

## **Magna Carta 800: The role of councils**

### **Purpose of report**

For update and information.

### **Summary**

This paper provides Members with an update on planning for the Magna Carta's 800<sup>th</sup> Anniversary in 2015. The paper provides a summary of the commemoration, the specific events planned and the LGA's role in the planning.

Councillor Julian Daly, Leader of St Albans City & District Council, will share how St Albans is engaging local people and partners in a programme of events and activities to mark the anniversary.

Caterina Loriggio, 2015 Anniversaries, Senior Parliamentary Campaign Manager, UK Parliament will update Members on how Parliament is planning to mark the Magna Carta anniversary and also the 750<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the De Montfort Parliament. A confidential update to this report is attached as **Annex A**.

### **Recommendation**

Members are invited to discuss the recommendations in paragraph 13.

### **Actions**

Subject to comments from the Board, officers to take forward actions.

**Contact officer:** Laura Caton  
**Position:** Senior Advisor  
**Phone no:** 020 7664 3154  
**E-mail:** [laura.caton@local.gov.uk](mailto:laura.caton@local.gov.uk)

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### **Background**

1. The Magna Carta is often highlighted as the cornerstone of individual liberty. Of the 63 clauses in the original document, the most important were clauses 39 and 40 which both established the fundamental principle that government, including the king, must be subject to the law. Therefore the document is often regarded as forming the basis for British democracy, the US constitution and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.
2. As the document was signed at Runnymede in June 1215, June 2015 will mark the 800<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of its signing and will act as the culmination to a series of build-up events. The anniversary will be commemorated across the free world and the programme of celebratory events will be televised worldwide.
3. The anniversary is relevant to local government for a number of reasons. First, it provides an opportunity to reflect on civic life, and to explore the civic underpinnings of places. Second, there is economic growth potential for places to benefit from a boost in overseas and domestic tourists. Third, there is an educational opportunity to engage young people to learn about how the Magna Carta gave rise to the individual liberties they enjoy, basic principles of fairness and the root of British democracy.
4. There are also links to the UK Parliament's work with councils to mark the 750<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the De Montfort Parliament in 2015, regarded as the earliest forerunner of the modern Parliament because it included elected representatives from each county, towns and cities, as well as the Great Council.
5. There are a number of other historic and cultural anniversaries coming up over the next few years, including this summer's commemorations of the outbreak of the First World War (commemorative activities will run until 2018), the 600<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Agincourt and the bicentenary of the Battle of Waterloo in 2015, and the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Shakespeare's death and the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Beatrix Potter's birth in 2016. In October Maria Miller announced a new £10 million 4-year Heritage Lottery Programme to help communities mark historic anniversaries.

### **Current Plans**

6. There are a multitude of local, national and international plans, many already underway, to celebrate the anniversary and raise awareness about the continued relevance of the Magna Carta.
7. The Magna Carta 800<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Organising Committee and a UK Parliament All-Party Parliamentary Group are taking the lead on event planning. HM The Queen is the patron for the commemoration.
8. Below are a few of the plans taking shape:
  - 8.1. Runnymede, where the document was signed, will act as the focus for the national celebration and Surrey County Council has agreed to £1million of funding for the anniversary celebration. Egham will also be branded 'the gateway to Magna Carta country'. The council is bidding for match-funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund and is working with organisations including Runnymede Borough Council, the National Trust, Brunel University and the 800th anniversary committee.

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- 8.2. The four surviving original copies of Magna Carta will be brought together for the first time in history at the British Library in collaboration with Lincoln Cathedral and Salisbury Cathedral.
- 8.3. The Magna Carta towns of Canterbury, City of London, Runnymede, St Albans, Bury St. Edmunds, Durham, Hereford, Lincoln, Oxford and Salisbury are planning their own events to celebrate their unique involvement as places where significant events happened connected to Magna Carta or home to original manuscripts.
- 8.4. There is a campaign for an extra bank holiday to take place on the 15 June 2015.
- 8.5. A wide range of music and artistic events will also mark the anniversary. Including a Magna Carta themed Opera, a play script called "The Great Charter" and four musical compositions.
- 8.6. An education programme for schools across the country [and the world] is being developed. It is hoped the Magna Carta will become even more embedded in the British curriculum. Furthermore a number of exciting new teaching resources, competitions and events are under development. Libraries, museums and archives services will be involved.
- 8.7. Academic symposiums have been agreed to take place in the USA, UK and Poland.
- 8.8. Further information can be found on the website; <http://magnacarta800th.com/>

**LGA Role**

9. The CTS Board had a brief discussion about the Magna Carta anniversary at the 9 September Board. Members agreed that the LGA had an important facilitative role to play – both in terms of promoting opportunities to councils and supporting them to develop their plans, and developing a coherent narrative about councils' central role in involving communities in very different types of anniversary in a locally appropriate way.
10. This is currently achieved by:
  - 10.1. Daniel Goodwin, LGA Executive Director for Local Government Finance and Policy, through his previous position as the Chief Executive of St Albans District Council, is the Deputy Chairman of the Magna Carta 2015 Commemoration Committee. After starting at the LGA, he agreed with Carolyn Downs, Chief Executive of the LGA, that he kept a watching brief for the LGA.
  - 10.2. The LGA hosts the meetings of the Magna Carta Towns and Cities group of councils as part of our wider facilitative role.
  - 10.3. Information on the LGA website and updates for councils in the LGA's monthly CTS bulletin.
11. There are also links to the LGA's *Rewiring Public Services* campaign. In a lecture as part of the St Albans Magna Carta event in August 2013, Professor Vernon Bogdanor (King's College London) highlighted the importance of Magna Carta to the evolution of the principle of Parliamentary sovereignty. He went on to highlight how the devolution

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of power from Westminster to Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales suggests we are moving towards a system based on the dispersal of power. In this way there is a contemporary link to *Rewiring's* propositions to rejuvenate local democracy and strengthen civic engagement, and to give local government in England the same freedoms to tackle national and local priorities that devolved governments in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales enjoy.

**Next Steps**

12. As plans continue to develop, there is an opportunity for the LGA to get more involved from the autumn.
13. **Members are invited to give a steer on the LGA's role, and to agree the following actions which will provide practical support for councils and help to develop a compelling narrative about the central role of councils:**
  - 13.1. **We have secured a provisional slot in First magazine on 14 December for a short article about the Magna Carta anniversary and the opportunities for councils.**
  - 13.2. **A workshop on councils' role in historic anniversaries at the annual CTS Conference 3 - 4 March, with a focus on events and links to growth.**
  - 13.3. **Refresh the practical online Community Events Handbook we produced for councillors to reflect the latest funding sources, and promote to councils through the CTS bulletin and LGA website.**
  - 13.4. **Continue to play a coordinating and facilitative role through LGA membership of the Magna Carta Towns Group.**