

## All About Local Councils

*Local (parish and town) councils and councillors make a massive difference to local people's quality of life. They are passionate about their communities and seek to make a change to help improve their residents' lives.*

*Councillors are elected to represent the local community, so you must either live or work in the council area. Becoming a councillor is a rewarding experience as you will be able to make a change in your community to help improve residents' lives. A councillor's role can include developing strategies and plans for the area, helping with problems and ideas, representing the community, working with other local community groups, decision making and reviewing decisions and talking to the community about their needs and what the council is doing.<sup>1</sup>*

### What is a 'Local council'?

'Local Council' is a universal term for community, village, neighbourhood, parish and town councils. They are the first tier of local government and are statutory bodies. They serve communities and are elected by residents. They can raise their own precept (a form of council tax). There are 10,000 local councils in England and 120,000 councillors who serve on these local councils.

### What do local councils do?

Your local council has an overall responsibility for the well-being of your local community. Their work falls into three main categories:

#### Delivery of services including:

- Allotments
- Leisure facilities
- Bus shelters
- Litter bins
- Car parks
- Local illuminations
- Community centres
- Parks and open spaces
- Public toilets
- Management of markets
- Street lighting
- Festivals and celebrations

#### Improve quality of life through:

- Local housing and infrastructure through neighbourhood plans
- Promoting dementia friendly communities
- Tackling loneliness
- Acting as community hubs
- Funding community projects and vital services.

#### Give communities a voice through representing:

- To the local police and health services
- On planning matters with principal authorities and developers
- To parliamentarians and government

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<sup>1</sup> Quote from the National Association Local Councils [https://www.nalc.gov.uk/our-work/local-elections?mc\\_cid=7d6181cefe&mc\\_eid=7ca7ff01b4#what-do-local-councils-and-councillors-do](https://www.nalc.gov.uk/our-work/local-elections?mc_cid=7d6181cefe&mc_eid=7ca7ff01b4#what-do-local-councils-and-councillors-do)

## Case Study – Saffron Walden Town Council

Saffron Walden Town Council (SWTC) works hard to build relationships with stakeholders from across the community. The council has consistently maintained strong partnerships with the principal authorities (Uttlesford District Council and Essex County Council), neighbouring parishes, community groups, Business Improvement District (BID) to deliver efficient services for the community.

The Council manages and funds the Tourist Information Centre (TIC), based in the heart of the town centre which offers a wide range of advice and guidance to both tourists and residents alike. The TIC offers a first-class service and works with other interested parties to develop tourism and marketing opportunities, thereby encouraging footfall into town.

To ensure the council is consistently representing the views of the community, Councillors hold regular open sessions where member of the public can drop in to discuss any issues or concerns. In addition to this, the Council has offices in the town, is easily contactable by phone or email and hosts a website providing additional information and advice regarding Council business and activities.

There are open sessions at each meeting for public speaking and representation and the Council appoints representatives onto local community groups which has helped the Council to keep an open dialogue with the community and learn about the issues that are affecting them. Through these relationships the Town Council has developed an in depth understanding of what the community wants them to deliver.

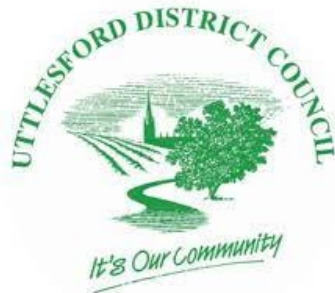
### **SWTC is a busy, diverse Council offering a wide range of services including:**

- Management of the award-winning Market (Tuesday and Saturday)
- Management of the award-winning Tourist Information Centre
- Allotments
- Cemetery in Radwinter Road
- Award winning, stunning Bridge End Gardens
- Delivery of a Neighbourhood Plan for Saffron Walden
- Management of open spaces in Saffron Walden, including The Common, Anglo-American Playing Fields and the Skatepark
- Christmas lights
- Town Hall management including bookings and hirings
- Golden Acre Community Centre
- Event Management for several community events throughout the year including but not limited to: Crafts, Civic Celebrations (Jubilee, Coronation, Remembrance Day), Warm Welcome Hubs, Summer Activities for families, pop-up cinemas and Christmas activities.
- Public toilets in Hill Street
- Management and maintenance of a number of public assets (benches, bins, shelters, structures)
- Support and grant awarding to local groups and charities

