub-committee which was made up of representatives of Cheshire East councillors. They were tasked with engaging with Macclesfield residents through a number of public consultations.

The first stage of consultations with residents and stakeholders took place from 24<sup>th</sup> June to 23<sup>rd</sup> July 2013. They held a series of 8 public meetings and contacted stakeholders such as local businesses and community organisations. At the meetings, stakeholders and members of the public were invited to submit their views on what they felt was the best option for Macclesfield. They were able to choose from 7 options including No change, one or more parish/town councils being created, community forums/community development trusts to be created, neighbourhood management options, residents and tenants associations to be created or community associations to be created.

In stage 2 of the consultations, the community governance review sub-committee considered the feedback received, with a view to refining the 7 options for the next stage of public consultation. Electors in Macclesfield were then consulted, by way of postal vote, in early July 2014. The closing date for receipt was 28 July.

Based upon the public feedback received, the Community Governance Review Sub-Committee decided that the second stage of consultation would focus upon two possible options for Macclesfield – these being “Parishing” (i.e. A Single Parish / Town Council for the whole of Macclesfield ; or 7 smaller Parish Councils (based on existing Borough Ward Boundaries); or an Enhanced Macclesfield Local Service Delivery Committee (consisting of the 12 Cheshire East Councillors which represent the Macclesfield Wards).

## **Outcomes**

Through the thorough consultation by Cheshire East Council, 6,400 (around 12% of the electorate) residents in Macclesfield voted in the CGR.

Following the consultation, Cheshire East Council made recommendations for the creation of a parish council for Macclesfield, comprising a total of 12 Councillors. It was proposed that seven parish wards be created, based on the existing Borough Ward boundaries, as indicated below, and that elections be held on Thursday 7 May 2015.

Since its creation, Macclesfield Town Council have supported Cheshire East Council on delivering a number of projects and services including the local plan, regeneration, Christmas lights, summer schools, and CCTV to name a few.

### **What Have Been The Key Elements Of Success?**

The reason the community governance review was so successful was thanks to a good consultation, led by Cheshire East Council. Although it took over a year to complete, the consultation gave a good opportunity for residents to have their say and vote for how they would like their area to be governed. It also fairly took into consideration the possibility of launching a town council, something which has often been overlooked in previous campaigns across the country. The community governance review was not politicised and may have led to the success of engagement with local residents.

### **What Has Been Learnt?**

This campaign has showed that if a good consultation is ran during the community governance review stage by the principal authority, it often leads to residents getting exactly what they want, whether that is a no change to the governance structure or the creation of a parish council.

The debate for and against having a town council was balanced and allowed residents to decide for themselves whether or not they would like to have a town council for their area.

It is often the case that successful campaigns are led by an organised body such as a neighbourhood forum, civic society or community group. Macclesfield Civic Society has been one of the driving forces behind this campaign and shows the success it can have.

It can also take a few attempts from a group before they become successful in their bid for a parish or town council.

### **Who Can I Contact?**

Macclesfield Civic Society can be contacted via Keith Smith, chairman & acting secretary at [keith76079smith@yahoo.com](mailto:keith76079smith@yahoo.com).

Macclesfield Town Council can be contacted via [clerk@macclesfield-tc.gov.uk](mailto:clerk@macclesfield-tc.gov.uk).



### **Other Information**

[http://www.cheshireeast.gov.uk/council\\_and\\_democracy/community-governance/macclesfield\\_governance\\_review/macclesfield\\_governance\\_review.aspx](http://www.cheshireeast.gov.uk/council_and_democracy/community-governance/macclesfield_governance_review/macclesfield_governance_review.aspx)

NALC Officer Contact: Ben Murray on e. [ben.murray@nalc.gov.uk](mailto:ben.murray@nalc.gov.uk) ; t. 020 7290 0317.

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**Pannal and Burn Bridge Parish Council: How A New Parish Council Was  
Created In Pannal, Yorkshire**



### Headlines:

- The villages of Pannal and Burn Bridge are in the Harrogate district of North Yorkshire.
- This case study tells the story of how the Pannal Village Society triggered a Community Governance Review, successfully establishing a parish council for Pannal and Burn Bridge.
- The case study provides an example of good practice for campaigns aspiring to establish a town and parish council, giving advice on how to build a good relationship with the principal authority and how to overcome challenges throughout the campaign.
- The main lesson to share from this case study is that where a campaign group works positively over a sustained period with both officers and members of its principal local authority it is possible to complete the full campaign journey. To this end Pannal and Burn Bridge Parish Council held its first elections in May 2016, working closely in partnership with Harrogate Borough Council.

### Why A Council Is Wanted:

Then Pannal and Burn Bridge campaign group wished to establish a parish council as a new parish council is able to increase the village's ability to manage its assets and to influence development plans in its area, being a legacy of the Pannal Village Society.

The Pannal Village Society was created in the early 1990s under the initiative of a former Harrogate Borough councillor at the time, who had a firm commitment that Pannal was missing out by not having a parish council. Parish Councils are statutory consultees in planning matters and, as such, have to be consulted on planning issues within their parish and, in Harrogate, have an opportunity to present their views at relevant council meetings. Thus, from the outset, one of the main purposes of the Society was to monitor planning applications and make comments to the Borough Council when appropriate, concentrating on significant applications.

The area faces a continuous growth in population, as its proximity to Harrogate attracts more residents to the two villages, which also pride themselves on very popular leisure facilities such as a golf course and the cricket club. The Pannal Village Society has been actively contributing to planning consultations, on issues such as Local Development Plans and individual planning applications with a significant impact on the villages. So when the Pannal Village Society became the main campaign lead in the creation of a new parish



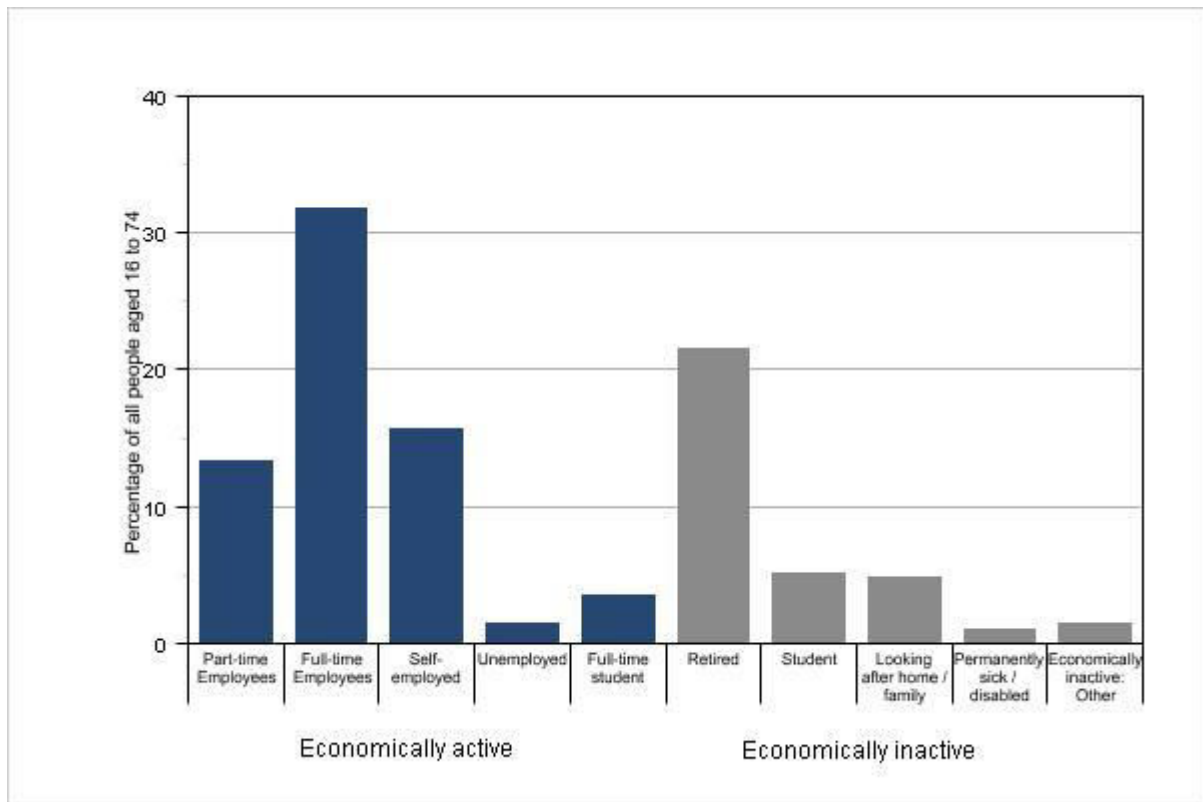
council for the village, its main interest was to ensure that the parish council provided the village with a stronger voice on planning applications.

