

THIS PARISH COUNCIL

Stanford Parish Council is at the lowest tier of local government and the one closest to individual residents. We are part of the civil administration and have no connection with the Church, despite having similar boundaries. The lay committee of the Parish Church is the Stanford Parochial Church Council whose concerns are all to do with the Church of England. The Parish Council deals with a range of other local affairs and was set up in 1894 to bring local government closer to all local people. Our activities are regulated by statute and they link up with the next tier which is Shepway District Council.

Stanford Parish Council serves about 350 people who live in the 160 houses which make up the villages of Stanford (North and South), Westenhanger and parts Newingreen. It comprises five councillors, who have no party political allegiance, who are elected for four years and who appoint a Chair each year. They also appoint a clerk who is not a councillor and who receives a salary based on the national scale for parish clerks: she is their legal adviser and administrator.

The Parish Council is required to meet at least four times a year, including an Annual General Meeting. In fact we usually meet seven times. All the meetings are open to the public and are publicised on the Notice Boards and on our website in the 'Dates for your Diary' section. These meetings are for council business and only councillors have a right to speak. Members of the public are present as observers – although we always include in the Agenda the opportunity for registered electors to ask questions or to comment on local concerns.

The Parish Council also convenes a Parish Meeting which, although normally chaired by its Chair, is not a meeting of the councillors but of the parishioners. They have the right to speak and to raise matters of local interest. All meetings are customarily on Wednesday evenings at 6.30pm in the Function Room of The Drum (by kind permission of the landlords).

The costs of running the Parish Council are covered by an annual payment from the District Council, the precept, which comes from the Council Tax according to a published formula: at present, the precept adds about £20 of Council Tax to each house per year. The Parish Council publishes a Newsletter four times a year which is distributed to every household in the Parish. This is paid for by Holiday Extras.

In recent years, the Parish Council has had considerable success in getting the District Council to take action against local flooding by clearing obstructions and adding extra drains, there has been effective action on roadways, footpaths and litter. A large number of planning issues have been resolved and the District Council has listened to our opinions, thus we were active in preventing STOP24 and other local developments from overloading our sewers, and in mitigating the worst nuisance from the new lorry park. We co-operate with other local parish councils in matters such as planning and highways. We have kept up pressure on the companies that run the railway about the maintenance of a full service and have been working to improve street lighting and road safety. We keep the interests of this parish at the forefront of matters relating to Operation Stack, a possible anaerobic converter, and the proposed development of a housing estate on the racecourse. We have been partially successful in rationalising the boundaries of the parish.

We have co-operated with local groups. We work closely with the Racecourse to protect the day-to-day interests of residents, and negotiated with the Highways Agency about the use of the Farmers' Bridge. We undertook the reform of the Village Hall trust, setting up full charitable status and establishing the Management Committee (Management Trustees) to deal with all future developments of this parish asset.

We have also established a number of policy documents (see 'The Small Print on this website). We have set up this website and found a sponsor for notice boards for Westenhanger (Holiday Extras) and Stanford North (SWAG) as part of our approach to better communication. All our business is conducted in compliance with the Code of Conduct which was established by the Government to ensure probity in the proceedings of local government and to which we recently renewed our commitment.

In December 2006, Stanford Parish Council was awarded Quality status: one of only 4% of councils and one of the smallest councils ever to receive this distinction. This recognised in a formal way, the standards achieved by our council and confirmed that it is representative, properly managed, upholds high standards of conduct, is committed to partnerships with the public services and other groups, delivers local services (in relation to its size), and acts as an information point for the community. Accreditation (by National Government) as a Quality Parish Council lasts for four years so was due for renewal at the end of 2010. The rules for accreditation became even more challenging, and we would not have been able to use the new powers that would be available (because of our size and limited budget) and so chose not to apply,