



National Association of Local Councils

Holborn – Community Exploring the Issue – The Story of How the Residents of Holborn Explored the Ideas of Creating a New Parish Council in the Previously Un-parished Area of Holborn

Headlines

- Holborn is an area of central London, currently administered by the London Borough of Camden, historically there was Metropolitan Borough of Holborn and even a Holborn Ward.
- Until 2008, setting up a community council in a London Borough was not permitted, with Queen's Park Community Council being the first civil parish to be created in Greater London in 2014.
- This case study tells the story of the Holborn community campaign exploring whether there is sufficient interest in the area to establish a community council, as well as exploring the best way of addressing local needs.
- The case study provides lessons for other campaign groups who find themselves at the incipient stages of setting up a parish council, providing lessons on mobilising residents and overcoming related challenges.

Why a Council Is Wanted

Community organisers believe that a Holborn Community Council will improve local democracy, giving residents more powers in determining what is right for their area at a time where the area is facing substantial growth. A community council would also allow the Holborn community to better administer its assets and tailor services to meet its needs, improving the socio-economic wellbeing of its residents. Further goals for a community council will be shaped during the process of setting up and delivering a neighbourhood plan through which residents and other stakeholders will have a chance to express their views on the changes needed in their community.

Contextual issues related to the theme

Holborn is an area of central London, currently administered by the Borough of Camden.

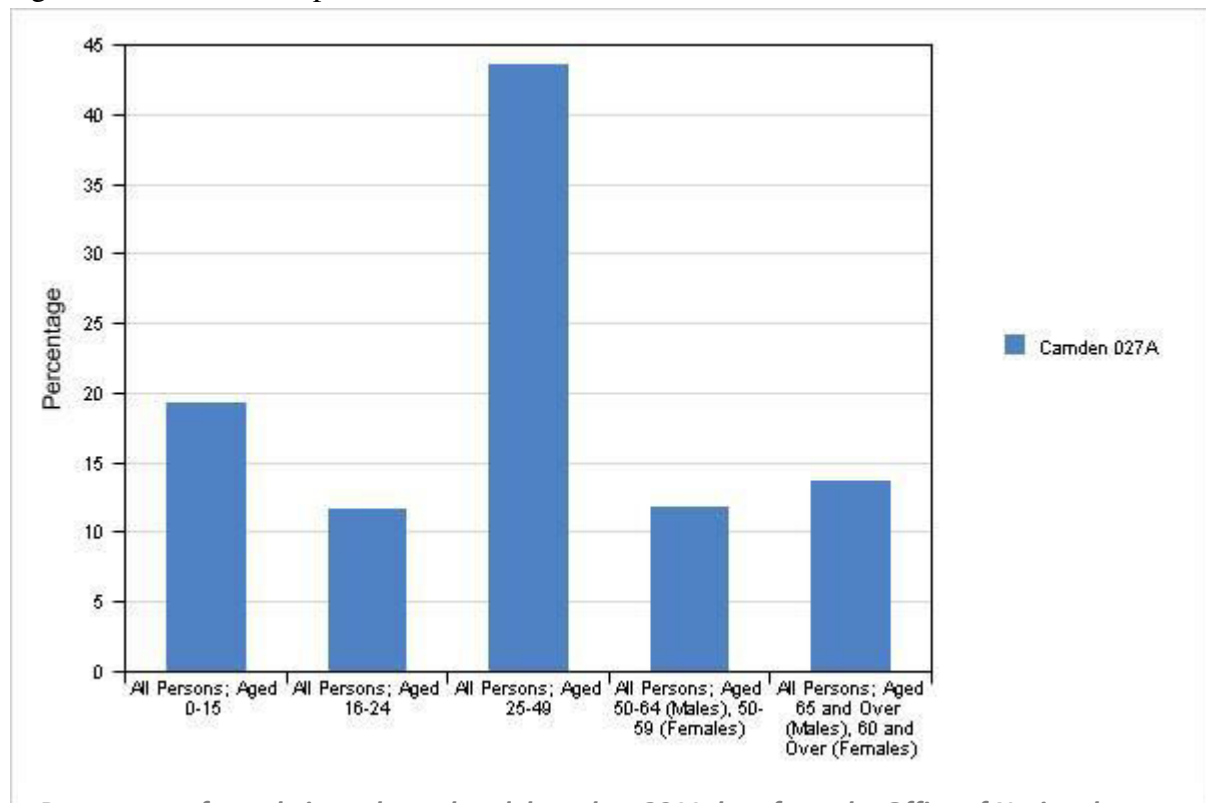
Holborn takes its name from the Holebourne, a tributary (or possibly part) of the now underground River Fleet. The stream was a major goods route from the Thames into the City and the area was referred to as 'Holeburnstreet' for the first time in 1249.

Holborn is the traditional home of the legal profession. The Inns of Court, ancient legal centres, were located here symbolising the law as a mediator in the battle for power between the City and Westminster.

