

WHAT GOOD IS A PARISH COUNCIL?

This is a good question. We know we have one here in Haddenham and Aldreth, but what does it do? What can it do? What should it do?

There are a lot of misconceptions about the Parish Council, so we thought it was about time we tried to clarify things for people. We hope to write a few articles for the Village Voice on a variety of topics relevant to the villages over the next few months. These will also be published on the Parish Council website and Facebook for those who prefer to access information that way.

Parish Councils are the lowest tier of local government, and act at a very local level. For this reason, they are probably the most accessible to the public. Our Clerk and all your Councillors live in the parish and have your interests at heart. What happens in and to our villages matter to us all equally. The issues, which concern you most, also concern your Councillors most.

The Council is non-political, so decisions are taken for the good of the villages only, and you are relying on the wisdom, experience and good judgement of your Councillors for these to be well-founded.

Many aspects of parish life are touched and affected by these decisions. Things like our recreation facilities, playing fields, open spaces, cemeteries, and parish lighting. However, as a community, we are also affected by what other tiers of local government do, or don't do. In this area, your Parish Council can act as a powerful local voice and can make representations on your behalf to improve services for us all.

There is often confusion between what we do and what other bodies do. It is hoped that these articles can clarify things a bit. For instance, who would imagine that some dog bins or litter bins are emptied by the parish, whilst some are dealt with by East Cambs District Council? Similarly, with grass-cutting: we do some, the District do some and the County Council do some!

There are parish street lights, as well as County Council street lights. All very strange and confusing!

Many people may have read the Council Minutes and tried to follow the decision-making. Very few have attended Council meetings in person. We are conscious that sometimes there might seem to be a lack of strategy in place. However, we want to reassure you that there is an overall coherence to it all.

The main threads of our activities are

- Environmental matters, which cover the maintenance of all our public estate (grass-cutting, trees, open spaces) and nature areas such as Fairchilds Meadows.
- Recreation matters, which cover the pavilion, playgrounds, playing fields and other sports facilities
- Road safety matters, which links us in to the County Council Highways Department and Police, along with all street lighting issues
- Communications, which will seek to explain policy and strategy, improve the website and encourage feedback from the community
- Planning matters, giving feedback to East Cambs. District Council where we feel it is important

Obviously, all these areas can overlap somewhat, but you can see the general concept. Future articles will expand and explain these areas more fully. In the meantime, we hope this has served to give a flavour of what your Council is doing. Your comments, good or bad, will be welcomed if you wish to give feedback to us.

You can do this via the Parish Clerk, the website, or our new Facebook page.

Details of your Councillors, Committees, and minutes are on the website for your information (www.haddenham.org.uk).

David Lyon

Chairman

Haddenham Parish Council