In 2014 the Government Planning Inspector declined Harrogate Borough Council proposals for housing and employment to 2024. The Pannal Village Society was concerned that with no plan in place, Harrogate Borough Council will struggle to reject inadequate proposals from developers. So it was decided that it would be in the best interest of residents to have the presence, strength, representation and influence of a parish council. As a result Pannal Village Society launched a petition to trigger a Community Governance Review (the process through which a new parish council is created).

In addition to having the ability to influence planning decisions, it is hoped that the parish council will better administer services which the Pannal and Burn Bridge communities need, yet which the borough and county councils are unable to provide. Therefore, it is hoped that the creation of a parish council in the area will improve residents representation, better service delivery and better local administration for residents than hitherto has been the case.

#### **Campaign Demographics:**

Pannal is a village in the Harrogate district of North Yorkshire. The village is situated to the immediate south of Harrogate and in many ways is a suburb of the town. Pannal is well known for its golf course, which attracts people from across the town. The neighbouring village of Burn Bridge now forms part of the new parish council boundary. Pannal, Burn Bridge is home to commuters to Harrogate and Leeds, as well as a preferred place by many for retirement. The population of Pannal and Burn Bridge is 2,100. Pannal and Burn Bridge is well connected to Harrogate, York and Leeds.

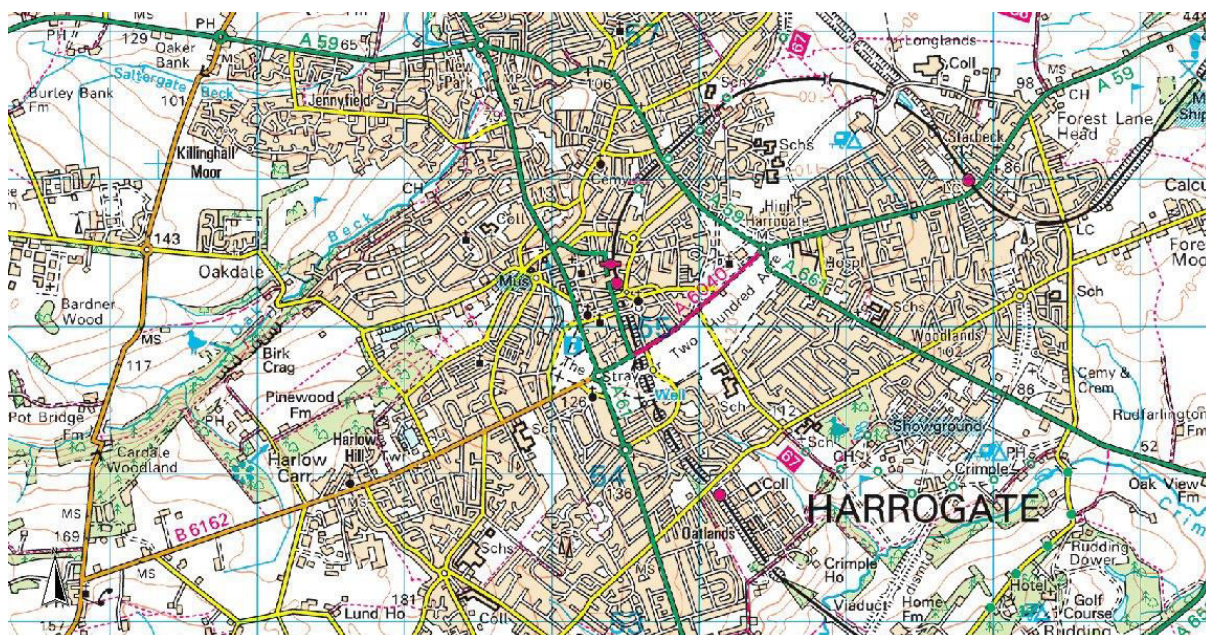


Above: Graph illustrating the economic activity in the Pannal and Burn Bridge area based on data from the 2011 Census, (Office of National Statistics, 2016).

The area is ranked 32,773 out of the 32,884 English neighbourhoods in the Indices of Total Deprivation 2015 (Department for Communities and Local Government, 2015), making it one of the least deprived areas in the country. In addition, the unemployment rate is lower than the average unemployment rate in England. According to the Office of National Statistics<sup>1</sup>, in March 2013 Harrogate had an unemployment rate of 3.9%. This compares with the average 7.8% in England. The average weekly total household income in Harrogate was estimated at £910 in 2008, in comparison to £570 for the Yorkshire and the Humber region.

1

<http://www.neighbourhood.statistics.gov.uk/dissemination/NeighbourhoodProfile.do?a=7&b=6275121&c=HG3+1JZ&g=6454580&i=1001x1012x1013&j=6309537&m=1&p=9&q=1&r=0&s=1456139447656&enc=1&tab=4&inWales=false>



Above; map of Pannal area of Harrogate, North Yorkshire

## Who Are The Key Partners / Stakeholders Involved?:

The campaign for the establishment of a parish council in Pannal and Burn Bridge was sponsored by the Department for Communities and Local Government, receiving a grant under the New Councils' Programme (a national Government programme running between 2013 and 2016 to promote the creation of new parish councils in previously un-parished areas). This funding was accessed by the Yorkshire Local Councils' Associations from the National Association of Local Councils (which was managing the programme).

The Pannal Village Society managed and drove the campaign for a Pannal and Burn Bridge Parish Council. It worked very closely with the Yorkshire Local Councils' Associations, and the National Association of Local Councils. Campaign leaders have also been liaising with Harrogate Borough Council, who have been very helpful throughout the campaign.

## Progress With Campaign To Date:

The Pannal Village Society opened a petition requesting Harrogate Borough Council to conduct a Community Governance Review of the area in June 2014. The petition gathered 283 signatures very quickly, exceeding the minimum of signatures required, and the petition was formally submitted on the 18th July 2014 triggering a Community Governance Review in accordance with the provisions of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007. The campaign group experienced no serious problems during 2014-15.

Harrogate Borough Council launched a consultation with electors and other interested parties between the 12 May and 28 July 2015, which registered 68.7% of responses in favour of the creation of a Pannal and Burn Bridge Parish Council.



Above; Campaign leaders celebrating their success in establishing a parish council in Pannal.

On 17 September 2015 the Harrogate Borough Council General Purposes Committee considered the consultation responses alongside a report from the Head of Legal and Governance, and made a recommendation to full council that a parish council be established for Pannal and Burn Bridge. This decision was endorsed by full council on 7 October, 2015.

The Borough Council found that a parish council will add value to the community of Pannal and Burn Bridge, delivering services which the Borough Council and the County Council are not able to provide, enabling other sources of funding to be accessed and facilitating the delivery of actions on the community-led action plan. It was agreed that the area of Pannal and Burn Bridge is a clearly defined community, separate from Harrogate town, with its own identity and the creation of a parish council will enhance community cohesion.



### Campaign Management:

The Pannal and Burn Bridge campaign did not encounter any major problems. As Peter Stretton, campaign champion, confirmed: *“There were no serious problems to overcome. Whether this was through luck or good planning it is difficult to say although I like to think that we got things right from the outset. It helped that the vast majority of the community supported us”*.

Certainly, having an active village society that has been mobilising residents for more than a decade around issues that affected their community, also eased the process. The dedicated members of the Pannal Village Society, good planning, and a good communication strategy have been key to a successful campaign in Pannal and Burn Bridge.

### Outcomes - Learning From The Campaign:

The campaign to set up a parish council for Pannal and Burn Bridge was effectively managed. Under the umbrella of the Pannal Village Society, the campaign received substantial attention from the residents in the area, with petitions being lodged at the village shop, the village Hall and the local pub. The unity of the two village communities also contributed to the petition being submitted in a relatively short period of time.

