

Update

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THE CHIEF'S BRIEF

By Danny Moody, Chief Executive, Northants CALC

Local elections wipe the slate clean and provide for a fresh start. The candidates elected are ready for a new term, and they have a fresh mandate from the people. 205 parish and town councils in Northamptonshire held elections on 6 May 2021, but only 35 (17%) of them were contested. That low figure belies the big turnover of councillors, with many choosing to retire at this juncture as we enter the unitary future, and it is not always easy to attract new councillors. However, one of the oddest things about the democratic process is that, where councils struggle to encourage people to put themselves forward as candidates for election, there is usually no problem in finding people to co-opt to fill any vacancies after the election. There are many reasons why this could be the case, but one of them is the nomination process itself, which is clunky and archaic. Northants CALC has asked both unitary councils for a review of the whole election process, with a view to making it slicker and easier for 2025.

There were few surprises during the elections. North Northamptonshire Council (NNC) and West Northamptonshire Council (WNC) returned Conservative majorities. Labour has majorities on Northampton Town Council (NTC) and Corby Town Council (CTC), whilst the Conservatives have Wellingborough Town Council (WTC) and Kettering Town Council (KTC). The Green Party had their best-ever election results in Northamptonshire. Congratulations to all those elected, contested or uncontested, regardless of affiliation, and regardless of which tier. Together, they are the elected representatives of the people of Northamptonshire and are there to serve and to make the county a great place to live, work and play.

Immediately after the elections, thoughts turn to the annual meeting of the council. For parish and town councils the annual meeting must be held within a relatively tight statutory window (10 to 24 May this year), which in most years is fine with a little preparation and foresight. This year however has presented unique challenges, trying to blend the legal requirement to hold the meeting in person, with the restrictions imposed by the Coronavirus pandemic. By and large, solutions have been found and meetings have been held. It does not sit well with me that the rules have had to be stretched so thin, with one or two councils needing to push the boundaries to the limit, so that they are now holding their breath to see whether any legal challenge materialises. The sector was put in an invidious position and I hope it never happens again. There is more on this below.

The unitary councils too have held their annual meetings, and it was very pleasing to see friends of the parish and town council sector installed in the key positions. Cllr Jonathan Nunn is Leader of WNC, and Cllr Jason Smithers is Leader of NNC. Both are experienced parish councillors, and both understand the value of community and of the two tiers of local government working well together. I look forward to a productive relationship between the tiers, based on mutual trust, understanding, and appreciation. Again, there is more below on the unitary councils and what the future might hold for parish and town councils.

Just as councils had their hands full with the elections, dealing with the pandemic, preparing the end of year processes, and the impending loss of remote meetings, the news broke on 9 April 2021 of the death of Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh. Fortunately, councils have been preparing for some time for the death of a senior royal, so for many it was simply a case of implementing well-prepared protocols. However, the period of national mourning – 9 to 17 April 2021 – caused election campaigning to be suddenly suspended in most areas. It also caused confusion over notice periods for council meetings, with some legal experts saying that the days of national mourning could not be counted in the calculation of notice periods, and others saying that they could because it was “*national mourning*”, not “*public mourning*”. I do hope that question can be resolved in time for the next such occasion. The community leadership role that parish and town councils play came to the fore, with respectful remembrance and commemoration on council web sites and notice boards. Councils with flagpoles were able to observe the national protocol of flying the Union flag at half-mast until 8am on the day after the funeral.

“The community leadership role that parish and town councils play came to the fore, with respectful remembrance and commemoration”

The stalwarts of the past two months have been the parish and town clerks. Yes, the councillors get the limelight at election time, but behind every great council is a great clerk, (too) often working beyond their contracted hours, ploughing on admirably, whatever is thrown at them. Clerks are resourceful and innovative. They have to understand a rapidly changing operating environment, digest complex and sometimes confusing rules and regulations, and then make practical

and pragmatic arrangements for the continuation of council business. And how many other jobs are there where the people that are responsible for your employment can change overnight based on the whim of the electorate? If you are a clerk and you are still standing after the past couple of months and all that it has thrown at you, then congratulations! And thank you!!

And so, with the local elections behind us, and Local Government Reorganisation done (constitutionally, at least), it is a time to look forward to a brave new future. In normal circumstances, 2021/22 might have been a year of consolidation and reflection, but there won't be time and space for that. The county is not out of the woods of the pandemic, and councils cannot afford to relax. And Vesting Day – the day the unitary councils formally took over legal responsibility for principal council services – was not the end of the process, but merely a staging post along the way. The unitary councils have much to do, and a lot of money to save. Be under no illusion that the next four years are going to be any easier in financial terms for local government than the past four years have been. And that means the unitary councils having to focus on their statutory commitments, rather than on the discretionary nice-to-haves. My hope is that the “transformation” of services is done in a thoughtful, careful, and collaborative way, and Northants CALC will work with the unitary councils to ensure that is the case for services where parish and town councils have an input.



