

‘LIFE AFTER DG.Eng.’

Another BUGLE Story from FRANK FIRTH.



START OF ONES CAREER

I've asked Frank to write this story as an illustration on how it is possible to be fully occupied at any time during your life. I worked with Frank during my time at RAF Wyton and although we differ slightly on our political persuasions; I admired his enthusiasm and enjoyed his company. (Albeit conversation being a little one sided) This is his story on life after DG.Eng. As interesting and enjoyable as his first story. See BUGLE 20, November 2012.

Once again I have been coerced by Malcolm into writing something for the Bugle. For some untold reason he believes that my exploits would make for interesting reading. I would not be so presumptuous but will leave that for you decide. Being younger than some of you I actually

finished my career at RAF Wyton. Work there was interesting, but being RAF led the structure was different to that of PE. At times promotion seemed to be the driving factor.

I did however enjoy my job, indeed I requested an extra five years, unfortunately however my AD, (Gp. Cpt) decided otherwise. All rather frustrating particularly as at the time the Government were considering changing the retirement age. Initially I took a valeting job at a second-hand car sales outlet. If you went to know how to morph a wreck into a desirably looking vehicle then I am your man.

For the past few years now, I have been involved in local politics. This all started by being asked if I would be interesting joining my local Branch, that led to me becoming a Committee member and finally the Chair of that Branch. After seven years I still remain in post. Moving on, I put myself forward as the Ward member on the Unitary Central Bedfordshire Council. The previous incumbent was standing down after 39 years and as we had no local volunteer (and rather than an outsider being imposed upon us) I put myself forward. Becoming duly elected as the Northhill Ward Member in the May of 2015. The Council operate full Councillor Elections

every four years, so as I write I am actively involved in campaigning. Campaigning has its ups and downs. I being the sole member for the Ward which is rural, encompassing five parishes, involves much driving/walking, particularly at election time. Unlike the towns with estates, streets etc, rural villages tend to be scattered, so there is lots of walking. One wonders whether the long walk to an isolated farm is worth that possible vote!

Door knocking can be intimidating, especially in the first instance, you never know what reception to expect. You definitely have to employ tact and diplomacy. Courage is also required, the bark of a ravaging dog being intimidating to say the least. It is not unknown to have one's fingers snapped at when posting leaflets.

The structure of local government varies across the country. Many parts of England have 2 tiers of local government:

- county councils
- district, borough or city councils

In some parts of the country, there's just 1 (unitary) tier of local government providing all the local services:

- unitary authorities in shire areas
- London boroughs
- metropolitan boroughs

County councils, have responsibility for services across the whole of a county, like:

- education
- transport
- planning
- fire and public safety
- social care
- libraries
- waste management
- trading standards

District, borough and city councils tend to cover a smaller area and usually responsible for services like:

- rubbish collection
- recycling
- Council Tax collections
- housing
- planning applications

Unitary authorities and London and metropolitan boroughs provide all the local services listed above. In London and metropolitan areas some services, like fire, police and public transport, are provided through 'joint authorities'. At the lower rung we have Parish, community and town councils. They are elected and can help on a number of local issues, like providing:

- allotments
- public clocks
- bus shelters
- community centres
- play areas and play equipment

- grants to help local organisations
- consultation on neighbourhood planning

As can be seen a Unitary has to cover a whole raft of responsibilities. To undertake those functions, and like Parliament, we have an elected Leader (PM) who then selects the Executive (Cabinet), with remainder (back benchers) to offer support/criticism. Again, like Parliament, the majority of the work is done in Committee. I myself being on two committees and substituting on another four. On average the committees sit six times a year, however Development Management on which I sit covers two full days every month. One day to cover site visits with the other being for discussion and determination. In addition, I attend five Parish Council, again on a bi-monthly, and act as the Local Authority representative on two school governing bodies. I also sit as a board member on a River and Internal Drainage Board, plus two other committees – Mineral Extraction and the Shuttleworth Collection/Swiss Garden. Just to ensure that one's time is fully engaged, once a month I offer a Councillor's surgery at three locations within my Ward. As can be seen all this leads to a very active life.

The big question upon one's mind is why do you do it. First let me say beginning a Councillor is very rewarding and satisfying. One can do as little or as much as you want. You

do not have to put yourself forward for any committee, and other than the Full Council (bi-monthly) you are not obliged to attend any other meetings. You put into it what you want, and like Parliament every four years the electorate decide your faith. At the recent May elections my Party took a big hit. On the doorstep BREXIT was the talking point, local issues coming second. Believe it or not, despite the dogs dinner that our elected MP's are making, as I was re-elected with a slightly increased majority on a lower turn out!!

Do we get a salary? – No but we do get, what I regard, a generous allowance, which is taxable.



END OF ONES CAREER

Thank you Frank for this dissertation. I am amazed at the range of activity that local government management involves. I really do not think that this is anywhere near the end of your careers!

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