

## THE ROLE OF THE PARISH COUNCIL

Parish councils are corporate bodies which have a separate existence separate from its members and therefore require express authority (statute or delegation) to do something. As a body, is responsible for its actions. Legislation determines what the council must do (its duties), what it can choose to do (its powers), and what it cannot do <https://www.cpalc.org.uk/>

**LOCAL GOVERNMENT STRUCTURE** comprises several independent tiers (county, unitary, borough and parish councils) each having specific duties, rights, responsibilities and powers.

Milton Keynes is a Unitary Council and is the principal council for Weston Underwood.

**The establishment of** Weston Underwood Parish Council derives from the Local Government Act of 1894 in which the local church authorities were relieved of the increasingly onerous duty of dealing with civil matters. The Parish Councils was established to administer civil affairs in the parish, leaving the parochial church council to administer solely ecclesiastical affairs.

**Weston Underwood Parish Council** exists to serve the public of the community that it represents. Parish Councils are the least bureaucratic and the cheapest kind of local authority in existence. Every Parish Council is an independent unit of democracy whose members are elected for four years at a time, in the same way as any other council.

The Powers Available to Parish Councils are laid down in law and although all Parish Councils must meet their essential obligations, the extent to which each Council uses its other rights and powers varies considerably. Over time, and in differing circumstances, each Parish Council has inevitably developed its own role in the affairs of its Parish, dictated partly by the way in which principal Local Authorities provide their services to the local community, and partly in response to the needs and demands of residents and organisations in that civil Parish. It is a role that continually evolves, depending on local circumstances and upon the judgement of serving Councillors.

Because the work they do has some cost, they are empowered to raise the necessary funds from residents in the parish by means of an annual "precept" collected as part of Council Tax.

In most places Council Tax comprises money collected on behalf of several authorities including Bucks Fire Authority and Thames Valley Police.

As with all other Parish Councils, all the meetings of Weston Underwood Parish Council are open to the public although sometimes certain confidential matters occur which will require the press and public to be excluded for part of the meeting. An assembly for all the electors of the parish (called the Annual Parish Meeting) is held every year between March and May.

The accounts, of course, are strictly audited each year, firstly by an internal auditor appointed by the parish council, and secondly by external auditors. The internal auditor also has to check the robustness of the administrative and accounting procedures adopted by the Council.

**Weston Underwood Parish Council has two main functions:-** The things it does itself and the things it tries to persuade others to do or helps them to do. Both functions are equally important and sometimes overlap.

### **Weston Underwood Parish Council - as a service provider:-**

Employs a part time CILCA qualified Parish Clerk<sup>i</sup> and engages contractors where necessary (usually for specialised work, such as tree surgery, grounds maintenance etc.).

It considers all planning applications and planning appeals making representations to the Local Planning Authority and The Planning Inspectorate, as appropriate.

It is represented on an increasing number of liaison groups with other authorities, including Olney Area Forum and Milton Keynes Parish Forum.

It gives regular financial assistance to small local voluntary and charitable organisations.

By showing early commitment to local projects in the form of grant aid, the parish council can often assist voluntary organisations in their applications for further funding from other sources.

### **Weston Underwood Parish Council - working with other authorities:-**

Reports defects and problems to [Milton Keynes Council](#) and to other statutory authorities, and tries to persuade them to carry out necessary repairs and improvements.

It sometimes puts pressure on the Local Highway Authority to give greater priority to certain highway safety schemes by offering joint funding.

As previously stated, it can influence decisions on planning applications under the established consultation procedure and it tries to influence forward planning matters (including the preparation of supporting documents that form part of the Local Development Framework and Plan:MK).

It is consulted on a wide variety of matters by numerous statutory bodies and other organisations dealing with national, regional and local matters, on which it submits a formal response.

---

<sup>i</sup> **Certificate in Local Council Administration**