The Pannal Village Society also made sure that all residents in the area were aware of the proposal to create a parish council by organising a public meeting and distributing leaflets to all households in the villages. A representative from the Yorkshire Local Councils’ Associations attended the public meeting to help answer questions about what a parish council could do for the community.

### How Was Progress Made So Far?

Peter Stretton, Pannal campaign champion, is very clear about why he felt the Pannal campaign succeeded: *“Having a committed group in the Village Society who were enthusiastic in pursuing the objective.”* Indeed, what all successful campaigns have in common is an active team of volunteers, willing to dedicate their time to do whatever needs to be done to keep the campaign running.

*“The other key was to take adequate time to plan the details of the campaign so that nothing hindered progress.”* – Peter Stretton, Pannal campaign champion.





Good planning is another essential element to ensure that successful campaign is delivered. Planning every step ahead means that there will be very little that can take a campaign group by surprise. Knowing how many petition signatures are needed, whether the principal authority accepts an e-petition, establishing a strategy for managing opposition and making sure all residents are correctly informed are just some of the things which a campaign group may want to consider at the beginning of its campaign. Although campaigns do not always go to plan, by knowing what its next steps are, a campaign group also knows what its options are when a contingency is needed. In addition, planning also ensures that a campaign group maximises resources available. By coordinating activities a campaign group ensures that the time that campaign members have the possibility to offer towards this cause is well spent.

It was clear that the Village Society had a long term vision for the area which included giving residents a say against inappropriate development. This vision chimed with residents who could see that a parish council would have the necessary statutory clout to defend the area's interests in an optimal way.

Chris Pilkington, Deputy Chief Officer at Yorkshire Local Councils' Associations: *"The Pannal and Burn Bridge campaign was a good example of a model campaign to create a new parish council and was remarkably 'challenge' free. This was partly because the Village Society had a clear vision for the community and could bring residents along with them in regard to the proposal and partly because Harrogate Borough Council were open minded about creating a parish if public support could be demonstrated."*

The Parish Council was elected in May 2016 with 9 candidates competing for 7 places and the first meeting elected a Chairman and a planning committee. Although it is still in the process of defining its agenda, the council has decided to give priority to items included in the community-led action plan, such as creating a Neighbourhood Plan and consulting residents on a parking permit scheme, as well as cooperating with the Borough Council to improve street lighting in dark spots, and improve the local bus service.

#### **Campaign Lessons To Share With Others:**

The support of the Pannal Village Society has helped the campaign, by attracting more immediate attention than the campaign would have otherwise received. This, as well as the small size of the electorate, allowed the petition to be formally submitted in a relatively short period of time. Campaigns to set up a new parish council can benefit from the support of civil society organisations, as often these organisations have already well established means of dispersing information and the necessary expertise of promoting the campaign.



Although cooperation can suit both parties' interests, the campaign for a new parish council should not be overshadowed by the individual interests of participating organisations involved.

**Who Can I Contact?:**

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**Other Information:**

**More information on creating a Council: The NALC 'Create a Council' web page:**

<http://www.nalc.gov.uk/our-work/create-a-council> .

**To see template resources such as a media release, leaflet and poster, please click here:**

<http://www.nalc.gov.uk/our-work/create-a-council> .

**NALC Create a Council:** <http://www.nalc.gov.uk/our-work/create-a-council> .

**NALC Power to the People Resource:** <http://www.nalc.gov.uk/publications> .

**Harrogate Borough Council Consultation response:**

<https://www.harrogate.gov.uk/mslg/Documents/CommGovReview-ConsultationAnalysis.pdf> .

**Harrogate Borough Council Community Governance Review:**

<https://www.harrogate.gov.uk/mslg/Pages/Community-Governance-Review.aspx> .

**Pannal Village Society:** <http://www.pannalvillagesociety.org.uk/> .

## **Queen's Park Case Study: Creating a Council**

In 2007, the Government passed the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act, which, among other provisions, permitted the creation of community councils in London, with the aim of enhancing community governance in urban areas.

The Campaign for a Community Council in Queen's Park (QP) is the first campaign to utilise this relatively new power. The QP Campaign is formed from a group of local residents who want to change their community for the better. They have decided that they can achieve this by creating the first community council in London.

The QP Campaign was born from the Queen's Park Forum, a sub-group of the Paddington Development Trust, set up in 2003 with funding from the Westminster City Partnership. However, government funding to support the work of the forum has finished.

On 22 January 2011 the formal campaign to introduce a community council in Queen's Park was launched by residents with the support of Queen's Park Forum, with aim of providing an ongoing voice for local residents. In April 2011, the QP Campaign presented to Westminster Council - the principal authority for the area - over 1400 signatures asking for a parish council.

Westminster Council are still to confirm the exact arrangements for the consultation and review process, but residents have been busy publicizing and organising their campaign, with support from NALC and the Department of Communities and Local Government.

**Victoria Pymm, Policy Officer**  
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## Case study on the experience of newly established local (parish and town) councils

### SALISBURY CITY COUNCIL (WILTSHIRE)

#### Background

Salisbury City Council was established in April 2009, when local government in the county of Wiltshire underwent re-organisation. A new unitary – Wiltshire Council – was created with its headquarters in Trowbridge. The former Salisbury District Council was disbanded. Those parts of the county which had not previously been so, were parished, including the city area of Salisbury.

Salisbury City Council has a population of about 45,000 making it one of the largest local councils in the country. Indeed, it contains roughly ten per cent of the county population and that despite having a boundary which is tightly drawn around the built-up area. The cathedral city recently celebrated its 750<sup>th</sup> anniversary and civic tradition, like the twice weekly charter market, plays an important part in the new Council's role.

Because of its size Salisbury City Council has chosen to distinguish the roles of its councillors and officers along lines more typical of a district council. Councillors take the more strategic decisions, setting policy direction, while decisions about service delivery take place at an officer level. Officers also have financial delegations set at a level high enough to match the broad remit and working model.

#### Key areas of learning

##### *Deciding which services to manage*

Prior to local government re-organisation the City Clerk was a manager at Salisbury District Council. When the formation of a City Council was announced, in 2008, he was seconded to a Working Group whose job was to plan for the new local council.

It was decided that Salisbury City Council should take on a mix of services, some of which cost money to run and others of which generated an income. This would ensure the

precept could be set at a reasonable level. Open days were held at the Guildhall and residents' surveys were conducted so they could find out what local people thought.

The Working Group came up with some costed options for the appropriate package of services to be transferred. Its proposals included:

- Some obvious very local services, such as parks maintenance;
- Others which local people wanted the City to manage, like a community centre; and
- Some services which made money, such as the crematorium and car parks.

These proposals were put to the Implementation Executive at (the then) Wiltshire County Council, who took a pragmatic line and largely agreed them. A few things were removed so, for instance, only two of the pay-and-display car parks were to transfer. The view was that it might be appropriate to revisit this in two years to consider further transfers. The outcome was that by December 2008 the list of services to be run by the City Council had been settled and in January 2009 they could calculate what precept was required for the first operational year.

#### ***Services managed by Salisbury City Council***

- 33 parks and open spaces (including sports pitches)
- 12 play areas, plus skate parks, sports walls and youth shelters
- 12 allotments sites (approximately 700 plots)
- 9 cemeteries and churchyards
- The crematorium
- Memorial trees and benches
- 2 of the pay-and-display car parks
- 7 public convenience facilities
- A community centre (Bemerton Heath Centre)
- Community development
- The twice weekly charter market, plus farmers and continental markets
- An annual charter fair
- The City Carnival, Armed Forces Day, the Food & Drink Festival, Christmas lights and other special events
- The Guildhall
- A caravan and camping site
- Various shops, offices and flats within an asset portfolio

Some staff who had been delivering these services at the District Council transferred to the City Council (under TUPE arrangements) and other posts were filled on the open jobs market. In all Salisbury City Council has 46 full- and part-time staff, the largest contingent being those who maintain the parks and open spaces. Given this number and the complexities of modern employment law they employ their own part-time HR manager.

