



Helsby Parish Council

COUNCILLOR INDUCTION PACK

Helsby Parish Council
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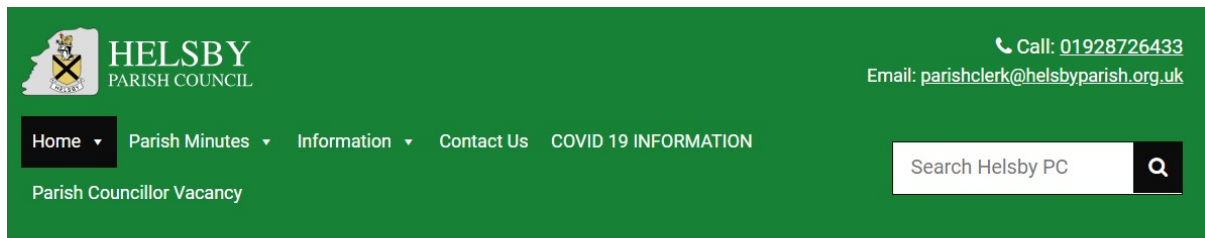
Welcome to Helsby Parish Council – I look forward to working with you during your term of office!

The contents of this welcome pack form the basis of your induction to Helsby Parish Council.

Please do not hesitate to ask me, or your assigned “buddy” councillor, about any aspect of this pack or Council matters that puzzle you as you start to get involved. All councillors have been new at some time and your “buddy” councillor is your mentor who will do their best to answer any queries you may have, no matter how trivial you may feel they are. A fresh pair of eyes often raises very good points that can improve what we do and how we do it!

I will arrange for you to have a dedicated e-mail account which may be used for all Parish Council related matters. All future correspondence will be sent to that address, including agendas/materials for Council meetings. Our [Social Media Policy](#) includes guidance on the use of email. The Council does not have a dedicated Facebook page or Twitter account.

I will add your details (photo and contact phone number) to the Parish Council website which is available at <https://helsbyparish.org.uk/>.



Parish Councillors

The Parish of Helsby is made up of three wards North, Central and South.



Council Documents

All policy, notice, registration, plan and regulation documents.



Parish Minutes

All parish council minutes from 2017 to date.

The website provides access to many Council documents, including our [Standing Orders](#) and [Financial Regulations](#). These define, in great detail, how the Parish Council manages its affairs and a hard copy of each is included with this pack. The website also contains our [Publication Scheme](#), which summarises information and policies related to the work of the Parish Council.

The information in the remainder of this document is divided into sections. The latest versions of the documents referred to throughout this pack are available on the website and links have been provided within this document. Please advise me if any links are broken or the information appears outdated.

1. The Council

Helsby Parish Council is a busy local Council. We are the first tier of local government and play an important role in promoting the village of Helsby, representing its interests and supporting the work of different groups in the community. Helsby Parish Councillors do not represent political parties and are simply unpaid volunteers serving their local community.

We have responsibility for the following areas and services:

- Cemetery at Old Chester Road;
- Allotments at Old Chester Road and Queens Drive;
- Parish field and play area/park (we are not responsible for the play area at Callender Gardens) ;
- Sherwood Court (area by Community Centre, leased from CWAC) and the adult gym; and
- Maltby Triangle (area between Chester Road and start of Robin Hood Lane, leased from CWAC).

We also have oversight of the following facilities, which are managed by local volunteers:

- Community Centre at Lower Robin Hood Lane; and
- Village planters.

Helsby Parish Council does not have responsibility for the following services:

- Highways, including parking, and public rights of way;
- Bins and waste collection;
- Street cleaning, including maintenance of verges;
- Housing issues;
- Health and social services;
- Schools and education; and
- Libraries.

These are dealt with by Cheshire West and Chester Council (CWAC) which is the second tier of local government. They have a comprehensive website at www.cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk where many routine issues can be reported. It is often helpful to carry out a Google search to find the correct area of the site (e.g. "report fly tipping in Cheshire West"). Helsby Parish Council offers guidance and support for residents experiencing problems with these matters. Helsby also has an elected borough Councillor who can follow up such issues within CWAC.

Helsby Parish Council does not act as the planning authority, although we are consulted on each application which is submitted within the parish and sometimes beyond. CWAC is the Planning Authority and all planning applications, current and historic, are available on the [CWAC website - Public Access to Planning Applications](#). You can search using a reference number if you know it, or by line of an address.

