

BUGBROOKE PARISH COUNCIL

The Role of Parish Councillors

Standing as a Parish Councillor can make a real difference to the community that you live in. Residents often ask what this entails; what sort of a commitment being a Councillor requires, and what qualifications you need to become a Councillor.

What is a Parish Council

A Parish Council is a democratically elected body established by legislation. It is the first tier of local government and has a range of statutory powers and duties and following the Localism Act 2011 the Parish Council has more flexibility to make a difference to its community – however small. Parish Councils have a statutory power to precept (tax) the local electors in the area to finance activities following decisions made by the Parish Council. Bugbrooke Parish Council has 15 Councillors and in 2017/18 the Parish Council will spend approximately £75,000; in compliance with the budget approved in November 2016. The new budget for 2018/19 is due to be approved at the November meeting. A Parish Council does not have statutory responsibility for services such as waste collection, street parking, traffic regulation, planning licencing and education – these responsibilities lie with the second and third tiers of local government, but the Parish Council are consulted when changes to services are proposed, or for planning applications affecting the village.

What is the role of a Parish Councillor

A Parish Councillor is the holder of a public office, not a volunteer (although the role is unpaid). A Councillor does not have any authority to make decisions about Parish Council business on his/her own. The main job of a Parish Councillor is to actively participate in the collective decision making processes of his/her council. A Councillor's normal term of office, when elected by a general ballot – the last election was in 2015 - is for four years. Anyone over the age of 18 who is a citizen of the UK, lives in the Parish or works in the Parish, or lives/works within 3 miles of the Parish may put themselves forward to be a candidate. Occasionally, vacancies will arise during the 4 year period and subject to various statutory notices, consultations and periods of time, these can be filled by co-option. This process is known as Casual Vacancy (but bears no relationship to the book of the same name!)

What Commitment is required of a Parish Councillor?

A Parish Councillor is required to attend each of the monthly meetings of the Parish Council – held on the second Monday of every month in the Community Centre at 7.30 p.m and usually last about 2 hours. They are expected to arrive at the meeting having read the agenda and all the accompanying papers which are circulated approximately 1 week in advance of the meeting. They are also expected to participate in the debates and decision making processes. Bugbrooke has very few Committees, but individual Councillors can opt to be selected to join any that hold a particular interest, or for which they have a particular skill set which would aid the Parish Council. There are other events held throughout the year, often out of the Parish, to which Councillors will be invited. These include meetings with the Police and Crime Commissioner, Emergency Services and South Northants Council. Attendance at these events is not mandatory, but representation of the Parish Council at these occasions is an important ambassadorial role. The only other commitment is in relation to inspection of Parish Council owned assets. The village is divided into 5 areas, with three Councillors for each area. Once a quarter each Councillor is required to inspect the items in their area and report on their condition.

What Qualifications do I need to become a Councillor?

Apart from the residence and age qualifications referred to above – you don't need any formal qualifications. Each new Councillor will be requested to attend a training course for new Councillors, which is held at Litchborough. They should be computer literate and able to communicate by email. Otherwise all that is required is a genuine interest in what happens in the village – to retain its character, its facilities etc, but at the same time to be part of the process of planning for the future. It is really important that the Parish Council has a range of different ages and demographic profiles to ensure that we truly represent the majority of the village.