## Understanding the different tiers of local government

Local government structures can often be confusing. As mentioned earlier local councils are the first tier of local government and deliver the most local form of services. Principal authorities are the tier above local councils and are often bigger in size and represent a larger area such as a county or district rather than neighbourhoods and communities. Usually principal authorities are referred to as borough, district, or county councils. They are responsible for services across counties and districts including education, transport, rubbish collections, housing, council tax collections and fire and public safety to name a few. Local councils often work in partnership with principal authorities and are delivering more services on their behalf than ever before. The different tiers and their responsibilities are illustrated below:

*When referring to local councils this document will be referring to town and parish councils, not principal authorities.*



Community Events  
Golden Acre  
Band Stand  
Town Hall  
Neighbourhood Plan  
Christmas Lights  
Grants Process  
Tourist Information  
Centre  
Markets  
Weddings  
Allotments  
CCTV  
Cemetery  
Public Open Spaces  
Play Areas  
Bridge End Gardens  
Skate Park  
Public Toilets  
Benches  
Litter Bins

Planning Authority  
Building Control  
Council Tax  
Business Support  
Council Housing  
All Licensing  
Public Open Spaces  
Litter Bins  
Recycling Bin  
Collections  
Enforcement  
(I.e,abandoned vehicles,  
anti-social behavior, car  
parking)  
Car Parks  
CCTV  
Trees  
Electoral Services  
Street Cleaning  
Weddings

Road and Transport -  
Issues and defects  
Street lighting  
Car parking (including  
permits / disabled)  
Bus passes  
Social and health care  
Public rights of way  
Births, deaths and  
ceremonies  
Trading standards  
Libraries  
Schools  
Education  
Leisure  
Cultural  
Heritage

## How do Councils get things done?

Your local council is made up of several councillors who meet regularly to make decisions about the direction of the local council and the work it does for the community. As elected bodies local councils are responsible to the people they represent – their local community. Attending a council meeting is the best way to find out what they do. Give the council a call and find out when its next public meeting is scheduled to take place and find updates on their website and social media channels. SWTC currently has 16 elected members and details of meetings can be found online at [www.saffronwalden.gov.uk](http://www.saffronwalden.gov.uk)

## Where do Councils get their money from?

Each year a sum of money called a ‘precept’ is collected through your council tax. This money is invested back into your local neighbourhood by your local council to improve facilities and services for you and your neighbours. Local councils can also apply for grants and loans and, if they own property, can receive money from rents or leases. They can also borrow money from the Public Works Loan Board.

## How are local councillors elected?

Local councillors are elected to represent a geographical area known as a ward or in some cases the parish as a whole. They are elected by people who live in the area. If the local council is divided into wards an election is held in each ward, the same way elections are held in principal authority wards. If the local council doesn’t have wards there is just a single local council election.

From 2023 the number of Councillors will increase from 16 to 18 with the following ward split:

Audley Ward	4 Councillors
Castle & Little Walden Ward	5 Councillors
Shire Ward	9 Councillors

The next elections for SWTC will be held on Thursday 4th May 2023. The elections are managed by the District Authority (Uttlesford District Council), further details can be found online at [www.uttlesford.gov.uk](http://www.uttlesford.gov.uk) or contact the electoral office on 01799 510510.

## What do local councillors do?

Councillors have three main areas of work:

1. **Decision-making:** through attending meetings and committees with other elected members, councillors decide which activities to support, where money should be spent, what services should be delivered and what policies should be implemented.
2. **Monitoring:** councillors make sure that their decisions lead to efficient and effective services by keeping an eye on how well things are working.
3. **Getting involved locally:** as local representatives, councillors have responsibilities towards their constituents and local organisations. This often depends on what the councillor wants to achieve and how much time is available. The day-to-day work of a councillor may include:
  - going to meetings of local organisations and community groups
  - going to meetings of bodies that affect the wider community, such as the police, the Highways Authority, schools and colleges
  - taking up issues on behalf of members of the public, such as making representations to the principal authority
  - running a surgery for residents to bring up issues
  - meeting with individual residents

## Interested in becoming a Councillor?

Uttlesford District Council is running a briefing session for candidates and agents - via Zoom. More information about registering to these online briefings can be found at <https://www.uttlesford.gov.uk/local-elections-2023> .

