

Update

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THE CHIEF'S BRIEF

By Danny Moody, Chief Executive, Northants CALC

Welcome to the first edition of *Update* for 2017. This time last year Barack Obama was the president of the United States of America, David Cameron was looking forward to a fresh mandate following the EU referendum, and life seemed altogether simpler. Now, as 2016 fades into the memory, it seems that the only certainty is that nothing is certain.

In local government is it a time to hunker down and consolidate, or a time of opportunity and innovation? Stick or twist? For parish councils the temptation might be to wait to see what unfolds, but it might also be a time for parish councils to cast their own future - to be part of the solution.

Financial pressure is the ultimate driver of change and we know that all sections of local government are feeling the pinch now more than ever. But necessity is the mother of invention. It is time to be flexible and adaptable, which are not terms that are often used in the world of local government! The imagination and creation of a new way of doing things requires careful thought, grown-up conversations, and purposeful co-operation. Redesigning local government is not just about making it cheaper, it's about making it smarter too. Who knows where we will be this time next year? But it won't be where we are now!



Can councils change, and change quickly?

December was a relatively quiet month for Northants CALC, partly because the school holidays started on 16 December, so councils were winding down early. There was certainly a lengthy list of apologies at a meeting of the Daventry Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) I attended on 20 December!

Earlier in December I attended a meeting of the Northamptonshire Community Resilience Forum, which brings together all the various agencies in the county that might be involved in an emergency response. From frontline police and fire officers, to a team of volunteer 4x4 owner/drivers (who actually seemed quite keen for there to be some kind of emergency to deal with!) it is an interesting mix of public, private and voluntary and community organisations. Some parish and town councils might struggle to see how they could be involved in an emergency

response, or even struggle to imagine an emergency ever happening in their area, but in fact there has been a very recent example in Northamptonshire when the entire town of Oundle found itself in mid-January cut off from mains gas caused by a faulty pressure regulator. National Grid quickly established a command centre at Oundle Town Council's Fletton House to co-ordinate the restoration effort and manage customer enquiries. All parish and town councils are encouraged to prepare a Parish Emergency Plan (PEP), which doesn't need to be a long or complicated document (templates are available) but might – just might – one day save a life.

The quid pro quo of a quiet December is an extremely busy January, and so it has proved. All those enquiries that "*can wait until the New Year*" started flooding in as soon as the office opened on 3 January. In January alone we have dealt with 173 technical/legal enquiries, and Anne Kirkland has been flat out with Transparency Fund applications. It was a busy month for training too and I had the great pleasure of delivering whole-council development sessions for Desborough Town Council and Middleton Cheney Parish Council, as well as an open training event on chairmanship. I really appreciate the time that clerks and councillors give up to attend training and development events; members of the public probably don't appreciate (or even know about) the time and effort their elected representatives put in on their behalf but it is a considerable personal commitment and, as I often say, your reward will be in heaven!

There's been a lot going on since the New Year regarding possible local government reorganisation in Northamptonshire. Many areas of the country are pursuing unitary councils and the debate is ongoing in Northamptonshire. It was a hot topic of discussion at the Northants CALC board meeting held on 21 January, which also received the results of a Northants CALC Councillor Panel survey on unitary councils. The board agreed to have a special focus session on the subject in April and will keep a close watch on events in the meantime. There is a special article below about unitary councils and the possible implications for parish and town councils.

And finally, huge congratulations to Josie Flavell, Clerk to Crick Parish Council, who achieved her Certificate in Local Council Administration (CiLCA) in January. As any qualified clerk or CiLCA student knows it is an enormous amount of work, often done on top of all the other council work, so it is a very significant achievement.

2017 looks likely to be yet another tumultuous year. Exciting, challenging, draining, rewarding. There is never a dull day in the world of parish councils!

Please do continue to get in touch with your queries and questions. That's what we're here for!

SUPERFAST GETS EVEN FASTER

Northamptonshire County Council (NCC) has announced that communications technology company Gigaclear is the winner of two contracts to deliver Stage 3 of the Superfast Northamptonshire project. This new partnership raises the game on broadband speeds available by bringing ultrafast broadband (up to 1 gigabit) to more communities and premises in parts of rural Northamptonshire.



The launch of the new partnership.