*On having an HR manager: "You can't afford to lose the confidence of your staff early on."*

Total expenditure on services in 2010/11 is £2.9 million gross and £1.2m net. In other words there is an income from services of £1.7 million. There will also be an extensive capital programme over the next five years.

Salisbury City Council holds the view that if a local council is going to be created it should be sufficiently viable to do things or it risks being seen as a lame duck. However, it recognises that its strong remit derives partly from having come about as part of local government re-organisation. Formation of the City Council was a condition of the agreement about the unitary.

### ***Raising the profile with the community***

In such circumstances there is always the possibility that members of the public cannot distinguish between the former district council and the new City Council. Not to mention scope for confusion about which services the City now provides and which ones the unitary provides. The City Clerk realises that this is, up to a point, inevitable and understandable.

The City Council have taken some measures to overcome this. For instance, anyone phoning their switchboard number first hears a telephone message re-directing them to Wiltshire Council if they are enquiring about matters such as planning, housing or schools.

Things like the newsletter help to address this too. City Voice is distributed four times a year to every local household. The right the City Council has gained to use the formal City status and its historic coat of arms means that it can build on the place's historic tradition.

Their profile should be further boosted in 2011 when the City Council is due to move into part of the refurbished Guildhall in the market square. This will be a much more visible site than the temporary offices (given to them on a short-term free lease by Wiltshire Council).

Wiltshire Council has always been keen to retain a presence in the city and has held on to certain flagship buildings like the City Hall and leisure centre. However, it has now co-located all of its own locally-based staff into a one-stop-shop.

Trowbridge, where Wiltshire Council has its main base, is quite some distance away. The unitary operates an Area Committee structure and one of these covers Salisbury. These committees exist primarily to bring the unitary closer to residents and engage with them. The City Council has a place on the Salisbury Area Committee, but does not feel this structure is one liable to cause public confusion, since it is not directly delivering services.

### ***Vesting and taking on assets***

The transfer of assets to Salisbury City Council, to go with its service responsibilities, has been a long and complex business. In all, hundreds of assets have been involved.

The former Salisbury District Council decided that it wanted to keep things as simple as possible for itself and so would transfer all of its assets to the new unitary. The intention was that relevant assets could then be transferred again, from Wiltshire Council to Salisbury City Council, at a later date. This process has proven bureaucratic, frustrating and expensive. It has involved the City in negotiations with individual service departments at the unitary, in some cases trying to ensure that restrictions (covenants) were not added to transfer agreements. Having the title deed transfers processed through the Land Registry Office has also taken longer than expected and involved much form filling. Plus the issue has consumed much management time and required solicitors' fees.

A further issue has been that some assets were simply overlooked at the time of vesting. War memorials were among these. No-one was disputing that the City Council ought to maintain them, but they had not been on any transfer list.

The lesson from Salisbury is that transferring the assets directly to the new local council would have been far easier than the double-transfer which actually took place.

## Next steps

Salisbury City Council has been in existence for less than two years. The City Clerk says they have now completed most things which needed to be put in place to get the Council up-and-running. But a few things, such as introducing a staff appraisal system, remain to be done and it may be two more years before the Council's establishment is truly complete.

*"We're now coming out of set-up mode and coming into the doing phase."*

The City Council has plans to apply for Quality Parish and Town Council Scheme status. What particularly attracts them is that QPS status makes it easier to use the legislative power of well-being (or the planned general power of competence), which permits them to take wide-ranging actions of benefit to their community.

It would not be surprising if the City Council took on some additional services over the next few years. This is being primarily driven by financial pressures faced by Wiltshire Council and an ambitious City Council. Some City Councillors would like to see an expanding role. In light of recent Government announcements about principal local authority funding, negotiations with Wiltshire Council have already begun. This, though, seems likely to be

matched by a sober assessment of what is practical, recognising that growth brings its own challenges and the precept must remain acceptable to residents.

Web address for Salisbury City Council: <http://www.salisburycitycouncil.gov.uk/>

***This document was written for the National Association of Local Councils (NALC) and the Commission for Rural Communities (CRC) by Brian Wilson Associates, with David Atkinson Consulting and Ellie Stoneley.***

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***January 2011***





## Case study on the experience of newly established local (parish and town) councils

### SHREWSBURY TOWN COUNCIL (SHROPSHIRE)

#### Background

Shrewsbury Town Council was established in April 2009, when local government in the county of Shropshire underwent re-organisation. A new unitary – Shropshire Council – was created, with its headquarters also in Shrewsbury. The former Shrewsbury & Atcham Borough Council was disbanded and the town of Shrewsbury became a single parish.

Shrewsbury Town Council serves a population of about 70,000, employs around 60 staff and has a budget of approximately £3.2m per year. This makes it one of the largest local councils in the country. It operates a number of important services which transferred from the borough council. These include parks, markets, entertainment and cultural venues, sports pitches and recreation grounds, together with a range of community facilities. Horticultural services are particularly important. The town has successfully represented the UK in recent international horticultural competitions and it sponsors the annual Shrewsbury in Bloom competition.

The Council comprises 17 members elected from 17 wards. The former principal local authority Councillors remained as Shrewsbury Town Councillors until the first elections were held in June 2009. There has subsequently been one by-election. The Council elected a Town Mayor to continue Shrewsbury's proud civic traditions, upheld formally by Borough Mayors. The Council's offices are within a new Guildhall, constructed in 2004, beside the River Severn.

#### Key areas of learning

##### *Relations with the principal local authority*

One of the most important lessons that Shrewsbury learned was to have a good working relationship with both the outgoing and incoming principal local authorities. Shrewsbury & Atcham Borough Council had initially opposed the creation of unitary governance for the

county (and hence its own demise). Nevertheless, once those decisions were taken, it established a working party to oversee the vesting of the new Shrewsbury Town Council. This involved agreeing services, assets and staff to be transferred and deciding on a realistic first year budget and precept. This was crucial to ensure the council was viable and sustainable in its first years.

The extent and scale of changes that the new Shropshire Council had to undergo meant that Shrewsbury Town Council initially didn't have the regular contact with them that it would have liked. Access to the major decision makers was difficult, but the Town Council is pleased that it recently had its first meetings with the Leader and Chief Executive Officer.

As both Shropshire and Shrewsbury have begun to emerge from their set up phases, there has been much better progress, including changes to the Shropshire Parishes Charter to recognise the size and scope of Shrewsbury Town Council as the largest local council in the county by some margin. Shropshire Council also has a commitment to "community working and parish councils" in its strategy.

The staff and members at Shrewsbury have worked hard to develop good engagement with Shropshire's liaison officer and with the portfolio holders. Interestingly, Shrewsbury doesn't meet Shropshire representatives alongside the other parishes. The issues are simply so different that it wouldn't make sense.

One valuable development has been the impact that Shrewsbury has made as a statutory consultee in the planning process. The Town Council now has its own planning committee which has developed some local influence. In a number of cases Shropshire Council has taken on board Shrewsbury's views about projects before going out to public consultation.

The county's local joint committees have become an important way of engaging with the principal local authority and other public sector stakeholders. There are 28 local joint committees in Shropshire and Shrewsbury Town Council is represented on six of them. These are partnership bodies with an average budget of £35,000 to spend on community projects.

#### ***Shrewsbury Local Joint Committees***

Membership:

- Shropshire Council and Shrewsbury Town Council councillors
- Officers from health, police and fire services
- Representatives of community organisations
- They are open to the public

Annual budget:

- £35,000 for community projects

Funded projects:

- Sports and recreation activities, plus cultural, learning and arts events

Shrewsbury Town Council has also established good contact with neighbouring local councils. Initially some of them were wary, fearing a take-over. But more recently local councils in the county have begun to see Shrewsbury as leaders. Often they await Shrewsbury's reaction to an issue and then either follow suit or react appropriately. There is no formal structure for relations with neighbouring local councils but there are some informal joint events. A trend that underlines the different nature of Shrewsbury's status as a local council is the increasing number of agency arrangements it has with its neighbours. For instance, Shrewsbury grows plants on behalf of other parishes in its nurseries.

### ***Governance and operation***

Some of the most significant and time-consuming issues have revolved around establishing governance and operational arrangements.