And finally, remember that no one is born a councillor, nor is it yet part of the national curriculum, so you must learn on the job. If you are a newly elected councillor, you need to attend training at your earliest convenience. The basic course for parish councillors is called Off To a Flying Start, for a very good reason! Training is an expected element of good councillorship and you will be more

effective as a councillor if you engage with it. Your council has a Training Policy and a training budget to support your development as a councillor, so please do avail yourself of the opportunities available. For all the details please see

<https://www.northantscalc.com/councillor-development-framework.html>.

COUNCIL MEETINGS

A parish or town council meeting is convened under the provisions of the Local Government Act 1972; legislation written fifty years ago before the World Wide Web was even a twinkle in the eye of Tim Berners-Lee.

Schedule 12 to the Act makes provision relating to “meetings” of statutory authorities in England and Wales. It covers matters such as how often meetings must take place, how notice of them is to be given and who can attend. Schedule 12 refers, in a number of provisions, to the “*place*” of such meetings, to people being “*present*” at them and to the persons who may “*attend*”. Other statutory provisions govern the circumstances in which meetings are required to be “*open to the public*” or “*held in public*”. The interpretation of “*place*” has always been taken to be a physical place – a village hall or community centre etc – and being “*present*” means being physically present at that place.

The Coronavirus Act 2020 provided for the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government to make regulations changing these long-held interpretations to include the Internet as a “place”, and that members of the council and members of the public could “attend” by remote means, i.e., via Zoom or Teams, or whatever. When the Coronavirus Act received Royal Assent, no one knew how long the Coronavirus pandemic would last, but it was thought prudent to include a “sunset clause” meaning that the provisions applied only to “*meetings required to be held, or held, before 7 May 2021*”.

Even as 2021 dawned it became obvious that the pandemic would not be over by 7 May, and that social distancing restrictions would still be in place. Government could of, and should of, legislated for an extension to the provisions for remote meetings, but chose not to. The reason given was that there was no time or opportunity for new primary legislation (despite the fact that no fewer than 25 Acts of Parliament have been passed already this year). Having made the decision that the local elections could go ahead safely on 6 May 2021, perhaps it would have led to awkward questions for the government if a parish council meeting held on 7 May 2021 could not go ahead in the same venue as used for the poll.

Whatever the case, the legal action brought by Hertfordshire County Council in conjunction with Lawyers in Local Government (LLG) and the Association of Democratic Services Officers (ADSO) and supported by the National Association

of Local Councils (NALC) failed in its attempt to have the 1972 terms redefined permanently, with the High Court judgment stating that *“meetings must take place at a single, specified geographical location; attending a meeting at such a location means physically going to it; and being “present” at such a meeting involves physical presence at that location.”*

The judgment was handed down on 28 April 2021, which immediately plunged the local government sector into a spin. How to comply with the legal requirement to hold the annual meeting in person, whilst at the same time complying with the government’s “roadmap” restrictions? In particular, there were all sorts of questions about meeting held between 10 May 2021 (the earliest date following the elections) and 17 May 2021 (when the country moved to Step 3 of the roadmap).

On 29 April 2021, the day after the judgment, Northants CALC asked the National Association of Local Councils (NALC) to obtain urgent clarification and direction from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG). The response was received on 19 May 2021. It said *“...our understanding is that all councils have been able to meet in person throughout the pandemic so long as they follow the relevant Covid-19 guidance on the safe use of council buildings. Current regulations include exceptions for gatherings that are held for work purposes or the provision of voluntary or charitable services, and as councillors are providing voluntary services, they can attend council meetings.”* Who knew that local government provided “voluntary services”! It beggars belief.

The national guidance on the use of community buildings was also confusing, which led to many parish and town councils being unable to use their normal meeting venues as the operators of those buildings claimed that parish council meetings were “not allowed”. Northants CALC worked with the Village Halls Advisor at Northants ACRE to at least produce joined-up, accurate and timely advice for venues in Northamptonshire. Many councils were forced to meet outside, and/or to cut their meeting agendas down to just the necessary statutory business. Many councils passed a blanket delegation to their clerk, in case in-person meetings are not possible, or desirable, in the coming months.

At the time of writing, all councils should have held their annual meetings already, so many of the questions are rendered moot. However, business goes on and some of the outstanding questions still need to be answered for future meetings.

And then there is the medium- and long-term future. Having seen the benefits and convenience of remote meetings, the sector cannot ignore the opportunity. The government's call for evidence on remote meetings is open until 17 June 2021, and all parish and town councils should consider submitting a response by visiting <https://tinyurl.com/23rsx3td>.



