

Culford, West Stow & Wordwell Parish Council

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Nomination for Co-Option to the Parish Council

Information for Potential Co-optees

Thank you very much for your interest in serving your community as a Councillor. This document provides a very brief background to what parish councils are and what they do, it explains some of the things that you should consider when deciding whether stand for co-option and sets out the process for putting yourself forward. Whilst there is a formal process, we aim to make it as clear and easy as possible and if you have any questions or queries I would be delighted to hear from you - please get in touch by phone or email.

Co-Option is the name given to the process when the Council itself appoints someone to become a councillor when a casual vacancy arises. Before co-option can be considered a statutory period of notice is used to announce the forthcoming vacancy and allow electors time to call for an election if they wish. In most rural parishes (this one included) it is very unusual for an election to be called. If no election is called within the statutory period, the Clerk initiates the process of recruitment and self-nominations are opened.

Parish Councils (also known as Civil Parish Councils to avoid confusion with Church parishes) sit at the most direct level of democracy in England and Wales, being the first tier of local government, and seek to improve community wellbeing and provide better services at a local level. Activities fall into three main categories: representing the local community; delivering services to meet local needs; and striving to improve quality of life and community wellbeing.

The Council serves, and makes decisions on behalf of, the villages and aims to keep everyone informed about important issues and on-going projects.

Councillors are members of the community, elected by the community. Elections take place every four years but in the event of casual vacancies (when a councillor resigns between elections) the Council may co-opt members to serve until the next elections. There are seven councillor seats.

Councillors are committed to the wellbeing of Culford, West Stow and Wordwell and give their time, effort and resources without financial reward - although the role is not defined as voluntary work because councillors are elected or co-opted to hold an office. One visible sign of councillors being office-holders is that they not *invited* to attend meetings but are *summoned* and so must attend meetings unless there is very good reason (which must be submitted to the Clerk in advance, for the approval of the council).

The time needed to be a councillor is not onerous. Meetings of the Council are held every other month and councillors may also serve on any time-limited Working Groups that are set up to focus on a particular task. Councillors sometimes agree to undertake tasks under specific mandate from the council. Importantly, councillors must prepare for meetings thoroughly by at least reading in advance any papers that are circulated. This enables each councillor to contribute to discussions and decisions in an informed way.

Nomination

Once you have decided to nominate yourself, please check that you are eligible. There are a few very straight forward criteria that you must meet in order to be eligible for co-option and a small number of things that may disqualify you - these are all set out at the end of this document. You do not need a proposer or seconder - just nominate yourself by writing to me (an email is fine), confirming which particular eligibility criteria apply to you and that none of the disqualifications apply. Please also let me have a brief statement that sets out your background and the skills, experience and knowledge that you would bring to bear on the role of councillor. The statement does not need to be formal and anything between a paragraph or two and the equivalent of a side of A4 paper is helpful. Again, email is perfectly acceptable.

When thinking about your personal statement, do remember that skills, experience and knowledge can come in many forms, from having voluntary or work-related experience that could be useful to the Council, to simply having a good knowledge of the village. The Council considers all nominations that are received and decides on co-option at a council meeting. The Council will have an eye to the balance of the Council in terms of matters such as knowledge and skills, distribution of councillors around different parts of the village and gender balance. I will notify you of the outcome of the process as soon as possible after the meeting at which your nomination is considered. The Council will not necessarily fill a vacancy immediately, for example if it is looking for particular skills or representation.

Successful candidates must sign a Declaration of Acceptance of Office (normally near the start of the next meeting of the Council) at which point they become members of the Council. New councillors then have 28 days within which to submit a completed Register of Interests Form, a copy of which I will send to you.

All newly appointed councillors must participate in an induction process within the first two months of appointment. This covers matters that will enable you work effectively such as the code of conduct, the roles of councillor, chair and clerk, and the legal frameworks within which parish councils work.

You are also very welcome to contact me for an informal discussion about the role and duties of a councillor or if you need further information at any stage, please do not hesitate to get in touch - my contact details are at the head of this document.

Maximilian Clay

Clerk to Culford, West Stow and Wordwell Parish Council

Being a Councillor - Eligibility and Disqualification

Eligibility

A. The statutes relating to eligibility to be a councillor require that you must be both :

- ◆ a UK or qualifying Commonwealth citizen or have full resident status.

and

- ◆ 18 years of age or over.

B. You must also meet **one** of the following conditions relating to your connection with the Parish:

- ◆ be a local government elector for the area of the authority;

or

- ◆ have occupied as owner or tenant any land or other premises in that area during the whole of the twelve months preceding election or co-option

or

- ◆ have had your principal or only place of work in that area during that twelve months;

or

- ◆ have resided in that area during the whole of those twelve months ;

or

- ◆ have resided either in the parish or community or within three miles of it during the whole of those twelve months .

Disqualification

The statutes disqualify a person from being elected or being a councillor if s/he:

- ◆ holds any paid office or employment (other than the office of chair, vice chair or deputy chair of the Council) to which s/he has been appointed by the Council or any committee or sub-committee of the Council, or by a paid officer of the council, or by any joint committee on which the council is represented;

or

- ◆ is the subject of a bankruptcy restrictions order or interim order (section 267(1) of the Enterprise Act 2002);

or

- ◆ has within five years before the day of election or since her/his election been convicted of any offence and has had passed on him a sentence of imprisonment of at least three months (whether suspended or not) without the option of a fine;

or

- ◆ has been found guilty of corrupt or illegal electoral practices

or

- ◆ was responsible for incurring unlawful expenditure in connection with an election and the court ordered her/his disqualification