

FEBRUARY 2007 NEWSLETTER

AN UPDATE FOR THE RESIDENTS OF
HANLEY CASTLE AND HANLEY SWAN

“Election Special”

Parish Council elections take place every four years and 2007 is election year. The election will coincide with that for Malvern Hills District Council and will take place on

Thursday 3rd. May 2007.

There are eight seats on the Parish Council for Hanley Castle and all Councillors are required to seek re-election if they wish to continue to serve. Two existing Councillors have already indicated that they will not be standing for election again, so the opportunity exists for some ‘new blood’ to join the council.

Why not you?

So, what is a Parish Council?

There are 151 Parish and Town Councils in Worcestershire, forming the first tier of Government. Most belong to the Worcestershire County Association of Councils (CALC) which is the advisory support and representative body for local councils.

Parish & Town Councils:

- Are the democratic voice of the community
- Have legal powers to provide many community services and facilities, either independently or in partnership
- Influence the decisions made by others on the way our communities are shaped and developed
- Have the statutory right to be consulted on planning applications
- Are consulted on community and planning strategies
- Are rarely organised along party political lines

Hanley Castle Parish Council (HCPC) meets six times a year and follows good practice by having a period for public question time at each meeting. In addition, it holds a public annual Parish Meeting at which residents may raise any matter that affects the community. This year, the annual Parish Meeting will take place on Thursday, 17th. May at 7:30pm at Hanley Swan Village Hall. HCPC publishes reports on its activities and the public has the right to inspect its minutes and accounts.

The Conduct of Parish Councillors

All Parish Councils are required to adopt the Code of Conduct to which individual Councillors must sign up. This code demands—for instance—that Councillors must declare their interests and must not disclose confidential information. The Clerk to the Council has copies of the “Good Councillor’s Guide” which are freely available.

Democratic Arrangements

Parish and Town Councils are elected every four years. Where a casual vacancy occurs for a Councillor, perhaps due to a resignation, there must be a bye-election if at least ten electors in the parish demand one. If one is not demanded, your Parish Council must seek to co-opt a person to fill the vacancy. The elections officer at the District Council administers all elections, but the Clerk to the council administers bye-elections. As previously stated, 2007 is an election year and the election will take place on Thursday, 3rd. May.

Parish Councils and the Law

Parish Councils are statutory local authorities. They have an element of sovereignty and are not answerable to other tiers of councils. They must make decisions in an open, accountable and transparent way. Their accounts are subject to internal and external audit, the results of which must be posted on the Council notice board. They must appoint a Responsible Finance Officer (Ann Canham, Clerk, for HCPC) and should have a complaints procedure. Each Parish Council is required to set an annual budget having undertaken a risk assessment of all its activities and agreed its policies. To fund its budget, the Parish Council sets a precept, which is an amount of money included in your council tax bill. This year, HCPC has set a budget of £12,000. This represents an increase of £1,500 over last year's budget, made up of £500 for general items of expenditure and £1,000 for election expenses which will be incurred if a contested election to the Parish Council occurs. Money has also been earmarked for work at the village pond; for the possibility of contributing towards the cost of a road speed indicator device and for the 'match funding' required to take part in the litter picking scheme. Full details of receipts and payments for the current financial year with the Chairman's annual report are to be printed in the next edition of this newsletter. Notice of Parish Council meetings must appear on the Council's notice boards and each resident of the Parish has a right to attend any meeting.

Quality Parish Status

This is the charter award for Parish Councils, meaning that the Council has satisfied a number of quality tests, including having a qualified clerk. A Quality Parish will have more influence and may have special privileges. The County Accreditation Panel is the awarding body for quality status. It has an independent chairman and is appointed by the Secretary of State. HCPC has recently achieved Quality Parish status and is one of the first Parish Councils in the area to do so.

Training

Councillors and Clerks are encouraged to undertake training to ensure that the Parish Council is modern and effective in representing its community. CALC arranges courses and briefings for Clerks and Councillors. The Certificate in Local Council Administration (CiLCA) is the professional qualification for Clerks and is a requirement for Quality Parish Status. This qualification was attained a couple of years ago by Ann Canham, Clerk to the Parish Council.

The Clerk is the Council's Statutory Proper Officer who administers and advises on all aspects of its affairs. The Clerk is a professional paid officer, often working from home in a part-time capacity and who is usually the Council's Responsible Finance Officer.

Parish Plans

A Parish Plan is a very useful budgetary and strategic planning tool to help identify and prioritise projects within the community, based upon needs and aspirations. The Parish Council's budget should reflect this action plan. The Parish Plan for HCPC was completed and published in 2003.

Councils Working in Partnership

The Councils' Charter in Worcestershire sets the framework for the other tiers of local government to work with Parishes in initiatives litter-picking, the successful value-for-money lengthsmen scheme and the Parish paths partnership scheme. HCPC already takes part in the lengthsmen and Parish paths schemes and at its last meeting agreed to join the litter-picking scheme as well.