One of the most frustrating experiences has been the audit process required of the Council. Shrewsbury Town Council is above the threshold of £1m turnover that requires a full audit by the Audit Commission. Nevertheless, the council is at the bottom of that scale and it found the external auditor prioritised other bigger organisations in the area – often for understandable operational reasons. The result is that the Town Council felt it experienced a rather disjointed and protracted audit, arranged around the needs of bigger clients. The fee of £17,000 for this service is substantial for a local council, even a larger one like Shrewsbury. The town clerk shares the views of many others, that the threshold for full audits should be raised so that relatively small organisations (in auditing terms) like Shrewsbury Town Council are not over-burdened.

On the other hand, the town clerk has found that the Council is often too big for certain processes. For instance one of the quirks of local council governance is that invoices cannot be settled by electronic transfer (known as the BACS system). For large councils with many bills to pay, having to sign off bills by individual cheque transactions results in a time-consuming and inefficient process. Shrewsbury is pleased to see that this requirement is due to change shortly.

Both these issues highlight that councils of the size of Shrewsbury do not quite fit with existing guidance, legislation and practice. Indeed, the town clerk has found that the best way of getting advice and support is to develop an informal network outside the usual structures. For instance, discussions with Salisbury City Council, established at the same time and through the same mechanisms, have been particularly fruitful.

## **Staff recruitment**

Negotiations with the outgoing Shrewsbury & Atcham Borough Council identified the need to transfer a large number of staff to Shrewsbury Town Council from the horticultural, outdoor play and ground maintenance teams. Whilst the TUPE process that applied to a number of these staff transfers was not contentious, the bureaucracy that surrounded it was very difficult to negotiate. It would have been helpful for Shrewsbury to have had specific advice or guidance on both this and health and safety issues to signpost a way through the requirements.

On the other hand, payroll, IT and internet responsibilities – which can often be onerous, particularly in the initial phase - have been handled by Shropshire Council. Shrewsbury developed a service level agreement for these functions with the principal local authority as one of its first tasks. This has worked well.

## **Next steps**

The two years of Shrewsbury Town Council existence have been dominated by setting up processes, establishing relationships and building a profile. Most of this has now been achieved. The budget has been spent wisely and the Council has been able to build up a small reserve, which has underpinned its short term sustainability.

Together with a recently completed Medium Term Plan, this now provides a platform to implement a more ambitious vision for the town. This includes expanding the range of services available to local residents and undertaking a capital expenditure programme for vehicle and equipment replacement.

Looking back on the initial phase, the town clerk underlines the importance of ensuring policies and procedures are set up as early as possible so a crisis can be avoided if an issue blows up.

*“Policies and procedures are often the last thing to be addressed and yet can be the most important in terms of preventative work.”*

The Council is now looking forward to becoming a Quality Parish Council and it sees opportunities for closer working with the town’s residents, given national policy debates about localism and building the Big Society.

Web address for Shrewsbury Town Council: <http://www.shrewsburytowncouncil.gov.uk>

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***January 2011***



## Case study on the experience of newly established local (parish and town) councils

### ST AUSTELL TOWN COUNCIL (CORNWALL)

#### Background

St Austell is the largest town in Cornwall, with a population of almost 22,700 at the time of the 2001 Census. It is situated on the south coast, about thirty miles west of the Devon border. In the 1700's the area was found to be rich in the world's highest grade china clay, this provided work long after the collapse of the tin mining industry. It still employs people locally, although tourism now plays an ever larger part in the local economy.

Following the decision to re-organise local government and grant Cornwall unitary status, there was a realisation that St Austell and its surrounds, being the only unparished part of the county, would have no local democratic body (though it would, of course, have democratic representation from elected councillors on the new Cornwall Council). Councillors at Restormel Borough Council (which was due to disappear) believed in establishing "*a local voice for St Austell*". In 2007, following a parish boundary review and a community consultation, the Borough put forward proposals to create four new local councils: St Austell Town; Carlyon Parish; St Austell Bay Parish; and Pentewan Valley Parish. This was formalised by the Restormel (Parishes) Order 2008.

Creating the new parish councils was a corporate priority for Restormel, and in 2008, four working groups were established, one for each of them. It called these groups 'temporary parish councils' (TPCs), to reflect their role in preparing the way. They had no legal powers, so any recommendations required approval by the Borough Council or the unitary Implementation Executive, as appropriate.

#### ***Role of temporary parish councils:***

- i) Ensure that practical preparations are made e.g. staffing and accommodation;
- ii) Assess local needs and make recommendations on priorities e.g. parish planning;
- iii) Draft a budget and recommend a precept to implement the practicalities of operation and ensure the parishes were fit-for-purpose on day one.

The Head of Governance and Performance at the Borough Council, and lead officer for the new local councils project, was involved in the set up process early on. TPCs reported back to him on decisions, issues and plans. He also became temporary clerk to St Austell.

There were huge issues with the electoral review, even though the Borough Council had been given management responsibility for the process by One Cornwall (the body formed to oversee the unitary re-organisation). There were uncertainties about election dates and difficulties in setting internal parish boundaries, to the frustration of local communities and those considering standing for election. Eventually, the order was made for local elections in June 2009, alongside those for the new Cornwall Council.

One Cornwall adopted a protocol for the governance of the four new parish councils between April 2009, when they came into existence, and the new parish councillors taking office (four days after their election). The temporary clerk and the County Councillors for the relevant divisions represented the new parishes in this interim. In practice, while the County Councillors were kept up-to-date with developments, they did not meet or take any decisions, as it was felt this should be left for the newly elected parish councillors.

The importance of the support and flexibility shown by Restormel Borough Council, One Cornwall and then Cornwall Council cannot be understated. Through its localism service Cornwall Council allowed two of its staff to spend a significant amount of time supporting the four new local councils until their clerks took over. This provided much-valued general support in liaising and co-ordinating with the local councils.

## Key areas of learning

### *Setting the budgets*

The Temporary Parish Councils considered appropriate budgets for the new local councils in a series of meetings during the period July to December 2008. Cost and budget estimates were based mainly on comparisons with existing local councils in Cornwall and the South West. Some much valued figures (for example, for election and accommodation costs) could be provided by relevant departments in the former Restormel Borough Council.

There were two key drivers considered when setting the precept, namely:

- i. **Affordability:** the TPCs were conscious that the precept would represent a new charge for residents in the newly parished areas. They also had to consider the impact of the wider public sector financial situation;

- ii. **Value for money:** they were determined that the new local councils should deliver good value and sought to achieve this by setting precepts which balanced affordability against ensuring there would be sufficient resources to make an impact from the first year of operation.

Town Council	Precept	Tax Base	Band D charge
St Austell	£201,550	6,334	£31.82

One Cornwall agreed that, as a one-off gesture to help the new local councils establish, it would not charge them for IT support, office accommodation or the hire of meeting rooms in 2009/10. St Austell Town Council have subsequently taken on the office accommodation costs themselves under a lease from Cornwall Council.

The incoming Cornwall Council also funded the initial Town Council elections, plus any by-elections in 2009/10, using funds set aside for this purpose from the Restormel project.

The precept in St Austell had been set at a good level and there was a small surplus at the end of the first year, so it has remained the same for the second year.

### ***Role and recruitment of the clerk***

The Head of Governance & Performance at Restormel Borough Council, and lead officer for the TPC's project, was made the temporary Clerk to St Austell. In that role, they managed the recruitment of the first permanent town clerk. This saved a considerable amount of money in the set up phase. Indeed, they wonder now whether that recruitment should have begun earlier in the process, but believe *"it is important for the Town Council to appoint its own Clerk"* and not to have someone imposed on them. The role was widely advertised and had a good response. They believe that they *"were blessed with extreme good fortune"* in recruiting David Pooley, who was previously the Director of Finance and then Chief Executive at North Cornwall District Council, with over thirty years of local government experience.

The permanent Town Clerk was appointed in September 2009. Their salary level and role were budgeted for by the TPC and then voted on by the new Town Council, this degree of accountability proving essential when the local press questioned the amount paid by the new Town Council. The Mayor of St Austell said publically that he believed the role was worth the sum offered and continued, *"People have this perception of a town clerk pushing a quill pen around behind a Victorian desk, and these days they are more akin to a council chief executive with a huge legal and financial responsibility."* Despite the noise in the media, the former temporary Town Clerk recalls only *"very low degrees of opposition"* on



the ground within the local community and only three comments were made back to Cornwall Council via their blog site.

