

About Your Parish Council

Parish and Town Councils form the first tier of local government and, as statutory local authorities, have the powers to provide many services and facilities. A Parish Council may not take a decision that involves spending money unless the matter is included on the agenda for a Parish Council meeting. It must make decisions in an open, accountable, and transparent way and its accounts are subject to internal and external audit.

Each Parish Council is required to set an annual budget or Parish Precept to fund the work it undertakes in the community. The Parish Council has the statutory right to be consulted on local planning applications. It is also consulted on occasion by upper tiers of government thereby making input to higher level decision-making.

Responsibilities

Parish Councillors are elected representatives who are unpaid volunteers and can help on a number of local issues, like providing:

- Consultation on planning applications
- Consultation on footpath lighting throughout the village
- Grass cutting to open spaces*
- Consultation over traffic signing, speed limits and other related matters
- Consultation over street naming
- Parish facilities such as bus shelters, seats, notice boards.
- Maintenance of the churchyard **
- Provision and maintenance of trees on Council-owned land
- Leisure facilities
- Allotments ***

* *Grass cutting services by Staverton Parish Council is limited to the playing field, the play area in School Lane and the roundabout on Thestfield Drive by the canal bridge.*

** *Maintenance of the Churchyard is carried out by the parochial church.*

*** *Unfortunately Staverton Parish Council does not own any land and therefore cannot provide allotment facilities.*

Assets of Staverton Parish Council

The Playing Field: The playing field/sports ground off Cygnet Way is shared with Wiltshire Council and Staverton Primary C of E School on a 999-year lease. The Parish Council manages the ground on behalf of all the community. A donation of £100,000 was also provided for the management of the field and its fencing and gates and is held in a separate bank account and in investment bonds. Staverton Parish Council and Staverton C of E Primary School each contribute several thousands of pounds annually to the maintenance of the field with a 2/3rd split apportioned to the Parish Council and a 1/3rd split apportioned to the School.

The Village Hall: The village hall on the playing field was built with a donation from Persimmon Homes and was converted from a changing room facility to a village hall after consultation with the community. It is managed by Staverton Parish Council and is hired to local groups and organizations. It is also available for children's parties. It is not licensed for alcohol and smoking is forbidden.

The Multi Purpose Hard Court: The court was built with a donation of £22,000 from Persimmon Homes for the use of all the community and is managed by Staverton Parish Council.

The Car Park at Cottles Barton: This car park is on land owned by Wiltshire Council but has been allocated as an overspill car park for users of the playing field and for the use of parents and visitors to Staverton C of E Primary School during school hours to alleviate parking in School Lane.

Duties

The Parish Council must also conduct regular Parish Council meetings, manage elections and represent the interests of residents on appropriate matters.

Parish councils have limited powers to make decision, but they do have the ability to negotiate with, and the power to influence, those other organisations that do make the final decisions (such as the borough or unitary council, health authorities, police etc).

Meetings

The Parish Council meets 6 times a year for the full council meeting, to which members of the public are also invited. They are held on a Monday at Staverton

Village Hall at 7 pm. Meetings may last two or three hours, depending on the agenda. Residents are always welcome at meetings but cannot always speak unless they are invited to by the Chair. Some councils have committees to deal with specific subjects, such as environmental issues. In addition to the regular meetings, councillors are required to attend other meetings representing the council, for example acting as a representative on an outside body, community activities or helping develop a new project for the community. A representative Councillor from Wiltshire Council attends each full meeting of the Parish Council.

Finance Committee: This committee meets prior to the November meeting to discuss budgeting and setting the Precept requirement for the following year.

Executive Committee to the Playing Field: This committee meets in June every other year to discuss the management of the playing field. Its members consist of representatives of the Primary School and the Parish Council.

Decision Making: The full council (a meeting of all council members) is responsible for all decisions but in practice most of the preparation and work is given to smaller groups of councillors or paid officers (parish clerk) prior to a meeting. The minutes of the meeting must show all decisions which have been made and expenditure and income between meetings in the Clerk's Financial Report. No decisions on expenditure can be taken unless it appears on the Agenda for the meeting. Any votes taken must be recorded.