Gigaclear has already supplied over 5,500 premises in the county as part of its own commercial plans. The deal with the County Council means that many more areas will benefit from a full fibre solution. The network will reach rural areas where there are no commercial plans and which otherwise would be unlikely to be served. The County Council is injecting £6.58m of public funding to secure the deal, including £1.68m from the Department for Culture Media and Sport (DCMS) and £4.9m from the County Council. Gigaclear is investing over £3.65m in the target area.

This latest initiative from Superfast Northamptonshire takes the project substantially towards the County Council's ambitious target to see countywide access to superfast broadband. More news on other Stage 3 measures will be announced during 2017.

For the full story, and to see which areas will be covered by Gigaclear's plans, please read the latest Superfast Northamptonshire project newsletter at:
<http://www.superfastnorthamptonshire.net/find-out-more/Pages/newsletters.aspx>

UNITARY LOCAL GOVERNMENT

The debate on local government (re)organisation in Northamptonshire has been going on for decades. In fact, there have been regular proposals and counter-proposals since the last major reorganisation in 1974.

In 2006 the then Chief Executive of Northamptonshire County Council (NCC), Peter Gould, gave his personal backing to a bid to create a single unitary council for Northamptonshire but it was not supported by the borough and district councils and the bid fell apart. Peter Gould resigned his position in May 2007 after his close involvement with the bid meant his position had become untenable. The failed bid left deep scars and created an environment of unease and even mistrust between the tiers of local government.



Was the idea itself flawed, or just the approach?

And what even is a unitary council, and where do parish and town councils fit in?

This article will attempt to answer a few questions in a reasonably clear and concise way.

What is a unitary council?

In Northamptonshire there are three tiers of local government. The first tier is comprised of parish and town councils and parish meetings. There are two hundred and sixty-two of them in the county. The second tier is made up of seven district and borough councils (Corby, Daventry, East Northamptonshire, Kettering, Northampton, South Northamptonshire and Wellingborough). The third tier is the county council (Northamptonshire County Council). The councils in the first tier are known collectively as “local councils” and the councils in the second and third tiers are known collectively as “principal councils”. This system is known as “two-tier principal local government”. All clear so far? Jolly good!

Unitary local government is where the functions of the district, borough and county councils are combined. The old councils are abolished and a new unitary council is created. A unitary council can cover an entire county (e.g. Cornwall Council) or only a small part of a county (e.g. Milton Keynes Council).

What happens to parish and town councils?

The geography and statutory functions of parish and town councils are unaffected by the creation of a unitary principal council. The potential large cultural and geographical distance between communities and the unitary council makes parish and town councils even more important and relevant as the voice of their local area.

What models of unitary local government are we talking about?

There have been several proposals for unitary local government in Northamptonshire; in fact one of the difficulties is that there is no consensus as to which model is best. Northamptonshire County Council (NCC) has proposed a single county-wide unitary council, citing a report written by the County Councils Network that suggests that such a move could save £29 million a year.

Northampton Borough Council (NBC) has proposed a “doughnut” model, where there would be one unitary council covering Northampton and another covering the rest of the county. Other proposals have included a split along the same lines as the North Northamptonshire and West Northamptonshire Joint Planning Units. The Leader of the Borough Council of Wellingborough has said that the current two-tier system should remain. Councillors at one council are “adamant” that a single unitary is the only workable model, whilst councillors at another council are “totally opposed” to the idea. An impasse seems likely.

What are the drivers?

Money. First and foremost, right or wrong, it is about money. There simply isn't enough money in local government to meet the ever-increasing demands for services and so if there is an opportunity to save money by rationalising the tiers of local government then it appears to be an enticing and unavoidable future. There are of course other potential benefits of unitary councils, including reduced confusion as to which council does what, which may provide greater accountability. The Rural Services Network says that *“the case for unitaries is as much about ‘push’ factors (the two tier system needs improving) as ‘pull’ ones (unitaries can work better). And in particular, it is surprising how little weight is given to what the general public are most interested in – namely, whether unitaries deliver better public services.”*

What happens in Northamptonshire may ultimately be decided in Whitehall. When Greg Clark was the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government he made it quite clear that he had no appetite or desire to wade in to local disputes, so unless there was local unanimity he would not entertain a unitary bid. In contrast, the incumbent Communities Secretary, the Rt Hon Sajid Javid MP has said that he is prepared to decide between rival bids, if that is the only way forward. Buckinghamshire County Council, for example, submitted a bid in December for a county-wide unitary council prompting the district councils to draw up a rival plan based on a north Bucks / south Bucks split. Both have been sent to Mr Javid who is considering the options.