The Town Clerk feels that their years of experience in North Cornwall gave him a good understanding of processes and structures, and this knowledge has proved invaluable in building relationships within the new unitary council. He has a clear grasp of the role of Councillors and of the need for good communications. The Clerk is currently supported by 1.4 staff - a Deputy Clerk and an Administrative Assistant. St Austell Town Council has 20 Councillors all of whom were elected.

The current Town Clerk and former temporary Clerk believe it is crucial to understand and establish the role of that post, both internally with the Councillors and in relation to the wider community. *“Is it strategic or admin?”* Both also reflect on the sheer amount of hard work involved in the early stages of setting up a new local council and the importance of ensuring that governance detail is worked through before *“saving the world”*.

*“The role is lobbying, acting as a champion ... helping to create vision and leadership and establish co-ordination in the area”*

### ***Communications and building local identity***

Good communication has been crucial in a variety of ways throughout the set up process.

Restormel Borough Council created a circulation list, comprising over 500 individuals and organisations, for keeping people up-to-date about the new local councils project via post and e-mail. The public were also informed through Restormel News, the local authority website, the local media, mail-shots and public meetings.

The Town Clerk maintains strong channels of communication with the Clerks in the other three new parishes in the St Austell area and with the Cornwall Association of Local Councils (CALC). On the latter the feeling is that they *“couldn’t have done it without ... the support and knowledge of the CALC”*.

They have a number of Town Councillors who were formerly members of Restormel Borough Council. Work has been done to clarify understanding of the difference in roles, not least between the Cabinet and committee styles of operating. In this the support of the County Association of Local Councils has been crucial.

The clerk’s existing contacts within the new unitary, and the fact that four Town Councillors also sit on Cornwall Council, has helped in terms of communication with a principal local authority which is still coming to terms with *“change upon change upon change”*.

It was proposed early on that IT systems, the website and e-communications should be funded, in the first instance, by Cornwall Council using the budget established by Restormel for the new parishes project. That website is now established and much visited.

Communications and engaging with the community is something that feeds through into the Town Council's work, such as councillors and staff taking part in the Clean Cornwall activities and the Torchlight Carnivals in November 2009 and 2010, which were put on in response to public demand expressed in a survey.

The regular Council meetings are attended by the public and over 100 people went to a recent public meeting on planning applications. Raising the profile of the Town Council and its work for the local community is seen as crucial against the backdrop of public service cuts and pressures on local taxation. In addition to the Town Council's newsletter, they ensure articles in local newspapers, take regular slots on local radio and the Town Mayor places videos on the Cornwall channel website, all to inform local residents about what's going on.

## Next steps

In the early stages of the process, the St Austell Town TPC recommended that the new local council should base its town plan on the St Austell Market & Coastal Towns Initiative Community Strategic Action Plan. A household survey was conducted on this basis in early 2009 and the results from this are now informing the Parish Planning process. According to the Town Clerk, *"There currently is no local development plan ... we are working on that with Cornwall and feeding information into it"*.

In terms of taking on service delegations, there are not yet sufficient levels of trust established. This is partially down to the new Cornwall Council establishing itself and the transition process, as seven former principal local authority services are merged together with the prospect of some significant cutbacks. There is concern from St Austell and other local councils about asset stripping. That said, St Austell automatically took over the running of local allotments when it was formed and it expects to take up wider delegated service delivery in due course.

The Town Clerk is working to complete their CiLCA qualification and once that is done the Town Council will have almost everything in place to go for Quality Parish Status. They believe that will gain them respect from Cornwall Council and others, establishing themselves as a leading local council in the county and gaining them wider recognition.

***Some do's and don'ts from those involved in the process***

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Do keep the formal processes as informal as possible (use simple language).</li><li>• Do use the County Association and SLCC – getting re-assurance is vital.</li><li>• Do prioritise on certain key issues and manage Councillor expectations.</li><li>• Do communicate with the public, your councillors, other local authorities, etc.</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Don't underestimate the level of bureaucracy you will have to deal with.</li><li>• Don't be too ambitious too early on and get the governance right.</li><li>• Don't under-value the role of the Town Clerk – think mini-Chief Executive.</li><li>• Don't allow anyone to think 'Vicar of Dibley'!</li></ul> |
|---|--|

Web address for St Austell Town Council: <http://www.StAustellTownCouncil.com>

***This document was written for the National Association of Local Councils (NALC) and the Commission for Rural Communities (CRC) by Brian Wilson Associates, with David Atkinson Consulting and Ellie Stoneley.***

*The authors would like to thank Chris Borg, the project manager at NALC, and Adam Lavis, Senior Policy Adviser at the CRC, for their helpful steers and advice. Sincere thanks also go to project steering group, who were: Louise Ashmore, Bedfordshire Association of Parish and Town Councils, Helen Ball, Town Clerk at Shrewsbury Town Council, Sue Lake, Norfolk Association of Parish and Town Councils, Russell Morgan, Town Clerk at Stanley Town Council, Sam Shippen, Town Clerk at Seaford Town Council, and Reg Williams, City Clerk at Salisbury City Council. Many other people contributed knowledge, examples and views during the course of the research. This document does not necessarily represent their views and any errors are the author's.*

***January 2011***



## Case study on the experience of newly established local (parish and town) councils

### STANLEY TOWN COUNCIL (DURHAM)

#### Background

Stanley Town Council was created through statutory instrument on 11<sup>th</sup> April 2007. It set its first precept during the later stages of 2008/09 and became officially operational on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2009.

Stanley is a former colliery town in County Durham, centred on a hilltop between Chester-le-Street and Consett. The town now stretches into what were formerly neighbouring villages and towns, such as Annfield Plain to the west, Tanfield and Tantobie to the North, and Beamish and Pelton to the east. The local council area comprises, what is called, the 'wider' Stanley area beyond the town and has a population of more than 31,000 which makes it the largest local council in the county.

The creation of the council came about as a result of a public petition. For many years there was a strongly expressed local view that Stanley had a separate geographic and historical identity from the other settlements which comprised the former Derwentside District Council. The public campaign for a local Stanley town council grew, based on a desire for representation closer to the town's population and greater local accountability. However, this was not supported by the District Council.

As the campaign gathered momentum, the support of a local MP became important. This was seen as crucial when the case for the new council was finally approved by the Secretary of State. National policy also played a key role at that point. The Government had put into effect a process to create a number of unitary councils in certain parts of the country. Durham County Council was to become one of those councils, which meant that Derwentside District Council would be disbanded. Although Stanley was not created as a direct result of the unitary process, its story is closely linked and the debate about unitary governance helped to change perceptions in favour a new Town Council.

Prior to vesting, a town council steering group was drawn from among the council campaign activists. Elections were then held, nine months before the council was formally operational, with the first members for Stanley all being from that campaign group.

## **Key areas of learning**

### ***Managing relations with the principal authority***

Stanley's relationships with both the outgoing Derwentside District Council and the incoming Durham County Council have not been straightforward. Derwentside opposed the creation of a new town council for Stanley on the basis that existing arrangements were working effectively and losing Stanley would have a significant negative impact on its tax base. Relationships at political level became strained, because some of the group that spearheaded the Stanley Town Council campaign were also District councillors.

However, the situation began to improve once the decision had been taken to create the town council. Derwentside's Head of Democratic Services fulfilled many of the initial town clerk functions. Once Stanley recruited its own town clerk there was a platform to build more effective and constructive relationships at officer level with the new unitary. This officer contact was seen as very important and it helped to overcome some of the political tensions.

Relationships with the outgoing district were also complicated by the introduction of the unitary council. The main elements of Stanley's creation were completed before the process which created the new Durham County Council and abolished Derwentside District Council. Nevertheless, many of Stanley's early challenges revolved around that re-organisation of governance arrangements. There were difficulties with transitional arrangements arising from the disappearance of key contacts in one council and the emergence of new structures in another. Then there were boundary changes in May 2008 which made the seven wards in Stanley coterminous with four of the electoral divisions at the new unitary.

