



NORTHAMPTON
BOROUGH COUNCIL

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY

SCRUTINY PANEL 3 – NORTHAMPTON POST UNITARY

The Scrutiny Panel is currently undertaking a review: Northampton Post Unitary

The purpose of the Review is

- To look at Northampton, (being mindful of the potential Unitary Authority), giving particular consideration to how civic pride and ceremonies can be preserved

CORE QUESTIONS:

A series of key questions have been put together to inform the evidence base of the Scrutiny Panel:

1. Please can you provide details of civic pride, events and ceremonies that currently or previously took place in Northampton for the Scrutiny Panel's consideration for inclusion of its formal list

Insofar as All Saints' Church is involved, events have both a borough and a countywide significance. For Northampton Borough Council, Oak Apple Day, the Mayor's Charity Sunday, Remembrance Day, and events with Northampton Freemen would be particular highlights. For the County, the High Sheriff's Service, events around interfaith Remembrance, St. Crispin's Day, and a few others. These often have variable timings.

2. How are Northampton's civic events and ceremonies marketed?

It varies according to the event – sometimes very well, sometimes hardly at all. The marketing often focusses on a dry account or list of events to take place, and would benefit from a narrative introduction, particularly where those are repeat events. The thematic focus of, for example, each Oak Apple Day or Remembrance Day could well feature higher, including reference to relevance to Northamptonians living today or the influence events in the past have upon our present and future. Northampton is sometimes unaware of its rich history, leaving quiet assumptions all too often hanging in the air.

- 3 Please provide suggestions how you feel the pride and history of the Borough and the Guildhall can be preserved and enhanced as part of any new Unitary Authority.

Northampton has a remarkable story to tell, which in recent times has been obfuscated by the need to progress or by issues to do with the lack of progress. The narrative of Northampton at present, which has been told around the world, is of an unarrestable decline which while

exceptional has been used in a general narrative on the state of the United Kingdom. Northampton's centrality in England meant that it was a key point for both Viking and Norman invaders, leaving us with the perception that he who aspires to rule England must first rule Northampton. In modern times Northampton North, and to a lesser extent Northampton South, has been thought of as a bellwether parliamentary constituency, successfully predicting the party of government for twelve successive elections. Despite its centrality, it has all too often been forgotten: the removal of the University during the reign of Henry II, the backing of the Parliamentarians during the Civil War, and British industrial decline brought great hardship to the town, and yet each of those key events left deep impacts which are visible in the modern town. The fragments of former eras have not always been respected, and the Borough is generally slow to act when the need for preservation arises.

In a situation where fewer statutory responsibilities rest upon the shoulders of those seeking to discharge the Charter of the Corporation, there is a real opportunity to build a relationship beyond the Guildhall walls with others who also wish to preserve and celebrate pride in Northampton. It begins with a telling of the story of this place that rises above the tendency to tell our history in order to lament what we have irrevocably lost. It begins with a Civic Life and Leadership that can successfully put to bed controversies that otherwise keep repeating on us (cf. Sixfields, cf. the Hardingstone Eleanor Cross, cf. Northgate Bus Station): dissatisfaction needs choking off at source by timely, well-resourced and well-led development.

As the new Unitary system develops, it may be that fewer statutory services are fulfilled at the Guildhall, taking away from it the social footfall of those who need to visit it. This could provide the opportunity for the Guildhall to invest itself fully in Northampton's Cultural Quarter, driving forward more value-added, social impact work. As I have said before Northampton seems to present as a powerful vehicle, but with an engine whose sixth cylinder continually mis-fires: getting the intangible to work for us would really drive Northampton and add power to our progress.

~~4 **Question to internal witnesses:** What is role of Northampton Borough Council in civic events and ceremonies within the borough ?~~

5 Question to external witnesses: What is the role of partners in civic events and ceremonies within the borough ?

The question All Saints' Church as a Civic Partner requires a long answer, but the modern history begins after the Great Fire in 1675, and the brokering of a new social contract as well as a new town. The Reconciliation gained with the crown through the intercession of the Earl of Northampton of the age, meant that the redevelopment was driven and represented an high ambition. The patronage of the Church, having resided before the Reformation with the Prior and Convent of St. Andrew, passed from Lord Cromwell to others before ending up in the hands of the Mayor George Raynsford and the Burgesses of Northampton. The Municipal Corporations Act of 1835 removed the right, as it sought to end "an exclusive system, to uphold local, political and religious party feelings, [which is] destructive of that confidence which ought always to be reposed in those who are intrusted with control, judicial or otherwise, over their fellow citizens...". Baron Overstone and Lady Wantage would be the Corporation's successors as patron, before it passed to the Lord Bishop of Peterborough and the Royal Foundation of St Katharine at Ratcliffe. Nevertheless, a close – sometimes too close – relationship developed, and All Saints' maintains

one of England's diminishing number of Corporation Pews, set almost awkwardly in the Nave of the Church, where seats are permanently kept for the Mayor and the members of the modern Corporation. Thought has been given, mostly by others, as to what would happen if there was no appropriate person to occupy these seats in the new dispensation, but the maintenance of it – and the evolving close relationship All Saints' Church has developed with the Lieutenancy of Northamptonshire, has – at least at present – secured much 'civic religion' in the heart of the town. Indeed, if there is no need for such civic celebration at a central place of worship, what would the purpose of All Saints' Church be amid a town centre – and a wider Borough – that now has many places of worship of varying provenance?

