**Nacton Parish Council**

**Guidance for new councillors**

The aim of all parish councillors is to represent the whole community of Nacton - the village Priory Park and all residents who live outside these areas.

There is a maximum of 9 parish councillors.

1. **Becoming a councillor for Nacton**

Nacton Parish Council consists of a maximum of nine councillors together with a Parish Clerk.

There are two ways of becoming a councillor: you can either be elected or co-opted.

Elected

Every four years there is an election for all parish councillors. If there are nine or fewer candidates, the election is uncontested and all are elected. If there are more than nine candidates, there is an election, with the nine receiving the most votes being elected as councillors.

Should a vacancy occur on the parish council during the four-year span, the vacancy will be advertised on the village notice boards and the parish website. If there are more applicants than seats available, there will be a by-election.

Co-opted

This happens when there is a vacancy and the council chooses someone to fill the vacancy. This occurs, if there are insufficient candidates at an election to fill all 9 vacancies or no candidates stand when a vacancy occurs.

The co-option process is set out in a separate document.

When councillors are elected, they must sign a formal Declaration of Acceptance of Office in the presence of the Clerk, which will include observing the Code of Conduct. They must also complete their register of pecuniary and non-pecuniary interests on the ESDC website (see below).

1. **Regular meetings**

The Parish Council meets every two months starting in January each year - a total of six meetings a year. The meetings will usually take place in Nacton Village Hall, starting at 7.00 pm. Meetings usually last around 90 minutes.

The Annual Meeting of the Parish Council takes place in May when, apart from the usual business of a parish council meeting, the chair and vice-chair are elected for the coming year. Also, councillors take on specific roles on the council. (See below)

In April, (or May at the AGM) there is the Annual Parish Meeting. This is not a parish council meeting, but the occasion when various clubs, societies and organisations in the parish report on the previous year. The meeting is conducted by the chairman of the Parish Council and the Clerk takes notes of the meeting. Whilst other councillors do not have to attend this meeting, the usual practice is that they do so.

All meetings are open to the public. The meeting dates for the following year are agreed at the November meeting and are published afterwards. The notices of the meeting have to be displayed at least three clear days before the meeting and the summons must be sent to all councillors giving at least three clear days’ notice.

1. **Other public meetings**

Occasionally, other meetings are called outside those scheduled. Often, they are called to consider planning applications, but it could be for any reason deemed too important to leave until the next calendared parish council meeting. Meetings are usually held either in the village hall or in the pavilion on the sports field. At least three clear days’ notice of such meetings is given and the general public is invited to attend.

1. **Councillor roles**

There are several other committees or charities to which members of the parish council are elected. These elections take place at the Annual Meeting of the Parish Council in May each year.

These organisations are:

* Village Hall
* George Court (Orwell Settlement Trust)
* Sir Robert Hitcham Almshouses
* Poors’ Land Trust
* Community Council

In addition, the parish council appoints a Tree Warden, who reports to each parish council meeting.

1. **Documents**

The following documents will be given to you by the parish clerk and should be read before attending the first parish council meeting:

* Standing Orders
* Code of Conduct
* Contact list for all councillors
* Claim form

1. **Nacton Parish website**

The parish council manages this website. It includes information about the parish as well as specific parish council information. The parish newsletter is also on there and all other information the parish council creates. The clerk manages the website and one other parish councillor acts as a back-up.

There is also a Nacton Parish Council Facebook page.

1. **Working groups**

The parish council has a few working groups that meet on various occasions to improve the efficiency of the council. They have no powers and merely report back to the parish council either at the bi-monthly meetings or by e-mail. Their purpose is to suggest and to advise. If necessary, a full extraordinary meeting of the parish council could be called if this was felt necessary following such a meeting.

The working groups are:

* Newsletter Working Group
* Finance Advisory Group
* Matters of the Moment (Chairman, deputy chairman and clerk meet in the month when there is no official parish council meeting to ensure that matters raised at the last meeting are progressing.)
* Emergency Plan Working Group

The Finance Advisory Group meets on a regular basis and consists of the Chairman, the Clerk and one other councillor. The working groups meet as and when necessary to complete a specific piece of work.

1. **Precept**

This is the Parish Council’s share of the Council Tax. It is distributed to the parish council annually.

The Finance Advisory Group proposes a budget for the next financial year, which is then submitted to the full Parish Council for discussion at the November meeting. Final approval comes at the January meeting. Once the budget has been agreed, the clerk submits this to the local authority in January.

The amount of money received will be indicated on all ESDC Council Tax statements around April each year.

The council cannot run a budget deficit and must ensure money is kept in reserve for emergencies. A full update of the parish council’s finances will be presented at each council meeting for councillors to discuss and accept.

The parish council is audited each year to ensure that the parish council has run the council’s finances in a sound and legal way. An internal audit looks at all the documents and papers relevant to the finances and procedures of the Parish Council. The external audit considers only the annual statement and whether standing orders have been reviewed correctly.

1. **Plans**

a)    **Emergency Plan**

Nacton Parish Council has an emergency plan, which is updated each two years around April. Part of the plan involves residents answering a questionnaire every four years. This is then put on the parish website. There is a working group consisting of around four councillors, who meet bi-annually.

b)    **Ten Year Plan**

Nacton parish Council has a ten-year plan, which indicates how it would like the village to progress over those years, when finances allow. This is reviewed regularly and specifically at the November meeting. Actions that are to be actioned soon or in the following year are highlighted.