What is the way forward for Northamptonshire?

There is a need, probably an urgent need, for a stakeholder dialogue and consensus building process to take place. Externally facilitated if necessary. Stakeholder dialogue, (sometimes referred to as consensus building, stakeholder participation, or conflict resolution), is an approach that brings different people and



interests together to talk, share knowledge, build understanding and agree a way forward. This approach can be used to improve communication and decision-making in many different situations and would work well in the context of local government reorganisation. Stakeholder dialogue is based on the principle that people who are affected by decisions

should have a real say in the decision-making process. This should be at an early stage when options are open and participants can influence the outcome. It is up to all the political leaders in Northamptonshire to put aside their own interests and entrenched positions and recognise the need for inclusivity and consensus building.

The unthinkable alternative is one council pitted against another council where self-interest and protectionism will prejudice sound judgement of the public interest. Surely no one in the county wants to go down that road, and so stakeholder dialogue is the only reasonable solution. The future of Northamptonshire must be decided by the people of Northamptonshire. No one wants to be put on Sajid Javid's naughty step.

Should parish councils be doing anything now?

Yes! Parish and town councils are an integral party to the debate. The Councillor Panel survey (report below) suggests that parish and town councils are starting to have the conversation, but now is the time to engage with your district/borough and county councillors like never before. Invite them to attend a parish council meeting or your Annual Parish Meeting to discuss unitary and what it means for your residents. There needs to be a Big Unitary Debate in every community, village and town in Northamptonshire and your district/borough and county councillors are absolutely key.

What is Northants CALC doing?

Northants CALC has been engaging with the unitary debate over the past year and has its ear very close to the ground as the situation develops. The board of Northants CALC has had the subject on its agenda as a standing item since April 2016 and will continue to do so. The board has had several detailed discussions about the structure of local government in Northamptonshire and what is best for its member councils in the first tier; the board is having a further focus session in April. Northants CALC is committed to helping secure an outcome that is best for the people of Northamptonshire and believes that dialogue is the correct way forward. Northants CALC will ensure that member parish and town councils are kept abreast of developments and are provided with timely, accurate and objective information and that parish and town councils are fully and formally involved in the debate.

If you have any comments, observations or questions please feel free to contact Northants CALC by e-mail to dmoody@northantscalc.com.

COUNCILLOR PANEL HAS ITS SAY ON UNITARY

Northants CALC used its Councillor Panel to conduct a survey on the subject of unitary local government.

The survey was open from 9 to 12 January 2017 and 77 (out of 138) councillors from member councils in Northamptonshire responded (56% response rate).

There is a good understanding of what unitary local government is, with 71% of respondents saying they agree or strongly agree with the statement “I understand exactly what unitary local government is”.

Only 6.5% of parish and town councils have discussed the subject formally (i.e. as an agenda item at a council meeting). However, more councillors are talking about it informally (with other councillors or the clerk), with 35% responding that they had done so.

79% respondents said that their district/borough councillor has not talked to their council or sent information on unitary, and 78% said their county councillor has not talked to their council or sent information. There appears to be little significant difference between the responses per district, although all of the “yes” responses came from the rural districts.

The majority (73%) of respondents didn't know what their district/borough council's preferred model for unitary local government is and this figure was only slightly lower (70%) for those knowing the county council's preferred model. Again, there appears to be little significant difference between the responses per district, although in South Northants 46% of respondents said they knew what South Northants Council's preferred model was.

18% of respondents strongly agree that unitary local government would be better than the current structure, with the majority (49%) saying that it depends on the model. 13% of respondents thought that unitary government probably won't make any difference, and 19% strongly disagree that unitary local government would be better.

91% of respondents said that the district/borough councils and the county council should involve parish and town councils fully and formally in the unitary debate.

When asked “Anything you would like to say about unitary local government” 45 (out of the 77) respondents provided an answer. Positive responses included that unitary local government would save money, be clearer (more accountable) and would strengthen the role of parish and town councils. Negative responses included the difficulty and complexity of making it work and the potential “remoteness” of unitary local government.

