A change in the law in 1999 enabled the residents of Rushden to hold a referendum on whether a Town Council should be created. Previously the town’s business had been administered by the District Council of East Northants with representation from 12 Councillors for the town. Over 9000 people voted positively and 20 people were elected as Councillors in May 2000 to form the first Town Council.

The first meeting was held on 16 May 2000 at Rushden Hall and the first agenda item was the election of a Chairman/Mayor who was Cllr Clive Wood, a Councillor on the former Rushden Urban District Council until it was dissolved into East Northants Council, and an obvious choice. The Vice Chairman elected was Cllr Ron Pinnock. It was agreed at the meeting to change these positions to Town Mayor and Deputy Town Mayor. The Acting Town Clerk would be Mr M J Bowerman, manager of the Rushden Centre employed by East Northants Council who had agreed to the position on a temporary basis until such time as a Clerk was appointed. Committees were also appointed consisting of Finance and General Purposes Committee, Planning Consultative Committee and Community Safety Committee.

Negotiations took place with the District Council to transfer some of the town’s assets to the new council and these included Rushden Hall, Spencer, Jubilee, Manor and Hall parks, Newton Road cemetery, and a large number of play areas and open spaces.
The Walled Garden

The Walled Garden adjacent to Rushden Hall was originally used for producing fruit and vegetables for the residents of the house. To the left of the garden, where the current gravel car park is now located, there were a range of glasshouses, which became a commercial Garden Centre for a short time. Sadly, this enterprise closed and the glasshouses were demolished in 1995. The area lay dormant for many years. Part of the area had been grassed, but the rest had been used as a compound by East Northamptonshire Council’s grounds maintenance team.

In 2001, to commemorate the Queen’s Golden Jubilee the compound was removed and fruit trees planted to create a picnic area. The Walled Garden is now used for many events throughout the year and is a fantastic venue for summer wedding receptions.

The Stage

The Stage is now the venue for the finale of Party in Park each year and is the perfect setting for our Annual Proms in the Park. Our Proms have all the pomp and ceremony of the London Proms with picnics, champagne and candelabras being the order of the evening!

Bark in the Park

In 2015 the ‘dog mad’ staff of Rushden Town Council decided they would like to hold a Dog Show. This show proved very popular and is now an annual event run by the staff who give their own time and enthusiasm to organise it. The dog show is entirely funded by sponsorship and donations from local businesses and dog lovers and all proceeds raised go to animal charities. The fastest pizza eater class is the most popular class and the pizza is handmade to a dog friendly recipe, by Cllr Cesare Marinaro. Ironically this class was first won by the Town Clerk’s dog Milo (pictured here).

First Mayor of Rushden

The office of Town Mayor or Chairman is held for one year. The Mayor or Chairman is elected at the Annual Meeting of the Town Council and is entitled to wear the Chain of Office. Rushden Town Council made the decision to have a Mayor instead of a Chairman as they felt this would enhance Rushden’s civic standing and create equal status with other local Town Councils.

As the Civic Head of the town, the Mayor is apolitical (no involvement in politics) and carries out the legal function of chairing meetings, signing legal documents on behalf of the Council and representing the Council in a civic capacity.

Rushden Town Council’s first Mayor, Clive Wood, held the position for two consecutive years to help the Council establish a strong civic presence within the local community. A Deputy Town Mayor is also appointed annually and their role is to provide support to the Mayor and serve as Acting Mayor in the Mayor’s absence.

The Civic Regalia and Robes

The civic regalia was designed in 2001 giving Rushden a sense of pride and civic status within the District. The cost was met by financial contributions from the following local businesses: Deejak Builders, Osborne Sports and Toys, KFAT, Glen Leathers, Sargents Shoes and Totectors, with additional contributions made by the newly elected Town Councillors. In 2007, during his Mayoral year, local businessman and Councillor Tony Helsdown generously donated Mayoral robes to Rushden Town Council, thus giving an added distinction to the role.

In 1997 Hall Park’s beautiful Edwardian bandstand was burnt to the ground by a mindless act of vandalism. The bandstand had accommodated many brass bands over the years and it was a sad loss of a much loved asset. However, when the Town Council formed it was an aspiration of many Councillors to have a new bandstand. In 2005 a stage was built in the Walled Garden to accommodate various entertainment, including bands and many other musical acts. Rushden Rotary Clubs generously donated £5,000 to the new stage and it was officially opened by the Mayor Cllr Colin Wright and the Chairman of East Northants Council Cllr Ron Pinock, together with members of both Rotary Clubs. This was the first opportunity to hear Rushden Town Band playing in Hall Park once again and coincided with commemorations for the 60th Anniversary of VE/VJ Day.
Events

Party in the Park/Queen’s Golden Jubilee

The Queen’s Golden Jubilee in 2002 was the beginning of the now very successful Party in the Park, the first commemorative celebration since the Town Council was formed. All over the country, people were organising street parties and community events and Rushden wished to be part of it. On a limited budget, a working party was formed and the ‘seed was sown’. The celebrations took place over two days in a large marquee sponsored by Deejak Builders and erected in the walled garden. With the addition of a beacon lighting and firework finale, the special event ended well into the evening.

