



*Little Downham  
Parish Council*

# LITTLE DOWNHAM PARISH COUNCIL

SO YOU  
WANT TO BE  
A COUNCILLOR?

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## **1. THE PARISH COUNCIL AS A CORPORATE BODY**

Little Downham Parish Council is the governing body of the civil parish, which consists of the villages of Little Downham and Pymoor, and the hamlet of Oxloode. It was created in 1894 and held its first meeting in December of that year. It remains in uninterrupted existence from the moment of its creation and will continue to do so unless dissolved by lawful dissolution; even if all its members vacate office or membership falls so low that it is unable to act for want of a quorum. It is a corporate body with assets and liabilities. It is governed by Acts of Law.

The Council consists of 11 councillors that are qualified members of the public elected or co-opted from the parish. The Council generally meets monthly on a Thursday evening and must hold its Annual General Meeting in May. Full Council Planning meetings and/or extraordinary meetings are held if matters need discussing by the Parish Council prior to its next general monthly meeting. It has a statutory duty to hold an Annual Parish Meeting between 1<sup>st</sup> March and 1<sup>st</sup> June, which is a public meeting for anyone in the community to attend and voice his or her opinion. It is not a Council meeting, although the Chairman of the Parish Council presides.

The Council's constitution is based on the Local Government Act 1972; however, there are many other Acts that it must abide by in accordance with individual statutory powers and duties. Its responsibilities are to provide and maintain certain local services for the community and it achieves this by receiving a source of funding (Precept) annually from the District Council, which is levied from parishioners' rates (Council Tax).

There are over fifty powers that the parish council can use to provide services, though all are subject to and dependent on funding, these include:

- Provision and maintenance of allotments, public baths, washhouses, burial grounds, cemeteries, bus shelters and seats, bye laws, public clocks, commons & common pastures, community centres, Village Halls, sports facilities, footpaths, recreation grounds, lighting, war memorials, mortuaries and post-mortem rooms.
- Power to support entertainment and the arts, community transport, schemes for the detection or prevention of crime,
- Right to appoint school governors and be consulted on planning applications.
- Power to supply litter bins, public conveniences and plant trees.

Although the Parish Council is the lower tier of local government, it is a statutory body that is the voice of the community and it expresses the community's view to the best of its ability.

In addition to the above, the Council is an employer and employs three members of part-time staff to carry out its administration, maintenance of assets and day-to-day management of the Book Café. Law requires that at all times the council must act as a responsible employer and ensure that all staff members have a written contract of employment. Employment Law protects its employees in terms of pay, annual leave, sick leave, maternity and paternity leave and pay, as well as protects them from bullying and harassment and discrimination. Health & Safety law protects employees, councillors and members of the public.

## **2. THE ROLE OF COUNCILLOR**

As elected members of the community, councillors as individuals can only vote and resign. They have no authority or powers as an individual and are not remunerated for their time or work. Councillors work together as a team for the benefit of the community and are required to ensure that all views and interests of the community are heard and put forward where necessary. All decisions are approved at a meeting as a majority decision of the Council and not by a councillor individually.

Upon being elected, councillors must sign a Declaration of Acceptance of office before attending their first meeting and complete a Register of Interests in the parish within 28 days of being elected. Failure to do either will result in the councillor being disqualified.

Councillors are summoned and have a duty to attend all meetings. If they are unable to attend, they must contact the Clerk with an apology and explanation. If a councillor fails to attend any meeting for six months, they will automatically cease to be a councillor unless the council approves the reason for absence before the end of the six month period.

At Council meetings, Councillors are required to make decisions that will maintain certain amenities in the parish on behalf of the community i.e. play areas, recreation areas, local part-time library (in partnership with Cambridgeshire Libraries), grass cutting and highway verge cutting (part funding received from County Council), and Local Nature Reserve and Community Orchard.

Councillors can be elected to be on committees that may have delegated powers. In some cases, the decisions have been agreed in principle by full council but need finer details being discussed. In other cases, committee discussions are reported and recommended to full Council meetings for approval.

Councillors have a statutory requirement as a Council to approve an annual budget to assess how much funding is required to carry out its duties for the next financial year. This is a good time for councillors to suggest new initiatives or promote special interests and projects.

Whether a new councillor, or one that has been elected for many years, councillors are strongly encouraged to participate in training programmes to help them keep up to date with best practices and duties. This covers a wide range of things such as statutory duties and the Code of Conduct, information about the Council's services, challenges and priorities, and training aimed at developing and supporting Councillor's personal skills to enable them to undertake their role most effectively. The Council will arrange the training at a time that is suitable for them and pay for the sessions/course.