It is overwhelmingly clear that parish and town councillors want to be part of the unitary local government debate and therefore would expect engagement with their district/borough and county council representatives. The conversation has started in a small way but there is a lot to be done to raise awareness and provide clear and concise information. It is essential that the pros and cons of unitary local government are fully understood and properly managed.

The Northants CALC Councillor Panel comprises of around 140 parish and town councillors in the county, representing approximately 8% of the total councillorship. Use of the Councillor Panel is strictly 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. Usage is limited to no more than six substantive polls/surveys per calendar year, and one quick poll/survey per calendar month. Substantive polls/surveys should take no more than 20-30 minutes to respond to including any background reading required. Quick surveys should take no more than 5-10 minutes to complete. If you are a serving parish or town councillor or parish meeting chairman in Northamptonshire and would like to join the Councillor Panel, or would like to see a copy of its terms of reference, please contact Anne Kirkland at akirkland@northantscalc.com.

DEFIBRILATORS AT THE HEART OF THE COMMUNITY

Article from Mandy Lowe, East Midlands Ambulance Service

Firstly thank you to those communities and parishes that have in the last year installed a community public access defibrillator (CPAD) from either the British Heart Foundation or ourselves. In excess of 50 new CPADs have been installed and this has prompted a further message to anyone that may have missed the original information or the opportunity to acquire one.

I should point out that EMAS do not give away Automated External Defibrillator's (AED) or sell them, however due to the close working relationship we have with the top defib manufacturers we can recommend types of AEDs and preferred



manufacturers subject to your individual requirements. Rather than paying the full retail price, as you would by going directly to a manufacturer yourself, you would be quoted and pay the discounted EMAS

price, which is heavily subsidised. For example a device such as a Physio Control Lifepack CR Plus AED would retail up to £1,499 (plus VAT if not exempt) but bought in association with EMAS the same AED is just £650 (plus VAT if not exempt).

Another benefit of working in association with EMAS is that we will send in one of our experienced specialist trainers to local communities to deliver a free of charge training course on the use of the AED and CPR; this is delivered on site. The training lasts about 2 hrs but again this can be tailored to suit and can be delivered in the daytime, evening or even a weekend. This training can be for anyone you wish to invite!

We can also assist with arranging publicity for the area to celebrate the fact that the community is a safer place to be thanks to the new CPAD.

We will register the AED on our CAD (Computer Aided Dispatch System) located within ambulance emergency operations centre, and this means that should anyone call 999 from within 500 meters of the unit they are automatically advised that there is a Defib available, its location and how to use it. The technology recognises this information from both land lines and mobile phones which ensures that should the unthinkable happen no one forgets that the AED should be collected and used which can unfortunately happen in a highly stressful situation such as a cardiac arrest.

Finally by being associated with EMAS we will advise you on all aspects of governance, legislation, training, support and any other aspect of support you may need.

There are numerous companies that offer similar services as the above but the charge for this is around £2,500, you will be pleased to know that EMAS do not charge for any of the services, therefore the only cost to you is the price of buying the Defib and cabinet as part of our 999 campaign. Please note EMAS do not receive any financial or other reward from any manufacturers.

If your council would like to explore the possibility of having a defibrillator please contact Mandy Lowe, Community Response Manager, East Midlands Ambulance Service NHS Trust on 07966 806 507 or mandy.lowe@emas.nhs.uk.

TRANSPARENCY CODE UPDATE

The Transparency Code came into effect on 1 April 2015. It applies to all parish councils with an annual turnover less than £25,000 and requires the publication on a web site of certain information, including amongst other things agendas, meeting papers, minutes, the Annual Return and the asset register.

To help offset the financial impact of achieving compliance, which could include the purchase of a new web site, a laptop and scanner and the staff time to upload documents, the government made available £4.7 million pounds for parish councils in England. The Transparency Fund is administered by the National Association of Local Councils (NALC) through County Associations.

To date Northants CALC has awarded over £80,000 of Transparency Fund monies to councils covered by the Transparency Code. However, this money has gone to just sixty five of the one hundred and forty five councils in Northamptonshire that are eligible. That means there are eighty councils that are missing out on funding that they are entitled to. The average award is £627 and councils can apply in each financial year.