The future is probably a blend of **in-person meetings**, where everyone is physically present in a single geographical location, **remote meetings**, where everyone is present via remote means, and **hybrid meetings**, where some people are present in-person and others are present via remote means. The latter category presents the most challenges, technically, legally, and procedurally.

The greatest challenge in all this has been the need to innovate and adapt, and to avoid fixed-thinking. For example, one council said, "*We **can't** hold our annual meeting in the community centre because it is in use every evening between 17 May and 24 May from 7pm onwards*". Well hold the council meeting at 6pm then. Or 5pm. Or 10am. There is no law that says a parish council meeting must be held in the evening, even though most are as it is considered the best time to hold a meeting that is supposed to be open to members of the public. Another council said "*We **can't** give remote access to members of the public because there is no Wi-Fi in the village hall*". Well install a new broadband line then! Or try a 4G mobile dongle. Or see if there is a guest network nearby. It was certainly one of those times when the mantra "*No such word as 'can't'*" applied! Most parish and town councils adapted very well, and even gave the unitary councils a run for their money when it came to annual meeting organisation and innovation!

The next step in the roadmap is scheduled to take place on 21 June 2021 when all restrictions will be lifted. However, the virus won't magically disappear at midnight on 20 June, so common-sense health protection measures (hands, face, space) will be with us for some time yet and should be applied to any in-person council meetings held over the summer.

TREE-MENDOUS

Trees are important. They capture and store carbon. They are a rich habitat and encourage biodiversity. They provide amenity and natural beauty. And they can be a marker of historical events, and a witness of the passing of time.

It is not quite true to say that the more trees there are the better; sometimes it is about quality, not quantity. And tree ownership comes with liabilities and responsibilities, both to the environment and to the public.

If ever there was a time for parish and town councils to get involved in tree planting and ownership, it is now. There are several initiatives that will be of interest, whether a council is looking to plant a single tree in the middle of a village green, or several acres of trees to green a disused piece of land.

The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) has published the **England Trees Action Plan 2021 to 2024** (see <https://tinyurl.com/c4sm9yep>). The plan sets out the government's long-term vision for the treescape it wants to see in England by 2050 and beyond. Local tree and woodland strategies offer an opportunity for local communities to decide where new trees will be planted and how existing trees will be protected. The enriched treescape will often be created with the help of councils. The plan is *"that England will have at least 12% woodland cover by mid-century, contributing to net zero greenhouse gas emissions. Its conifer and broadleaf woodlands will be managed for biodiversity and other environmental benefits, along with providing sustainable sources of hardwood and softwood timber and woody products, which can be effective carbon stores and are already seeing increased demand for as we transition to a green economy"*.

Plant a Tree for the Jubilee

2022 is the year of The Queen's Platinum Jubilee and a project to provide a legacy has been launched called The Queen's Green Canopy (QGC). It is a unique, UK-wide, tree planting initiative inviting people to **"Plant a Tree for the Jubilee"**. Everyone, from individuals to Scout and Girlguiding groups, villages, towns, cities, counties, schools and corporates, will be encouraged to plant trees from October 2021 when the tree planting season begins, through to the end of the Jubilee year in 2022. See www.queensgreencanopy.org.

With a focus on planting sustainably, the QGC will encourage the planting of trees to create a legacy in honour of The Queen's leadership of the Nation, which will benefit future generations. As well as inviting the planting of new trees, the QGC will dedicate a network of 70 Ancient Woodlands across the United Kingdom and identify 70 Ancient Trees to celebrate Her Majesty's 70 years of service.

Planting season - October to March

The QGC will encourage everyone to learn more about the best way to plant trees so that they survive and flourish for years to come. Trees and hedgerows must be planted with care, at the right time of year, in the right place and with species that are not prone to prevailing tree diseases. The QGC initiative will encourage planting during the official planting season, October to March, to optimise the chance of trees surviving and flourishing. The countdown to planting season began at the launch on 17 May 2021. Parish and town councils are encouraged to use this summer to plan their Jubilee tree planting projects and be ready for October.

The QGC project is being co-ordinated in Northamptonshire by Paul Parsons, the immediate past High Sherriff of Northamptonshire, and a local farmer and conservationist. A lot more information about the project will be forthcoming in the weeks and months ahead. However, now is the time for parish and town councils to begin thinking about what they can do to make this initiative a success in their own communities. Please put an item on your next meeting agenda "To consider how this council can engage with The Queen's Green Canopy project".

Funding For Tree Projects

Of course, tree planting takes time and money. But there are various sources of help available. Defra has launched a £2.7 million **Local Authority Treescapes Fund** (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/local-authority-treescapes-fund>) for local authorities to plant or naturally regenerate trees across communities to revitalise neglected green spaces. Applications to the fund would have to be made by the unitary councils as it is not open directly to parish and town councils, so why not



engage with your new unitary council representatives, and see what their plans are under the Local Authority Treescapes Fund.