Nomination packs will be available on the District Council website and must be completed and returned to the returning officer at Uttlesford District Council – not SWTC.

Nomination forms must be submitted by 4pm Tuesday 4 April 2023.

## Useful Guidance

- Information on becoming and being a local Councillor can be found at [https://www.nalc.gov.uk/our-work/local-elections?mc\\_cid=7d6181cefe&mc\\_eid=7ca7ff01b4#what-do-local-councils-and-councillors-do](https://www.nalc.gov.uk/our-work/local-elections?mc_cid=7d6181cefe&mc_eid=7ca7ff01b4#what-do-local-councils-and-councillors-do)
- Government guidance on becoming a Councillor <https://www.gov.uk/government/get-involved/take-part/become-a-councillor>
- Parish Candidates <https://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/i-am-a/candidate-or-agent/parish-council-elections-england>

## **Could you become a local councillor?**

As a councillor you can become a voice for your community and make a real change. Councillors are community leaders and should represent the interests of the communities they serve. Local councillors have to be residents of the area their local council serves, making them the most local part of our democratic system and closest to the community. Why don't you stand for your local council and see what difference you can make to your local neighbourhood?

## **How much time does it take up?**

The results of a NALC local councillor census survey told us that councillors spend on average about three hours a week on council work. Obviously, there are some councillors who spend more time than this – and some less, but in the main, being a local councillor is an enjoyable way of contributing to your community and helping to make it a better place to live and work.

## **What else do you need to know about becoming a Councillor?**

Most people are qualified to stand for their local council but there are a few rules. You have to be:

- A British citizen, or a citizen of the Commonwealth, or the European Union, and
- 18 years of age or older
- Live in an area that is served by a local council

## **You cannot stand for election if you:**

- Are the subject of a bankruptcy restriction order or interim order
- Have within five years before the day of the election, been convicted in the United Kingdom of any offence and have had a prison sentence (whether suspended or not) for a period of over three months without the option of a fine
- Work for the council you want to become a councillor for. There are specific rules around candidacy.

The full range of disqualifications for candidates is quite complex and some exceptions may apply.

You should refer to the website of the Electoral Commission for full details: [www.electoralcommission.org.uk](http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk)

## **Do you need to be a member of a political party?**

No, you don't have to be, most local councils are not political and most councillors sit as independent members of the council. If you would like to be a representative of a political party you will have to contact the party you want to represent and go through their processes.

## **Co-options**

Local councils can co-opt residents to support their work. This enables them to get new expertise or someone from a part of the community that is not represented on the council. Contact your local council to see if any of these opportunities are available.

## Being a Councillor, you need to:

- Care about getting the best for your Community
- Have a willingness to represent your electorate.
- Want to make a difference
- Undertake training courses
- Have the time
- Be committed and enthusiastic
- Adhere to the Code of Conduct
- Register your interests

## The Code of Conduct

SWTC's adopted Code of Conduct and Policies must be adhered to as a Councillor. These documents can be found at <https://saffronwalden.gov.uk/documents/policies/>

## Civility and Respect

SWTC has signed the National Association Local Councils Civility and Respect Pledge <https://www.nalc.gov.uk/our-work/civility-and-respect-project>

Councillors must:

- Promote equality by not discriminating unlawfully against any person
- Treat others with respect
- Ensure you do not use the Authority's resources for political purposes unless it is part of the functions of either the Authority or your elected office

Councillors must not:

- Compromise the impartiality of anyone who works for, or on behalf of, the Authority
- Disclose confidential information without valid consent
- Prevent anyone getting information they are entitled to
- Bring your Office or Authority into disrepute at any time
- Use your position improperly to advantage or disadvantage yourself or anyone else

## Training

Training can open Councillors eyes to new possibilities, and it is essential that they undertake training to fully partake in their role. A wide range of training for Councillors is available through the Town Council or via the County Association:

- Roles & Responsibilities
- Law & Procedures
- Planning
- Council Finance
- Budget & Precept
- Employment Issues
- Chairman/Councillor Training

SWTC will provide a series of training sessions for all newly elected Councillors and it is anticipated that all will attend these important sessions. The dates will be set at a mutually convenient date and time and once Councillors have settled into their roles.

## You're Elected

Congratulations! Now what does this mean?

