

GUIDE TO BECOMING A PARISH COUNCILLOR

Councillors play a key role in the life of a Parish Council - they are a vital cog in making life better for its residents.

They are:

- ☒ the voice of the community representing local people
- ☒ the lynchpin to partnership work with other levels of local Govt.

All the seats on the Parish Council are up for election EVERY 4 Years giving you the perfect opportunity to get involved by standing as a representative of your community.

We hope this GUIDE will help you make up your mind as to whether you would like to stand for election to become a councillor - and if your answer is **“yes, I would”** it tells you what steps to take to make that become a reality.

Why become a councillor

People become councillors for all manner of reasons. For some it's a completely new direction to take, school governing body, political party or trade union.

But most want to:

- ☒ make a difference to their local community and be involved in its future shape
- ☒ ensure that their Parish is able to access the services it deserves
- ☒ represent the views of local people and ensure they count.

No specific qualifications are needed to become a councillor - life experience is the best thing to bring to the role. It's vital that members represent all sections of the community - we want to attract people from a broad range of backgrounds to stand as candidates.

See later in this document, for a sample of why some of the current councillors decided to stand.

Do I have to belong to a political party?

Membership of a political party is not necessary.

Who Can become a Councillor

To be able to stand as a candidate at a Parish Council election you must:

- ☑ be at least 18 years old on the day of your nomination
- ☑ be a British citizen, an eligible Commonwealth citizen or a citizen of any other member state of the European Union
- ☑ live within 3 miles of a parish to stand for election.
- ☑ meet at least one of the following three qualifications:

☑ You are, and will continue to be, registered as a Parish Council elector for the Parish, from the day of your nomination onwards.

☑ You have occupied as owner or tenant any land or other premises in the Parish area during the whole of the 12 months before the day of your nomination and the day of election.

☑ You have lived in the Parish area during the whole of the 12 months before the day of your nomination and the day of election.

You cannot be a candidate if at the time of your nomination and on the day of the election:

- ☑ you are the subject of a bankruptcy restrictions order or interim order.
- ☑ you have been sentenced to a term of imprisonment of three months or more (including a suspended sentence), without the option of a fine, during the five years before polling day.
- ☑ you have been disqualified under the Representation of the People Act 1983 (which covers corrupt or illegal electoral practices and offences relating to donations) or under the Audit Commission Act 1998.

How decisions are made

Parish councillors are elected every four years and they meet together regularly as 'full' Council. These meetings are open to the public and are led by the Chairman of the Parish Council. He or she is appointed at the annual council meeting in May and serves for one year.

The council sets the financial budget each year, upon which the Parish Precept is based.

Council members make decisions which are in line with overall budgets and other matters which are brought before the Council.

Council meetings are monthly - they are open to the public, except where personal or confidential matters are being debated.

The Parish Council also has a number of Sub-committees, made up of councillors which deal with different areas in which the Council oversee on behalf of the Community, such as Planning; Finance; Footpaths; allotments etc.

What do Councillors Do

The Council is currently split into four parishes with each councillor elected to represent one of them. Roles are as volunteers and can be varied and to a great degree depend on the amount of time individuals give to them, although there is a need for each Councillor to attend a high majority of monthly Council meetings.

Every councillor is a member of full Council and will also sit on some of the sub-committees and working parties to debate and approve council business. Most meetings are open to the press and public but all are governed by written 'procedure' rules.

A good deal of time will be taken up in regular monthly and occasional extraordinary meetings; dealing with local people; carrying out volunteer working parties, within the Parish; carrying out a specific role on the Council

Councillors have responsibilities to their Parishes, Council, the Community as a whole and as Advocates.

To the Parish:

- ☐ represent the views of the community
- ☐ ensure services are provided in the parish
- ☐ help out individual residents on specific issues.

To the Council to:

- ☐ help develop the budget and set the Council annual Precept charge.
- ☐ make and scrutinise decisions.

To the Community:

Councillors are local residents who are able to listen to their communities and bring partners together to implement a shared vision of how they can help to improve their areas. Councillors have a role to play in supporting the local community and working to resolve local issues.

