



## **Holborn – How Holborn (London) Residents Explored Creating a New Parish Council**

## Headlines:

- Holborn is an area of central London, currently administered by the London Borough of Camden. Historically there was a 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 provoked interest from Holborn residents into finding out more about the powers, duties and benefits of parish councils as a governance model.
- This case study tells the story of how the Holborn Community Association (HCA) drove a campaign to explore the benefits of creating a community council in the area – but had to work hard to gather more local evidence of whether residents wanted a Neighbourhood Plan first.
- The case study provides lessons for other campaign groups who are challenged with the question of when they should start a campaign for a new parish council – if they want to secure a Neighbourhood Plan past referendum stage first. In the end the campaign group decided they wanted to deliver a Neighbourhood Plan first and then create the new community council (using new Government regulations).

## Reason For Setting Up A New Council:

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 when 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. The main advantage to Holborn residents would be that the parish council could lead and manage the new Neighbourhood Plan (once this is secured past referendum stage). This would mean that residents were represented by a democratically elected and hyper-local body defending their interests on planning and related issues (both in dealings with Camden Council as the local planning authority and otherwise).

Residents at three public meetings in late 2015 organised by the Community Association expressed a clear interest in a parish council having a strong role in the local economy of Holborn. They were supportive of raising a precept (the parish form of council tax) and this being spent on local priorities such as street-lighting. Residents were also keen to pursue (in the medium term) once the parish council had been established after the Neighbourhood

Plan had been adopted – the parish council deriving 25% of receipts from the Community Infrastructure Levy. The Community Infrastructure Levy is a form of tax a developer pays to a planning authority to invest in community infrastructure when it is engaging in a large development. A new Holborn Community Council could then consult residents about how to spend these monies – ploughing them back into the community (this could be on any local asset ranging from bus shelters to war memorials which the parish council had the legal power to manage).

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.

Holborn is a thriving area in central London with a large student and business population and a new community council will have powers to look after street-lighting, bus shelters, war memorials and grass verges / open spaces which Camden Council (with a shrinking budget) will struggle to retain. Residents at the three public meetings funded by grants from the NALC / DCLG New Councils' Programme in 2014-15 showed a definite interest in these service delivery and asset management powers for their area.

## **Metropolitan Borough of Holborn Ward Map (1952)**



Above: Map of the Metropolitan Borough of Holborn (1952) and its wards.