Another fund – **The Urban Tree Challenge Fund (UTCf)** – opened 26 April 2021 as part of the Government’s Nature for Climate Fund, supporting the planting of 44,000 large ‘standard’ trees over a two-year period: 2021/22 to 2022/23.

Applications are open now until 25 July 2021. The UTCf is open to anyone who wants to plant trees in urban or peri-urban areas, as long as there is full management control or consent to use the land for the duration of the agreement. The fund provides 50% of published standard costs for planting and establishment. The remaining costs of planting and establishing trees supported under the UTCf must be met through match funding, either in the form of money or labour.

For smaller projects **The Woodland Trust** provides free tree packs to community organisations, including parish and town councils. The packs contain saplings of 20 - 60cm in a variety of appropriate, native species and parish councils can apply for up to 420 saplings. See <https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/plant-trees/schools-and-communities/>.

If your council has a larger piece of land available, The Woodland Trust will also help on a one-to-one basis with larger projects (over 0.5 hectares) under the **MOREwoods Project**, where an officer will visit the site with you, help design your woodland, create a bespoke species mix, supply the agreed trees and tree protection, and cover up to 75% of costs. For further details please see <https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/plant-trees/large-scale-planting/morewoods/>.

So there are plenty of initiatives and projects to get involved with in 2021 and 2022. But what if you don’t know where to start, or your council is struggling for ideas and inspiration? Well, that is covered too! The National Association of Local Councils (NALC), which is a **Tree Charter** organisation, has just published a series of Case Studies (<https://www.nalc.gov.uk/library/our-work/climate-change/3484-tree-charter-case-studies/file>) from parish and town councils up and down the land that have been there are done it! From planting single oak trees to mark a significant person or event, to planting new woods of many hectares, you will find a project that suits your council and gives you the energy and inspiration to move forward. By working together and making the most of all these opportunities, we can put Northamptonshire at the top of the tree!

THE UNITARY COUNCILS ARE GO!

1 April 2021 was Vesting Day for North Northamptonshire Council (NNC) and West Northamptonshire Council (WNC), the day when they formally took over legal responsibility for principal council services. The previous district, borough and county councils were dissolved and are now referred to as “the former principal councils”, and the old boroughs and districts are “the former local government areas”.

The old geography and names will exist for many years though, not least because the unitary councils have decided to create Local Area Planning Committees based on the old geography. So, for example, we have the South Northamptonshire Local Area Planning Committee of West Northamptonshire Council.

Both unitary councils are controlled by the Conservatives, who won 66 of the 93 seats on West Northamptonshire Council, and 60 of 78 seats on North Northamptonshire Council. The full political makeup of the unitary councils is

Party	WNC	NNC
Conservative	66	60
Labour	20	14
Liberal Democrat	5	0
Green	0	3
Independent	2	1
Total	93	78

The unitary councils have 3-member wards, meaning that each ward has three members elected to represent it. That presents some interesting questions. Previously, every area had one borough or district councillor, and one county councillor, so you knew who to engage with. Now, you have a choice of three, all from the same council. How it works in practice depends on local arrangements made by the ward members. Where, for example, all three ward members are from the same party, they might decide to split the ward up geographically taking a third each. Or, if one of the three is a Cabinet member for example, the other two might shoulder a greater proportion of the work in the ward. What happens where the three ward members are from different parties is intriguing. They might

start fighting to see who can attend the most parish council meetings! The ward members will generally work in the best interests of the ward and of the unitary council, but do not expect it to always be sweetness and light! Parish and town councils should avoid getting dragged into any political shenanigans, and clerks should avoid distributing information from ward councillors that is overtly political in nature.

What is clear is the need for parish and town councils to work closely with their ward representatives. If they are new, or new to you, contact them and invite them to a council meeting. You will find contact details for all ward members at <https://westnorthants.moderngov.co.uk> & <https://northnorthants.moderngov.co.uk>. The ward members should be sent copies of agendas and minutes and kept informed of local issues. If you want them to be there when you need them, make sure you are cultivating that relationship in between times too.

Now legally established, and with their full complement of elected members, the unitary councils are entering a phase of “transformation”. Remember that the objective of setting up the unitary councils was to do things better and/or cheaper, so there are teams dedicated to ferreting out improvements and savings. Make no mistake, the unitary councils are up against it financially; they both have savings targets in the millions. The financial pressures of the past ten years have not magically evaporated simply with a change to council structures because it is the underlying structure of local government funding, particularly for adult social services and children’s services, that remain the greatest challenge.



The transformation journey has started.