Councillors also need to become actively involved, by offering their time, in a wide variety of community projects, the main three being - The Village Event (pre- event organisation, during the event, and tidying up, after the event); the Firework Display (pre- event organisation, during the event, and tidying up, after the event); and erecting and dismantling the Xmas Tree. Additionally, there are various working parties set up as and when required, such as the Village Litter Pick and Community Speed Watch, where councillors are able and willing to become involved.

It should be emphasised that to ensure that these events are successful on the day, often weeks or months of planning is required beforehand.

As Advocates:

- ☐ speaking up for and on behalf of residents and groups
- ☐ encouraging residents to engage and participate
- ☐ taking part in plan making and planning decisions
- ☐ communicating individual resident's concerns to the council and other interested parties.

How much time is involved

Each councillor will decide their own level of commitment to the role and some of the issues to consider before committing are:

☒ how being a councillor will impact on family and personal relationships - you will need their support as some of your free time will be occupied with council matter's.

☒ the people you represent will look to you for help and assistance.

☒ there are twelve monthly Parish Council meetings a year which you are expected to attend the majority of - meetings start at 7.15pm and generally last for up to two hours

☒ you will be a member of at least one sub-committee, with any meetings being held on an evening, as and when required.

☒ some councillors may also represent the Parish Council on local outside bodies so there will be other meetings to attend.

☒ if you are elected as chairman of a sub-committee more work and time may follow

Probity and Integrity

Councillors' conduct is formally governed by the Code of Conduct adopted by every local government authority. It sets out the rules members should work to.

They must work to make sure they do nothing to bring the council into disrepute and not misuse their official position to their own advantage or the advantage of others. Certain interests, such as land owned in the district, must be registered.

Councillors are expected to follow certain principles:

☒ **Selflessness** ☒ **Objectivity** ☒ **Accountability**

☒ **Openness** ☒ **Leadership** ☒ **Honesty**

How do I become a candidate?

When there is to be an election, a Notice of election is published by the District council. This gives details of the electoral areas, date and time of election, the number of councillors to be elected, and the timetable for proposing a candidate - known as submitting nomination papers.

A copy of the election timetable and a nomination pack can be obtained from the Electoral Services team at Hambleton District Council at the start of a formal election period. The pack will contain all the forms and information you will need to become a candidate. After the close of nominations, if there are more candidates than vacancies then an election will be held.

How do I get nominated to stand?

Nomination packs are available from the Electoral Services team at the start of the formal election period. To be nominated you will need:

☒ a 'proposer' - someone who will put your name forward as a candidate

☒ a 'seconder' - someone who supports the proposal

You must also complete a 'consent to nomination'. The Notice of Election will state the date by which the papers must be submitted to the Returning Officer. Although it is unusual for a Parish Council election, you can either appoint an election agent to manage your election campaign or, alternatively, you can act as your own agent. It is the candidate's responsibility - or that of the agent - to present nomination papers to the Returning Officer before the closing deadline.

It is worth noting, that each candidate is responsible for their own publicity whether it be by themselves, an agent or friends. For example, the voting cards when delivered to households will not list the candidates. The Electoral authorities are only obliged to list the candidates on the voting paper in the "poll booth".

The election process, including what candidates may spend on their campaign, is set out in legislation and it is the responsibility of candidates to ensure that they comply with the law. The nomination pack will contain guidance notes for candidates.

The legislation relating to elections is extensive. Candidates and election agents are advised to familiarise themselves with the provisions. The Returning Officer

and his staff are available to give general advice to candidates and election agents. If you require advice please contact Electoral Services at the Civic Centre, Stone Cross in Northallerton (01609 779977). Please note however, that the team will only provide generic advice. For detailed advice on individual matters, candidates and election agents should use other sources.

Before completing the nomination form, make sure you:

- ☑ don't leave it until the last minute - your papers will need verifying so give yourself enough time to correct mistakes
- ☑ read the nomination paper and supporting material carefully
- ☑ Candidate needs to find the proposer and seconder's respective Election Numbers (these numbers could be made available from the Parish Clerk, or the Electoral Services at Northallerton). Candidate needs to make sure the people nominating and seconding you, are only backing you and not several candidates.

