

# Brenchley and Matfield Parish Council

**Serve the community – become a Parish Councillor!**

**THE NEXT ELECTIONS WILL BE IN MAY 2020**

## **What is a Parish Council?**

Parish Councils (and Town Councils) are elected public bodies whose principle function is to promote the well-being of their communities. Also known as “Local Councils”, they are the first tier of local government in England. Within Kent and Medway there are 320 Local Councils. Brenchley and Matfield Parish Council is one of sixteen Local Councils in the Tunbridge Wells Borough Council area, which is the second tier; the third tier is Kent County Council.

As the local authority closest to communities, Parish Councils are often the first port-of-call people will go to for help with their concerns, ideas for improving the parish - and offers of help to make those improvements. For these reasons, Parish Councils are a vital part of any community.

## **Why become a Parish Councillor?**

If you've never been to a Parish Council meeting, you may be forgiven for thinking that Parish Councillors are a group of (probably older) people who meet now and then to talk amongst themselves. If, however, you live in a community where something 'big' has happened – or is happening - you'll know that when people in the community need support and guidance, it is often to the Parish Council that they turn.

By being elected a Parish Councillor, you become someone your community will look to for help, guidance and support, and a community leader who can influence decisions for the benefit of the people you serve. Seeing your community change for the better, as a result of decisions you have helped make, is something that can give you a sense of achievement and pride.

## **How much time does it take up?**

Brenchley and Matfield Parish Council meets once a month for the full Council meeting. The length of meetings depends on the issues on the agenda but is typically around two hours. BMPC also has provisional planning meetings once a month, where the number of applications is too great to include in the full meeting. In addition, there are sub-committees to deal with specific functions, such as policy and management, and finance. Councillors are occasionally required to attend other meetings, for example if appointed to represent the Council on outside bodies.

## **How long does a Parish Councillor serve for?**

As a Parish Councillor you would be elected for a four-year term. However, you may of course stand down at any time. Occasional vacancies may be filled by co-option, for which there is an approved procedure.

## **What powers do Parish Councils have?**

The main power available to Local Councils is to levy a “precept” to pay for their activities. The precept is the Parish Council's share of the council tax and, in our area, is collected by the Borough Council. In addition, there are powers related to the provision of allotments, sports, play and recreational facilities, bus shelters, and car parks. In Brenchley and Matfield the public toilets are paid for from the precept, through a contract with the Borough Council. The PC also make grants to organizations that provides services of benefit to the community – such as the Parish Archives, the Air Ambulance, and the Paddock Wood Community Advice Service – and occasionally gives donations to local groups.

## **Councillor Duties and Responsibilities**

Brenchley and Matfield Parish Council has 9 Councillors. Their duties and responsibilities reflect the variety of activities undertaken by the Council – as the following list shows.

- **Planning** – responding to planning applications, engaging with the Borough Council's Local Plan, and preparation of a Neighbourhood Development Plan.
- **Traffic** – reporting potholes, damaged or missing road signs, and other highways issues. Liaising with the police, and tackling road safety, through a Highways Improvement Plan.
- **Finance** – calculation of the precept and setting the budget; income generation; and assessing applications for grants.

- **Organizational matters** – complying with health & safety regulations, stewardship of Council and community assets, and ensuring compliance with statutory obligations.
- **The Environment** – maintaining trees and the pond, managing the allotments, and stewardship of Cinderhill Centenary Woodland.
- **Communication** – maintaining the parish website, keeping in contact with community organizations, and engaging in purposeful public relations – including social media,
- **Legal and assets management functions** – maintaining an Asset Register, leases, agreements, licences, and byelaws.

As will be seen, there is a wide range of skills, knowledge and experience that prospective candidates can offer to support the work of the Council and help promote the well-being of the community. An essential requirement for a modern councillor is a good level of computer-literacy – so a general competence in the main programs of Microsoft Office will be beneficial to the role. The Council does not provide any equipment for Councillors – anyone elected to serve would need to have access to the standard equipment, including a printer.

To comply with Data Protection legislation, Councillors are required to use a generic e-mail address that will be provided via the Council's domain, for all Council business. Training and assistance to comply with this requirement will be provided.

### **Community Engagement**

All meetings are open to the public, and there is a forum before the start of meetings at which members of the public can raise concerns and ask questions. There is also an Annual Parish Meeting, through which the Council reports to the community on its activities. Meetings are advertised on the Council notice boards and on the parish website. Residents may also bring to the attention of the Parish Council anything that concerns them, by contacting the Chairman or the Clerk.

For more information, or an informal chat, please contact the Clerk.

Chantal Brooks  
[Clerk@brenchleypc.org.uk](mailto:Clerk@brenchleypc.org.uk)  
 01892 723586

## **Information Event**

The Parish Council will be holding an information event for prospective candidates **on Thursday 5th March 2020, at 7.00 pm, at Matfield Pavilion**. There will be a presentation from Clive Powell, Local Councils Adviser for the Kent Association of Local Councils. Experienced Councillors, and the Clerk, will be on hand to clarify and expand on the role of a Parish Councillor, and respond to any queries. Refreshments will be provided.

## **Election Information**

The election for the Parish Council will take place on **May 7, 2020** and will be overseen by Tunbridge Wells Borough Council. Notice of the election is likely to be published in the middle of March, with the deadline the submission of nominations approximately three weeks later.

If you would like some more information about the election, please contact:

Mathew Jefferys AEA (Cert)  
 Democratic and Electoral Services Manager  
 Town Hall, Royal Tunbridge Wells, Kent, TN1 1RS

T: 01892 554403 ext: 4403  
 E: [mathew.jefferys@tunbridgewells.gov.uk](mailto:mathew.jefferys@tunbridgewells.gov.uk)