Devolution of assets and services from the unitary councils to parish and town councils is inevitable. Cost will shift from the unitary councils’ budgets to parish and town councils’ budgets. Parish precepts will go up. The unitary councils cannot legally compel a parish or town council to take on a service or asset that it does not want to, but if the alternative is the discontinuation of that service, or sale of that asset, then there will be a moral pressure, if not a legal one. That devolution will happen is a certainty. How and when it will happen is an open question. Ideally, there will be a framework for devolution, where bids and

proposals can be considered through an objective and transparent process. Transfers will happen methodically and against mutually agreed timescales, with finance following function, for at least the agreed transition phase. It is vital that services and assets are devolved, not dumped, and that the main driver is that a service or asset is delivered at the most appropriate level, regardless of whether or not it is revenue generating. True devolution should follow the principle of subsidiarity; it is not just about passing down services and assets that cost money and jealously guarding other services and assets that generate revenue.

Northants CALC has already begun work with the Assistant Directors for Housing and Communities at the unitary councils on a devolution framework, building on research the Association has carried out on other unitary areas in England. Northants CALC was also pleased to input into the Local Government Association's work to build a national devolution toolkit, which will be published in the next few weeks, and could form the basis of the conversation between the tiers of local government in Northamptonshire.

At the annual meetings of North Northamptonshire Council and West Northamptonshire Council, their respective Leaders said in their acceptance speeches how important it was that everyone works together for the good of Northamptonshire. Local government, health, the emergency services, the private sector, the voluntary and community sector, and social enterprises. If we all pull in the same direction, we will go places!

STRONG START TO PLR SCHEME

The Police Liaison Representative (PLR) Scheme is the first of its type in England. At the most basic level, the PLR acts as a single point of contact between their parish or town council and Northamptonshire Police. The aim of the scheme is to improve the flow and quality of information between the police and councils.

The scheme was launched in January, and to date 150 parish and town councils and parish meetings have appointed a PLR. That is well over 50% already, with names flooding in currently following councils' annual meetings.

A steering group has been set up, and the first meeting is on 8 June 2021. It is hoped to be able to publish the details of the new Local Policing Beats shortly thereafter. To follow the scheme, please visit www.northantscalc.com/plr.

ENGLAND'S YOUNGEST PARISH COUNCILLOR

Meet Freya Davies, now Councillor Freya Davies, a recently elected member of Flore Parish Council. Freya was eighteen just before the close of nominations in April, making her England's youngest parish councillor.

Asked why she wanted to stand to be a parish councillor, Freya said *"I appreciate what a fantastic village I am fortunate to live in. As a resident of Flore my entire life, attending the village school and local clubs and societies, I now want to ensure that others have the benefits and opportunities I did."*

The passion for the place she lives hasn't just started. Freya adds *"As a volunteer I am actively engaged in a number of different village organisations and particularly enjoy intergenerational work. I love my village and want young people to be able to have a voice. Becoming a parish councillor gives me a perfect opportunity to join an experienced team and continue to help the parish council shape the future of Flore for all generations."*

The average age of parish and town councillors in Northamptonshire at the last survey was 62, so Cllr Davies could have a long career ahead of her!

Flore Parish Council and neighbouring Weedon Parish Council both had contested elections. In Weedon three of the candidates were 18 and one was 23. Two of the three 18 years olds were elected. It appears we have discovered the centre of youthful vigour in the county!

Congratulations and a warm welcome to all the young councillors that have joined the sector, and all the new but not-so-young councillors too! It is vital that new people come forward to represent their towns and villages, and that they bring with them new ideas, energy, and fresh perspectives. Parish and town councils are better for it, and it helps keep the sector feeling lively and vibrant. Whether your contribution is long or short, we are very pleased to have you!



Councillor Freya Davies.

THE NORTHANTS CALC COUNCILLOR PANEL

Do you have conviction in your views and opinions, and a willingness to share those views and opinions? If so, we are looking for new people to join our Northants CALC Councillor Panel.



Part of the Association's work is lobbying and representation, locally, regionally, and nationally; we are the voice of parish and town councils in Northamptonshire. To do that we need to build and maintain a strong evidence base, and one of our methods is the Councillor Panel, which gives a direct voice to parish and town councillors and ensures that the diverse nature of member councils is always represented.

The Councillor Panel is an email list of 100 – 150 parish and town councillors in Northamptonshire. After local elections we normally lose 10 – 20% of the panel members through retirement, so we are looking for new people to join. The only qualification is being a member of a parish or town council in Northamptonshire... you can be young or old, experienced or new, from a big town council or a small parish council, urban or rural.

Use of the Councillor Panel is limited so that the commitment expected of panel members is a known quantity and to ensure that the Panel is not used without good reason. There are no more than two substantive polls/surveys per calendar year (taking up to 30 minutes to respond to), and six quick poll/surveys per calendar year (taking 5 – 10 minutes to respond to).