The extent of these changes meant that a stable relationship between the new town council and new unitary authority took some time to emerge. The town clerk sees this as inevitable. Over time that relationship has become much more solid. For instance, Durham County Council's local councils support team now provides helpful day-to-day liaison and there are good individual relationships with a number of its service teams. The clerk has recent principal local authority experience, which is considered an advantage in understanding the bureaucracy and workings of Durham County Council. They have also

been able to tackle some of the residual political tensions by emphasising the members' valuable local role in partnership working between the tiers of government.

### ***Building its local identity***

These organisational relationships have had an impact with the local community. The campaign for a Stanley Town Council had been quite high profile, so there were already good connections with residents. The new council feels that it enjoys a high profile locally and that it is not confused with the old (district) arrangements.

Nevertheless, after vesting and local government re-organisation Stanley Town Council had a different sort of communications challenge, to distinguish between its functions and those of the new unitary. The clerk believes that after a period of six to nine months the Town Council achieved a good level of local distinction, even though there is still some confusion among residents about which provides what service. Stanley considers its corporate identity to be important and it has developed an informative website. It also has a Communications Committee whose role is to establish strategy. But there is always room to improve communications and Stanley would welcome initiatives by Durham County Council to promote the role of the Town Council. It thinks this would help to create better clarity about their respective roles.

It feels that one of the most successful things it did to connect with residents was developing the Stanley Strategic Town Plan 2009-2014. This was partly based on a series of public consultation events held during 2008. There were also meetings with the County Council and other service managers. The completed plan was launched by the local MP and reaction to it from residents has been positive.

#### ***Stanley Town Council: Strategic Town Plan 2009-14***

Aim:

The Strategic Town Plan provides a picture of the communities living and working within the seven Town Council wards, in a document which examines the demographic profile, the views and aspirations of residents, and the services and facilities which are available to them.

Objectives:

- To carry out a socially inclusive consultation process with the residents of the area;
- To provide Stanley Town Council with evidence of local need, adding substance to its overall strategy, and;
- To demonstrate the rationale behind the development of a realistic, outcome-focused and consultation-based 'Action Plan'.

### ***Recruiting a permanent town clerk***

Recruiting a full-time town clerk proved to be the turning point in defining Stanley as a fully functioning town council, in establishing good relations with partner organisations and in building a stronger profile. The initial operational arrangements in Stanley were slightly unusual in that members had been elected nine months before its formal vesting date. As noted above, the town clerk duties were initially undertaken by Derwentside's Head of Democratic services, though this had to be alongside their other duties which meant insufficient time could be devoted to the role.

The town clerk recruitment process was aided by County Durham Association of Local Councils, whose technical support helped define the specific role of the clerk. They gave presentations to the steering group. An action that proved particularly useful was to appoint a recruitment consultant to oversee the process. The specific advantages of this approach were being able to develop the right salary and supporting package, and to manage the advertising and head hunting. Costs for the recruitment consultant were about £5k, on top of the £3k of other recruitment costs e.g. to advertise the post. The town council believes this proved to be a very effective use of resources.

In hindsight, members have accepted that they were rather slow to appoint a full-time clerk and in the early days underestimated the scale and volume of the administration required to move the council forward. One reason for this is seen to be the transition of some councillors from a principal local authority role, with its extensive officer support, to a parish council role, where those resources are simply not available.

## **Next steps**

Stanley Town Council acknowledges that the set up phase took them longer to get through than anticipated. The moves to establish unitary governance within Durham may have changed local perceptions in favour of a town council for Stanley, but they also brought about delays in putting the Council onto a firmer footing.

That period is now essentially over. The Council has made good progress on the compliance and governance procedures that were outstanding, it has developed a range of protocols and structures for managing the council and it has established a strong local presence.

The Town Plan and related action plans now provide a strategic framework for them to move forward. They will help Stanley Town Council to deliver its responsibilities as one of fourteen Area Action Partnerships (AAPs) which have been set up across the unitary local government area of County Durham. Its assumption of this important role illustrates that it has made progress at a strategic policy level, as well as within the local community.

Web address for Stanley Town Council:

<http://parishes.durham.gov.uk/stanley/Pages/default.aspx>

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***January 2011***





**Sutton Coldfield Town Council: The Creation of a New Town Council in Sutton  
Coldfield, Birmingham**

## Headlines:

- Sutton Coldfield is a large urban town located on the edge of Birmingham, West Midlands.
- Sutton Coldfield's current population is 100,000 which meant 10,000 signatures had to be obtained on the petition to submit to Birmingham City Council to trigger the necessary Community Governance Review to create a local council.
- Residents were dissatisfied with the loss of the old Sutton Coldfield urban district council in 1974 and further with the removal of the old Sutton Mayoral chains and regalia
- The campaign to create the new Sutton Coldfield Town Council has therefore been a Herculean effort to regain a local political identity for the town. The unique selling point of this campaign is that it succeeded to create a new town council in the second largest local authority area in Europe in a city where service localisation has struggled to be implemented by Birmingham City Council so far.
- This case study tells the story of how Sutton Coldfield successfully established a Town Council in the summer of 2015 after years of campaigning, networking and consultation.

## Why A Council Is Wanted:

The theme of this case study is the creation of a new town council in the locale of Sutton Coldfield, Birmingham. This campaign was supported by the National Association of Local Councils, the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) and the Warwickshire and West Midlands Association of Local Councils through the national New Councils' Programme between 2013 and 2015 (a programme funded by Central Government to support the creation of new parish councils in previously un-parished areas). Sutton Coldfield is at the end of the journey a campaign group travels to after the principal local authority has given permission to create a new town council during the relevant Community Governance Review (CGR) phase.

Ken Rushton, Cllr. Rob Pocock, Stephen Smallwood and the Sutton Vesey Community Association campaigned for years to create the new Town Council in Sutton Coldfield in the belief that services could be best delivered locally due to the size of Birmingham City Council – the biggest in Europe – which made the needs of towns difficult to voice. Sutton Coldfield residents since 1974 have not felt they have had a sufficient voice in the way key services are delivered by Birmingham City Council such as health, education and planning and a town council will at least give these residents a permanent, statutory and elected voice – on their behalf – in negotiations on service delivery with the City Council. Following the creation of Sutton Coldfield Town Council, residents will now benefit from a £1.8 million precept; newly



elected Sutton Coldfield Town Councillors will determine how this sum will be best spent on behalf of residents in the area.

### **Possible Service Areas For The New Town Council:**

Since 1974, residents of Sutton Coldfield have sought more of a voice on issues like town planning, car parking, highways and green spaces. Whilst the campaign group recognised during the Community Governance Review phase that though the General Power of Competence (GPC) is a power of first resort for parish councils – campaigners also know that parish councils are neither planning nor highways authorities. However, the creation of the largest town council in England in the town will do much to give residents a bigger say on these key issues. The new Town Council have also realised that these service areas are interlinked critically. Highways bring footfall to and through Sutton Coldfield on the edge of the second largest city in England (Birmingham). This is why the new town council is seeking a central role in town planning for Sutton Coldfield – as green spaces in such a busy urban environment are crucial and car parking (itself critical for visitors to the town) – would be a hugely important additional revenue stream for the town council.

Other recently formed parish councils have been created in areas such as Kidderminster, Finham, Pannal and Westgate. Elections for the new town council will take place on 5 May, 2016. Given the success of the Sutton Coldfield campaign, it is now likely that there will be other campaigns to create new parish councils in other nearby areas of Birmingham (such as Castle Vale and Shard End), to join Sutton Coldfield and New Frankley as the first two parish councils in Birmingham.



Above; area map of Sutton Coldfield, Birmingham.

### Who Are The Key Partners / Stakeholders Involved?:

The key organisation involved in the campaign from the campaign group perspective was the Sutton Vesey Community Association. The key member from Birmingham City Council was Councillor Rob Pocock, who since his election in 2012 has championed the creation of a town council and constantly worked toward his agenda of greater community involvement. These campaigners were also received huge support from a small group of officers at Birmingham City Council who ensured that the Community Governance Review timeline was adhered to stringently and that – subsequently – the needs of all candidates for election to the Town Council were satisfied in the lead up to polling day and afterwards. Local policy advice was provided by the Warwickshire and West Midlands Association of Local Councils



for the duration of the campaign. The National Association of Local Councils also provided detailed technical advice to the campaign group on the technicalities of Community Governance Reviews throughout the duration of the campaign.