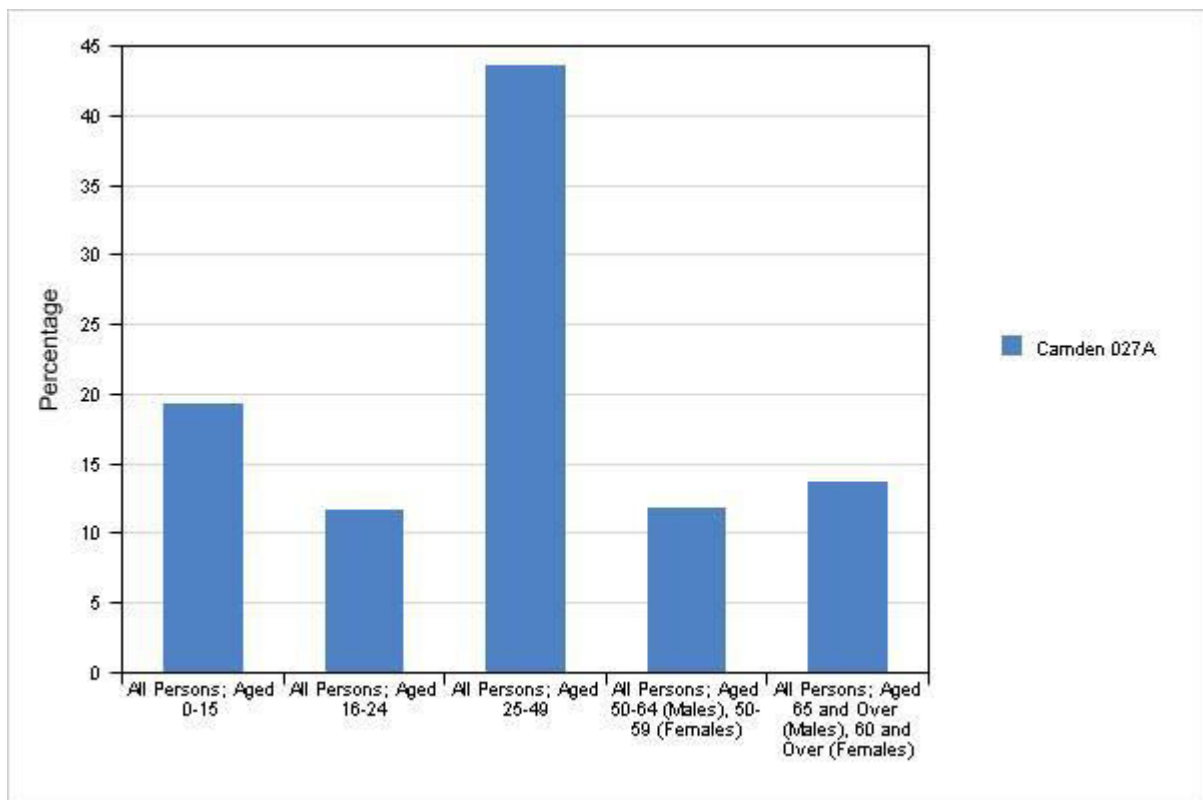
### **Background:**

Holborn is an area of central London, currently administered by the Borough of Camden. The population of Holborn is 13,000 approximately. As with many areas of central London, Holborn scores high on the living environment deprivation index, being ranked 16,853 out of

the 32,844 neighbourhoods in England according to the Index of Multiple Deprivation (Department for Communities and Local Government, 2015).

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 the 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 in 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.



Above; A histogram showing the percentage of people in each age band, based on 2011 data from the Office of National Statistics (the above figures relate to Camden residents and not specifically to Holborn).

## Who Are The Key Partners / Stakeholders Involved?:

The original driver behind the campaign for a Holborn Community Council is 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 promote the initiative, making sure that the right information was 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.

Residents felt at the end of the three 2015 public campaign meetings that establishing a Neighbourhood Forum first to deliver a Neighbourhood Plan would achieve three things – it would create a natural long term campaign group for a community council after the Neighbourhood Plan had passed referendum stage; it would create the foundation for much of the work on planning and related issues to be undertaken by the new community council; and many Forum members could then stand for election to the community council. A community council with parish status will give Holborn residents a permanent voice whereas most Neighbourhood Forums currently have a shelf life of five years only.

## Progress With Campaign To Date:



Above: Exploring what Holborn residents want for their community at one of the three public meetings organised in Holborn late in 2015.

HCA started by organising door to door visits and public meetings to explore resident issues and whether there was enough support to establish a community council in Holborn. It was

recognised by HCA early on that many of the powers held by parish councils could deliver services to answer some of the social, economic and environmental concerns of residents. So it was natural for HCA to employ its Community Organiser to elicit both the community needs of residents and views on whether a community council was a potential solution to those problems – in the same door-knocking exercise.

With the help of volunteers and public meetings, information 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 visits to nearly 300 residents at their homes. Such door to door engagement was undertaken by the Holborn Community Organiser during 2014 and 2015 and additional questions were asked of residents about the desirability of a community council and the services one could deliver.

Nevertheless, as a neighbourhood plan is a pressing issue for the Holborn community in times of rapid change Residents decided to establish a neighbourhood forum first, triggering a Community Governance Review (the process by which a new parish council is created) after the neighbourhood plan referendum (by making a Community Governance Application to Camden Council). This will also ensure there is a strong organisational basis, and more time to explore with Camden Council what the implications of creating a new Holborn Community Council are to all stakeholders, as Camden Council has a positive experience of Neighbourhood Planning, but not yet of community councils.

