



KING'S LYNN CIVIC SOCIETY

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The case for a Town Council

The Borough Council has recently run a consultation to ascertain whether as part of the proposed Local Government Reorganisation (LGR), King's Lynn should have a Town Council.

King's Lynn Civic Society (KLCS) are strongly in favour of this. Even the current Borough of King's Lynn and West Norfolk spans a very large area (one of the largest districts in England). Many of the Borough Councillors represent wards far from Lynn and have little detailed knowledge of issues affecting the town.

Moreover, they must be seen (rightly) to be fair-handed to all Borough residents. We have often felt that this has led to indirect discrimination toward Lynn, or at least a reluctance to champion the town and its needs above other areas.

Imagine how this might manifest in the proposed much larger unitary authority – an area with other significant towns including Thetford, Dereham and Attleborough. Like Lynn, these are all fast-growing settlements with an existing combined population of more than 80,000. But, different to Lynn, they all have their own long-established Town Councils that are focused on supporting and enhancing their own community.

What does a Town Council do?

Thetford Town Council is probably a good example to look at. They are front and centre of promoting and managing the town, its history, several historic buildings, and a number of public open spaces (including nearly 100 hectares of common land). They look after play areas, allotments, cemeteries, public toilets and the (very good, twice weekly) market. They coordinate the 'Anglia in Bloom' displays and in 2025 won the 'gold award'.

They are responsible for planning and running events in the town – including heritage events. They are the front line for all community liaison and engagement. They can work to obtain grants and funding for a range of town-focused initiatives (recently including restoration of their Guildhall and biodiversity enhancement in the River Thet).

Town and Parish Councils are statutory consultees for all planning matters. We feel that King's Lynn town consistently suffers from not having 'official' local representation on planning and design issues. Over many years, the KLCS planning committee have provided

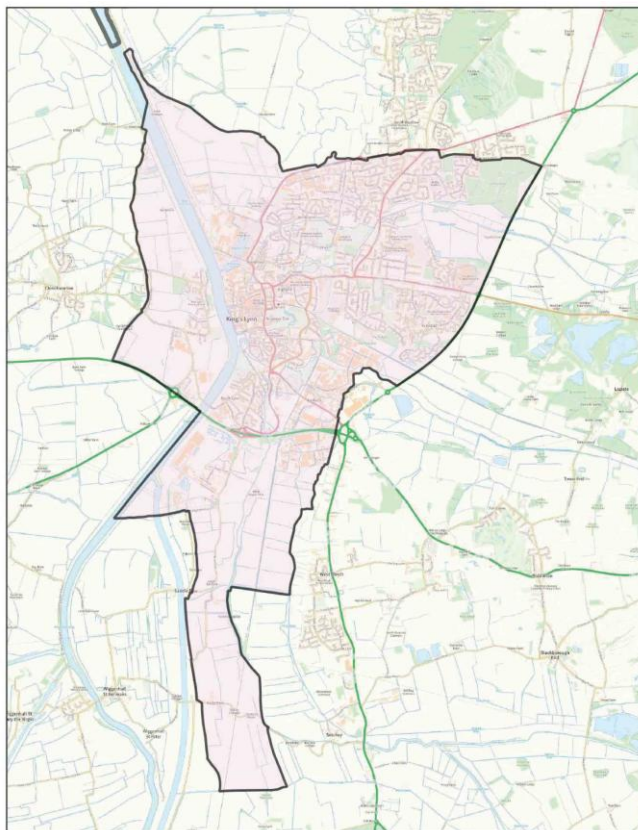
the only consistent local representation in response to planning applications and policy development involving the town. But a Civic Society does not have the authority to speak for residents that an elected body would have. Thetford, like most Town and Parish Councils, has a dedicated planning committee (which happens to include Terry Jermy, MP for SW Norfolk, and three District Councillors).

Thetford have 18 councillors and employ 14 'in-house' staff (some part-time), and 10 'outdoor' staff. This year they were awarded the NALC (Norfolk Association of Local Councils) Gold Award for high standards of transparency, strategic planning and community engagement.

They achieve all this well targeted and important work on a relatively modest budget. Their proposed budget for this year is £1.5m, mainly drawn from a precept levied on approximately 11,000 households.

What would a King's Lynn Town Council be responsible for?

