

What Can Parish Councils Do?

The powers which have been vested in Parish, Town and Community Councils by Acts of Parliament are summarised here as a guide to Councillors and others.

Each description is brief and is intended to be a general indication. Like all powers given to public bodies the powers of local councils are defined in detail in legislation and these details may include a requirement to obtain the consent of another body (for example the approval of the County Council to the provision of a car park).

Local Councils must exercise their powers also subject to the provisions of the general law (for example planning permission is necessary for a sports pavilion). Information on all these details should be in the hands of the Clerks of the Councils.

The powers are listed alphabetically. Where a power is marked with an asterisk the council may, in addition to exercising the power itself, help another body to act by giving financial assistance.

Allotments	Provision and maintenance of allotments for cultivation.
Arts*	Developing and improving knowledge of the arts and the crafts which serve the arts.
Baths	Provision of baths and wash-houses (which in modern terms may mean a launderette).
Borrowing	Parish, Town and Community Councils may borrow money subject to certain limits+.
Cemeteries	Provision and maintenance of burial grounds, cemeteries, crematoria, mortuaries & post-mortem
Church Yards	Power to contribute to the costs of a churchyard in use and a duty to maintain any closed churchyard where the duty has been transferred by the Church of England.
Clocks	Provision and maintenance of public clocks, on churches or elsewhere.
Commons	Power to protect any finally registered common which has no registered owner.
Crime Prevention*	Installation of equipment and establishment of schemes for the detection or prevention of crime; making grants to the police authority for these purposes.
Entertainments*	Provision of any form of public entertainment and any premises for giving entertainments. (This includes maintaining bands or orchestras and providing for dancing.)
Halls*	Provision of buildings for public meetings and functions, for indoor sports or physical recreation, or for the use of clubs or societies having recreational, social or athletic objects.
Legal Proceedings	Power to prosecute and defend any legal proceedings in the interests of the inhabitants. Power to take part in any public local inquiry.
Lighting	Provision and maintenance of any footway lighting which lights roads or pavements provided the columns are not above specified heights.

Litter*	Provision of litter-bins in streets and support for anti-litter campaigns.
Open Spaces	Provision and maintenance of public open spaces, pleasure grounds and public walks.
Parking Places	Provision and management of car and cycle parks.
Parks	Provision and maintenance of public parks and appropriate facilities.
Planning	Local councils have a right to be notified of any planning application affecting their area and to make comments which the planning authority must take into account.
Playing Fields*	Provision and maintenance of land for any kind of outdoor recreation, including boating pools.
Ponds*	Power to deal with ponds, pools, or other places containing filth or matter prejudicial to health.
Public Lavatories	Provision and maintenance of public lavatories.
Rights of Way	Maintenance of public footpaths and bridleways.
Roadside Verges	Power to plant and maintain roadside verges.
Seats*	Provision and maintenance of public seats on the highway.
Shelters*	Provision and maintenance of shelters for general public use and also particularly for bus passengers.
Signs	Power to erect signs which warn of dangers or announce a place name, or indicate a bus stop.
Swimming*	Provision of indoor or outdoor swimming pools or bathing places.
Tourism*	Provision of facilities for conferences and encouragement of recreational and business tourism.
Traffic Calming*	Contribution towards the cost of traffic calming works provided by highway authorities.
Transport*	Establishment of car-sharing and taxi fare concession schemes; making grants for community bus services and bus services for the elderly or disabled; investigation of public transport, road and traffic provision and needs; provision of information about public transport services.
Village Green*	Powers to maintain the village or town green.

General Expenditure Power: In any situation not covered by one of the specific powers described above a council may spend money on any purpose which in its opinion is of direct benefit to its area or to the inhabitants. The total expenditure by the council on all the cases under this general power was originally not allowed to exceed £3.50 per local government elector in the parish or town or community in any one financial year.

This is sometimes known as 'Section 137' expenditure because it was first authorised in Section 137 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1972. The Local Government Act 2003 raised this to £5 with effect from 1 April 2003, indexed annually inline with the RPI.

The Department for Communities and Local Government has confirmed that the appropriate sum for the purposes of section 137(4) (a) of the Local Government Act 1972 (“the 1972 Act”) for parish and town councils in England for 2011/ 2012 is £6.44. This is the amount that results from increasing the amount for 2010/ 2011 (£6.15) by the percentage increase in the Retail Prices Index between September 2009 and September 2010 (that is, 4.6%) in accordance with Schedule 12B to the 1972 Act (as amended in 2003).

Originally summarised from a document produced by The National Association of Local Councils (representing Parish, Town and Community Councils) 109 Great Russell Street, London, WC1B 3LD and dated May 1997

+(The Local Government Act 2003 removed the requirement for prior loan approval)

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