

## WHAT ARE PARISH COUNCILS?

KSPC IS VERY GRATEFUL TO ELISABETH SKINNER, OF THE UNIVERSITY OF GLOUCESTERSHIRE FOR PERMISSION TO USE, ADD TO AND ADAPT THIS ARTICLE.

Parish Councils have had nothing to do with the Church since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century & should not be confused with Parochial Church Councils (PCCs). TVs Vicar of Dibley has managed to confuse people & annoy those who work - in either forum!

Parish & Town councils are a tier of local government – the tier closest to the people they represent.

Government funded research carried out by Aston University Business School in 1992 accused the majority of Parish Councils of fragile management. Government discovered it could *not* rely on *some* of them to manage public money correctly, nor act within the law relevant to parish councils, nor represent local interests effectively. This has changed; with tighter regulation & more opportunities for training many Parish Councils are now working well in their community leadership role.

When operating correctly a Parish Council is a legitimate voice of the people. It has a legal mandate to represent the interests of the local community in all its aspects. It carries a lot of weight when lobbying other authorities. It has a legal right to collect tax from every household. The average household in King's Stanley probably paid just over **£20** for the whole of the latest financial year to help fund King's Stanley Parish Council's activities. What else can you get for **£20**? You can easily spend £20 on hairdressing. You might be happy to pay more if it helps fund projects that would benefit King's Stanley Parish. A local tax for local benefits makes good sense.

Parish Councils have a legal right to spend money to improve the local quality of life. They can fund recreational & cultural activities. They can provide services for elderly people or the youth of the community or help others to provide them. They can fund community transport schemes, environmental projects, open spaces, IT centres – and village halls. They can provide services where others leave gaps and give pump-priming funds to volunteer organisations where donations are often unreliable. The best Parish Councils reflect local identity, local needs, local issues and benefit from truly local knowledge and a good understanding of the people they represent.

What is expected of a Parish Councillor on a top quality Parish Council?

You know what concerns people in all sectors of the local community. You don't wait for them to come to you.

You make sure you are properly informed to represent the interests of all local people. Sometimes this is difficult as their interests can conflict.

However, you contribute to properly informed decisions through a transparent democratic process and well-chaired, interesting meetings.

You enable the Council to act to improve the quality of life of local people. This can include providing services, supporting local groups, putting pressure on other agencies and authorities and building the capacity of local people to influence decisions that affect their lives.

You keep an eye on public money. You make sure the Council raises income & spends it wisely & lawfully in response to local need. You recognise that the Council is accountable to the electorate.

You do nothing to bring the Council into disrepute and you make sure that all the Council's decisions and dealings are above board.

You help the Council keep a high profile in the community and make sure that local people are well-informed of what the Council does.

Above all, you create a Council that always has people wanting to take their turn as a Councillor.

Creating high quality Parish Councils across the country is a huge challenge but Elisabeth Skinner & colleagues at the University of Gloucestershire have devoted their professional lives to it for two decades. They would like to plant a seed in someone's mind in every Parish that needs to find people willing over the next few years to make a contribution to their Parish Council on behalf of their community. They would urge you to talk about it - with friends, neighbours & family & not to leave it to some else. Being a Parish Councillor is another great way to put something back into the community.

**WHAT CAN PARISH COUNCILS DO? Well, more than you think perhaps.**

### **THE POWERS OF TOWN AND PARISH COUNCILS**

**(A summary of powers for those who want better villages and towns)**

<b>Allotments</b>	<b>Provision and maintenance of allotments for cultivation.</b>
<b>Arts</b>	<b>Developing &amp; improving knowledge of the arts and the crafts which serve the arts.</b>
<b>Baths</b>	<b>Provision of baths &amp; wash-houses (in modern terms may mean a launderette)</b>
<b>Borrowing</b>	<b>Parish, Town &amp; Community Councils can borrow money for up to a maximum of 25 years with loan sanction consent which must be obtained before borrowing.</b>
<b>Cemeteries</b>	<b>Provision &amp; maintenance of burial grounds, cemeteries, crematoria, mortuaries &amp; post-mortem rooms.</b>
<b>Churchyards</b>	<b>Power to contribute to the costs of a churchyard in use &amp; a duty to maintain any closed churchyard where the duty has been transferred by the Church of England.</b>
<b>Clocks</b>	<b>Provision and maintenance of public clocks, on churches or elsewhere.</b>
<b>Commons</b>	<b>Power to protect any finally registered common which has no registered owner.</b>