Full details of the nomination process, is available from:

Electoral Services, Hambleton District Council,

Civic Centre, Stone Cross, Northallerton DL6 2UU

tel: 01609 779977 e-mail: elecereg@hambleton.gov.uk

Electoral Register: In the run up to the election candidates can request a free copy of the electoral register (this lists residents who can vote at the next election) for the parish for which they are standing.

Useful Contacts

Hambleton District Council: Civic Centre, Stone Cross, Northallerton DL6 2UU

tel: 01609 779977 fax: 01609 767228 info@hambleton.gov.uk hambleton.gov.uk

☒ Electoral Services - 01609 767227 elecrag@hambleton.gov.uk

Electoral Commission 3 Bunhill Row, London EC1Y 8YZ 0207 2710500

info@electoralcommission.org.uk electoralcommission.gov.uk

Local Government Association (LGA) Lamden House 76 - 86 Turnmill Street,

London, EC1M 5LG 0207 664 3000 local.gov.uk info@local.gov.uk

Local Government Information Unit (LGIU) 251 Pentonville Road, London, N1 9NG

0207 554 2800 lgiu.gov.uk

Useful link:

www.beacouncillor.co.uk

Existing Councillor's Thoughts:

"I have always believed in putting something back in & had done so for most of my life. I had come across the workings of the Parish council having from time to time sent in letters/emails with respect to particular matters & attended various meetings to back that up. The Council dealt with the matters professionally. Accordingly, I felt I could offer little more. Like most people when Neighbourhood Plan raised its head I become more involved & was pleased to see an improvement of the collaboration between the Council & the Community. I realised that I had been lazy over the years & like most people in the community by my indifference had not supported the Council. I was then party to the calling of a contested election & was one of the two people returned.

I have no regrets about this decision & working in conjunction with colleagues of long standing believe I can assist them improve the communication between the Council & the Community & vice versa. Hopefully this will lead to more individuals wishing to do their share on the Council which will lead to a better future for Hutton Rudby as there will always be things to deal with after Neighbourhood Plan is completed "

"Over the years from the village event through the fireworks to the raising of the Christmas tree on the green I have become steadily more aware of the importance of the work the parish council undertakes on behalf of the village; as family commitments lessened I had started to consider helping to put something back into the community that had made life so enjoyable over the years. I started attending council meetings as a member of the public and soon discovered that there was a lot more to the parish council than the high-profile events, subjects like litter picking and dog fouling being far from glamorous still require constant consideration. From there I also started attending the neighbourhood planning meetings, again as a member of the public to offer grassroots support to something deeply affecting village life.

When the election process was triggered earlier this year I was approached by several people asking me to consider standing, it took me several weeks to decide, after all this was a serious decision, but I believed I have the necessary principles including integrity, compliance, humility and respect to see

it through. Being elected was and remains an honour and I am still now being pleasantly surprised by local reaction and level of support from the parish.

I strongly feel that as a living entity the parish council can only get better by embracing change in all its forms including its own members and that the election process is an important and democratic part of this. “

“I was co-opted onto the Council having been approached by an existing Councillor, who was a friend, without having any previous knowledge, experience or interest in Council matters, other than in regard to national issues.

It didn't take long to become aware of the role the Parish Council fulfils within the local community and the amount of time and effort the Councillors (who are all volunteers) and the Parish Clerk put in, to deliver local services, manage and maintain local assets, and carry out various working parties, to carry out minor repairs etc.

The Councillors are from a wide variety of public and private working backgrounds and all are able to provide a wide range of experiences and skill sets to their Parish Council roles and by committing their private time to attend regular Council and sub-committee meetings, planning and organising regular events and working parties, for the benefit of the Community.

The role of Councillor has highlighted the importance of being principled, having integrity, being compliant and working within the Standing Orders, set and agreed at a higher level.

I am fully supportive of the changes we are currently seeing in the operation of the Parish Council by being more open to the community, providing improved access to more information, encouraging the community to become involved and interested and encouraging individuals to seriously consider becoming future Councillors.”