The campaign group was grant funded with £17,000 over three financial years to help produce leaflets, organise public meetings, and related activity to galvanise and sustain resident interest in the concept of a new town council and the campaign to create one in Sutton Coldfield. Such funding was provided by the Department of Communities and Local Government and accessed from the Warwickshire and West Midlands Association of Local Councils via the National Association of Local Councils between 2013 and 2015.. Ken Rushton, Sutton Coldfield Campaign Champion claims '*there would not have been a campaign*' without this funding, citing it as extremely helpful in communicating with residents, namely due to the political challenges the campaign faced with Birmingham City Council, as explained below.

### What Are The Key Issues / Challenges?:

It took approximately two years to gather the 10,000 signatures required to trigger the Community Governance Review for the creation of the new Sutton Coldfield Town Council. Apart from the huge logistical challenge of gathering signatures, there was also the challenge of widely advertising to create greater awareness of the campaign given the sheer size of the town. The physical size of the campaign area and its population explain why posters posted on local trains and stations were crucial in raising awareness. Party politics has also been an issue as well as the ongoing need to minimise its involvement in the campaign from Birmingham City Council which met the efforts of the campaign group efforts with resistance initially. Local media coverage earlier in the campaign also supported this initial resistance to the very idea of a new Sutton Coldfield Town Council (as to that point New Frankley Parish Council had been the only parish council in Birmingham). There were points – particularly earlier in 2015 – when it appeared as though the campaign would not succeed for these reasons alone.

Grant funding from the New Councils' Programme in 2015 was used to facilitate ongoing negotiation with Birmingham City Council following the consultative ballot which completed on 16<sup>th</sup> July 2015. This was followed by discussions prior to a final decision by Birmingham City Council in September 2015 (on the creation of the new town council) regarding how best to strategically inform residents and resident groups of decisions. The grant was allocated towards the cost of public meetings and information dissemination via leaflets and newsletters

For instance 2 campaign meetings in Sutton Coldfield of two hours' duration were held following the vote in Birmingham in September / late October, 2015. The first meeting determined what final campaign tasks were now required and tasks / research were



allocated appropriately. The second meeting pulled together the work subsequent to the first meeting and established clear priorities and a timetable of actions eventually leading to the first election for Sutton Coldfield Town Council.

*"WALC congratulates the group of residents, led by Ken Rushton that have, through sheer hard work and determination, pulled off the amazing achievement of establishing Sutton Coldfield Town Council. We look forward to welcoming them as members and providing, in the years ahead, the advice and support they will need to deliver quality services to their community that will make Sutton Coldfield an even better place to live." – John Crossling, WALC.*

### How Have These Issues / Challenges Been Overcome?:

The £17,000 of Government funding since September, 2013 has helped the campaign group to overcome huge difficulties which may have proved insurmountable otherwise. The two main problems were gathering the 10,000 signatures and sustaining awareness of the campaign over a two - three year period. The main solutions paid for by these monies were as below;

- Printing of newsletters and briefing leaflets;
- Hire of community halls for briefing events;
- Postage and distribution of selected direct mailshots to community groups; &
- Advertising and promotional posters.

The direct mailing to 45,000 homes in the Sutton Coldfield area was the single most effective method the campaign group felt it used to overcome the challenge of the early resistance from Birmingham City Council and lack of support from local media which resulted from this.

To avoid party politics becoming a factor in Sutton Coldfield, the campaign group aimed to put newer, younger faces into the council who could bring forward a fresh start and ideas to the council moving forward. 24 new town councillors were elected to the town council at the council's historic first elections on 5 May, 2016. These representatives were from a range of political parties and some were Independents.

## Outcomes - Learning From The Campaign:



Above: The campaign poster for a Royal Sutton Coldfield Town Council.

The initial campaigning achievement was the securing of the 10,000 signatures required to trigger the Community Governance Review to create the Town Council. The second main achievement was to secure an overwhelming majority of 'Yes' votes when the final referendum of the Review took place of residents earlier in 2015.

On the final referendum, an overwhelming majority of the electorate – 70% – voted 'Yes'. No one on party political grounds or otherwise could then dispute this. Since this time and also when Birmingham City Council communicated back its formal agreement to the creation of the town council later in 2015 – the sharing of learning has been national (in the form of presentations at NALC events) and local – in the form of sharing campaign ideas with Shard End and Castle Vale (emerging campaigns for parish councils from the same areas).

Since then, Sutton Coldfield residents and the campaign group have been able to improve their relationship with Birmingham City Council and work hard to have an outward facing approach to decision making, involving community voices as well as looking at the way other councils across England manage similar issues.

Other related outcomes have been the subsequent smooth passage of the new town council through its first elections on 5 May, 2016 (with the election of 24 new town councillors) and the holding of the council's inaugural parish council meeting on 17 May, 2016 (where the new council voted to call itself a Town Council and vest a Sutton Coldfield Town Mayor). The council is still in the process of recruiting its first town clerk (chief officer).

## Key Achievements:

The key element of success on a project of this scale was to persuade 70% of the residents voting in the 2015 referendum to create the town council to vote 'Yes'. The second main achievement was then to persuade officers and members of Birmingham City Council that there was nothing to fear from the creation of the new Sutton Coldfield Town Council –



political or otherwise. This latter task may have been made marginally easier by the outcome of the referendum result – but campaigns elsewhere (as in Fenton and Corringham) have failed at the first attempt at a similar stage of the campaign. So this was a real achievement given the geographical size of the area and its population.

### **Campaign Lessons To Share With Others:**

Sutton Coldfield residents will benefit from a strong and permanent voice on several strategic policy issues such as highways, car parking, green spaces and town centre management – through the new town council – and largely through changed resident relationships with Birmingham City Council. As mentioned, residents will benefit in year one from £1.8 million from a local precept (the form of council tax raised by parish councils) which can be spent on services in Sutton Coldfield. Communicating the benefits of a town council has not been as much of a challenge as first thought as most residents recognise that due to the size of Birmingham City Council, their services have not been local enough until now.

Another lesson learnt from the campaign is the effectiveness of direct communication with residents, such as the mailing method used by the Sutton Coldfield campaign group which, with the help of the Government funding, enabled the campaign to reach 45,000 homes directly. The council cite this as their most effective form of communication, and highly recommend it to campaigns looking to persuade local residents of the benefits a community council can bring.

The campaign group also recognises that sharing lessons on gathering petition signatures and how to sustain a long campaign are critical. Engaging with the principal local authority once a Community Governance Review has been triggered - is also critical. Finally, it is also important to recognise once a re-organisation order has been issued by the principal authority, the entirely new set of challenges involved in creating a new town council: budget setting, vesting and namely, having sufficient residents to stand for election.





**Who Can I Contact?:**

**Ken Rushton: Sutton Coldfield Campaign Champion - [kenrushton@blueyonder.co.uk](mailto:kenrushton@blueyonder.co.uk) / 0121 355 3224.**

**John Crossling: Warwickshire & West Midlands Association of Local Councils – [johnc@walc.org.uk](mailto:johnc@walc.org.uk) / 01789 472 61.**

**Other Information:**

**More information on creating a Council: The NALC 'Create a Council' web page:  
<http://www.nalc.gov.uk/our-work/create-a-council> .**

**To see template resources such as a media release, leaflet and poster, please click here:  
<http://www.nalc.gov.uk/our-work/create-a-council> .**

**More information on how to create a new council: The NALC 'Create a Council' page:  
<http://www.nalc.gov.uk/our-work/create-a-council>**

**The NALC 'Power to the people' resource:  
<http://www.nalc.gov.uk/publications>**

**The Royal Sutton Coldfield Town Council Campaign:  
<http://www.suttoncoldfieldtowncouncil.com/> .**

**Warwickshire & West Midlands Association of Local Councils:  
<http://www.walc.org.uk/> .**

**Sutton Coldfield Town Council web pages on the Birmingham City Council web-site -  
<http://www.birmingham.gov.uk/sutton-coldfield-parish-council> .**