1. **Training**

All councillors are expected to go on some training, both annually and when they become councillors for the first time. Training sessions are organised by SALC and cost £25 per module. They may claim back any travel expenses, although many sessions are now held on zoom. The parish clerk keeps a record of courses that are attended and councillors are encouraged to give some feedback afterwards, either by e-mail or in person at a council meeting. Details of all training courses available for the year will be sent out by the parish clerk regularly.

1. **Standing Orders**

This is a document that all councillors should read. It is reviewed on an annual basis and revised if necessary. It lays down the procedures and regulations that govern how Nacton Parish Council carries out its business.

1. **Non- attendance**

Councillors are summoned to, and expected to attend, every council meeting. However, if they are unable to do so, they should inform the parish clerk about their anticipated absence, together with the reason. Councillors will be informed at that meeting and they will decide whether to accept the reason or not.

If a councillor fails to attend a meeting for six months without good reason, that councillor automatically loses their seat and a casual vacancy arises (see above).

1. **Code of Conduct and Register of Interests**

Nacton’s Code of Conduct informs councillors how they should behave as a councillor.

The Register of Interests must be completed on the ESDC website within 28 days of being elected or co-opted. ESDC will send a password to access the relevant page. It requires statements about financial and other interests in Nacton, including work commitments. Failure to complete the register is an offence.

1. **Role of the Parish Clerk**

The clerk is appointed and employed by the council. The clerk is the only salaried person that the council appoints. The clerk gives advice and administrative support to the council. The clerk also implements council decisions. The clerk is answerable to the council as a whole and not to individuals, although they will work most closely with the chair. The clerk cannot make decisions for the council unless the council has specifically stated that this should be the case.

The parish clerk is protected by law like any employee.

1. **Assets for which the Parish Council is responsible**

The parish council is responsible for:

* Bus shelters (two)
* War memorial
* Victoria Field, including the trees and any furniture on it
* Paupers’ Graveyard and Wood
* Grit bins
* Dog bins (two)

In addition, through one of the councillors, it is involved in the appointment of residents into George Court and any distribution of funds to residents from Poors’ Field.

It also ensures that a suitable ceremony is carried out on November 11th by the chair, at the village war memorial to commemorate the fallen. It also pays for the Christmas tree outside the village hall each year.

1. **Planning applications**

The parish council is responsible for discussing any planning applications that affect Nacton. The full procedure is set out in the document entitled “Nacton Parish Council- Planning Application Procedures”.

1. **Rules**

A council must do what the law requires it to do.

A council may do only what the law says it may do.

A council cannot do anything unless permitted by legislation.

1. **Documents**

The following documents exist to make the council more efficient:

* Standing Orders
* Financial Standing Orders
* Asset Register
* Parish Risk Assessment
* Asset Risk Assessment
* Publication Strategy
* Filming at meetings protocol
* Complaints Procedure
* Disciplinary and Grievance Procedure
* Emergency Plan
* Training and Development Policy
* Planning Application Procedures
* Contact list of councillors
* Budget for the current financial year
* Minutes of previous meetings
* Insurance policies – one for the war memorial and one for all other assets and legal duties
* Action Plan for the current year.

The clerk has them all and can e-mail them out. They are updated on a regular basis.

1. **Meetings**

Full Parish Council meetings are conducted by the chair or deputy chair. The meetings should be business-like and effective. Councillors should conduct themselves at all times as per the Code of Conduct. Councillors should involve themselves and seek to make decisions as a body, when necessary.

Councillors will be summoned to a meeting by the clerk, together with the agenda. This will be done by e-mail.

A full agenda will be sent to all councillors at least three clear days before the meeting takes place. The village hall will need to be set up before each meeting. Councillors sit in a horseshoe shape with the public seats facing them. The chairman and the clerk sit in the middle of the horseshoe arrangement. A list for the public to sign is put out, as are any relevant plans. The clerk takes the minutes. Both the district councillor and county councillor that represent Nacton, together with the police, are invited.

At the end of the meeting, all tables and chairs are returned to the storeroom and lights and any heating are turned off. The hall is locked up by the clerk.

The meeting will usually be in the following format:

* Apologies for absence
* Declarations of interest
* Invitation to the public to comment on the agenda
* Matters arising from the last meeting
* Chair’s update
* Reports from the councillors, tree warden, Suffolk Police and village hall. If the representative is not there, any report they might have sent will be read out by the chairman.
* Finances - including agreeing to payments and noting the budget situation
* Correspondence
* Planning applications
* Matters raised by and reports by councillors
* Public question time

If an item is not on the agenda, no decision can be made about it, although it can be agreed to discuss at the next meeting.

1. **Financial arrangements**

All councillors are responsible for ensuring that the council is run efficiently and within the budget agreed at the January meeting. The council has a current and savings account with Lloyds. Any cheques have to be signed by two authorised councillors. They must also initial both the cheque stub and the receipt itself.

Any requests for payment should be handed to the clerk, using the claim form provided.

Finances are published on the notice boards

Councillors must seek confirmation from the chairman before they go on a course or make any purchase on behalf of the parish council. Failure to do so may result in no payment being made.

The parish council must ensure that a full audit takes place each year and that any comments made by the auditor are acted upon as soon as possible. A certificate is provided after this audit to show compliance.

The council must also send a precept demand to ESDC by their deadline.

November 2021