

Is it time for us to form a Parish Council in Baylham?

Dear Residents,

As you may be aware, a small group of us have got together to see if there is any merit in changing Baylham's local governance from a Parish Meeting to a Parish Council. Prior to any such move, a Community Governance Review must be triggered and for our village this would need the submission of a petition signed by 37.5% (approx. 83 people) of our electors in favour of the change.

We are therefore writing to ask if you would carefully consider this letter with a view to having a Q&A at the next Coffee Morning Sat. 4th May and an open forum at our AGM on 22nd May 2019.

THE CHOICE.

The future looks certain to bring us further challenges that we will have to face, for good or ill. As a community, are we happy to continue to rely on someone kind enough to act largely alone as Chair of the Parish Meeting, or do we wish to opt for a change of governance? A Parish Council brings with it a constitution which defines certain responsibilities on those who stand for office, and offers potentially more power for, and better engagement within, our community.

PARISH COUNCIL RESPONSIBILITIES AND POWERS.

Parish councils have certain powers that can be discharged within the parish, and they are a recognised body which district and county councils are required to consult, prior to making decisions that affect the community.

There are many powers and responsibilities where a Parish Council can make a difference. The most relevant for Baylham are as follows:

- Traffic calming - power to contribute financially to traffic calming schemes
- Town and Country Planning - right to be notified
- Neighbourhood planning - power to act as lead body for a neighbourhood plan
- Crime prevention - power to spend money on prevention and detection measures
- Environment - power to issue fixed penalty notices for litter, graffiti and offences under dog control orders ie dog fouling
- Highways - right to be notified of plans, and power to provide certain traffic signs, to plant trees, shrubs and maintain verges and to submit complaints requiring a response.
- Public buildings and village hall - power to acquire (by agreement) and provide for public meetings
- Ditches and ponds - power to maintain
- Land - power, to acquire by agreement, to appropriate, to dispose of and to accept as a gift
- Cemeteries - power to contribute towards expenses
- Charities - power to act as trustees

PARISH COUNCIL - POTENTIAL BENEFITS

- The Council is a statutory body, recognised as the first tier of local governance, and as such has more influence (not powers) with County and District councils, police, utility companies, land owners etc
- Since there must be a minimum of five elected councillors, duties, responsibilities and workload to support the community may be shared. There must be a Chair and Deputy plus at least 3 others.
- The Council must employ a Parish Clerk (see below).
- The Clerk is an expert on local governance and can bring a wealth of experience from similar communities, as well as being a first point of contact available to residents
- There must be a minimum of 4 meetings a year (open to the public) plus the AGM. In addition to the required agenda items these give a regular opportunity to discuss community issues.
- All Parish Council activities MUST be recorded and made public.
- Parish Councils have increased opportunities for fund raising through district and county councils as well as other funding bodies such as Community Action Suffolk and companies like SUEZ UK (the incinerator)
- Parish Council support is also given by the National Association of Local Councils. Suffolk branch is in Claydon. www.nalc.gov.uk

THE CLERK

The Parish Clerk manages, and to a degree controls, the processes the Parish Council must legally follow. In addition to the councillors, the Clerk is a readily available, independent contact for all Residents to use. Contact can be by mail, e mail and phone. We would look to hire a Clerk who has experience of other parishes (as they often do) so they can act as a resource and we can use their, often considerable, knowledge to the benefit of our community.

THE PRECEPT.

Should we opt for a Parish Council, any subsequent benefits will have to be weighed up against the requirement to levy a charge (the precept) on all Council Tax paying residents. It is proposed to raise about £2000 per annum. The following examples illustrate the approximate range of costs per year. Council Tax Band A £11 - Band E £19 - Band H £32

From this money, the council is required to employ the Clerk costing about £1000.

The advantages of a Precept are as follows:

1. It makes any elected officers more accountable to the community.
2. It means that all residents have a stake in the community, and have the right to demand good value for money from their representatives.
3. It means the Parish Council will have a small amount to spend on good causes within the community, eg the village hall.
4. Residents can propose projects for funding that the precept can be used for.

ENGAGEMENT

In order to give everyone the opportunity to contribute to this decision making process, the first step, prior to the formation of a Parish Council, is to ask those of you who are prepared to give time to the tasks below and would like to seek election (assuming the community gives its approval), to make contact with one of the undersigned.

WHAT NEEDS DOING

In addition to needing a Chair and Deputy, we suggest that we need people to take responsibility for:

- Baylham Village Plan
- Liaison with other ongoing neighbourhood plans in Claydon-Gt Blakenham-Barham and Needham Market.
- Planning applications ie supporting or objecting to future planning and development proposals, building relationships with MSDC planning, enforcement and policy departments.
- Ecology and environment monitoring ie protected species, trees and hedgerows, litter, any pollution issues ie fires, footpaths and bridleways, verges and ditches.
- Equestrian liaison ie with existing land owners to improve the equestrian environment.
- SnOasis Parish Alliance liaison ie joining committee which is responsible for minimising resident impact from the development.

Once we know who is interested then we will meet together, discuss responsibilities and next steps. If you would like to put yourself forward then please contact/email any of the undersigned before 1st May 2019.

For more information on the workings of parish councils, the Wikipedia page is quite informative:
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Parish_councils_in_England

With kind regards,

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