

Grimstead Parish Council: Vision Statement

Parish Councils are the lowest tier of local government in England. The villages of East and West Grimstead are served by Grimstead Parish Council. The main functions of a parish council are:

- representing the local community,
- delivering services to meet local needs and
- improving quality of life and community well being

Through an extensive range of discretionary powers, local councils provide and maintain a variety of important and visible local services including allotments, bridleways, burial grounds, bus shelters, car parks, commons and open spaces, community transport schemes, community safety and crime reduction measures, events and festivals, footpaths, leisure and sports facilities, litter bins, public toilets, planning, street cleaning and lighting, tourism activities, traffic calming measures, village greens and youth projects.

Parish Council activities are largely funded through an element of the council tax (known as a 'precept'¹) but do receive other monies e.g. raised through a levy on certain new developments (though such monies can only be used for infrastructure projects).

Grimstead Parish Council wants to improve the way in which it operates in the above areas (where these are applicable to us). One of the ways in which we have chosen to do this is to publish a 'vision statement', making clear our intentions regarding how we feel the Parish Council could support our community in key areas. We see feedback from our community as a vital part of the process, as only through two-way dialogue will we ensure that we are truly representing local residents and addressing main areas of community concern.

1. Representing the local community

The Parish Council represents the local community (to Wiltshire Council) in a number of ways:

Planning – the Parish Council reviews planning applications covering the Grimsteads and feeds back its views to Wiltshire Council. The Parish Council does not have powers to approve or reject planning applications but can make clear the strength of local feeling on any proposed development². Planning applications under consideration are shown on each Parish Council meeting agenda and councillors are always happy to hear residents' views on planning applications and welcome residents' attendance at monthly Council meetings to express any views personally.

¹ The council decides what it wants to do and how much this is likely to cost and sets a budget accordingly. The 'precept' is set annually by the council after considering how much the council will take from reserves or put into reserves to meet its spending plans.

² The council feels that there is an imbalance between the number of planning applications to build large houses as opposed to more affordable housing and that the villages would benefit from the balance moving towards more affordable housing.

One of the ways in which the Council plans to improve its approach to planning is to make more visits to sites where the development is believed to be particularly contentious.

Wiltshire Council consultation exercises – the Parish Council is made aware of consultations being undertaken by Wiltshire Council and members may respond to these on an ad hoc basis. The Parish Council has started to make residents more aware of such consultations (e.g. car parking charges in Salisbury and provision of rural bus services) and this will continue with the Council looking to use different forms of engagement to ensure that as many people as possible are made aware of such consultations.

2. Delivering Services to Meet Local Needs

Grimstead Parish Council does not provide many services; the main one being the playground in West Grimstead. The Council commissions a playground safety report each year and then addresses any issues raised the report. In addition to a programme of ongoing maintenance, the Council is engaging with the community on what improvements residents would like to see and is putting an improvement plan together. In addition, the Council is going to investigate commercial sponsorship of the playground by a local organization.

The other service the Parish Council provides is grass cutting for the playground and Crockford Green (in West Grimstead) and Maypole Green and the Village Green (in East Grimstead). This service is envisioned to continue as currently.

3. Improving Quality of Life and Community Well Being

The Parish Council sees the following areas as deserving most attention:

Roads – the condition of our local roads and the ways in which they are used are of concern to the Parish Council from both a safety and amenity perspective and so we will:

- Encourage use of Speedwatch, as a way of ensuring traffic conforms to the legal speed limits
- Lobby Wiltshire Council to repair roads/bridges etc.
- Work with the Parish Steward to ensure his work (currently ½ day per month) focuses on addressing the right issues in the villages
- Lobby Wiltshire Council for improved road signage
- Notify residents of planned road closures

Litter/Fly-tipping - our roadsides and lanes are plagued by litter and fly-tipping and so we will:

- Report fly-tipping – encouraging local residents to use the “My Wiltshire” smartphone app
- Lobby Wiltshire Council for support in helping to discourage fly-tipping e.g. placing cameras in known local hotspots to catch fly-tippers
- Organise litter picks twice a year – Wiltshire Council can provide equipment
- Encourage local residents to pick up litter themselves when out walking

Public Rights of Way (PROW) – our villages have an extensive network of footpaths and bridleways. Upkeep of these is the responsibility of the landowner but the Parish Council will:

- Work with landowners to keep paths marked and maintained – including stiles & gates
- Create a circular path using the existing footpaths network around the Grimsteads
- Encourage village participation in path maintenance
- Maintain the PROW map on public display in both villages
- Set up and maintain a log of issues for each path as a way of managing and resolving footpath problems

Crime/Safety – the Grimsteads is an area of relatively low crime and residents are generally safe in their homes. However, more can be done and the Parish Council will:

- Liaising with the Community Police Team and making people aware of police services regarding advice on domestic/personal security, especially for the elderly and other vulnerable groups
- Make people aware of fire services regarding property safety
- Encourage residents to be aware of the part they can play in keeping the community safe
- Organise public meetings on specific issues e.g. defibrillator use

Area Boards support Wiltshire Council's objective of developing stronger and more resilient communities across Wiltshire and the Parish Council will work with the Southern Wiltshire Area Board, especially in the areas of grant funding for community projects, highways schemes and youth activities.

In addition, the Parish Council will look to develop a 'Friends' scheme for each village: people who have the ability and are willing to repair, clean, cut and make things for a small fee so we are not always reliant on the Parish Steward for improvements.

The Parish Council will support community initiatives and will work closely with groups looking after the most vulnerable members of our community. We will help to signpost relevant services e.g. medical, social services, care, counselling and volunteer groups to help people get the support they need.

The management and governance of the Parish Council is important as the Council (as an elected body) has a responsibility to the community to ensure that resources are well managed, monies well spent and the needs of the community properly served. Specific actions we are taking (and will continue to take) include:

- Striving to maintain a full complement of 7 councilors (4 from West Grimstead and 3 from East Grimstead) and encouraging more people to put themselves forward for parish council posts
- Ensuring new councilors receive induction training and any further training required in order to carry out their duties effectively
- Reviewing 'standing orders' on an annual, cyclical basis
- Improving financial reporting – presenting the state of our finances on no less than a quarterly basis
- Managing issues of risk to the Parish Council

The Parish Council acknowledges that communication between the Council and residents has not been satisfactory over the past few years and although a concerted effort has been made recently, more is going to be done to improve our communications. Currently, we maintain and use a number of communication channels to keep people informed of matters that concern or may interest them: website (<http://www.southwilts.com/site/Grimstead-Parish-Council>), email lists, Nextdoor Grimstead, notice boards, parish magazines and Facebook pages.

The Parish Council is going to improve its website and will ensure that it uses the most appropriate channel to communicate on specific subjects e.g. making clear where council meeting minutes may be found, how residents will be notified about road closures etc. We will seek consistency in communication, giving people confidence that they know where specific information may be found. A table of communication topics and channels is illustrated below. However, most channels are used to 'tell' and the Council wants to 'listen' more and so needs to find ways to do this.

This is a living document and needs to be updated regularly to ensure it remains current. In addition, the views of local residents are sought: Are our priorities right; what is missing etc?

Please send any feedback to the Parish Council Chair, Gill Sowersby, at gillsowerby@aol.com