For public reference, a list of all councillors and their contact details are displayed on the Parish Council notice boards and the Parish website: [littledownham.net](http://littledownham.net). The notice boards are on the corner of the Village Hall, Main Street, Little Downham, and in the bus shelter at Pymoor.

### **3. DO I WANT TO BE A PARISH COUNCILLOR?**

#### **3.1 Why become a Councillor?**

Parish & Town Councils are the lower (first) tier of local government and closest to communities.

There are many reasons why people stand for election as a Councillor. Often it is because they want to:

- speak on behalf of their local community and to help local people and represent their needs and concerns;
- pursue their political beliefs and aspirations;
- offer their personal or professional skills to assist the work of the Council.

Little Downham Parish Council has 11 Councillors that come from all walks of life. This is important in order to reflect the different points of view and help to shape and develop the quality and effectiveness of services, which the Council provides for the benefit of all its residents.

#### **3.2 What does Little Downham Parish Council do?**

The 11 elected councillors meet monthly to decide on most local issues. Although there is over fifty powers that the parish council might use to provide services for their community, below is a summary of some that relate to Little Downham Parish:

- Provision and maintenance of the Book Café library and access point, sports facilities and recreation areas, conservation area public open space and local nature reserve, grass cutting and street lighting;
- It can contribute towards the Lawn Lane cemetery expenses and maintains, repair and protect the war memorial;
- It is consulted by the District and County Councils on local planning applications;
- It has the power to supply approved crime prevention measures.

A proportion of the Community Council Tax is used to fund the expenditure of the Parish Council. This is the only tier of local government that currently has no Government spending cap, which means that a Parish Council can look to provide any facility that the community requests as long as it has the statutory power and funding to do so. For large capital projects, the Parish Council may borrow money, but it must apply for permission from the Secretary of State. It may also build up funds over a period of time for specific projects, in order to reduce the impact of increasing the Community Tax levy in one go.

The Council employs three members of part-time staff: Clerk/Responsible Financial Officer, Handyman and Book Café Manager. An agreed grievance procedure ensures that if any concerns are raised by employees they are handled properly.

### **3.3 What will my time commitment be?**

This will depend on several factors such as how involved you want to be and if you choose to be involved in Committees, particular issues and projects or be appointed as a representative on an external body.

Committees and Working Groups are set up to consider matters in more detail. Some Committees can have delegated powers from the Council. All Parish Council Working Groups report to full council meetings for decisions to be made.

The Council appoints five eligible members to be representatives of the Downham Feoffees Charity for a four-year term. It also appoints members annually to be representatives of the Conservation Group, Book Café, Village Hall Committee and Parish Magazine. You will have the opportunity to express your interest in serving although there is, of course, no guarantee that each Councillor will be appointed to the bodies on which they would like to serve.

### **3.4 Must I be in a Political Group?**

No, unlike most councillors at the District Council and County Council. Members of Little Downham Parish Council are not in political groups. You may have your political view, however, politics rarely comes into parish matters, as members focus on the local issues and what will most benefit the residents.

### **3.5 What does East Cambridgeshire District Council do?**

Provides environmental services such as:

- Council Tax
- Refuse collections
- Environmental Health
- Electoral services
- Planning (local planning authority)
- Housing
- Dog fouling, fly tipping, noise nuisance
- Recreation on a district basis

### **3.6 What does Cambridgeshire County Council do?**

Serves the community by providing services including:

- Care in the Community
- Heritage
- Libraries
- Transport
- Education
- Highways & Rights of Way
- Trading standards

### **3.7 The Parish Council Code of Conduct**

The Local Government Act 2000 introduced the new Ethical Framework for Parish & Town Councils. Following the Localism Act 2011, the Parish Council adopted (updated May 2015) the same Code of Conduct as East Cambs District Council. All members of the Council must abide by the adopted Code of Conduct and its fundamental principles. These principles underpin the Code of Conduct that applies to all elected and co-opted members of Little Downham Parish Council when attending to Council business.

The General Principles are:

- i. Selflessness
- ii. Integrity
- iii. Objectivity
- iv. Accountability
- v. Openness
- vi. Honesty
- vii. Leadership

**DO YOU HAVE THESE QUALITIES?**

**ARE YOU INTERESTED IN BEING A COUNCILLOR?**

...if the answer to both questions are yes, then your opportunity to apply is this year...

Parish Council elections in East Cambridgeshire are being held in May 2019. Candidates papers will be available in March for a limited period (dates yet to be confirmed). Information about elections can be obtained from the Parish Clerk (contact details overleaf) or from ECDC Electoral Services Tel: 01353 665555 or [www.eastcambs.gov.uk](http://www.eastcambs.gov.uk)

Copies in larger print can be requested  
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