Councils that have applied for funding have used the money to purchase new fit-for-purpose web sites, modern laptop or desktop computers and scanners. They have also used the money to pay for the staff time that working towards compliance has used. All councils must have incurred some costs in working towards compliance, and are missing out if they do not put in a claim. We know that some councils consider that their costs have been relatively low and are happy to absorb them, but the Transparency Fund is there to use. If the whole £4.7 million is not used then any remainder will go back into the government's coffers and be lost to the sector. If you are not sure what your council could claim for please contact Anne Kirkland at akirkland@northantscalc.com.



To gauge levels of compliance with the Transparency Code Northants CALC sent a secret shopper (Linda Bain) to ten council web sites picked at random. Two councils were fully compliant, six were almost compliant and two were not

compliant at all. Neither of the non-compliant councils has applied for Transparency Funding.

The results of the exercise are encouraging and show that many councils have come a long way over the past two years in terms of their openness and accountability. But there is still room for improvement, and all councils with a turnover less than £25,000 must be compliant with the Transparency Code; 80% is 20% too few.

The risks of non-compliance are potentially serious. There is a theoretical risk of judicial proceedings against a non-compliant council, but by far the greater risk will come from “keyboard warriors”, you know the type: the council upsets them somehow (often commenting the “wrong” way on their planning application!) and they make it their life’s work to get back at the council. Such people will quickly become aware of the requirements of the Transparency Code and it is then easy to determine whether or not a council is compliant (since compliance means that all of the required information is published on the council’s web site). If the person finds any information missing they can raise a concern with the council’s external auditor, who has powers of investigation and enforcement. No council wants to have to raise its precept to pay off fines and penalties that could so easily be avoided.

If you have any questions about the Transparency Code please contact Danny Moody on dmoody@northantscalc.com, and for questions about the Transparency Fund please contact Anne Kirkland on akirkland@northantscalc.com.

Case Study

Yelvertoft Parish Council Funding Received 2016/17 £1,470.70

Yelvertoft Parish Council received a substantial transparency fund grant. As a small Parish Council we were extremely grateful as this made a significant difference to us. The grant paid for a computer, printer/scanner for the Clerk and a new website for the Parish Council, including training time. Thus, the Council became more professional and enabled us to more easily adhere to the Transparency Code. The grant was very easy to apply for and NCALC were extremely helpful. We would recommend all eligible Councils apply.

3 – 2 – 1 – START THE WATCH!

An article from Nick King, Northants NHW

Neighbourhood Watch will of course be well known to Parish Councils. In many cases Councillors and volunteers work together in building safer and more secure communities.



For those that don't know, Neighbourhood Watch in Northamptonshire operates on a traditional network of local, grassroots Watches (or Schemes). These are often at hamlet or village level, or at specific street or housing estate at town level. At the wider district level, there are seven Area Support teams who meet locally with an open invitation to all Scheme coordinators in their area to network, discuss issues and gain strength and knowledge from each other's work. Beyond this, representatives from the areas join a county Executive where further guidance and leadership is given to strengthen and encourage the work at grassroots level.

We know the reality of today: the visibility of our Police and Safer Community teams is a fraction of what it used to be: their focus and priorities have changed as criminal activity and threats have changed. The workforce number has been reduced by 21% (554 staff) over the period 2010-2016 and more worrying in our view, the major reduction in the number of PCSOs in that period: down 35% from 164 to 98 and set to drop even further to 74 by 2020. This places more emphasis on communities becoming more responsible and more vigilant in the prevention and solution of crime and anti-social behaviour, and promoting good community spirit. All of which is central to Neighbourhood Watch.

We have 1,250 Schemes in the county, representing about 40,000 households. In common with many voluntary and community groups, there are pressures and challenges in sustaining our work, not least the aging population from whom we draw a good number of our volunteers, but also the "busy-ness" of everyday life, diverse lifestyles, and the drive towards technology which may relegate or make redundant good old fashioned neighbourliness.

Despite all this, our ambition is to increase the number of Neighbourhood Watch Schemes in the county in addition to reinvigorating existing Schemes.