It is difficult to address the specifics of 'events and ceremonies' without first saying what I have above. The relationship to Civic Northampton has come to define All Saints', and the way in which it has safeguarded its heritage, and developed its life, socially, ecclesiastically, and – to an extent – financially. It is the Civic place of Remembrance as we recall Armistice Day and Remembrance Sunday. In the last year it was also the venue for memorials to the Manchester Arena Bombing victims and to Walter Tull. On Oak Apple Day it is the appropriate place to recall the Restoration of the Monarchy in England, insofar as it directly benefitted the town of Northampton in the town's hour of need, not forgetting the role it played in the fall of the regnancy of King Charles I.

From time to time incumbents and clergy at All Saints' Church have provided an ad-hoc or official chaplaincy to the Mayor and other civic dignitaries and have played a full part in the planning process for many of significant moments in the civic year insofar as they are related to All Saints'.

6 In your opinion, how can all assets, including Museums and their contents, in the borough be preserved and secured?

I conject that All Saints' Church and the Town and County War Memorial, which falls within our land and precincts, should be numbered among the assets of the Borough of Northampton. Though manifestly independent, they are necessarily dependent on the Borough if their present pattern of life is to be sustained. In the case of the War Memorial (designed by the Cenotaph designer, Edwin Lutyens, and which properly belongs to Northampton and Northamptonshire), it is important that it remains a sacred place dedicated to the many thousands who left Northamptonshire over the course of the 20th and 21st century never to return home.

Much of the responsibility for their preservation rightly belongs to the congregation that meets there day-by-day and week-by-week, but they deserve to sense that the Borough, and whatever successor authority comes into being, shares their commitment to the place and to the 'plant'. Recent changes to parking regulations, and interminable dispute with Northamptonshire County Council, have made a measurably negative impact, making the task harder. While there is an appreciation that this is a burden borne by all who work or live in the town centre, it ought to be understood that the vocation of a Parish Church, even more so for a Civic Church, is distinctive and demanding. It is dishonest to say that it is like any other business. Further, the decision to displace rough sleepers from the commercial districts of the town centre, left many of the churchyards full of people taking refuge – with the consequent disruption and desecration of gravespace that often follows with this. That churches did not wish to be so hard-hearted as to perpetuate displacement, at least not without a decent alternative solution already in place, meant rough sleeping in churchyards became unmanaged – seeming even more so to members of the

general public than to do those directly involved. It almost seemed as if churches were being punished for making the claim that displacing rough sleepers without provision of a viable, realistic alternative lacked human kindness.

All Saints', as a site, must develop. Its last major reordering took place in the 1830s, and parts of its infrastructure are well overdue for renewal. While 2019 will see renovation to the café at the Western end, and a programme of works to safeguard the fabric, it more broadly needs to understand what the town and what the Borough expects of it and thinks of it. The setting of ambitious expectations will aid its better serving the place in which it is set. Like many other heritage assets, where the Borough is able to offer direct encouragement and aid, much will be achieved.

7 Do you have any other information you are able to provide in relation to civic pride in Northampton

It certainly needs some.

But not all of it is contingent on good local government evolving, because sometimes it is about local government getting out of the way and letting a good thing thrive. Both the organisers of the St. Crispin's Fair and Northampton Carnival have recently expressed to me the difficulty of some of the obstacles placed in their way, because of restrictive licensing and the (for example) the cost of getting suspensions on highways. A series of exchanges had with NBC planning officers when *Northamptonshire Surprise* (whom I hope will be invited to give evidence to your scrutiny committee) wanted to erect advertising banners on the façade of All Saints', gave the impression that many obstacles – and not much help – lay in the way of using Northampton's most iconic church to advertise Northamptonshire more generally.

We do not expect not to have to work hard for our town. Northampton deserves to have people (to paraphrase David Cameron) who are "working hard" and "doing the right thing" for it. But a drive toward Civic Pride should make it a little easier, and provide the right catalysts, at the right time, to really set alight the individual ingenuity and commitment that exists in abundance. It is also capable of dealing with the matter of Civic Leadership, and building among those elected and not the capacity to shape and form the treasure we have so that it well serves the people of Northampton. In whatever shape Northampton is in when this present process of local government reorganisation has concluded, we need to be prepared with a visionary future for this place.