Outlook

NALC - UPDATE NOVEMBER

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Welcome to the November issue of the NALC ENews!

We are always looking for good news stories and examples of good practice from Town and Parish Councils across the County.

Has your Council recently introduced a new initiative or done something that has made a real difference to your community?

Have you completed a project worth celebrating, achieved something special or got an individual within your Council or community who deserves recognition for their hard work and contribution?

Perhaps you have an inspiring community project, a fantastic achievement or simply a good news story worth sharing?

We would love to hear about the things your Council is doing, the ideas you are proud of and the people who make a difference. Whether it's a success to celebrate, a little stroke of luck, an

inspiring initiative or an example of good practice that others could learn from, we'd love to feature it.

Please send us your news, articles and photographs so we can celebrate the great work taking place across our Town and Parish Councils and share ideas and inspiration that others might benefit from.

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Join us for a Teams briefing: Understanding the HELAA and the new Northumberland Local Plan

How can your Town or Parish Council help shape the future of development in Northumberland?
Join **Rob Murfin and Steve Robson from Northumberland County Council** (NCC) for an informative online session exploring how councils can use the new Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment (HELAA) to provide their initial views on potential development sites for the emerging Northumberland Local Plan.
The preparation of a new Local Plan formally began on 9 September 2026, marking the start of a 30 month process to prepare and adopt

the plan. Town and Parish Councils have an important opportunity to help shape this process and influence where future housing growth takes place.

The HELAA replaces the previous Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA) and identifies sites put forward by landowners for potential housing and economic development.

During this session, Rob and Steve will explain:

- What the HELAA is and what information it contains.
- How Town and Parish Councils can use the HELAA to review potential development sites.
- How to provide initial views on sites within your parish.
- How your council can contribute to shaping the emerging Local Plan.

This is a valuable opportunity to understand the HELAA, ask questions and find out how your council can play an active role in shaping Northumberland's future.

Meeting details:
Tuesday 1st December 2026
1.30pm - 2:30pm
Join: https://teams.microsoft.com/meet/3202673345260989?p=Sr4wgehgUabdaYo9oR
Meeting ID: 320 267 334 526 098 9
Passcode: Rr3bd9sn



Town and Parish Council Conference at County Hall

More than 120 Parish & Town Council Councillors from across Northumberland attended the Town and Parish Council Conference at County Hall, Morpeth, on Thursday 8th October 2026, which also

incorporated the Annual General Meeting of the Northumberland Association of Local Councils (NALC).

The conference provided an opportunity for councillors to meet officers from Northumberland County Council and other organisations, find out more about the services available to local councils and discuss issues affecting their communities.

A marketplace, staffed by NCC officers and representatives from partner organisations, offered the opportunity to speak directly with specialists. Topics included planning and development management, the Local Plan, community governance reviews, civil contingency, highways maintenance and road safety, waste management, environmental enforcement, libraries, iNorthumberland, regeneration, public health, employability, animal welfare and community initiatives.

The plenary sessions included presentations on the new National Planning Policy Framework and what it means for decision-making, an update on the Local Plan and its next steps, and the national scheme of delegation for planning committees.

Officers from the Environment and Transport Directorate also outlined how essential services are delivered across Northumberland. Presentations covered Highways, including infrastructure, maintenance, winter services, parking, road safety and flood risk; Neighbourhood Services, covering waste and recycling, cleansing, green spaces and environmental enforcement; and Strategic Transport and Climate Change, including public transport, active travel and the county's approach to sustainability and net zero. There was also an informative Q&A session with Glen Sanderson, the Leader of the Council.

The conference was a valuable opportunity for councillors to hear directly from county council officers, make useful contacts and gain a better understanding of the services and support available to their local communities. Refreshments and a very nice buffet ensured Councillors travelling long distances or coming straight from work did not go hungry!

We are already thinking about the Spring Conference and welcome suggestions from members.

Our AGM: some departures and welcomes

As a departure from our normal practice, our AGM took place this year during the County/Parish/Town Councils’ Autumn conference on 8 October, which attracted an excellent turnout. As a further departure,

members were surprised and delighted to receive and agree a proposal to reduce next year's NALC county subscription, and to offer a period of free and subsidised access to training for clerks and councillors! Our thanks go to President and previous-Acting Honorary Treasurer, David Woodard, who has been working in recent months on this financial strategy with Margaret Tweddell in CAN's finance team. The next meeting of the County Committee will consider a proposal for how this free training will be rolled out and allocated to member councils in 2027/2028.

We were pleased to welcome back Gillian Turner to the role of Honorary Treasurer. Gillian previously held the position three years ago and has most recently served as the Association's Honorary Auditor.