Many buildings here survive from before the Great Fire of 1666, including the magnificent timber-framed facade of Staple Inn. Temple Bar, where the Strand meets Fleet Street, marks the official boundary between Westminster and the City. The monument, set in the centre of the road, is a griffin, the symbol of the City.

As with many central areas of London, Holborn scores high on the living environment deprivation, being ranked 677 out of the 32,844 neighbourhoods in England according to the [Office of National Statistics](#) . There is only 2.2sqm of public green space per capita in the neighbourhood. Post war damage led to the development of several substantial social housing estates, and this is still a clear majority of local housing. There are few places where such development sits as closely with luxury flats and major businesses. Four Lower super output areas* in the area fall within the 10% most deprived in England. 48.2% of people over 65 live alone (approximately 10% of households). 42.1% of children live in poverty and 73.5% of children are on the children's social care system.

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



Percentage of people in each age band, based on 2011 data from the [Office of National Statistics](#).

The original driver behind the campaign for a Holborn Community Council is the Holborn Community Association (HCA), being supported by the National Association of Local Councils. Having received a grant under the Department for Communities and Local

Government New Councils' Programme, Holborn community organisers hosted public meetings to spread the word, making sure that the right information is available to residents. In the coming months, the Holborn campaign will be closely liaising with Camden Council to establish a Neighbourhood Forum to develop a Neighbourhood Plan, providing the basis on which to progress with the Community Governance Review. This is a multi-year community-led plan with engagement at all stages.

Progress with campaign to Date



Exploring what the Holborn residents wish for their community at one of the public meetings organised by the Holborn Community Association.

The Holborn Community Association started by organising door to door listenings and public meetings to explore resident issues and whether there is enough support to establish a community council in Holborn. With the help of volunteers and public meetings, the word about a Holborn community council continues to spread in the local community. Residents have already expressed their preference for creating a community council not only during the public meetings but also through nearly 300 listenings. Nevertheless, as a neighbourhood plan is a pressing issue for the Holborn community in times of rapid change, they decided to establish a neighbourhood forum first, triggering a Community Governance Review after the neighbourhood plan referendum. This will also ensure there is a strong organisational basis, and more time to explore with Camden what the implications are, as Camden have positive experience of Neighbourhood Planning, but not yet of community councils.

How have issues/challenges been overcome?

Community organisers were worried due to the modest attendance of the first public meeting despite the positive response on the doorstep. Fortunately, residents' attendance increased gradually at the next few public meetings. With the help of volunteers the word about new powers and the need to engage continues to be discussed in the community. Advertising the meetings through leafleting as well as encouraging the first attendees to bring someone along

at the next meeting, worked really well in encouraging more residents to attend the meetings. In addition, organising the meetings in the evening, after working hours also encouraged attendance, given that many of the residents are professionals.

Another challenge encountered by the campaign was that although many people were supportive of its goal, not many people agreed to volunteer their time to progress the actions agreed during the public meetings. This is one of the reasons why it was felt that formalising boundaries and a membership will help strengthen the process. This is one of the main challenges that campaign leaders need to address in the months to come. Without a dedicated community organiser and support for facilitation of meetings it would have been hard to mobilise people to take their interest to the next level. Volunteering is key, but so is support to make it easy for people to get involved.

Learning from the Campaign

Lukas Lehmann, campaign champion: *“We have learnt that when people are dedicated and passionate enough about making their community a better place to live to get involved, they can find time even in busy lives. Our volunteers have been really inspiring, becoming community leaders and getting things done: helping write the Neighbourhood Forum Constitution, creating a website and carrying out conversations for a boundary survey and helping with outreach, organising meetings, reaching people at community festivals, and door to door listening etc. Not forgetting our skilled facilitator, Angela Koch from Imagine Places, who is supporting our public meetings, sharing experience from other areas (including linking us to experts e.g. from Queen’s Park) and much more. Our current focus is to formalise our membership, boundaries and processes, and to make sure we engage all of the community including, e.g. businesses.”*

What have been the key elements of success?

The success we have achieved so far is that:

- Several hundred local people have been engaged.

- HCA have finished their draft Neighbourhood Forum Constitution Application and hopefully will finalise it at its next public meeting.
- HCA has created a draft website for the project which should go live within 2 weeks.
- A draft online survey has been completed to get more people involved and get their views.
- HCA is creating a membership form for people to sign up to the neighbourhood forum.
- HCA has created a draft proposal boundary map to show Camden Council its Neighbourhood boundary.
- Once these are agreed HCA will organise an AGM for its Neighbourhood Forum and officially register with Camden.

What has been learnt? Campaign Lessons to Share With Others

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

Who Can I Contact?

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Other information

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

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

Holborn Community Association – www.holborncommunity.co.uk

Camden Council – www.camden.gov.uk .