



Council – 22 March 2021

Celebrating 47 Years of East Northamptonshire Council

Purpose of report

Council is asked to consider the contribution that East Northamptonshire Council has made to its people, communities, local economy and prosperity throughout its 47 years.

1.0 Background

1.1 East Northamptonshire Council will come to an end on 31 March 2021 with the establishment of the new North Northamptonshire Council on 1 April. This report seeks to mark the last formal meeting of the Council and to highlight its history since its first meeting in 1974.

2.0 East Northamptonshire Council – origins, inception and councillors

2.1 East Northamptonshire Council came into existence following local government reform, which was a product of the Local Government Act 1972. The new Council contained the areas previously covered by the Urban District Councils of Rushden, Irthlingborough, Oundle and Raunds, together with the areas under Higham Ferrers Borough Council and the Oundle and Thrapston Rural District Council, plus the Parish of Newton Bromswold.

2.2 Meetings of the Shadow Council started after elections in June 1973, with the new East Northamptonshire District Council (as it was known then) formally coming into existence in April 1974. Council meetings were held in Thrapston, the geographical heart of the district, and have continued in Thrapston to this day.

2.3 East Northamptonshire District Council's first leader was Allen Goulsbra with 36 councillors serving 19 wards. Cllr Goulsbra was awarded an OBE and followed as Leader by John Richardson, who had been a leading light in the campaign to create the new council.

2.4 Cllr Richardson retired from the council in 2011, having been Leader until 2005 (except for the few years in the mid-1990s when the Council had a labour majority). He was awarded an MBE in 2004.

2.5 Cllr Richardson was supported by Roger Glithero as Deputy Leader, mirroring the roles that they had previously held at Oundle and Thrapston Rural District Council. Cllr Glithero remained on the council until his death early in 2021, and was the council's longest serving member.

2.6 This Council ends with another long-serving leader, Cllr Steven North, who has served for 10 years to date.

3.0 Council Responsibilities through the Years

3.1 The Council in its early days provided a variety of early services, which included:

- inspecting meat at the eight slaughterhouses in the area;
- licensing the storage and sale of ice-cream and the eight milk dealers;
- licensing hackney carriages;
- considering planning applications;
- carrying out food hygiene inspections and organising waste collection;
- licensing of cinema and theatres;
- issuing late night refreshment licences;
- licensing money lenders and game dealers;
- subsidising meals on wheels provision until 1976, when responsibility passed to the County Council; and
- purchasing furniture from the Co-Op for furnishing for new estates such as that at Nippondale, Rushden.

3.2 The duties and responsibilities of the council varied over the next few decades – for example, in 2000 the council became responsible for the licensing of butchers' shops after an E-Coli food poisoning outbreak in Lanarkshire. After the creation of East Northamptonshire Council, five of the six towns were granted Town Council status. However, Rushden was ineligible because it had too high a proportion of the new district's population of 59,800. When ENC's appeal failed, the council created a Rushden Town Committee to serve Rushden residents. In 1975, it was also agreed that ENC would return the management of key local facilities such as sports grounds, parks, bus shelters and cemeteries to the new Town Councils, an unusual move for the time.

3.3 After several years of local campaigning the law changed in 1998 and the opportunity arose to create a Rushden Town Council. After a petition and a referendum, Rushden Town Council was formed in April 2000 and Rushden Hall passed to its ownership. A separate Parish Council for Stanwick was formed at the same time.

3.4 In 1996, the decision was made to drop the word 'district' from the title of the council and in 2008 the council's logo was given a refresh to its present design.

4.0 Legacy and Achievements

Shaping the District

4.1 The population of the district has risen from nearly 60,000 in 1974 to over 90,000 in the last 47 years, with growth largely concentrated in the larger towns as a result of the development planning documents produced by the council over the decades. ENC launched its first draft Local Plan covering the period 1991-2006 in December 1991 and it was adopted in 1996. For the next iteration it was decided to split the district into three areas. The Rural North, Oundle and Thrapston Plan was approved in 2009 and then adopted in 2011.

4.2 Planning for the creation of a District wide Local Plan commenced in 2017 and the plan is currently undergoing consultation prior to submission to the Secretary of State. It will include provision for an urban extension to the east of Rushden to provide 2,700 homes plus leisure and employment facilities.

