



"Your Parish Council Needs YOU"

Join and be an active member of our local community and help us with crime and safety, planning issues, environment, highways and local services.

What is a Parish Council?

A parish council is a local authority that makes decisions on behalf of the people in the parish. It is the level government closest to the community, with the district authority (South Norfolk) above it in the hierarchy.

As it is the authority closest to the people, parish councils are invariably the first-place people will go with concerns or ideas. For this reason, they are a vital part of any community.

Why become a Parish Councillor?

If you've never been to a parish council meeting before, you may be forgiven for thinking that parish councillors are a group of (probably older) people who meet now and then in a draughty village hall. If, however, you live in a community where something 'big' has happened, you'll know that when people in the community need support and guidance, it is sometimes the parish council that is turned to.

By becoming a parish councillor, you become someone your community will look to for help, guidance and support a community leader with the power to influence decisions for the benefit of the people you serve. Seeing your community change for the better, as a result of decisions you have helped make, is something that can give you a sense of achievement and pride.

The position is unpaid and voluntary, but some expenses such as training are paid for by the Parish Council.

What decisions do Parish Councils make?

Parish councils make all kinds of decisions on issues that affect the local community. Probably the most common topics that parish councils get involved with are planning matters (they are statutory consultees), crime prevention, managing open spaces and campaigning for and delivering better services and facilities.

It's true to say that on their own, parish councils have limited powers to make decisions. But they do have the ability to negotiate with, and the power to influence, those other organisations that do make the final decisions (such as the borough council, health authorities, police etc).

In this respect parish councils are extremely powerful. The organisations that make the final decisions know that a parish council gives the best reflection of how a community feels about something, and its views will be taken seriously.

How much time does it take up?

Ashwellthorpe & Fundenhall Parish Council hold nine meetings a year and these are held on the third Tuesday of the month to which members of the public are also invited. Meetings may last two or three hours, depending on what needs to be discussed. In addition to the regular meetings, councillors may be required to attend other meetings as a representative of the parish council, for example acting as a representative on an outside body, community activities or helping develop a new project for the community. Such meetings won't happen every day, so it's not going to take over your life.

There is also an annual meeting which all parishioners are invited to attend. All meetings are advertised on the council notice boards. Residents can bring to the attention of the parish council anything that concerns them, either directly or through the clerk. If matters raised are not the responsibility of the council, the clerk can bring them to the attention of the proper authority.

How long does a parish councillor serve for?

Once elected, parish councillors sit on the council for a maximum of four years. If they then want to stay in the post, they can stand for re-election.

Am I eligible to be a Parish Councillor?

To stand for election on a parish council, you must:

- be over 18 and on the electoral register or a resident of the Parish or live within three miles of the Parish as the crow flies or own a business in the Parish
- be able to attend evening meetings every other month
- have an interest in local issues
- have a desire to improve the quality of life in the Parish
- be able to represent the views of local people

The position is unpaid and voluntary, but some expenses such as training are paid for by the Parish Council.

If you do become a parish councillor, you will have to sign up to the Code of Conduct.

What powers do parish councils have?

They have a wide range of powers which essentially related to local matters, such as looking after community buildings, open space, allotments, play areas, street lighting, bus shelters, car parks and much more. The council also has the power to raise money through taxation, the precept. The precept is the parish council's share of the council tax. The precept demand goes to the billing authority, the district council, which collects the tax for the parish council.

Don't take our word for it!

The best way to find out what it's like to be a parish councillor is to talk to someone who's doing it now. Come along to a parish council meeting or speak to one of our councillors and find out what they think of the job.

Becoming a parish councillor is a rewarding experience and often described by those that get involved as a way of giving something back to their community.

If you are interested please email the clerk at: clerk_ashfun@hotmail.com