Annual Parish Meeting

This meeting is always held in May of each year especially for residents to have the opportunity discuss any issues they may have and put forward their views for the coming year. The Chair and the Responsible Financial Officer (The Parish Clerk) read out their reports on activity and actions taken for the previous year.

Annual General Meeting

This meeting follows immediately after the Annual Parish Meeting and votes are taken on a new Chair and Vice Chair for the coming year. If elections are held and it does not go to the polls, then the rest of the council members can be co-opted to serve for a further 4 years. The internal audit report will be discussed

and Year End Accounts are presented for approval. All standing orders, risk assessments, policies etc have been updated for scrutiny by the auditor and included in the report. Any large projects or tenders can be discussed and setting of hire fees for the village hall and sports ground for the coming year.

Details of upcoming meetings, agendas and minutes are posted on the noticeboards and on the Parish Council website at www.stavertonparishcouncil.org.uk

Complaints: These can be made directly to the Parish Clerk at parishclerk@stavertonparishcouncil.org.uk

If it involves the Parish Clerk then you can complain directly to the Chair of the Parish Council at: chair@stavertonparishcouncil.org.uk

If you feel the complaint has not been resolved you can complain directly to Wiltshire Council Standards Committee.

The Parish Councillors, the Chair and the Parish Clerk

Staverton Parish Council has 9 volunteer Parish Councillors at any one time and a salaried Parish Clerk.

To be eligible to be a Parish Councillor

You have to be:

- a British subject, or a citizen of the Commonwealth or the European Union
- over 18 years of age

and additionally you have to be one of the following

- a local government elector for the council area for which you want to stand
- have during the whole of the 12 months occupied as owner or tenant any land or other premises in the council area or within 3 miles of it for the whole period
- have during that same period had your principal or only place of work in the council area or within 3 miles of it for the whole period.

You cannot stand for election if you

- are subject of a bankruptcy restriction order or interim order.
- have, within five years before the day of the election, been convicted in the United Kingdom of any offence and have had a sentence of imprisonment (whether suspended or not) for a period of over three months without the option of a fine.

You don't have to be connected to a political party.

If you do become a parish councillor you will have to sign up to the Code of Conduct and the Register of Interests kept by Wiltshire Council.

If you are interested in becoming a Parish Councillor please contact the Parish Clerk at parishclerk@stavertonparishcouncil.org.uk. Anyone is welcome to meet up for an informal chat and get some answers before you decide.

The Role of a Parish Councillor

The main role of a Parish Councillor is to represent the views of his/her community and serve for a 4-year term unless co-opted or elected in a by-election when they serve until the next election. They must apply the law and comply with the Code of Conduct and other adopted policies of the council.

Councillors are required to act in an ethical way and to declare an interest when necessary. Councillors contribute to the work of the council by suggesting ideas, influencing policy and strategy, engaging in constructive debate and by responding to the needs and views of the community. represent the whole community and possess different enthusiasms, skills, attitudes, and interests.

The Role of the Parish Council Chair

The Parish Council Chairman is elected by the other councillors and is typically elected for a period of a year. The Chairman will often represent the council at community events and is responsible for chairing the meetings of the council, ensuring good order, and using their casting vote in the event of a tie on any matter requiring a council decision. Beyond this, the Chairman has no other authority and cannot act independently on behalf of the council.

The Role of the Parish Clerk

The role of the Parish Clerk is to ensure that the council conducts its business properly and to provide independent, objective, and professional advice and support. They are under a statutory duty to carry out all the functions, and to serve or issue all the notifications required by the law of a Local Authority's Proper Officer.

The Parish Clerk is an employee of the Parish Council. They are not an elected officer and can only make decisions which the Parish Council's elected Members

delegate to them. Typically, these responsibilities are set out in the Parish Clerk's contract of employment and include most day-to-day administrative functions.

For a complete guide to information about your Parish Council visit:

www.askyourcouncil.uk