A sundial was purchased as a lasting tribute and placed in the flower bed of the ‘old’ bandstand base but later removed to the herbaceous border so it could be seen more fully. The rest as they say is history! From that day in 2002, Party in the Park remained a 2 day event which included the Sunday after being held in the High Street with various markets and Ice Cream Festivals until reverting to a 1 day event in 2010. It was always intended to be a community day for everyone to enjoy, free of charge, and to give the opportunity to local charities to raise funds for their own cause. And this has remained so, becoming the most successful event in the Council’s calendar year organised by a dedicated team of staff, Councillors and their supporters.

Queen’s Diamond Jubilee

VE/VJ Day Celebration

3 years later in 2005 from the 1st Party in the Park, came another celebratory weekend, that of the 60th Anniversary of VE/VJ Day. With a lottery grant, Rushden was able to give the town an event to be remembered. The theme naturally was 1940’s and schools, town organisations, churches and British and American military personnel as well as veterans were all involved. The programme of events for Saturday 9 July included many displays including a field gun display team, exhibitions in the Hall from Keith Hill local aviation artist, ’Rushden at War’ including the USAF bases of Podington and Chelveston and also H.E.Bates In the marquee videos were shown of ‘D Day’ in colour and another of the Home Front. Entertainment was provided by 40’s singing group ‘The Spitfires’ and an ENSA concert and sing-a-long by Rushden Amateur Theatrical Society. An evening dance rounded off the day.

The weekend continued on Sunday 10 July with arena acts consisting of a parade of military vehicles, the Carlsberg Pipe Band and the highlight being a free-fall parachute jump by the Royal Artillery Parachute display team. A thrilling moment and spectacular display. British and American war veterans and military personnel were invited for tea in Rushden Hall before parading to the marquee for a Church Service organised by the Royal British Legion. RAF Molesworth supplied a colour guard for the occasion.

Queen’s 90th Birthday

Another occasion for the town was the celebration of the birthday of HM Queen Elizabeth II. Residents attaining their 90th birthday in 2016 were sent an official invitation inviting them to tea which was supplied by the ladies from the Royal British Legion. During the afternoon, maypole dancing was performed by schoolchildren from Alfred Street School, music from Rushden Town Band and from singing group ‘The Victory Dolls’ for everyone’s enjoyment. Commemorative coins were given to prizewinners of the fancy dress competition and also to the nonagenarians as keepsakes.

Permission had been granted for Rushden’s by-pass to be named Liberty Way in honour of the 1600 US Airmen from Podington and Chelveston who were killed in action, and the road sign was unveiled during the service. A metal display information board was also erected in the lay-by at the Bedford Road end of Liberty Way.
Grounds Maintenance Contract
When the Town Council was formed in 2000, the administration and monitoring of the Grounds Maintenance Contract was carried out by East Northants Council. This arrangement continued until 2005, when the Town Council took over the running and monitoring of this contract. As a result of this direct control, the maintenance of the parks and open spaces has improved greatly. Hall Park being awarded Green Flag status for the sixth consecutive year indicates this and the contract will continue to be managed effectively.

Park Improvements
Under the transfer of assets, Rushden Town Council took ownership of over 30 Parks & Open Spaces. These sites had lacked investment for a number of years and therefore a significant refurbishment plan was embarked upon which evolved into an ongoing Refurbishment and Renewals Programme.

Over the last 20 years, as the town has grown, the Council have taken on a number of new sites and now have 46 Parks & Open Spaces within their ownership. Covering over 200 acres of land, encompassing parks, sporting facilities, informal open spaces and Newton Road Cemetery. Significant investment has been made in new play equipment, and RTC continue to improve facilities across the town.

Parks and Open Spaces are regularly inspected and maintained by the Council’s qualified staff.

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Following a meeting of the Town Council in 2012 it was agreed to commission a Rose Arbour to commemorate the Diamond Jubilee of HM Queen Elizabeth II. This would be positioned on the footings of the old band stand that had been erected by Councillor John White in 1935 to commemorate the Silver Jubilee of HM King George V and sadly destroyed by fire in 1997.

