

The Parish Council

1. About the Parish Council

There are 10,000 Parish and Town Councils in England, covering a third of the population. The Parish Council is the first level of local democracy sitting beneath the District and County Councils.

Parish Councils were established in 1864 to rationalise and reduce the many thousands of different bodies and boards that existed before. This included replacing the old "Vestry" Committee that was a part of the ecclesiastical parish and feudal system.

The 1972 Local Government Act, which created new types of Local Authorities, strengthened the Parish Council role in planning at a local level, giving the Parish Council the right to be informed and consulted in all planning matters.

The Localism Act of 2011 enacted parts of the 1972 Act that were never implemented allowing Parish Councils to exercise an interest and activity in areas outside of their statutory powers. (See below) However this still requires a council to apply for a General Power of Competence, and our council does not currently meet the criteria. The Localism Act also introduced new rights and powers to allow local communities to shape new development by coming together to prepare neighbourhood plans. Neighbourhood development plans are an important change to the planning system, communities can use neighbourhood planning to permit the development they want to see - in full or in outline. Our Parish Council has proactively involved local people in the development of the plan to ensure that their wishes and interests are promoted and protected.

Powers and Duties.

All eligible parishioners pay as a part of their annual Council Tax a small precept to ensure the Parish Council can exercise its responsibilities. Although the Parish does not presently have allotments the Council has a duty to consider providing these if there is sufficient demand. The Council also has the power to provide facilities either directly or through others, there are no specific requirements but tend to be set by previous custom and practice, supporting other Local Authorities in their statutory duties and looking after past initiatives. So in our parish we look after the Broad Green natural area,

the provision of Berryfields Playing Field and the Village Hall in Broadwas. We also ensure that rights of way are maintained, and in keeping the parish as litter free and tidy as possible. We also use the precept to support local organisation that provide sports, recreational, arts and other opportunities for residents.

The Parish Council has a standing sub group to support how it ensures that we are fully involved in all matters to do with planning, listening to local views and making sure that all aspects of the wider planning and development arrangements are conducted to the highest standards and in a way that ensures the villages are put first.

In addition to the “power to provide”, the Parish Council also has “representative and miscellaneous powers”, for example the council can be consulted about the appointment a governor to a Primary School, or appoints a trustee to a local charity.

2. So what difference does the Parish Council make?

To a large extent this relies on people who live in the parish showing an interest and taking up the role of a Parish Councillor, this is a voluntary and unpaid role. All those who live in the parish are welcome to attend meetings these are held 10 times a year. District and County Councillors attend the meetings and sometimes we have a particular topic and or hear from other people about relevant issues and developments.

At these meetings councillors make sure that all the amenities and facilities in the parish are working as they should, we also direct matters to the relevant District and County Council services as they are often responsible for some of the things that make a difference to life in the parish. In determining what’s the best thing to do especially when commenting on planning issues, it is important to understand that this is done in an open and transparent way, and all meetings are open to parishioners and are a matter of public record. Councillors are always available to talk.

We have a part time clerk who is responsible for the administration of the Council and annually elect a chair and vice chair. Our website provides lots of information and is the main way to get in touch.

Once a year there is an open Parish Meeting where representatives from all the organisations and bodies who are involved in providing services and activities in the parish are available to tell us about their achievements and the things they think are important for the Parish going forward into the coming year.

Sometimes perhaps when there is a significant issue or opportunity that potentially affects everyone we call a special meeting or event, to provide an opportunity for all to be involved or consulted.

The difference the Parish Council makes depends therefore on people stepping forward to be on the Council and making sure that if they have views, issues or suggestions these are put forward.

Mostly of course we all just want to get on with our lives in a community that is safe and promotes the things that we value, and for most of the time the difference the Council makes should not really be noticed. However there are times when it is important that all parishioners can come together and know that whether it is a time to celebrate or a time to face a common challenge, there is a body that has a role and responsibilities to protect and promote the best interests of the parish.