It can happen and here is the story of Nether Heyford:

As a large village within its area, the local PCSO Jen Harrison had been aware for several years that Nether Heyford did not operate a Neighbourhood Watch Scheme. She saw the weakness for her and the Police in not being able to connect with an established network in the village for crime prevention, local intelligence and building the awareness of crime and criminal-related activities that she knew she could rely on in other villages. Efforts were made through the Parish Council, the village newsletter and other contacts but to no avail.



PCSO Harrison contacted the Neighbourhood Watch Support Team for South Northants and a 3-point plan was put in place:

- 3.** An initial advert in the village newsletter to promote the concept of Neighbourhood Watch in the village and seek interest.
- 2.** As follow up, the NHW Area Support team hired the local Village Hall for a public meeting. The local PCSO attended as well as representatives of other village NHW Schemes to share ideas.
- 1.** Only a few villagers attended, but they had the energy and vision to begin building a Neighbourhood Watch.

Villagers formed a more comprehensive publicity campaign, with successful links to the Parish Council, the local shop owners and village businesses, and held a larger meeting a few months later: Nether Heyford & Upper Heyford Neighbourhood Watch was formed. The Parish Council contributed money for new street-signs and a local business gave a donation to publicity.

Congratulations to Nether Heyford! – most especially for the leadership of Julia and Vernon, with excellent initial hard work from Maureen and Tony.

If you need help in your village or community with Neighbourhood Watch, please see the county website: www.northamptonshireneighbourhoodwatch.co.uk or contact me direct at nickking567@btinternet.com.

UNHAPPY NEIGHBOURS AND THE FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT

An article by Liz Howlett, solicitor

Disputes between neighbours can develop into entrenched battles and others, including the parish council, can be dragged into the fray. Ammunition is sought by the warring parties. The Freedom of Information Act 2000 (“FOI”) was designed to open up the darkest recesses of government to the light of public scrutiny. It was not intended to fuel the fire of disputes between individuals. Unfortunately that is an indirect consequence of the legislation.

What of the poor council (and clerk) caught in the crossfire? It is never a comfortable place. Confidence about what is required (and what is not required) can help.

First, remember it is the authority which is responsible for deciding what should be disclosed. Do not be bullied, or intimidated, by either side. Second, before any such problems develop, think about how you treat all communications received by the council. An adopted policy consistently applied will help. Why spend precious meeting time looking at correspondence? Why not delegate the handling of correspondence to the clerk? They can raise points of principle with the authority without circulating the offending letter or email. Third, a request for information under FOI is for “information held” by the authority. Requests for opinions are not requests under FOI.

This brings us to the beleaguered clerk and the FOI request to see a letter received by the council from one irate resident about another irate resident. The letter is “information held” by the council. The letter will contain personal information (the name and address identifying the person who has written it and identifiable details about the person they are upset with, if nothing else). The Information Commissioner (“ICO”) has excellent guidance (at www.ico.org.uk) on applying the exemption, under section 40 of the Freedom of Information Act, which covers personal information. The key questions to consider are:

- Is it personal data (does it identify a living individual)?
- Is it sensitive (containing medical history for example)?
- What would be the consequences of disclosure?

- What expectations of privacy did the person have whose data would be disclosed?
- Is there a legitimate public interest which outweighs the right to privacy?

If the letter is marked “Private and confidential” this indicates the writer had an expectation of privacy. Conversely, if the writer expressly says they want the letter published, or made available to anyone who asks, that makes clear there is no expectation of privacy. Neither is conclusive but should be weighed in the balance. You are entitled to consider whether disclosure is likely to inflame the situation. Where personal data is concerned if the balance for and against disclosure is even then you should not disclose.

Every situation is unique (and can be uniquely awful) but an information management policy applied consistently with confidence can help.

The author, Liz Howlett, is a solicitor and former Monitoring Officer. She provided initial training and advice when the Act was introduced in 2005 and has specialised in information management (amongst other things) ever since. For further information or assistance on handling FOI requests please contact the author, Liz Howlett, at ehowlett@ejhlegal.co.uk.

WHAT DO WE THINK? RUBBISH!



Will your village or group take part in the Great British Spring Clean, AND (at the same time) win a cash prize in the CPRE Northants 2017 Litter Heroes Awards?