- 4.3 The creation of Rushden Lakes has been a significant recent achievement, with an application in 2012 to convert a derelict site into a retail and leisure development, approved by the Council in 2012, and coming to fruition in 2017. Such is the popularity of Rushden Lakes that an extension with additional restaurants, shops and a cinema opened in 2019.

Housing Provision

- 4.4 The Council had responsibility for building and maintaining council homes from 1974. In 1999 the Council undertook a campaign for the agreement of tenants to a large-scale stock transfer of its remaining homes in order to secure their future. The homes were transferred to East Northants Housing (which subsequently became Spire Homes) in 2000.
- 4.5 In 1999, the council also launched its Empty Property Strategy which resulted in 300 homes being brought back into use or, in one extreme case of a house with trees growing through it, being demolished and the site reused.

Open Spaces

- 4.6 Despite having passed the management of its parks and open spaces to town councils in 1975, ENC went on to acquire two major open spaces to enable both leisure activities and wildlife conservation which have been enjoyed by many local residents and visitors. The first of these is Twywell Hills and Dales, and the second, Stanwick Lakes which is a 750-acre site, purchased in 2004. After significant land scaping work, the site opened to the public in 2006 with an assault course and adventure trail, and a purpose built visitor centre was added in 2009.

Community Facilities

- 4.7 The council has provided funding for the renovation and creation of community facilities right from its earliest days. In the 1970 s, the council provided Village Hall Grants, which enabled improvements such as the re-roofing of Ringstead Village Hall and the purchase of Thurning Village Hall. ENC also offered a Jubilee Fund in 1977, which supported village noticeboards and signs, tree planting and benches.
- 4.8 From 2013, the council ran a wider Community Facilities Fund (CFF), which utilised funding from the New Homes Bonus Scheme, introduced in 2011 by central government, to mitigate the impact of an above average level of development in the area. The CFF distributed nearly £2m over 8 rounds, with funded projects ranging from a sports facility in Kings Cliffe to village hall refurbishments in Lowick and in Deene and Deenethorpe.

Waste and Environment

- 4.9 Waste collection has undergone significant changes over the years to respond to an increasing emphasis on recycling from the late 1990s. Rushden's first bottle bank opened in 1987, situated in the Duck Street car park. It was followed, in the early 1990s, by the purchase of land at Herne Rd, Oundle in a joint project with Oundle Town Council to provide a community centre, light industrial units, a recycling centre and car park.
- 4.10 Access to kerbside recycling for the whole district started with the purchase of a new state-of-the-art refuse wagon in December 1998. By 2000, ENC was one of the best district councils in the country for recycling at 14% of total waste collected.

- 4.11 The most significant change came with the switch to wheelie bins in 2011, which included a mixed recycling bin to replace the previous three recycling boxes. By 2019/20, the recycling rate had risen to 47%.

Local Economy

- 4.12 The health of the local economy has been a concern of the council since it started, as signs were appearing that the footwear industry, which had been a key element, was in decline. Early guides to the district promoted its attractiveness for investment because of its low rates, central location and availability of private and public housing for key workers.
- 4.13 The council started to take a more proactive approach after part of the district was designated a Rural Development Area, which helped provide funding to build industrial units at Oundle and Thrapston in 1986.
- 4.14 In partnership with the Rural Development Commission, Northants CRE and Northampton Chamber of Trade, in 1998 the council started a series of Village Shop development grants designed to help these valuable community assets survive.
- 4.15 The East Northamptonshire Business Partnership was launched in 1998. It published Trade Directories for each of the towns to encourage Business to Business trading and organised low cost locally based training for local companies through its ENTRAIN programme starting. In 2009, the St Peters Community Enterprise Centre opened in Raunds to provide support for community businesses and training for young people.
- 4.16 Raunds was also the location for one of the council's biggest investments - the £8 million East Northamptonshire Enterprise Centre, which opened in 2020. The centre offers start-up and growing businesses flexible workspace and business support, and will create up to 785 jobs in the first 10 years. The Enterprise Centre received £1.69 million of funding from the South East Midlands Local Enterprise Partnership (SEMLEP) Local Growth Fund.