We welcomed as guest speaker Dr Jonathan Owen, Chief Executive of the National Association of Local Councils (NALC). Jonathan spoke about the work being undertaken by the national association and its support for local councils, including the launch of NORA, NALC's new artificial intelligence (AI) tool. We thanked Jonathan, who will be retiring in March, after 12 solid years of service to parish and town councils across the country.

The meeting closed, with thanks to the County Council for permitting us to benefit from the opportunity of the Conference to accommodate our AGM.

NORA the explorer

Many parish and town councils already know how AI (artificial intelligence) is spreading into everyday life, and some councils are using it as a means of handling their routine tasks, such as the drafting of minutes, and even producing responses to planning consultations.

Now, after months of development and trials, our National Association has launched its AI tool NORA: NALC's Online Resource Assistant, which is part of National ALC's website. It allows clerks and councillors to pose questions which are answered by drawing on NALC's own huge array of publications, briefings and model documents on its website. It is a closed system, which enables a rapid delving into the material which NALC itself has drafted, to provide answers. As such, it avoids the pitfalls of many publicly-available AI tools which frequently produce misleading, misguided and incorrect answers based on inadequate or out-dated data.

NORA, and indeed all of the resources on the National website are available to clerks and councillors whose councils are in membership

of our association. Registration is very straightforward, via this link: https://www.nalc.gov.uk/

Training: basics for Parish and Town Councils

A chance to benefit from these ever-popular introductory/refresher live, online events for clerks and councillors on: roles and procedures; financial management. These events will be delivered free of charge by David Francis and Graeme Popay of NALC, via Zoom video call to your own home.

Dates are

Monday 4th January - 6:00pm - 7:30pm - **Introduction to Parish Council Finance & Budgeting -**
Tuesday 11th January 2027 - 6:00pm - 7:30pm - **Roles, Powers & Procedures**

Charter review

We are working closely with County Council colleagues to review the Charter, which clarifies the respective roles of and relationships between our two tiers of council. The Charter was first drafted and adopted in 2009, and it has since undergone reviews roughly every four years. Among other matters, we are seeking: greater clarity over the respective responsibilities for running local services such as parks and cemeteries; a stronger commitment to promote high standards of behaviour among parish/town councillors; clarification of election cost recovery; and a closer working relationship with NCC's local Community Partnerships. It is hoped to launch a revised Charter next March.

Proper Practices

A nationwide review is currently under way to re-write the 'Practitioners' Guide: Governance and Accountability for Smaller Authorities in England', which specifies the requirements, and makes recommendations, for accounts and audit of all parish and town councils. The review has included two rounds of consultation so far, the most recent having been in September and October, covering a re-draft of the mandatory elements: see Consultation on the Governance and Accountability of Category 2 Authorities in England.
We have largely supported the changes, including improvements to the format of the AGAR (Annual Governance and Accountability

Return), and moving from hard-copy to electronic systems . However, we have also signaled our concerns over some rather challenging proposals to introduce a considerably more demanding Internal Audit regime, which appears disproportionate for small councils, and begs the question of the availability and affordability of suitable internal auditors. We will monitor closely and respond to further developments.

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New A1 study identifies dualling could bring millions more in benefits

A technical study carried out to support the push for future dualling of the A1 has shown increasing the capacity of the road could provide well over £200m in previously unidentified benefits.

A previous appraisal on dualling the stretch between Morpeth and Ellingham had already showed overall benefits of around £280m at today's rates - covering a range of metrics such as journey time savings and reduced accidents.

Now new figures now show potential driver frustration benefits on top of this are between £200 million to £225 million over a 60-year period.

Based on a comparable study used on the A9 dualling project in Scotland, 'driver frustration' is calculated by three key factors, the presence of oncoming traffic, the degree to which travel is below their

desired speed, and the number of Heavy Goods Vehicles (HGVs) in the traffic ahead.

Research shows that drivers place a value on avoiding these conditions, and people are willing to pay for a smoother, less stressful journey.

Because of this, the benefits of road improvements can be measured not just by time saved, but also by the reduction in driver frustration. If a scheme helps drivers travel at a more consistent speed and reduces delays, that improvement can be converted into a monetary value, showing the economic benefit of a better driving experience.

The study also found casualty figures on the A1 (between Morpeth and Ellingham) are the highest for ten years, with seven people killed in 2026 (just one less than the previous nine years combined), while traffic levels rose by over 6% between 2018 and 2025 – with more than 21,000 vehicles a day using the road.

Council Leader Glen Sanderson said: "This study clearly demonstrates to the Government why the Business Case for dualling is now more compelling than ever.

"The benefits to drivers, to the county, the region and the UK speak for themselves, while the appalling safety record and the dangerous and frustrating mix of dual and single carriageway are key reasons why we need the A1 dualled.

"Northumberland is thriving – but our main road through the county isn't fit for purpose. We've seen a 6% increase in traffic on the A1 over the past few years compared with a nationwide traffic increase of just 2.5%.