Meetings

Parish Councils *must* (meaning that they have the duty to)

- Meet in public at least four times a year including the annual meeting which takes place in May and at which they must elect a chairman for the ensuing year
- Have an agenda which must state the business to be transacted, which means (in particular) that the Parish Council requires a description of the item on the agenda before it may make any decision on the item. Late items of business for decision are not permitted.
- Have at least three, or a third of Councillors (whichever is higher) present at any Council or Committee meeting.
- Have a public notice posted at least three clear days before the meeting, excluding the day of notice and the day of the meeting. It is good practice to exclude weekends in this notice period.

Decisions

Parish Councils may (meaning that they have the power to):

- Exclude the public and press while they make certain decisions in confidential session providing it is in the public interest to do so.
- Delegate decisions to Committees (which must meet in public) or to

- paid officers
- Delegate services to another Council
- Deliver services delegated to them by another Council

Records

Most records of the Parish Council must be available to the public, including agendas, minutes, accounts, letters and reports. The Freedom of Information Act explains public rights of access and exemptions.

Financial Management

Parish Councils must

- Keep adequate financial records and have a system of internal financial controls in place
- Appoint a Responsible Finance Officer (usually the Clerk)
- Appoint an independent internal auditor
- Undertake a risk assessment at least annually
- Complete an annual return, audited by an external auditor appointed by the Audit Commission, which must be posted on the Council's notice board
- Approve an annual budget
- Set an annual precept
- Use receipts from the sale of capital assets first to pay off loans and then for capital projects only

Corporate Body

The Parish Council is an incorporated body subject to general statute in many areas, including

- Employment
- Data protection
- Health & safety
- VAT

Specific Powers

Parish Councils may

- Borrow for capital projects for which consent is required for the Secretary of State via CALC

Parish Councils may act/spend in the following areas

- Allotments, arts
- Cemeteries, churchyards, clocks, commons, community buildings, conference centres, crime prevention

- Entertainment
- Legal proceedings, lighting, litter bins and anti-litter campaigns
- Open spaces
- Parking places, public parks, public buildings, planning, playing fields, ponds, public lavatories
- Recreation, (public) rights of way, roadside verges
- Seats, shelters, signs, swimming pools
- Tourism, traffic management, transport
- Village greens, village halls

General powers

Parish Councils may

- Act/spend in any way that facilitates or is conducive or incidental to any of its powers
- Act/spend on any purpose for which it has no specific power and which in its opinion benefits all or part of its community. All expenditure under this power in any year must be within limits set by the Secretary of State based upon the number of electors.

Call for New Councillors!

As mentioned earlier, there will be two vacant seats on the Council at the election on Thursday 3rd. May. If you would like to stand for election to our Parish Council and have the opportunity to exercise some of the powers listed above, then more information may be obtained from

The Clerk to the Council:	Ann Canham 01684 310366 ann@hancaspc.demon.co.uk
The District Election Officer:	Mary Wood, Electoral Services Manager Malvern Hills District Council 01684 862212
The CALC web site:	www.worcscalc.org.uk

The Village Pond

There will be another opportunity to help stabilise the banks of the pond with work taking place on Friday 2nd. and Saturday 3rd. March. Once again, Wade Muggleton of Worcestershire County Council's Countryside Service will be on hand to instruct us in the finer points of weaving willow revetments. Please come along and assist with this important task.

Parish Litter Collection Day

This will take place on Saturday 31st. March and will be an ideal opportunity to spring clean our villages before the start of the litter picking scheme. The usual arrangements will apply, with volunteers meeting at Hanley Swan Village Green, or the 'Three Kings', Hanley Castle, both at 10:00 a.m.

Provision of Affordable Housing

The next meeting of the Parish Council will take place on Thursday 15th. March at 7:30 p.m. at Hanley Swan Village Hall. At the start of the meeting, Keith Parry of MHDC and Anne Harris of West Mercia Housing Group will talk about the next stage in the process of providing affordable housing in our Parish. There will be plenty of opportunity for members of the public to ask questions, so do come along and find out what happens next.

The Newsletter

As you've read this far, do you find this newsletter useful? A waste of paper? Please let the editor know: 01684 310716 or irt@cygnetlodge.co.uk.

PARISH COUNCIL CONTACT INFORMATION

Hanley Castle Parish Council meets on the third Thursday of January, March, May (AGM), July, September and November at Hanley Swan Village Hall: meetings start (usually) at 7:30 pm. All members of the public are welcome at these meetings, though they will be allowed to address the council only before and after the meeting unless otherwise invited by the Chairman.

Our Council comprises:	Telephone
Sue Roberts (Chairman)	592686
Tony Atkinson	310408
Anne Ballinger	592812
Ann Davies	310861
Francis Harcombe	310740
Margaret Norris	310786
John Taverner	310460
Ian Thompson	310716
Associated officers:	
Ann Canham (Clerk)	310366
John & Margaret Quibell Smith (footpaths)	310578
David Cheale (Tree Warden)	310233
Sue Adeny (MHDC Councillor)	310440
Mary Wilkinson (MHDC Councillor)	593704

Comments and contributions from parish residents are welcomed on any subject to do with our community. The Parish Council is very conscious of the cost of producing and distributing this newsletter and the methods of so doing will be under constant review.

If you would be prepared to receive it in electronic form either by email or by downloading it from our website, please let us know — this will help us to keep production costs to a minimum.

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