It was recognised after the three public meetings late in 2015 that a Neighbourhood Plan would only address some of the concerns of residents (on planning and development matters) for the area. But this was enough of an incentive for residents to campaign for now and it was agreed that the types of additional service and asset to be managed and delivered by a later Holborn Community Council could be elicited from ongoing neighbourhood engagement by the Neighbourhood Forum in due course.

#### **How Have Issues / Challenges Been Overcome?:**

Community organisers were worried due to the modest attendance at the first public meeting despite the positive response on the doorstep. Fortunately, residents' attendance increased gradually at the next two public meetings. With the help of volunteers the information 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 to the next meeting worked 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 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 creating a Neighbourhood Forum first (with a formal membership) would help strengthen the community council campaign process. This is because in many areas Neighbourhood Forums who first deliver a Neighbourhood Plan – later campaign to have parish councils – and they want to sustain the life and delivery span of the Plan through the creation of a permanent and elected local body (a parish council) – so they are more committed at a later point – to campaigning for the parish council, and the Forum provides a natural campaign group for this.

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 difficult 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 become involved. This is why a Neighbourhood Forum in Holborn is needed first.

#### **Learning From The Campaign:**

The main feedback from the extensive programme of door to door visits undertaken by the Community Organiser in Holborn during much of 2015 revealed that residents wanted more of a say in planning matters; a mechanism was needed to derive more income for the community from development; and not enough was seen or heard from ward councillors and Camden Council in the area in general (i.e. there was not enough engagement of residents by Camden Council). This learning was borne out in the three public campaign meetings held at the end of 2015.

The campaign group decided to engage more closely with Camden Council and ward councillors (who seemed to be promoting their own agenda on the Community Infrastructure Levy during the public meetings) to find more common ground and work together for the benefit of Holborn residents. It was universally agreed that the timings of certain campaign activities would be more or less effective at certain points during the campaign; but it was agreed that the new Neighbourhood Forum should engage with all stakeholders at this early stage including all residents and Camden Council – so that the campaign was flexible, responsive to local need and joined-up. The Holborn campaign group is seeking advice and guidance from the National Association of Local Councils and the only other parish council in London currently (Queens Park Community Council) – which the campaign group regard as critical.

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 visits. 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 the campaign group has achieved can be summarised as below:

- Several hundred local people have been engaged;
- A draft Neighbourhood Forum Constitution Application has been completed and this hopefully will be finalised soon;
- A Holborn Neighbourhood Plan web-site is currently being developed;
- A draft online survey has been completed to involve more people and seek their views;
- A membership form is being created for people to sign up to the Neighbourhood Forum; &
- A draft proposal boundary map has been created to show Camden Council the proposed Holborn Neighbourhood boundary.

Once these are agreed an Annual General Meeting for the Neighbourhood Forum will take place and the Forum will officially register with Camden Council.

### **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, campaigners need to pace their campaign based on the resources and the support that are available to them locally.

Residents plan to see through a full Neighbourhood Plan for Holborn first past referendum stage and then to use the new *Making It Easier* regulations to make a Community Governance application to Camden Council to trigger the review needed to create a Holborn Community Council.





The next six to twelve months will see the campaign group submit its Community Governance Application to Camden Council, secure a Neighbourhood Plan past referendum stage, launch its Neighbourhood Plan web-site, launch and complete its online resident survey, issue its Neighbourhood Forum membership form, and finalise its parish council boundary map. The group is confident of success soon after that period.

**Who Can I Contact?:**

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**Other Information:**

***To see template resources such as a media release, leaflet and poster, please click here:***  
<http://www.nalc.gov.uk/our-work/create-a-council> .

***To see case studies from other areas campaigning to set up new parish councils please click here*** <http://www.nalc.gov.uk/our-work/create-a-council> .

***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](http://www.holborncommunity.co.uk) .

***Camden Council –*** [www.camden.gov.uk](http://www.camden.gov.uk) .

***Holborn Neighbourhood Forum -*** <http://www.holbornforum.org.uk/> .