We have consulted the Councillor Panel recently on such things as local government reorganisation, community resilience, mood of councillors during the pandemic, and the transparency and openness of local councils.

To find out more, please see the Terms of Reference for the Councillor Panel at <https://www.northantscalc.com/uploads/councillor-panel-tors-v4.pdf>. And to sign up, simply send an email to cllrpanel@northantscalc.com with your full name and the name of your council.

BUILDING NATIONAL LAYERS USING PARISH ONLINE

Parish Online (www.parish-online.co.uk) is growing in popularity as a tool to help Local Councils manage their businesses, with over 1,400 councils signed up (including 30 in Northamptonshire). Parish Online gives councils a way to access OS mapping, address data and a host of other national datasets, and then to map their own asset layers (allotments, streetlights, playground equipment etc) and plans (Neighbourhood Plans, Emergency Plans, Tree Planting etc).

National Maps: More recently, Parish Online has launched the concept of aggregating the information from individual councils to create National Maps of information. In effect this means harvesting the detailed knowledge of each individual council to create a national overview which otherwise would not exist.



The first two National Maps are for Allotments and Cemeteries/Burial Grounds, and these Maps have been launched with the support of the National Associations concerned, the National Allotment Society (NAS) and the Institute of Cemetery and Crematorium Managers (ICCM) respectively. These Associations have also specified the fields of information which they think would be the most useful in a National Map – things like access to water and parking for an allotment, and the religious denomination of a cemetery. You will find links to the currently available National Maps at <https://gcstones52.wixsite.com/pugs> together with an explanation of how to use them. Parish Online intends to launch many other National Maps in due course (for instance for Village Halls, Playgrounds, and Digital Inclusion Support).

To allow every council in Britain to support the National Map initiative, Parish Online has launched a free cut-down version of Parish Online called **Parish Online Lite**, which allows every council to access and edit the National Maps. To access Parish Online Lite a council must first sign up to a free trial of Parish Online (www.parish-online.co.uk/sign-up). The National Maps are available in a folder to the left of the screen. After four weeks the trial will expire, and the council will be left with permanent access to the Parish Online Lite system.

The National Maps can be shown free of charge on any public-facing council website so that the public can benefit from them.

REGISTER YOUR DEFIBRILATOR

Ask yourself these TWO questions:

1. Has your Parish got a Community Public Access Defibrillator (CPAD)? It can usually be found inside a yellow locked or unlocked metal cabinet.
2. Do you know if it is registered on **THE CIRCUIT**? This is the newish national registration database for all defibrillators, managed by the British Heart Foundation and not to be confused with being registered previously through East Midlands Ambulance Service (EMAS).

Mandy Lowe, retired Community Response Manager for Northamptonshire explains all... *"I retired from EMAS in 2018. I worked with parish councils in Northants to assist them with information and the benefits of purchasing and installing a community defib. EMAS ran an offer that was very appealing financially to include a defibrillator, a heated cabinet and a 2-hour training session for the public to learn Basic Life Support and how to use the defibrillator. These defibrillator units were then registered with EMAS who were then able to direct a 999 caller to retrieve it in the event if it being required in an emergency.*

Since I retired however, a new registration and activation process has been implemented, and it is now a national database being run by the British Heart Foundation (BHF). EMAS notified all known registered owners of CPADs (usually via the clerk's email address) of the change some 2 years ago and provided the link and details to re-register their defibs onto the new system. Upon doing a simple search on the new database I found many that were not registered. My concern is that some councils did not act on the email sent by EMAS or that contacts may have changed. Ultimately the sad fact is that defibrillators not registered on The Circuit will not be activated and will not be sent for retrieval to an emergency incident by EMAS. This is a real shame after the council's hard work of purchasing and installing them."

To find out more, please visit <https://tinyurl.com/ubcy5f2e>. ALL parish councils with defibrillators should ensure they have registered their defibrillator via <https://www.thecircuit.uk/defibrillators/register>. If you are not sure what to do and need any help with registering, then please feel free to contact Mandy Lowe at mandyalowe@hotmail.com.

NORTHAMPTONSHIRE SEARCH & RESCUE

Professional Volunteers On Call 24/7, 365

Northamptonshire Search & Rescue (NSAR) was formed in 2013 with the aim of locating and assisting anyone in distress or injured and returning them to a place of safety. Primarily aimed at locating missing and lost persons, its role has grown to include water and flood rescues and now air search operations using the latest generation of drone technology. Furthermore, the team's role expanded in the last year to cover huge amounts of COVID-19 support, with welfare checks and food and medicine delivery taking place.

43 volunteers and 4 dogs on call every day of the year, ready to assist the police and other emergency services as required.