"Our study shows up to half a billion pounds of benefits could be generated.

"But the longer we wait for Government action, the more we will see the road getting snarled up, drivers either getting more frustrated or creating a burden on alternative routes, and ultimately more lives being lost.

"Working alongside the Mayor, business leaders and politicians of all colours, we must continue to push for action."

North East Mayor Kim McGuinness, said: “Local people don’t need to be told how dangerous it can be to drive along the A1 in Northumberland.

"Lives are being lost and although the solution - dualling the road - is obvious to everyone, action still isn't being taken.

"Now we also know that poor road safety on the A1 is harming our economy. I will continue to push for a resolution – we must dual the A1 without delay."



NALC encourages parish and town councils to share barriers to nature recovery

We are encouraging parish and town councils to respond to a call for evidence from the Office for Environmental Protection (OEP), seeking examples of regulatory and practical barriers that are delaying efforts to protect and improve nature.

Launched on 19 October 2026, the call for evidence aims to identify obstacles preventing landowners and occupiers in England from taking action to support nature recovery, and explore how these barriers could be addressed.

Parish and town councils can play an important role in protecting and enhancing their local environment. From managing green spaces and supporting wildlife to improving habitats and working with local partners, councils have valuable experience of the challenges that can affect environmental projects.

The OEP is seeking real or perceived barriers affecting work across land, freshwater and coastal environments. It will consider their impact on conservation efforts, including progress towards environmental

targets for wildlife-rich habitats and the commitment to protect 30% of land and sea for nature by 2030.

We encourage parish and town councils with relevant experience to contribute examples of what has prevented or delayed action, helping build an evidence base to identify practical solutions and accelerate nature recovery.

Read the OEP's call for evidence, which includes a briefing document and response template.

Read more HERE



Does a councillor commit an offence under the Bribery Act 2010 if they make a donation for selection boxes for local children?

We were asked about a scenario in which a councillor proposed donating £300 to their council to purchase chocolate selection boxes for local children attending a council Christmas event, prompting concern from another councillor that this could raise potential bribery issues under the Bribery Act 2010. The first point we made was that the council received a cash donation (under Section 139 of the Local Government Act 1972). The council's internal financial processes would detail the donation, so there would be a record of it. Our view on the bribery point was that for a matter to constitute bribery, there must be evidence that the donation was made for the purposes of obtaining a benefit that would not otherwise be available, whether or not the desired benefit was actually received. We could not see any evidence that the donor was seeking a benefit from the council.

CCTV and the Data (Use and Access) Act 2025

We have referred in previous bulletins to The Data (Use and Access) Act 2025 (the 2025 Act). Our view is that it will have limited application

to the sector. The 2025 Act modifies the UK GDPR and the Data Protection Act 2018 to improve clarity and streamline certain processes.

We were asked about council CCTV use. Our advice was that parish and town councils need to comply with the basic data protection framework when operating CCTV that captures personal data (people identifiable in footage), for example, CCTV use for safeguarding council property. The 2025 Act also introduces a new lawful basis in the GDPR framework for processing personal data: "recognised legitimate interests". It includes things like crime prevention and safeguarding vulnerable people. While the requirement for the processing to be necessary remains, the need for a detailed legitimate interests' assessment, which balances the data controller's interest against the individual's interest, has been removed. That could make it easier for parish and town councils to justify recording CCTV in some situations without needing a full balancing test, as long as rights and safeguards are respected. It does not replace existing legal bases. Parish and town councils still need to decide and document which legal basis will apply to their CCTV data (such as legitimate interests and legal obligation). Parish and town councils cannot just record and use footage without a lawful basis. The Information Commissioner's Office has produced a factsheet on this subject.

The 2025 Act is being commenced in stages, and we will issue advice as and when any further relevant points come into effect.

Meeting notice — Press and public excluded

We were asked whether the ordinary notice requirements would still apply where a council had called an extraordinary meeting for the purpose of dealing with a matter that would be held in confidential session with the press and public excluded. Our view is yes, it would. Whether the press and public are excluded from a meeting or part of a meeting has no bearing on the statutory notice period. The notice requirements in Paragraph 10 (2) of Schedule 12 to the Local Government Act 1972 still apply.

Use of the words "summons" and "summoned" in the meeting summons

We were asked if the meeting summons to members must include the word "summons" in order to be lawful and valid. Our advice was that Paragraph 10 (2) (b) of the Local Government Act 1972 says that three

clear days at least before a meeting of a parish or town council a summons to attend the meeting, specifying the business proposed to be transacted at the meeting and certified by the proper officer of the council, shall be sent to every member of the council by an appropriate method. The provision does not specify a form of words to be used or whether the word "summons" has to be used or the person "summoned". Our view was that specifying it makes it clear what it is, so it should be used as good practice and to avoid any uncertainty.



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Northumberland County Office is only an email away.

Best regards

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