

The difference between a Parish or Town Council and a Parish Meeting

A Parish Council is a “representative democracy”- it has councillors that are elected and act as representatives (proxies) and make decisions on behalf of their Parish.

A Parish Meeting is different, it is a “direct democracy”- there are no proxies or representatives, this is an overhang from the middle ages, when all local decision making was carried out by meetings of the whole community.

The Chair of a Parish Meeting is not empowered to make decisions on behalf of their Parish, other than how to legally deliver on the decisions of the Parish Meeting.

Redlingfield is a Parish Meeting.

The Annual Parish Meeting (or Redlingfield Village AGM as it is locally called) is the decision making body. The electors of Redlingfield vote on items and make decisions and elect a Chair, the Chair’s role is to carry out those wishes/decisions to the best of their ability.

A Parish Meeting can raise a precept (local Council Tax) provided the residents agree. Here in Redlingfield we do not, though it has been proposed a few times in the past and voted down each time.

On the whole the powers of a Parish Meeting are very limited.

A Parish Meeting is formally “consulted” on a range of matters, for example Planning Applications, Licencing Laws and changes to Rights of Way etc but does not have the power to make any decisions about them.

It can make formal representations to the relevant authorities about matters of concern to residents eg speeding traffic or flooding or lack of affordable housing.

In relation to land ownership, a Parish Meeting can own Allotments and Burial grounds but no land for other purposes.

A Parish Meeting can maintain War Memorials and closed Churchyards. It can also provide bus shelters and street lighting as well as play and sports equipment for village greens.

A Parish Meeting can create committees (or a single committee) to exercise its functions in relation to:- Allotments, Burial Grounds, responsibility for closed churchyards and Street Lighting.

Parish Meetings need to account for their expenditure and are regulated and audited in the same way as Parish and Town Councils but cannot reclaim VAT on purchases.

In Redlingfield our main expenditure is on grass cutting, insurance, dog bin emptying, audit & accounts systems, play equipment inspections and data protection – which comes to around £1,200-£1,300 each year and our income comes from events and the Pub on the Greens along with donations. With people’s agreement, Redlingfield is also able to provide grants for the church or Doorstep Green or anything else that people consider important.

Legally a Parish Meeting cannot sign contracts with commercial or other companies for services such as looking after a Defibrillator, instead the “Parish Trustees” have to do this. For Redlingfield the Parish Trustees are the Chair of Redlingfield Parish Meeting and the Chief Executive of Mid Suffolk District Council, currently Midge Gibbons and Arthur Charvonia, respectively.