The wrought iron construction took over twelve months to construct. It was initially designed by Councillor Clive Wood reflecting the original structure and encompassing the events of 2012 which was to include the five Olympic rings and the Rushden Town Council initials to show the local authority parish. By some way of a miracle, the weather vane from the original bandstand had been retained and so after some restoration it once again topped off the impressive structure. The structure was built by local blacksmith/businessman Mr Philip Warner (whose son worked out the technical dimensions) and Mark his assistant, both craftsmen in their field who delivered the superb structure over and beyond our expectations. The old base was strengthened by a local supplier and the stonework restored in anticipation. The new roses were sourced from a local supplier. Councillor Clive Wood was given the honour of unveiling the plaque at the opening ceremony in the year of the Queen’s Coronation celebrations in 2013.

Supporting Town Organisations

There are other events that take place which are organised by town organisations. The Royal British Legion organise many events throughout the year and until recently have organised the annual Civic Remembrance Parade and Service which during the past 20 years has increased in numbers threefold. The event is one that many look forward to, to pay respects to those who lost their lives during the Wars. The Town Council has now taken this over. Several flag-raising days are also undertaken at the War memorial commemorating specific dates relating to wartime including lesser known ones Merchant Navy Day and the more recent Holocaust Day. They also organise a very successful Armed Forces Day parade working alongside the Rushden Historical Transport Society turning the day into a 40’s extravaganza.

Rushden Historical Transport Society is also a very pro-active society organising many events to promote the town of Rushden. The station plays a very big part in the accommodation of hundreds of people and now with the acquisition of the goods shed, further space for many town activities.

Nene Valley Scouts are responsible for the magnificent firework display in Hall Park in November. The display is now in its 53rd year of existence.

Supporting these organisations and many others is two-fold, as many members also support the Town Council during their events for which we are very grateful.
Celebrate Rushden

In 2013 Lottery funding was available for a town event based on its heritage. In conjunction with East Northants Council a bid was successful for ‘Get to Know Rushden’. Two councillors initiated the event contacting businesses and groups in the town with a view to inform residents what was happening within the town. Subsequently some 65 events of all sorts, spread over one week, took place in Rushden ending with Party in the Park.

The following year the Town Council agreed to its funding and over 80 events took place including a shoe competition won by a Denfield Park School pupil Charlie Street.

Having ‘Got to know Rushden’ for two years the event changed its name to Rushden Party Week since it ended with Party in the Park. The format being the same which was to encourage businesses and groups to advertise their organisations with the Town Council subsidising the events so that they were free to attend. In 2018 the Women’s Cycle Tour of GB chose Rushden Hall Park as a starting point for one of their stages. In order to highlight the Cycle Tour it was decided to move Rushden Party Week to an earlier date in June to coincide with the tour. Having moved away from Party in the Park, the name then changed to Celebrate Rushden which proved to be a successful move and is now in June each year.

The Soap Box Derby has been part of the celebrations since the start in 2013 and has now moved from a weekday evening to a Sunday proving to be very successful and enabling a much larger event to take place.

There is virtually no restriction on the nature of the events as long as their organisers contribute to showing how many things actually happen in Rushden. A programme of events is publicised and widely distributed.

Skate Park

The skate ramp in Jubilee Park has been a success story since 2002 for RTC with local BMX riders contributing to its development. Over the years with the help of Karl Pentelow, a member of the Bike and Board Association, and local businessman Ben Joyce, competitions have been organised for the enthusiasts to compete against one another. Professional riders have also attended, demonstrating their skills. When the wooden ramp was beyond repair, we invested in a superb, cutting edge Skate Park in 2016. This has proved to be a destination park and is well used all year round.

BMX Track

The BMX track in Spencer Park replaced an old paddling pool and sandpit which had long been disused. The natural contours of the area after the removal made it the ideal place to turn into a track.
High Street CCTV

Since taking over the High Street CCTV we have made significant improvements to the range and quality of images produced by the cameras. The CCTV system is now monitored by Crime Secure based in Daventry and we have full access to images when required. Crime Secure actively monitor incidents as they are occurring and they are linked in with the Police at Wootton Hall. We have installed additional cameras in High Street South and Jubilee Park and continue to review the possibility of additional cameras if we feel they would be beneficial.