Last year’s litter campaign was the best for many years, in terms of the number of participating villages and other groups. This was probably, at least in part, because CPRE Northamptonshire decided to tie in its regular annual spring-cleaning competition with the national Clean for the Queen campaign. And since Her Majesty cannot have a round-number birthday again this year, it is clear what should be done. This year the tie-in is with the Great

British Spring Clean. Your spring litter-pick can support either campaign, or both at once! Your group can be litter heroes in both or either campaign.

The campaign dates are easy – the months of March and April. This is the focus of the campaign activities. The Great British Spring Clean dates are the weekend of March 3, 4 & 5 but any group in the county who holds a litter pick between now and midsummer is eligible for a cash award.

The CPRE Northamptonshire awards will again be a main prize of £500 and three runner-up prizes of £150. And if there are a good number of entries from children and young people, a further £150 prize will be added just for them. For a third year, the old “litter projects only” rule has been relaxed: the prize money may be spent on any community-related project in the local area of the winning group. Last year, the main Litter Heroes prize - a cheque for £500 - went to Little Houghton, for their superb entry and excellent mobile phone photographs, which told the story of how the day was planned, how the village school worked on litter posters, how local volunteers were organised, what was collected, which village groups participated and how they planned to spend the prize money if successful. The runners up were Brigstock, Blisworth and Towcester, who each received cheques for £150. From the Brigstock entry it was clear that there was a great community spirit and sense of involvement from village residents and local organisations. At Blisworth the project started as a poster project in the village school, but spread to other people around the village. The Towcester Tidy-Up project organised by the town council and local Rotarians showed that market towns can benefit too.

As these and many others have shown, community groups working together can “do something about it”. To enter this year’s awards email your best three or four picking photographs to info@CPRENorthants.org.uk, with a paragraph or so saying how your event was organised and what happened at your litter pick. If you choose to hold your litter pick outside of March and April, that’s fine too but the judging will be sometime in July, so please send your entries as soon as you have them, and before the end of June.

Whether or not you intend to participate in the Great British Spring Clean, please visit www.greatbritishspringclean.org.uk/home/2684#home. The Resources section is really helpful, and includes two A3 posters for use in villages. Please let CPRE know your planned pick date, by email to info@CPRENorthants.org.uk.

Happy picking from the CPRE Northants spring litter campaign team!



LEADER Programme

The grant aims to support rural businesses, create jobs and grow the rural economy.

- small and medium-sized rural businesses
- farm diversification
- rural tourism
- farm innovation
- rural services
- forestry projects
- culture and heritage projects

North and West
Northamptonshire
LEADER offers
grants of up to
£100,000

Example projects LEADER can support include:

- Farm shops
- Wood processing machinery
- Glamping
- Local food initiatives
- Micro-breweries
- And many more!

Contact the team:

01494 568970

info@leader-programme.org.uk

leader-programme.org.uk



BATTLE'S OVER – A NATION'S TRIBUTE

An article from Bruno Peek LVO OBE OPR, Pageantmaster

On the 3rd August 1914, Britain's Foreign Minister, Sir Edward Grey, was looking out of his office window. It was dusk, and gas lights were being lit along London's Mall, leading to Buckingham Palace, when he remarked to a friend, "*The lamps are going out all over Europe; we shall not see them lit again in our lifetime*". Our country was about to be plunged into the darkness of the First World War, and it would be four long years before Britain and Europe would again experience the light of peace

In commemoration and remembrance of the end of the war and the many millions who were killed or came home dreadfully wounded, a chain of 1,000 beacons will be lit throughout the United Kingdom, Channel Islands, Isle of Man and UK Overseas Territories at 7pm on the 11th November 2018 – a century after the guns fell silent.

You will be pleased to know therefore, that more than 320 town and parish councils have already confirmed their involvement, and will be lighting a beacon at 7pm on 11th November 2018, as part of their plans for this important anniversary that day.

The event will also commemorate the huge army of men and women on the home front who, often in dangerous and exhausting conditions, underpinned the war effort - keeping the wheels of industry turning, bringing the harvests home and ensuring the nation did not starve.

The beacons will symbolise the 'light of hope' that emerged from the darkness of war, and we hope that your council and local community will join us in this important national commemoration on Sunday 11th November 2018, especially as the majority of you would have had a previous member of your family involved in this four year conflict, so will become a personal tribute in their memory.



