

Make a Change, Become a Parish Councillor!

The Whitchurch-on-Thames Parish Council would like you to consider helping your community by becoming a Parish Councillor.

What do councillors do?

Local councillors are the champions of their community who invest time in local projects and issues to the benefit of residents and the neighbourhood. Councillors attend to local needs of residents, local groups and businesses, make decisions on local services, and work closely with both district and county councils to progress vital projects to invest in the future of the community.

In Whitchurch-on-Thames, there are a number of areas that councillors typically spend time addressing issues or making decisions on:

- Maintaining and improving open spaces such as on the Village Green, the Maze, the Manor Road playground. and the new Polish Church Memorial Garden.
- Addressing traffic and parking related issues.
- Liaising with Oxfordshire County Council to address issues with drainage, flooding, and road and pavement improvements.
- Maintaining and executing our village emergency plan.
- Supporting the Village Hall Management Committee.
- Working to address issues raised with planning applications such as Eastfield House and the Coombe Park fence along Hartslock bridleway.
- Liaising with the allotment's society.
- Working to address resident's issues as they are raised.

What do councils do?

In Oxfordshire, there are three levels of local councils:

- **Oxfordshire County Council (OCC)**– is responsible for maintaining all roads, pavements and drainage. They also fund schools and social care services.
- **South Oxfordshire District Council (SODC)** is responsible for making planning decisions and managing local services such as waste removal and street cleaning.
- **The Parish Council** - leads on other areas where we own or rent land and facilities such as the Village Green, Village Hall, Manor Road playground, the War Memorial and the allotments. We are the first point of contact for residents to raise local issues. We either work to address issues within the powers we have, or work with SODC and OCC as needed.

Parish Council activities are funded by a local tax, called a precept, which is determined by the council. The Whitchurch Parish Council currently receives approximately £26,000 budget each year to spend in the village along with any other grants or fundraising we may seek.

In Whitchurch-on-Thames, the Parish Council worked with the community to develop the [2019 Village Plan](#) (available on the village website) that defines the priority areas that the village wanted to improve. The Parish Council has been working to implement many of these recommendations that include:

- Making improvements to the Village Hall.
- Improve pavements in the village including addressing pedestrian safety issues.
- Forming a Green Team to better maintain village open spaces.

- Implement a community emergency plan.
- Finding solutions to traffic and parking issues.
- Implementing a 20-mph speed limit.
- Replacing the pavilion and tea hut on the Village Green.
- Re-assessing the Conservation Area by re-submitting a new appraisal for the Conservation Area.

How long does it take?

A recent survey by the National Association of Local Councils found that councillors put aside, on average, three hours a week for council work. Some councillors will spend more than this, but this is not mandatory. Council work often includes attending meetings, engaging with residents and speaking to local groups and bodies on behalf of the council.

In Whitchurch, we generally have one two hour meeting each month that councillors are required to attend. Extraordinary meetings may typically be held a few times a year. Meeting preparation includes reviewing all agenda items, including planning applications and preparing motions with background material for other Councillors to debate and vote on at the meeting. Councillors may choose to get involved one or more initiatives that requires participation in a Working Group or liaising with key stakeholders in the village.

What are the requirements to become a councillor?

You must be:

- A British citizen, or a citizen of the Commonwealth, or the European Union.
- 18 years of age or older.
- A resident of the village for at least 1 year, or own land or work in the Parish for 1 year.

Councillors need to run for election in an election year, which is normally every 5 years. In Whitchurch we have 7 councillors. When a vacancy becomes available between elections, the Parish Council is normally allowed to “co-opt” a new member without the need for an election. In an election year, all councillors must submit nomination forms to run as a candidate. In the last election year, 2019, all Councillors were re-elected without the need for a public ballot as there were 7 or fewer candidates.

How can I get involved?

We need people of all ages, skills, and backgrounds to ensure that our Council can work professionally and effectively, representing a cross-section of views in the village. A full job description of responsibilities and desired skills can be found on the website, but please don't let the list of skills stop you from getting involved as we know that everyone brings different things to the Council and will continue to develop through their experience working on the Council. Training courses are available to all Councillors and more experienced Councillors are available to mentor new members. We expect applicants to have some knowledge of issues in the village that they would like to help address, but the most important traits we look for are people who care about our community and want to make a difference.

To find out more, please contact the Parish Council Clerk at parishclerk.whitchurchonthames@gmail.com or any member of the Council.

Whitchurch-on-Thames Parish Council, April 2021