Leisure Provision

- 4.17 One early achievement of the new council was the opening of what is now called the Pemberton Centre in September 1976. Continuing the theme of leisure provision, the Council enabled the addition of a new Splash Pool in Rushden, in 1990; this was extended to include a 64-seat restaurant and creche in 1997.
- 4.18 In August 2004, the Nene Centre was opened in Thrapston, with improvements made to that venue and at the Pemberton Centre for re-opening in 2013 and 2015 respectively. After Freedom Leisure took over the running of the three facilities in 2016, attention turned to increasing overall community fitness with the 2019 'Beat the Streets' initiative that got over 8,000 residents walking, running and cycling a total of 73,000 miles.

The Council's Staff

- 4.19 The numerous achievements of East Northamptonshire Council would never have been possible without the dedication of its hard-working staff. The first Chief Executive and Clerk of the Council was Derek Adnitt, and he was supported by a senior

management team of Treasurer, Director of Technical Services and a Health and Housing Officer.

- 4.20 The initial staffing structure included 126 posts, but it soon grew as the responsibilities of the new council became clearer. Staff were initially located over three offices of the predecessor authorities. Plans were started for the creation of additional temporary offices and other facilities at Thrapston, which after a number of delays, were eventually built by Scotts of Thrapston at a cost of £55,000. Consideration was given to creating permanent offices but, in view of the economic situation and the constraint placed upon local authorities, this was necessarily delayed.
- 4.21 Modernised East Northamptonshire Council Offices opened in Thrapston in the late 1990s, connecting the old Infirmary, Stone Building, and a new central wing and reception. In 2007 the Aiming for Excellence Programme was launched to improve the Council's services and communications with its customers. The impacts were wide ranging, from an improved staff induction programme and staff knowledge skills and behaviours framework to clear customer service standards.
- 4.22 The Council received external recognition of its service delivery on a regular basis. In May 1999, a survey by the Independent on Sunday rated ENC 7th out of 260 district councils in a comparison of 22 performance indicators on how well the council was providing services. In June 2002, the Food Standards Agency praised the environmental health team for its performance and in 2006, the Joint Licensing Unit that was hosted by ENC and provided administrative services to a number of councils, won the Best Public Partnership award for public service excellence.
- 4.23 Environmental Services and Planning were two of the professional areas where the council invested in training new officers, while apprenticeships in a wide range of areas provided a career start for other young people.
- 4.24 The Council gained Investors in People award status in 2006 and the achievement was reflected in the Council appearing in the top 25 councils to work for tables in 2008 and 2010. Another occasion when the council sought feedback was in 2014, when it invited a Local Government Association Peer Review team to look at its plans for, and ability to deliver, growth in the district. Amongst the feedback was recognition that there was a dedicated team of staff who were flexible and well-respected outside the council and the council was seen as responsive, accessible and having a 'can do' approach.
- 4.25 The Council remains an employer committed to its staff and, led by its present Chief Executive of 15 years, David Oliver, is well known for its family-orientated approach, flexible working arrangements and close ties between its staff.

5.0 Conclusion

- 5.1 East Northamptonshire Council has brought about much in its 47-year history and has made many contributions to the lives of its residents and communities. Its legacy will live on, and councillors and staff both past and present will have their own memories of these achievements.

6.0 Equality and Diversity Implications

- 6.1 There are no equality and diversity implications.

7.0 Privacy Impact Implications

7.1 There are no privacy impact implications.

8.0 Health Impact Assessments

8.1 There are no health impact implications.

9.0 Legal Implications

9.1 There are no legal implications arising from these proposals.

10.0 Risk Management

10.1 There are no significant risks arising from these proposals.

11.0 Resource and Financial Implications

11.1 There would be no resource or financial implications arising from these proposals.

12.0 Constitutional Implications

12.1 There are no constitutional implications arising from these proposals.

13.0 Implications for our Customers



13.1 There are no customer implications arising from these proposals.

14.0 Recommendation

14.1 The Council is recommended to:

- (1) Record the contribution of East Northamptonshire Council and share some personal memories.

(Reason – To mark the last formal meeting of East Northamptonshire Council and to highlight its history since the first meeting of the Council in 1974).

Legal	Power:				
	Other considerations:				
Background Papers:	A Brief History of East Northamptonshire Council – researched and compiled by Sharn Matthews, former Executive Director of ENC				
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