Parish Meetings

Are Parish Meetings the same as Parish Council Meetings? The simple answer is 'No' although both are regulated by the Local Government Act 1972 and other statutes controlling public meetings.

Parish Council Meetings will be the more familiar of the two. The Parish Council hold these meetings once a month, usually on the second Wednesday, save for in the traditional August recess. Essentially, this is where Council business is discussed and decided upon by the elected members only i.e., your Parish Councillors.

In contrast a Parish Meeting consists of local government electors of the parish and the purpose of the meeting is to discuss parish affairs. There is no statutory definition or definitive caselaw to determine what constitutes a 'parish affair'. However, a legal view is that a 'parish affair' includes an issue, activity, or subject which specifically affects a particular parish and which the parish meeting may wish to discuss, debate and potentially influence.

An assembly of a parish meeting should therefore provide for an effective forum for the local government electors in the parish to discuss matters specific to the parish, even if there is a separate parish council. Attendance at such a parish assembly by members of the parish council will also serve to demonstrate that the council is receptive to hearing the views of local residents.

At least one Parish Meeting must be called on an annual basis and held between 1st March and 1st June (dates inclusive) and may be convened by any of the following:

- The chairman of the parish council;
- Any two parish councillors for the parish;
- Any six local government electors in the parish.

Historically, therefore, it is perhaps no surprise to hear that this responsibility has always fell to the chairman of the parish council with the parish meeting generally being convened to follow after a normal monthly parish council meeting that falls within the statutory timeframe. Traditionally these meetings were then utilised as a forum to deliver the chairman's annual report. This is certainly no criticism; the chairman's report is an important reflection, not only on past parish council performance, its successes and perhaps some of the more frustrating moments, it also provides for a focus on future council intentions, direction and aspirations. In fact, the last chairman's report is a fine example and a very worthy re-read. It may be found on our web-site in the News & Articles section.

Public participation has also now been an agenda item in full parish council meetings for some years. I still recall its welcome introduction from the days I regularly attended parish council meetings as a keen public observer.

Of course, this more regular opportunity for a parish elector to raise issues and put comments to the parish council directly has added further to the obscurity of the annual Parish Meeting event and may, perhaps, bring into question its necessity at all. It does, however, remain a statutory requirement.

As such, it is the Parish Council's intention to raise the profile of the Parish Meeting by using it as both an opportunity and a forum where representatives of other key parish organisations may come

together to exchange ideas, issues, concerns or indeed discuss any other 'parish affair' with parish councillors. It is hoped to identify areas of common interest where synergy and the mutual benefits of 'joint enterprise' become apparent. It is therefore ventured that by adding an organisational element to parish elector involvement this will not only elevate the much-underplayed Parish Meeting to a more effective level of Parish Summit it may also provide for a more informed and co-ordinated approach to some aspects of future parish development and improvement.

Planning for the forthcoming summer Jubilee celebrations will be the main focus of such a pilot Parish Summit Meeting now scheduled to take place in February and we anticipate being able to provide details of positive feed-back in future articles. We hope to welcome representatives from the Parochial Church Council, the Women's Institute, the Playing Fields Association, the Village Hall Committee and the Parent Teachers Association of All Saints' CE Primary School. So, please don't be offended if your organisation is not mentioned here, you are also more than welcome to attend. It is important to remember the meeting remains, essentially, a Parish Meeting in which all electors will remain equal and valued participants.

Parish Council Meetings and Parish Meetings are, by statute, public events so please refer to our web-site for all the meeting dates and times if you would care to attend.

For now, kind regards from all on the Parish Council team and please remember if you have any ideas for parish improvement or wish to share any particular concern you may always contact any Councillor or our Clerk via e-mail at any time. Our details may be found on our dedicated web-site at https://www.trysullandseisdonparishcouncil.org

P.C. Chair - Andrew