

Chelveston-cum-Caldecott News

Election Special

Parish Council and Village News – March 2007

The Parish Council Elections – as you will have seen in the media, it is time for the local elections again. It's the turn of the Parish Council and the District Council (the latter has a new ward structure, so you will be voting for two not three ENC District Councillors this year).

As the Clerk to the Council, I am very keen to see candidates put themselves up for election to the Parish Council. This is not because I want to get rid of the present Councillors, it is because I am concerned that (barring a bye-election in 1994) the Council has not had a contested election since 1983 (yes, 24 years!). Usually only just enough or, more usually, not enough candidates stand, so they become the uncontested Council.

This situation leads to questions as to how democratically representative of you is the Council. I therefore need at least 8 or more candidates to stand to ensure that the new Council has been voted in by you.

What are the requirements of a Councillor?

Firstly the legal requirements (in brief) –

- a) You must have been resident, or have your principle place of employment, within the parish for the last 12 months.
- b) You must be 18 or over, be a qualifying Commonwealth citizen or Euro national and you must be on the electoral roll.
- c) You are disqualified if you are a bankrupt, have been given a custodial sentence of more than three months (inc. suspended sentence) in the last 5 years or have been previously disqualified for corrupt or illegal practices (e.g. bribery, illegal payments).

Secondly the parish requirements -

- a) You should be an active member of the community, who cares about what goes on in & around the parish.
- b) You need to be prepared to volunteer your time to attend meetings, training, more meetings, read lots of correspondence and talk (and listen) to residents, pressure groups, officers from other Councils, etc.

c) You should be prepared to suggest ideas and projects and, if required, lead these to completion.

d) If your motivation is fame and glory, then this probably isn't the right place for you. Councillors are occasionally thanked, often ignored and (if you vote the "wrong" way) sometimes derided.

But the local Council doesn't have any powers?

This old chestnut comes out periodically, usually over planning consent, so I'll deal with this one first. The general principle is that it is the next tier of government above that decides planning applications, on the grounds they see the bigger picture. So housing, etc. gets decided by the District, the County decides schools and quarries, whilst nuclear power stations get the okay from the Secretary of State.

Locally, if someone submits an application, the Council has a statutory right to comment. If the Council's decision and the District planning officer's decision match (for/against) then that is it (unless called in to a planning committee for other reasons). If the decisions differ, then the ENC ward Councillor is asked to comment. If their decision matches ours (i.e. 2-1 against the planning officer) then it goes to a planning committee. If the ward Councillor agrees with the planning officer (i.e. 2-1 against us), the planning officer's decision carries.

The Council is a creature of statute i.e. everything it does is because there is a statutory power or duty. There are a lot of statutes about and the Government keeps adding to them (e.g. *Crime & Disorder Act 1998*, *Clean Neighbourhoods & Environment Act 2005*). Powers currently used include Precepting (raising money through the Council tax), providing public lighting (the 44 street lamps), maintaining the verges (the monthly grass cut), giving grants (Church clock fund, village fireworks, village funday), traffic calming (signage, gateways) and so on.

Last year the government introduced plans to extend the Power of Wellbeing to certain parish Councils – this power more or less gives the Council the power to do anything that isn't expressly prohibited if it benefits the community.

But the local Council doesn't have any money?

Over the last term (4 years) the Council has raised over £28.9k income (excluding a further £18k of donations specific to the memorial fund).

A little over half of that went on the grass-cutting and street lighting (£16.5k), with the rest being spent on various projects and running costs within the parish.

But the local Council doesn't do anything?

In the last 4 year term the Council has –

Introduced traffic calming measures on the B645 (Higham & Kimbolton Roads), the B663 (Raunds Rd), Caldecott and extended the 30mph limit on Bidwell Lane (which is now signed at both ends).

Increased the grass-cutting contract to provide more cuts over more areas, including the Millennium garden - remember how it was when NCC just did the 3 cuts a year?

Worked with NCC Rights of Way to get two footbridges replaced, as well as being involved with the Ramblers and others to get the old ROW reopened over the former airfield.

Worked with the 305th BGMA to build the new memorial and landscaping on what was a piece of waste grassland in the centre of the village.

Installed a new street lamp to protect the crossing on the Higham Rd and replaced an older 80w mercury lamp in Water Lane with a more efficient 35w sodium street lamp.

Reported 86 incidents of fly tipping to ENC in order to have it removed promptly.

Considered 43 planning applications, of which only 4 (9.3%) were decided differently by ENC.

Refurbished one village seat in Caldecott and installed two new ones by the memorial.

Replaced three litterbins in Water Lane to stop vandals throwing the contents into the brook.

Carried out an opinion survey of resident's views on the development proposals for the former airfield site.

Set-up and operated a web-site to promote its activities and host the village history project – these pages are very popular with the site hits rising from 324 in 2003 to 15,368 in 2006.

Who are the present Councillors?

Councillor	Attendance	Max possible
Adrian Dale	40	42
Michael Foulger	46	48
Mick Izzard	44	47
Robin Meeson	38	48
Adrian Palfreeman	33	48
Sarah Stopps	47	48
Melvyn Wooding	44	48

So what do I do if I want to become a Councillor?

Apply to the Returning Officer at
East Northamptonshire Council
East Northamptonshire House
Cedar Drive
Thrapston
Northants
NN14 4LZ

for an application form and information pack. You will need two sponsors who are also on the parish's electoral roll to support your application.

All valid forms have to be received by noon on Weds 4th April 2007. Assuming there are more than 7 candidates, an election will be called, to take place on Thursday 3rd May 2007. Candidates are permitted to canvass for votes (within certain restrictions – you can't buy or bribe voters), but no political parties operate at parish level – we need Councillors who are going to work together for the parish, not a party line.

The winners of the "first past the post" system are those with the highest number of valid votes, working down until all 7 places are filled.

The new Councillors will meet for the first time at the Annual Parish Council Meeting on Monday 14th May 2007, when they will choose their leader for the coming year.

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Edited by the Clerk
Legal Notice – This newsletter is not an election document and does not seek to promote or support any candidate(s).