Who we help:

Every year in the County there are 3,800 missing people reported to Northamptonshire police force, that is over 10 a day. It is also an 11% increase on the previous year's reports. These missing persons may be children or despondent adults living with conditions such as dementia or Alzheimer's.

If your elderly relative, parent, or child were missing you would want to know that everything possible was being done to find them. NSAR does just that.

We use the latest statistics and predictive planning to aid in their location and rescue. Time is important and it saves lives, the faster we can be on scene the better chance we have for a positive outcome.

We have also been deployed in the past year to several major flooding incidents, actively saving several lives and reducing the risk to hundreds of residents



Funding & future projects:

The team relies solely on donations and grants to survive and has suffered a huge loss due to COVID-19 restricting our fundraising options. The operating costs in an average year are around £13,000 which is far less than the equivalent economic value delivered.

One key activity we are currently looking at is identifying sites for our clothing collecting units. These have been our lifeline during the Pandemic and have kept the team afloat. Each bin placed has the potential to raise £1,000 per year, so as you can see a few sites will be able to sustain this life saving charity with ease.

Looking to the future we are working on replacing our ageing third vehicle, the technical rescue vehicle which carries vital water and technical rescue equipment - this is a £60,000 project.

We also have big dreams for the future and are considering options to create a permanent base which is predicted to be a £700,000 project. As you can imagine, we have to commit to massive fundraising activities and are seeking to raise awareness and support for our activities around the County that we serve.

www.northantssar.org. Find us on Facebook, twitter, and Instagram

ELECTRICITY BUYING GROUP UPDATE

The Northants CALC partnership with Weedon-based Clear Utility Solutions (CUS) is paying dividends, both in terms of cash savings and carbon reduction. The scheme started in Autumn 2020 and to date parish and town councils have between them saved a whopping **£30,000!** More importantly, as a result of CUS switching councils to greener energy suppliers for the long term, nearly **200 tonnes** of CO2 will now not be dissipating into the atmosphere.

The buying group is open to all member parish and town councils in Northamptonshire. To see if your council can save money and/or carbon now, please visit <https://www.clearutilitysolutions.com/ncalc-partnership>. If your council is part way through a fixed-term contract and not ready to renew just yet, CUS will take a note of the contract end date and send you a helpful reminder when it is time to start looking at renewal rates.

SITUATIONS VACANT

Raunds Town Council

Raunds is a rapidly expanding market town in East Northamptonshire just off the A45 near Stanwick Lakes. The council has 12 seats and there are just under 8,000 electors. The council set a precept for 2021/22 of £511,765. The council has a vacancy for a Town Clerk. The position is full time, permanent, based at the Town Hall, Raunds. The closing date for applications is **Friday 11 June 2021**.

Rothwell Town Council

Rothwell is a small market town between Desborough and Kettering. It is home to the famous Rowell Fair. There are 6,431 electors and the council set a precept for 2021/22 of £80,000. The position is permanent part-time at 18 hours per week initially. The closing date for applications is **Friday 11 June 2021**.

Brixworth Parish Council

Brixworth Parish Council has a vacancy for a Clerk/RFO working 30 hours per week. The council has 14 seats and there are 4,356 electors. The precept for 2021/22 is £166,460. The closing date for applications is **Friday 28 May 2021**.

Please see <https://www.northantscalc.com/council-vacancies.html> for details of all the above vacancies.

Northants CALC

Northants CALC is recruiting for a full time **Business Support Manager - £29,104 - £31,426 depending on experience, plus 8% pension contribution**. The Association gets busier and busier, and we now need someone to support all our internal business systems including finance, administration, and comms. The position requires someone with a broad range of skills, the ability to be self-motivating and self-managing, and a passion for doing things right first time. The Business Support Manager will work from home and be part of our small team which has daily catchups online. The job is five days a week during normal business hours, but there is scope for flexibility within that (the Association is a family-friendly and equal opportunities employer). This is an opportunity to join us at an exciting time and be part of delivering excellent value for money services to member councils. The closing date for applications is 5pm **Monday 28 June 2021**. Please see www.northantscalc.com/bsm for details.

A CAUTIONARY TALE

Lord Digby Jones, former chairman of the CBI said *“If we never took a risk our children would not learn to walk, climb stairs, ride a bicycle or swim; business would not develop innovative new products... scientists would not experiment and discover, we would not have great art, literature, music and architecture.”* So play, and a degree of risk, is essential to a healthy childhood. Users of play equipment must accept that there is an element of risk involved, and that accidents can and do happen. However, there is a line between providing play equipment that is properly maintained in good condition, and being negligent. Keeping the right side of that line is all about risk assessment and routine and regular inspection, evidenced by good record keeping.