Detailed co-ordination begins in April 2017, when we will publish a special Guide to Taking Part, similar to that produced for Her Majesty The Queen's Birthday Beacons on 21st April 2016. If you can **confirm your involvement before the end of March 2017** we will be able to include your organisation in the guide's acknowledgements pages before it is distributed to others encouraging their involvement too.

The reason for sending this information so far in advance, is because we understand from those already participating, they have started to plan their events for this commemoration. Participating councils, organisations and community groups will receive a special certificate as a permanent reminder of their involvement in this special tribute.

I would be grateful if you would confirm your involvement by providing me with the following details as soon as possible to ensure that you are included in the guide when published, and put on the events website at the end of April 2018: Name of organisation, Name of beacon co-ordinator, Address of beacon co-ordinator, Telephone number, Mobile number, Email, County, Country, Beacon location

Please confirm if your beacon will be open to the public or will be lit at a private event for family and friends. This is important because private beacons will not be included in the acknowledgements pages of the guide but will be included in the list kept in memory of this unique occasion.

When planning your beacon, your local newspaper could help you in contacting a relative of someone who served their country in WWI so you can invite them to light your beacon. This will also help you to gain media coverage for your event while providing a personal and touching aspect to the occasion, so do hope your council will join us in this special tribute and look forward to hearing from you soon.

Bruno Peek LVO OBE OPR, Pageantmaster, Battle's Over - A Nation's Tribute, 11th November 2018, Tel: 07737 262 913, Email: brunopeek@mac.com.

A CAUTIONARY TALE

Parish councils might be concerned to hear about a recent case involving a shop worker in Leicester. The employee of Wilko stores was pulling a trolley out of a lift

when it toppled over and crushed the worker, who was left paralysed by the incident.

Leicester Crown Court heard that there was no risk assessment for the lift or the use of the trollies, and there was "inadequate training and supervision".

Wilko admitted failing to ensure the health and safety of its employees and was fined £2.2 million.

The occupation of Clerk to the Council is relatively low risk. Certainly it is unusual for clerks to be in control of heavy weights, unstable loads or dangerous machinery. But such things are not impossible. How many councils have risk assessed the clerk's working conditions and practices, and how many have ensured that the clerk has adequate training and supervision? As the employer, all councils have a duty to ensure the health and safety of their employees, so maybe now is the time to carry out a risk assessment of the clerk's working conditions. And if you don't where to start, ask!

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.

Training Opportunities – February to April 2017

Off to a Flying Start (25 February 2017) - FULLY BOOKED

Sat, 25 Feb 2017 10:30am

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.

The Code of Conduct in Practice

Tue, 14 Mar 2017 10:00am

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.

New Clerks (Spring 2017)

Sat, 22 & 29 Apr 2017 10:00am (2 day course)

This course provides a broad understanding of the role and responsibilities of a town or parish clerk. This course is a must for newly-appointed clerks, or clerks who feel they could benefit from some formal training.

For information on any of these courses please see

www.northantscalc.com/events.html or for further information contact Anne Kirkland, Training Manager, on 01327 831482 or akirkland@northantscalc.com.

All courses must be accompanied by a course booking form, which can be downloaded from www.northantscalc.com. You can also book online at <http://www.northantscalc.com/training-reservations.html>.

If you would be interested in a training session specifically designed and delivered for your Council, please contact Anne Kirkland to discuss your requirements.

SITUATIONS VACANT

Full details and contact details for the vacancies below are available at <http://www.northantscalc.com/job-vacancies.html>.

There are no new vacancies in Northamptonshire currently to advertise as of today but there is a full time clerkship in south Leicestershire that may be of interest being less than 20 minutes out of Northamptonshire up the A5:

Burbage Parish Council

Applications are invited for the position of Principal Officer to Burbage Parish Council in Leicestershire. Salary Scale Point 38 – 44, £33,437 – £39,177 (2017-18). 37 hours per week. The closing date for return of applications is noon on Tuesday 21 February 2017. Interviews will be held Tuesday 28 February 2017. All enquiries to Julie Perrin, Principal Officer, Burbage Parish Council, Burbage Millennium Hall, Britannia Road, Burbage, Leicestershire, LE10 2HF, Tel: 01455 637533, Julie.Perrin@burbage-council.co.uk.

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