

Information about Parish Councils

Issued by Loversall Parish Council

What is a Parish Council?

It is a statutory local authority set up under the Local Government Act 1972 and is sometimes referred to as the first tier of Government. It operates in the area of a defined civil parish or group of parishes. A Town Council, eg Tickhill Town Council, has exactly the same powers as a Parish Council - it is simply that the council has decided to take on the title 'town' as more appropriate. Parish Councils are secular organisations and have nothing to do with Parochial Church Councils (executive committees of the Church of England) and a church parish may have different boundaries from parish councils. Parish Councils vary greatly in size, the largest being Bradfield Parish Council in Sheffield with a 15,000 population and a budget of £250,000.

If you live in Loversall you are governed by two types of local authority – Doncaster Metropolitan Borough Council (DMBC) and Loversall Parish Council. Loversall Parish Council has no responsibilities for St Katherine's Church or the maintenance of its grounds which, along with churches at Wadworth and Balby, are the responsibility of the Parochial Church Council. Loversall PC is a very small parish with a precept of £900 in 2014/15

Who is on the council?

The council is made up of councillors elected by the electors of the parish. Every year the council elects one of them to be the Chairman of the council (called the Mayor of a Town Council). The council normally has a paid officer who organises meetings, ensures that statutory financial and administrative requirements are met and helps to carry out the council's decisions - this officer is usually called the Clerk which rather understates their role as they are both the "Proper Officer" and "Responsible Financial Officer" for the Parish Council and it is their job to ensure that business is conducted properly. The Clerk does not vote or make decisions; that is the role of the councillors. Parish Councillors receive no payment and are bound by a Code of Conduct to act in the best interests of the Parish as a whole.

Loversall has provision for five councillors. The Loversall parish precept remained the same from around 2000 to 2015 making it difficult because of inflation to afford a Parish Clerk for more than one hour per week. It is allowable for the Chairman to act as Clerk (unpaid) but only on an interim basis. In 2014 /15 the Chairman of Loversall PC was also the Clerk. In 2015/16 the Parish precept was increased by 4.9%, working toward the affordability of employing a Clerk.

What powers do Parish Councils have?

Theoretically they have a wide range of powers, which essentially relate to local matters, such as looking after community buildings, bus shelters, car parks and much more. Parish Councils must be notified by Planning Authorities of planning applications made to them. They also have the power to raise money (the parish precept) through the council tax. *Loversall being a small Parish does not need to exercise the full range of powers – for example it does not manage a Community Hall or take responsibility for street lighting.*

To whom are they accountable?

The electors of the parish. Elections to parish councils usually are held every four years. Exceptionally, the councillors elected in 2015 may serve for six years. The council's accounts are subject to scrutiny by the District Auditor and the Standards Board for England can investigate alleged breaches of the Code of Conduct by individual councillors. *Although Loversall PC is a very small council it is nonetheless subject to the same degree of legal regulation, scrutiny and bureaucracy as much larger parish councils.*

Can I attend meetings of the council?

Yes, all meetings of the council and its committees must be open to the general public and the press, except in very exceptional circumstances. The time and place of meetings are advertised beforehand and three days in advance of the meeting- traditionally on the parish noticeboard. The Clerk will be able to give details of forthcoming meetings. *In Loversall the notice of meetings (and any other notice statutorily required) is placed on the Parish notice board at the end of Bubup Hill. More recently also provided on Facebook and from August 2015 on the Parish Council Website.*

Can I speak at the meeting?

You cannot speak while the normal business of the meeting is being conducted. However, it is good practice (which nearly all councils follow) to allow some time at the meeting when members of the public may address the council on an issue that concerns them. The Clerk will provide you with details about how this works in your council. *Provision for speaking at Loversall PC is covered by Standing Orders based on models for standing orders issued by the Yorkshire Association of Local Councils and National Association of Local Councils.*

Can I see the minutes of council meetings and other papers?

Under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 you may see and have a copy of the 'recorded' information held by the council (unless it is classed as exempt information in the Act). This includes reports, minutes, correspondence and emails. The information has to be provided within 20 working days. There may be a photocopying charge. Parish Councils are now required to place their Minutes on a publicised website within one month of a council meeting taking place. *Loversall PC now has its own website but since 2013 has provided summaries of meetings on Facebook and provided an email address for parishioners to make contact.*

How do I find out who the councillors are?

From the Clerk. *In Loversall by email: loversallcouncil@gmail.com*

In Loversall there is a list on the parish notice board and on Facebook (Loversall Parish Council). Councillors were also listed in the Loversall PC newsletter, first issued in Winter 2013, which was distributed to every household in the parish. In 2015, four councillors were duly elected in an uncontested election in Loversall. A fifth Councillor will be co-opted. The elected councillors in office until 2021 are : Pat Barbour, Nigel Tomlinson, Keith Wilson and Colin Wright. The co-opted Councillor is Spencer Morris. None of the councillors has a declared affinity with any political party.

How do people get elected to the council?

Exceptionally, parish councillors elected in 2015 may serve up to six years before the next election is called but usually elections are held every four years and will usually coincide with a District Council election. A Public Notice of a forthcoming election is placed on noticeboards according to rules regarding timing of the Notice.

Sometimes the number of people who put their names forward for election equals or is less than the number of seats on the council. In these circumstances there is not a poll on election day and the people nominated are deemed duly elected, unopposed. If the number deemed elected is less than the number of seats on the council, then the council is required to co-opt people onto the council to fill the vacancies. The process of co-option is strictly governed by procedures laid down in law.

If a seat on the council becomes vacant between normal elections then a special procedure has to be followed which can lead to an election or, more usually, the co-option of a new councillor.

Do councillors have to declare any financial or other personal interests they have in a matter under discussion by the council?

Yes. All councillors have to abide by a Code of Conduct, which sets out which interests have to be declared. They also have to enter relevant financial and other interests in a special Register that is open to inspection by members of the public. The council's Clerk has a copy of the Code of Conduct and the Register or it can be inspected at the District Council's offices. *These documents are also available on Loversall Parish Council's Website*

What do I do if I have a complaint against the council?

First of all speak informally to the Clerk or Chairman to see if there is an easy way of resolving the matter. Failing that, email or write formally to the council (send the letter to the Clerk). Ask for a copy of the council's complaints procedure. The council will consider your complaint at its next meeting.

Hopefully, this will lead to a resolution. If it does not, then the next steps will depend on the nature of the complaint. If you believe there has been a breach of the Code of Conduct you need to write to the Monitoring Officer at DMBC. If you believe there has been some other kind of financial or other impropriety you should initially discuss it with the DMBC's Monitoring Officer who will advise. Please note that the Local Government Ombudsman (who investigates maladministration) does **not** have any jurisdiction with respect to town and parish councils.

What powers do Parish Councils have with respect to planning applications?

Parish Councils are consulted by the relevant Planning Authority (which could be either the District/Borough Council, the National Park Authority or the County Council) on all planning applications. Any views expressed by the Parish Council will be taken into account by the Planning Authority before a decision is made, providing the points made are relevant to the determination of a planning application. The final decision is made by the Planning Authority (DMBC), **not** the Parish Council. The Caravan Club of Great Britain is the designated Planning Authority for the purposes of granting permission for certificate locations (CLs) for caravan sites.

Further information

If you have other questions or require further information, please contact us:

by email: loversallcouncil@gmail.com

or Facebook: "Loversall Parish Council"

or attend one of our meetings the dates of which are published with the agendas on the parish notice board on Bubup Hill and on our website.