<b>Crime Prevention</b>	<b>Installation of equipment and establishment of schemes for the detection or prevention of crime; making grants to the police authority for these purposes</b>
<b>Entertainments</b>	<b>Provision of any form of public entertainment &amp; any premises for giving entertainments. (includes maintaining bands or orchestras &amp; providing for dancing.</b>
<b>Halls</b>	<b>Provision of buildings for public meetings and functions, for indoor sports or physical health, recreation, or for the use of clubs or societies having recreational, social or athletic objects.</b>
<b>Legal Proceedings</b>	<b>Power to prosecute and defend any legal proceedings in the interests of inhabitants Power to take part in any public local inquiry.</b>
<b>Lighting</b>	<b>Provision and maintenance of any footway lighting which lights roads or pavements provided the columns are not above a specified height.</b>
<b>Litter</b>	<b>Provision of litter-bins in streets and support for anti-litter campaigns.</b>
<b>Open Spaces</b>	<b>Provision &amp; maintenance of public open spaces, pleasure grounds &amp; public walks.</b>
<b>Parking Places</b>	<b>Provision and maintenance of car and cycle parks.</b>
<b>Parks</b>	<b>Provision and maintenance of public parks and appropriate facilities.</b>
<b>Planning</b>	<b>Local councils have a right to be notified of any planning application affecting their area &amp; to make comments which the planning authority must take into account.</b>
<b>Playing Fields</b>	<b>Provision and maintenance of land for any kind of outdoor recreation, including boating pools.</b>
<b>Ponds</b>	<b>Power to deal with ponds, pools, or other places containing filth or matter prejudicial to health.</b>
<b>Post &amp; Telephone</b>	<b>Power to guarantee the postal or telephone authorities against a loss on a facility.</b>
<b>Public Lavatories</b>	<b>Provision and maintenance of public lavatories.</b>
<b>Rights of Way</b>	<b>Maintenance of public footpaths and bridleways.</b>
<b>Roadside Verges</b>	<b>Power to plant and maintain roadside verges.</b>
<b>Seats</b>	<b>Provision and maintenance of public seats on the highway.</b>
<b>Shelters</b>	<b>Provision and maintenance of shelters for general public use and also particularly for bus passengers.</b>
<b>Signs</b>	<b>Power to erect signs which warn of dangers or announce a place name or indicate a bus stop.</b>
<b>Swimming</b>	<b>Provision of indoor or outdoor swimming pools or bathing places.</b>

<b>Tourism</b>	Provision of facilities for conferences and encouragement of recreational and business Tourism.
<b>Traffic Calming</b>	Contribution towards the cost of traffic calming works provided by highway authorities.
<b>Transport</b>	Establishment of car-sharing and taxi fare concession schemes; making grants for community bus services and bus services for the elderly or disabled; Investigation of public transport, road & traffic provision needs; and provision of information about public transport services.
<b>Village Green</b>	Powers to maintain the village or town green.
<b>General Expenditure Power</b>	In any situation not covered by one of the specific powers described above a council may spend money on any purpose which in its opinion is of direct benefit to its area or to the inhabitants. The total expenditure by the council on all the cases under this general power must not in any financial year exceed £5.84* per local government elector in the parish or town or community.

### **Does YOUR Council Exercise ALL Its Powers?**

**Source: The National Association of Local Councils leaflet "What Can Local Councils Do?"**

\* Or as revised by Central Government from time to time.

A grass roots viewpoint:

If most local councils started spending money on the scale indicated by some of the above possible functions, you, the electors, whose money it is, would have something uncomplimentary say about it. £5.84\* per elector would raise over £11,500.00 in addition to the precept (£21,500.00 for 2009/10).

Interested in Parish Councils aiming to become Quality Parish Councils?

[http://www.defra.gov.uk/rural/quality\\_parishes/default.htm](http://www.defra.gov.uk/rural/quality_parishes/default.htm)