

ETCHINGHAM PARISH COUNCIL

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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 Rother District Council and East Sussex County Council above it in the hierarchy.

As the authority closest to the people, we are invariably the first port of call people go to with their concerns or ideas. For this reason, we 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 when something 'big' has or is about to happen, you'll know that's when people in the community need support and guidance and it's the parish council that you turn to.

As 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 will give you a sense of achievement and pride.

What decisions do Parish Councils make?

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.

On their own, parish councils have limited powers to make decisions. However, they do have the ability to negotiate with, and the power to influence, those other organisations that do make the final decisions and, 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 our views are taken seriously.

Parish Duties

Etchingham Parish Council has 7 Councillors.

The duties and functions of a parish council are many and varied so it is an interesting position to hold.

We normally meet once a month in the Parker Hall, Parsonage Croft and meetings may last up to two hours, depending upon the items on the agenda to be discussed.

We discuss and decide what comments should be made upon planning applications and on any other matters referred to it by local residents.

There is also an annual parish meeting (assembly) which all parishioners are invited to attend as they are to the monthly meetings.

All meetings are advertised on the council notice boards and also via the Council website and on E-Bulletin.

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 much time does it take up?

In addition to the regular meetings, our councillors have specific duties (portfolios) possibly requiring them to attend other meetings to represent the council, e.g. acting as a representative on an outside body, or helping develop a new project for the community.

Such meetings don't happen often, so it's not going to take over your life. The allocation of portfolios is open for discussion at an open council meeting to try and match interests and experience to the right one. Nobody will have a portfolio area foisted upon them.

How long does a parish councillor serve for?

Once elected, parish councillors sit on the council for a maximum term of four years. If they then want to stay in the post they can stand for re-election. However, Councillors can also be co-opted at any time during a four-year term if a vacancy occurs due to resignation or any other reason.

This requires the prospective candidate to write a brief resumé and attend a parish meeting for a short informal interview.

The councillors will then take a vote and appoint the most suitable candidate.

Am I eligible to be a Parish Councillor?

To be able to become a councillor for Etchingam Parish Council, you must:

- be an elector of the parish, or;
- for the whole of the previous 12 months have occupied (as owner or tenant) land or other premises in the parish, or;
- during the previous 12 months have worked in the parish (as your principal or only place of work), or;
- for the whole of the previous 12 months lived in the parish or within three miles of the parish boundary.
- be a least 18 years old.

Etchingam Trust for Sport & Recreation

Etchingam Recreation Grounds Trust

Etchingam Parish Council is now the Sole Managing Trustee of the above Registered Charities so as a Body Corporate its members (the councillors) are automatically and jointly the Trustees. The first charity manages the Community Halls on Parsonage Croft and the second manages the Queen's Gardens including the playground and also the Viper playpark on Station Approach. These are important village assets taken on by the Council to ensure their longevity and continuing service to the community.

And finally...

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. Any of our councillors would be happy to chat this through and let you know what they think of the job. If you don't know any of them personally please call the clerk for their contact details or look in the latest copy of the Parish Magazine (inside back cover usually).