Once elected as a SWTC Councillor a full formal welcome pack will be provided to you along with your declaration of office which must be signed in the presence of the Town Clerk at or before the first Council meeting<sup>2</sup>.

The upcoming Council meeting dates can be found below or online at <https://saffronwalden.gov.uk/about-us/committee/>

### Saffron Walden Town Council – Calendar of Meetings 2022-23

	2022						2023					
	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	April	May	June
<b>Full Council</b> 2 <sup>nd</sup> Monday of the month	11 <sup>th</sup>		12 <sup>th</sup>	10 <sup>th</sup>	14 <sup>th</sup>	5 <sup>th</sup>	9 <sup>th</sup>	13 <sup>th</sup>	13 <sup>th</sup>	11 <sup>th</sup>	15 <sup>th</sup>	12 <sup>th</sup>
<b>Planning &amp; Transport</b> 2 <sup>nd</sup> & 4 <sup>th</sup> Thursday of the month	14 <sup>th</sup> 28 <sup>th</sup>	11 <sup>th</sup> 25 <sup>th</sup>	8 <sup>th</sup> 22 <sup>nd</sup>	13 <sup>th</sup> 27 <sup>th</sup>	10 <sup>th</sup> 24 <sup>th</sup>	15 <sup>th</sup>	12 <sup>th</sup> 26 <sup>th</sup>	9 <sup>th</sup> 23 <sup>rd</sup>	9 <sup>th</sup> 23 <sup>rd</sup>	13 <sup>th</sup> 27 <sup>th</sup>	25 <sup>th</sup>	8 <sup>th</sup> 22 <sup>nd</sup>
<b>Finance &amp; Establishment</b> 3 <sup>rd</sup> Monday of the month	18 <sup>th</sup>		19 <sup>th</sup>	17 <sup>th</sup>	21 <sup>st</sup>	12 <sup>th</sup>	16 <sup>th</sup>	20 <sup>th</sup>	20 <sup>th</sup>	17 <sup>th</sup>	22 <sup>nd</sup>	19 <sup>th</sup>
<b>Assets &amp; Services</b> 4 <sup>th</sup> Monday of the month	25 <sup>th</sup>		26 <sup>th</sup>	24 <sup>th</sup>	28 <sup>th</sup>	19 <sup>th</sup>	23 <sup>rd</sup>	27 <sup>th</sup>	22 <sup>nd</sup>	24 <sup>th</sup>	30 <sup>th</sup>	26 <sup>th</sup>
<b>Other Meetings</b>									14 <sup>th</sup> Annual Town Meeting			17 <sup>th</sup> Provisional Ceremonial Mayor Making

All meetings to be held in the Saffron Walden Town Hall

August Recess – Except P&T  
 December Meetings brought forward by one week - P&T combined into one meeting  
 TUESDAY 11<sup>th</sup> April 2023 – Due to Easter Monday Bank Holiday  
 May meetings delayed by one week with one P&T meeting  
 Full Council meeting to be preceded by the Annual (General) Meeting at 7pm  
 TUESDAY 30<sup>th</sup> May 2023 – Due to the late May Bank Holiday

## Key Meetings

- Introduction meeting – Wednesday 10<sup>th</sup> May at 7.30pm this is an informal meeting where you will receive your welcome pack, meet fellow councillors and SWTC staff and receive access to your councillor email address.
- Headshot photos – Wednesday 10<sup>th</sup> May at 7pm or an earlier session will also take place during the day, time TBC in the Town Hall. The photos will be published on the Town Council website.
- The first formal Council meeting is the 15<sup>th</sup> May 2023 at 7pm with the Annual (General) Meeting followed by the Full Council meeting.

At the Annual (General) Meeting the following will be agreed:

- The 2023/24 Mayor and Deputy Mayor
- Schedule of 2023-24 meetings
- Committee membership
- Terms of Reference

<sup>2</sup> Local Government Act 1972, part 5, paragraph 83(4)



**Being a Councillor means you will also be expected:**

- To attend: Civic events / ceremonies, i.e., Remembrance Day; Community Events to support the running of events, i.e., Christmas Activities / craft workshops.
- Partake in officer/councillor working groups, i.e., play area refurbishments.
- Manage your SWTC email and be contactable by members of the public and/or members of staff.
- Upcoming SWTC community events can be found online at <https://saffronwalden.gov.uk/news/swtc-upcoming-events/>