Public Toilets

In 2010 East Northamptonshire Council decided they were no longer going to fund and maintain public toilets throughout the District. Rushden Town Council was determined to retain this important public service and took ownership of the public toilets in Duck Street and Newton Road in 2011. As many towns no longer have public toilets, we are pleased that we have retained this service in Rushden and we are looking to undertake a refurbishment programme of both sets of toilets in the near future.

Bus Shelters

The bus shelters in Rectory Road, Skinners Hill and the north end of the High Street are in our ownership. We refurbished the Rectory Road and Skinners Hill bus shelters in 2012 and we are currently in the process of replacing these shelters.

Planters and Floral Displays

One of the ‘assets’ transferred to the Town Council in 2000, was the High Street Planters. These were soulless brick planters that were vandalised as soon as plants were put into them, and they became glorified rubbish bins. The planters were subsequently filled with concrete and pebbles as it was impossible to grow plants in them. In 2006 the Town Council invested in new planters and hanging basket brackets and started to improve the look of the High Street. Additional works were carried out in 2012 and additional floral displays and barrier baskets have now been added to provide a vibrant floral scheme for the town.

Devolved Services

Since Rushden Town Council was formed in 2000, a number of services have been devolved to us from East Nortamptonshire Council and these include:

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Sports’ Pavilions

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In 2000 we inherited the sports pavilions at both Jubilee and Spencer Parks, these were predominately used for Sunday League football and had suffered a lot of ‘wear and tear’, since they were built in the 1960’s. Unfortunately, the pavilion at Jubilee Park became unsafe and had to be demolished in 2004. After obtaining £50,000 funding from Sport England in 2015 we were able to build a brand new sports pavilion at Jubilee Park and this was named the Jim Osborne Pavilion in honour of a true sportsman and gentleman of this town.

The Spencer Park pavilion was fully refurbished in 2017 and both pavilions now boast excellent changing facilities and continued to be used for community football and rugby matches.

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Neighbourhood Plan
With a population of over 30,000 people, Rushden is much larger than the majority of parishes in the area. It was thus a major decision as to whether to embark on a Neighbourhood Plan for such a large town. The benefits of such a plan are:

'Neighbourhood planning gives communities direct power to develop a shared vision for their neighbourhood and shape the development and growth of their local area. They are able to choose where they want new homes, shops and offices to be built, have their say on what those new buildings should look like and what infrastructure should be provided, and grant planning permission for the new buildings they want to see go ahead.' An additional benefit arises where Councils had introduced 'Community Infrastructure Levies' for planning developments such that 25% of the levy (CIL) would be paid directly to parishes to facilitate improvements in their infrastructure.

Community groups and residents, together with councillors, were involved in the process. Specialist advisors undertook 19 public consultations throughout the process, in order to ensure the plan was legally sound. A referendum was held in May 2018 and the Rushden Neighbourhood Plan was 'made' by East Northamptonshire Council in June 2018. This plan can be found on our website.

The plan is now frequently quoted during the various planning applications that arise for the town. Thus the document is assisting significantly in the way that the town is developing, but is also seen as a foundation document that can be enhanced with time, in order to embrace new opportunities that may arise for Rushden in the future.

The Future
As we look back on the last 20 years, it is encouraging to see how much has been achieved, however as our logo states we are ‘looking to the future’. With the imminent arrival of a new Unitary Council we need to be ready for the changes and challenges that will result from this. We will continue to deliver our current services to a high standard and be prepared to consider other services that may be devolved as part of the countywide restructuring of local government.

As the town continues to grow we understand the importance of infrastructure and facilities to support this growth and this is our motivation for our ambitious project to develop new sporting and community facilities.

We have an opportunity to acquire a 60 acre (24 hectares) site, which will be large enough to accommodate a new sports/community building, relocate Rushden and Higham Rugby Club from Manor Park and provide space for other sporting and recreational requirements. Rushden Town Council feels that by securing this site, there will be enough land safeguarded to provide sports and community facilities for many years to come. This venture will only be possible by the sale of Manor Park, however, development of this site will give the opportunity for a large, enhanced green space for future public use.

We will continue to make improvements to our existing assets and look for opportunities to enhance our town, but most importantly we want to support our community. Rushden has a great community spirit and we are proud to work with local organisations, societies and charities and continue to organise our established, busy events programme. Here’s to another great 20 years!!!

And Finally! Those Bikes!
The decorated bikes in the flower-bed in Skinner’s Hill originally came about due to the Women’s Cycle Race Tour of Great Britain using the Hall Park as one of its starting stages. Since then, the staff have dressed them in all kinds of costumes to denote special events in the town or special days throughout the Country successfully becoming very much the talk of the town, with residents contacting the Council to find out when the next ones would be on display. What will be next? Who knows!