A Town Council would most likely represent the 'unparished' area of King's Lynn (see map). This area, which includes the town, West Lynn, North Lynn, Gaywood and areas south including Saddlebow, was subsumed into the Borough of West Norfolk and King's Lynn in 1974. Since then, local representation has been via 10 borough councillors (and 5 county councillors).



LGR is expected to reduce the number of councillors, whilst their role will be to represent not just the people of Lynn but all the 350,000 residents in the entire 1,104 square mile district.

This will mean that without creation of a Town Council, these changes will leave King's Lynn (the new authority's single largest settlement with a current population of around 45,000 residents) as the worst-represented part of Norfolk.

The unparished town area includes significant public assets that would benefit from locally controlled management. These undoubtedly include The Walks and Greyfriars Gardens, Gaywood Park and other large public open spaces in Reffley, South Lynn, Fairstead and various spaces within residential estates. Hardwick Road and Gayton Road Cemeteries are also important public assets that would be appropriate for a Town Council to manage. BCKLWN have always retained management of these assets, using a dedicated management team, but there is no guarantee this will be the case with a unitary authority. (Both Breckland and North Norfolk have outsourced these services to nationwide contractors with debateable results.) Town Councils can and generally do take pride in managing local amenities to a high standard.

There would also be a good case for a King's Lynn Town Council to manage Lynnsport and the town's *Alive Leisure* facilities. It would make sense for operation and management of these important community amenities to be run and managed by local people. The facilities were of course successfully operated and developed by a not-for-profit charitable trust up until 2019, before being taken in-house by BCKLWN. It is not clear that they would prosper if run by a much larger unitary authority, which had have far-flung resources and district-wide commitments.

Other key town centre facilities that might benefit from locally focused management are the Town Hall (including Stories of Lynn and the Old Gaol), Guildhall Arts Centre and the Custom House. The Guildhall site is actually owned by the National Trust, whilst the Custom House is privately owned, but the Borough Council have managed them and are presently dedicating significant resources toward alterations. These are clearly 'King's Lynn' assets, which are at the centre of many civic events and activities and it would be logical for them to have 'grass roots' management in future.

A range of annual town events, many of which are mainly run by local volunteers, would likely benefit from the support of a Town Council. These include King's Lynn Festival, Festival Too, The Mart, Hanse Day, Heritage Open Day, the Hanseatic Ski Race, the GEAR 10km and other events annually held in The Walks and Tuesday Market Place.

A Town Council would be able to focus closely on working with and supporting existing community organisations that are central to town development and activities. These would include BID, Freebridge, the Purfleet Trust, King's Lynn Civic Society, the Town Guides, a range of Friends groups and local service clubs/organisations, such as Rotary and Lions.

Most importantly – a Town Council could, by virtue of a being a democratically elected locally focused body, bring new powers and influence to strategic planning programmes, funding bids, local engagement programmes and any other initiatives aimed at developing and promoting King's Lynn.

Opposition to a Town Council

Opponents to establishing a Town Council for King's Lynn have cited cost and an additional level of bureaucracy as disadvantages. Even supporters of the idea have said that having a Town Council would chiefly be a way of retaining a King's Lynn Mayor (an 800-year tradition).

Both positions seem highly reductive. The main benefit of having a Town Council must surely be to ensure good local democratic representation; to ensure that a single body is focused on caring for and developing the town; and to have accessible officers and councillors that work for and engage directly with Lynn residents with regard to the assets they use and the issues that affect them on a daily basis.

'Too expensive' is an easy way to dismiss any serious debate on this matter. The fact is that all the services a Town Council will undertake will have to be undertaken by someone anyway. It is not clear that a unitary authority would be able to deliver them for less cost. Unitary authority officers and councillors would certainly not be able to provide the local focus and community engagement that a Town Council could offer. It would literally conflict with their mandate to represent the whole area.

Town and Parish Councils typically offer great value for money. Councillors generally work on a voluntary basis, but in larger authorities they may receive a small allowance. Political affiliations are generally undeclared, with councillors simply working for their community.

Conclusion

We think this is a once-in-a-generation opportunity to introduce a new elected body that can focus solely on representing and developing King's Lynn, its assets, its community and its culture. It will ensure that residents have accessible local representatives who will be advocates for the town in any future negotiations with the higher authorities – including the new unitary authority and the combined North/Suffolk authority and its new mayor. If we don't take this opportunity, we are likely to be the only community in Norfolk lacking this level of representation. We have a chance to create a long-term champion for King's Lynn – as well as retaining the traditional Mayor!