What are the powers, duties and responsibilities of a Parish Council?

The following paragraphs are a summary/extract from the latest edition of NALC’s ‘Good Councillor’s Guide’.

The relevant section in the guide concludes with, “Of course, your council could always decide to do very little; but local residents might then wonder why the local council exists at all”. This very point was actually raised by the Council at its meeting!

The council has been granted powers by Parliament including the important authority to raise money through taxation (the precept) and a range of powers to spend public money.

The council is an elected body in the first tier of local government. Other tiers, known as principal councils or authorities, have many legal duties to deliver services such as education, housing, town and country planning, transport, environmental health and social services.

Local councils have:-

* the legal power to take action,

* but they have very few duties and

* [have] greater freedom [than the other tiers] to choose what action to take.

NALC’s conclusion is that “Parish Councils can play a vital part in representing the interests of the communities they serve and improving the quality of life and the local environment. Furthermore they influence other decision makers and can, in many cases, deliver services to meet local needs”.

Issues that may concern parish councils include the following. Whilst the Parish Council does not directly provide these services, it does play a role in, have an influence on the majority of them (see comments in brackets).

* planning, (Planning Cttee, consideration of planning applications, attendance at BDBC Planning Cttee,)
* highways,(meetings with HCC Highways Dept, potholes, flooding etc)
* transport and traffic, (speeding review, HGVs,Transport
* community safety, (Neighbourhood Watch)
* cemeteries, (annual grant to Parish Church)
* playing fields, (application of legacy to Michael’s Field)
* community centres, (village hall)
* litter, (residents annual clear-up)
* war memorials, (Wellhead and Millenium Stone)
* seats and shelters, (new seat at White Lane)
* rights of way (repair of bridleway, stile to gates initiative, footpath reps)
* village green (NALC did not include this item.. but I have.)

Some of the larger Local Councils may also concern themselves with housing, street lighting, allotments, etc.
Through its ‘Devolution Agenda’, Central Government is looking to encourage local councils to deliver more services and play a greater part in their communities. NALC suggest examples could include provision of or giving financial support for:-

- an evening bus taking people to the nearest town
- pond clearing
- redecorating the community centre
- a teenagers’ drop-in club
- a summer festival
- equipment for a children’s activity group
- transport to hospital,
and for the larger authorities perhaps even the provision of affordable housing to rent.

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