

A CLERK'S EYE VIEW...What you should know about #4.....

WHO IS INVOLVED IN THE PARISH COUNCIL?

Holbrook's Parish Council (HPC) is made up of volunteers from the parish who are elected by the residents of the parish (if they stand unopposed, they will be elected by default). They have a wide range of skills, experience and interests which is all to the good as it means the parish council has a broad representation from the parish residents.

HPC is supported by an employed Clerk/Responsible Financial Officer and also has an employed Parish Warden who undertakes activities to ensure the parish is tidy and safe for residents. The parish Warden carries out minor works or reports to the clerk more major problems that are passed on to the relevant authorities.

Councillors act corporately and not as individuals. This means that decisions are made by the Council as a whole following discussion and resolution. The Council acts as one body but there are additional individual roles that councillors can undertake.

Chair/Chairperson (also Vice (or Deputy) Chairperson) - The councillor who holds the position of Chairperson can choose how they wish to be addressed – in Holbrook's case, it is Chairman. The Vice (or Deputy) Chairman steps in when the usual Chairman is unavailable to carry out his duties.

The Chairman holds an office created by legislation and is primarily a team leader and has responsibility for managing council meetings to ensure they run smoothly, all business is properly considered and councillors can speak if they wish to.

The Chairman has few special "powers" and is like any other councillor, but he may cast a second vote when a vote is tied, may call an extraordinary meeting (though 2 councillors can force an extraordinary meeting if the Chairman refuses to do so) and can refuse items to be listed on the agenda if they are outside of the remit of the parish council.

The Chair/Chairperson is sometimes the public "face" of the parish council and often undertakes duties that will place them in the public eye as a focus or spokesperson.

Committee/sub-committee Chair/chairperson

This position, if the council has any committees/sub-committees, is the same as for the whole council i.e. team leader, manager of meetings and spokesperson for the committee.

Clerk/Responsible Financial Officer

The role of the clerk is to ensure that the Council as a whole conducts its business properly and to provide independent, objective and professional advice, administrative support (e.g. production of agendas, minutes, dealing with correspondence), and takes action to implement council decisions.

The clerk is not a secretary and is answerable only to the council as a whole. S/he is the proper officer of the council in law. Legally councils can delegate decisions to clerks because they are trusted professional officers whose objectivity allows them to act for the council.

Many parish councils, especially small ones like Holbrook, have a clerk with additional responsibility – that of Responsible Financial Officer (RFO) - to manage the council's financial affairs (often in partnership with the Chairman and other nominated councillors).

Parishioner's involvement with the Parish Council

Most parishioners only contact their parish council when something "big" is happening e.g. a planning application that will have a big impact in the parish, anti-social behaviour occurring or open spaces under threat. Whilst a parish council on their own have limited powers to make decisions relating to these issues, they can (and do) support and provide information and guidance to parishioners wishing to object or have input about these issues. The parish council is taken seriously by other authorities as it is a good reflection of how a community feels about something. The parish council works for the parish and greater involvement by parishioners leads to a better parish for everyone!