Recently, a 6-year-old boy using play equipment provided by a parish council fell from some monkey bars and broke his arm. The accident was caused by one of the bars pulling out of its socket in the wooden beam. Inspection showed that the wood had rotted due to water ingress. Could this have been spotted? Should this have been spotted? The Health & Safety Executive (HSE) asked to see the council’s inspection record (fortnightly visual inspections were required under the council’s insurance cover). The clerk knew that one of the councillors had volunteered to take an occasional look at the play equipment, but he didn’t have copies of the safety checks. When asked, the councillor said that he remembered looking at the monkey bars recently but that he didn’t keep any records. In the absence of any documentary evidence, HSE deemed that no proper inspection had been carried out. Had the council been able to evidence that a visual inspection had been carried out within the two weeks prior to the accident, and it had not indicated any problem with the monkey bars, then HSE might have been happy and the council’s insurance provider might have covered any claim arising. A council that owns and/or operates play equipment has a duty of care towards users, which includes making sure the equipment is properly maintained and fit for use. The duty is discharged by the council’s Health & Safety Officer (normally the clerk), but is often delegated to a councillor, who in that capacity is effectively operating as a volunteer playground inspector for the council. It is the responsibility of the council’s Health & Safety Officer to arrange the visual checks required under the council’s insurance policy, and to monitor that they have been done by receiving the written, signed, and dated reports of the person carrying out the checks. Unfortunately, *“I think Cllr Smith was doing the checks but I’m not sure”* does not cut the mustard!

TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT FOR LOCAL COUNCILS

Look below for a course or event that may be of interest and make a booking through the Clerk to the Council. All councils must have a training budget from which councillors can book courses under the authority of the clerk. See <https://www.northantscalc.com/events.html> for full course details.

Off to a Flying Start **FULLY BOOKED**

Tue, 08 Jun 2021 18:30

This course is designed to help all Clerks and Councillors make an early, effective and confident start to their careers, by providing quality, constructive and participative training on the roles and responsibilities of Clerks and Councillors.

Chairmanship Training

Mon, 14 Jun 2021, 18:30 & Tue, 22 Jun 2021, 10:00

The course will cover a range of topics including how to conduct an efficient and effective council meeting, dealing with disruptive councillors and/or members of the public, and the one secret that will make your meetings better – and shorter!

Planning Nuts and Bolts **FULLY BOOKED**

Mon, 28 Jun 2021 18:30

An introductory training session for Parish/Town Councillors and Clerks covering the basic principles of planning including policy, applications, appeals and enforcement. This two-hour session will also include tips on increasing the effectiveness of the responses that Parish and Town Councils send through to local planning authorities and the opportunity to ask questions of an experienced planning consultant who has worked for local Councils, a volume house builder and a planning consultancy.

Off to a Flying Start **FULLY BOOKED**

Wed, 30 Jun 2021 10:00

See course description above.

Cemetery Management and Compliance – Two Part Course

Date & Time (delegates must attend both parts)

Part one Tuesday 6 July 2021 09:30-12:30 &

Part two Wednesday 7 July 2021 09:30-12:30

This course will now be delivered over two mornings to accommodate an online delivery. This course deals with common problems, issues and mistakes and the costs that can be realised by burial authorities. The course will tell you how to avoid these costs and create potential new income streams.

The Code of Conduct in Practice

Tue, 13 Jul 2021 19:00

Are you aware of your responsibilities as a Councillor under the Code of Conduct? If there was a planning application next door, would you declare an interest? What type of interest? What if the application was down the road but opposite your good friend's house? This course will look at the practical operation of the Code of Conduct at parish and town council level and will answer all your questions as to what interests to declare and when.

Off to a Flying Start

Thu, 15 July 2021 10:00

See course description above.

For more information on any of the courses mentioned above, and to make a booking please see <https://www.northantscalc.com/training-and-events.html>, and if you would be interested in a training session specifically designed and delivered for your council, please contact Marie Reilly on 01327 831482 or email mreilly@northantscalc.com to discuss your requirements.

EMAIL SCAMS

Please be aware that email scams are on the increase, and parish and town councils are particularly vulnerable because they are public bodies, with public-facing web sites that normally contain visible email addresses and other details. If you receive an email that says something like "YOUR IMMEDIATE ATTENTION TO THIS MESSAGE IS ABSOLUTELY NECESSARY!" simply delete it. No one would ever write that in the normal course of business, so you should already know it is a scam. More subtle is the so-called "CEO" scam. You get an email that looks like it came from the council chairman that simply says something like, "*Have you got a moment, there's something I need you to do*". If you reply, you get hooked into purchasing vouchers, or making bank transfers. No chairman should ever the clerk or councillors to do things like that!! Never reply to an email without pausing to think. If it looks fishy, it probably is!

NORTHANTS CALC CONTACTS

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