

ASSOCIATION OF CHARTER TRUSTEE TOWNS & CHARTER TOWN COUNCILS

CHAIRMAN'S ADDRESS TO THE 2022 ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Thank you all for joining us this morning, and a special thank you to the Mayor and officers at Ellesmere Port and Cheshire West and Cheshire for hosting our Annual General Meeting of the Association of Charter Trustees Towns and Charter Town Councils, ACTT for short).

My name is Jim Anderson; I'm a District Councillor in Bassetlaw - the most Northerly part of Nottinghamshire. When Bassetlaw was 'created' in 1974, the two principal towns of Worksop and Retford were granted Charter status under the 1972 Act and have remained unparished since. I serve the ACTT as chair - an elected position that is open each year for election - I live in hope.

Many cities and towns have expanded well outside their unparished areas, and there are presently only about a dozen functioning Charter Trustee bodies - the ACTT exists to help them work well in accordance with their Regulated statutes, and if necessary, guide and advise them about how they can change their status to parished areas via Community Governance Reviews.

As the wave of Devolutions sweep across England, more Charter Cities and Towns are being created - what tends to happen is that their Officers will contact the ACTT and ask procedural questions to ensure the legal and efficient functions of a new group within their existing structures.

You won't be surprised to hear these next two points

1. virtually every new creation of Charter Trustees has varied (just a little, sometimes rather more) from earlier Regulations or Statutory Instruments. The key point to consider (for new ones, and for us gathered here as well) is that the Charter Trustees are a precepting authority, and if they exercise that power they will need the services of a RFO and an Audit trail.
2. The main obligations of Charter Trustees are always set out in Regulations - preserving the traditions and history of your local Mayoralty, including the maintenance of any associated items - that doesn't include the Town Hall by the way. New Charter Trustee bodies - and indeed some older ones - sometimes are unclear about how much or how little they can do. The ACTT is here to help - by way of an illustration, Rochester's Charter Trustees lost its Royal status (held since the Cinque Ports era) principally because they didn't take on board the ACTT advice offered by our former ACCT Exec led by Charles Talbot MBE. Only a reigning Monarch can choose to return that status to Rochester.

We do live in mercurial times at present - those of you who read the LGC news (Local Government Chronicle) will have seen a roller-coaster cascade of headlines. I understand that LGC is a news outlet and so tries to capture readers by dramatic headlines - well here are four from the last few days!

Councils face further budget cuts after the government reportedly shelved plans for this year's spending review.

The government plans to extend the committee stage of the Levelling Up & Regeneration Bill, amid speculation about major changes to the legislation.

After being named as Liz Truss's levelling up secretary, Simon Clarke tweeted that "delivering on levelling up for communities in all parts of our country" was central to the new government's mission

The chancellor's silence on public service funding was deafening amid tax cuts and increased borrowing, writes the chief executive of the Chartered Institute of Public Finance & Accountancy. The new chancellor hasn't got off to the best of starts.

So whilst Councillors, Officers and Cabinets up and down England are dealing with that, the additional burden of Civic duties and responsibilities based on in some case hundreds of years of history might seem at worst inappropriate, or at best irrelevant. Indeed, it is neither - quite the opposite in fact, and it is essential that Charter Trustees apply themselves diligently and exclusively to those matters which fall within the remit of the Mayoralty and Mayoral tradition in your area. This varies dramatically and I can only speak for Bassetlaw and Retford. Retford gained a Charter in 1246, and has had a long succession of Mayors, who in times of famine, crisis, war and wealth have served the public of Retford and created a legacy that a 'District Chair' cannot either equal or indeed compare with - this on a precept that is a fraction of the surrounding parished areas of the town.

I'm sure that our Exec meeting in a little while will hear more from other cities and towns, but I mention Retford because of the likelihood of a Regional Mayor arriving for the whole of Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire - two unlikely bedfellows.

HM Govt Levelling Up Bill

Here's the summary; I see no mention of forcing unparished areas to become parishes in this overview. That's not to say that lobbyists will probably seek to insert it.

Our own position and DLUHC was set out earlier this year, but things can change in politics

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/levelling-up-and-regeneration-further-information/levelling-up-and-regeneration-further-information>

Mr Simon Clarke MP is adamant sometimes that change will not be enforced from above, but it is incumbent of Charter Trustees bodies to deliver well what they are regulated to deliver, and those same Charter Trustees, when they serve as parent authority councillors must protect the history and dignity of the historic office of City or Town Mayor.

So once again, thank you for joining us, and we will proceed with the AGM agenda.