A copy of the **Annual Report** which is given in April each year at the Annual Parish Meeting is included to give you an idea of the topics handled by the Parish Council and bring you up to date on what's been happening in recent times. This report is also termed the Chairman's Address and is posted on the Council's website and distributed via Helsby News.

Councillors

The Parish of Helsby comprises three wards – North, Central and South – each with 5 representatives giving a total of 15 Helsby Parish Councillors. **A list of Councillors and their contact details (email, home and mobile phone number)** will be provided to you. This is for internal use only by me and other Councillors.

We publish the name, address and a contact telephone number for all Councillors on the Parish Council noticeboard (currently located by the Station Avenue car park). **A copy will be provided to you.** Our website displays a photo and contact phone number for each Councillor.

The next routine elections to Helsby Parish Council will take place in May 2023.

Committees

The Parish Council meets once a month but delegates a number of its functions to committees and the Parish Clerk. This means that matters tend to be discussed in detail by the appropriate committee, which recommends actions for approval by full Council. Conversely, strategic decisions made by Full Council may be cascaded to a committee, volunteer councillor(s) and/or the Parish Clerk for implementation. The Scheme of Delegation within [Standing Orders](#) sets out the powers and duties of each Committee.

A list showing the membership of Committees is provided. This is reviewed at the Annual Meeting of the Parish Council which is held in May each year but new Councillors are encouraged to join any committee as soon as they wish if numbers permit (there is a maximum of 7 Councillors per committee).

Staff

The Parish Council employs one member of staff – Mrs Claire Jones - as Parish Clerk. Claire is also the Burial Clerk and Responsible Financial Officer for Helsby Parish Council. She works 30 hours per week, on a flexible basis. Claire's core contactable hours when she is available by phone, email or at the Parish Office are 10.00 to 14.00 Monday to Thursday.

The Council has appointed a local contractor to maintain the cemetery, allotments and other areas owned or leased by the Parish Council. We also have other contracts for grass and hedge maintenance, tree surgery and Christmas lighting.

Acronyms

As a new member of the Council, you are likely to see and hear many acronyms at meetings and in e-mails. This can seem very daunting if you are unaware of the terminology. Whilst not an exhaustive list, Appendix 1 sets out some of the more common acronyms used by councillors.

2. Code of Conduct

Code of Conduct

Please read and familiarise yourself with the [Council's Code of Conduct](#), **a copy of which is provided.** Helsby Parish Council has adopted the CWAC Code of Conduct which dates from 2015 but is anticipated to be updated very shortly. Any complaints about a Helsby councillor are handled by CWAC's Monitoring Officer

Register of Interests

A copy of the Register of Interests form is included. Please complete it as soon as possible but in any event within 28 days of your election / co-option to the Council. An electronic version

of the form is available on CWAC website at [Parish council forms - register of interests, gifts and hospitality \(cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk\)](http://Parish council forms - register of interests, gifts and hospitality (cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk))

The completed form should be returned to me. If you have any questions, please also contact me in the first instance.

Declarations of Interests

An opportunity is provided at the start of each meeting of the Council or its committees for you to declare any interests in items on the agenda.

This does not preclude you from declaring interests at other points during the meeting if it becomes clear that you may have a conflict of interests.

Cheshire Association of Local Councils (ChALC) provide regular general and specific training sessions for Councillors which cover the Code of Conduct.

3. Guidance / Training

A copy of the Good Councillor's Guide is provided. This provides a straightforward overview of the role of a local councillor. **I can provide log-in details for you to access this online as well as other relevant PUBLICATIONS (nalc.gov.uk)**

Helsby Parish Council is a member of the Cheshire Association of Local Councils (ChALC) and several Councillors have been/are senior members of the ChALC Board. [ChALC](#) is a member-based organisation that exists to promote the rights and interests of Town and Parish Councils across Cheshire East, Cheshire West and Chester, Warrington, Trafford and Halton Boroughs. ChALC also provides professional support for member councils in all aspects of their work and when necessary, can provide formal, legal advice on a wide range of council related issues. You may have seen or read about ChALC's Chief Officer, Jackie Weaver, in action! ChALC is affiliated to the National Association of Local Councils (NALC).

Training

ChALC runs a comprehensive programme of training aimed at supporting the core work of Town/Parish Clerks, Councillors and Chairmen. They are suitable for both new and experienced Councillors and include sessions by experts in planning and local government finance. ChALC also partners with [Breakthrough Communications](#) who deliver online training in a range of communication skills for Clerks and Councillors.

A copy of the latest virtual training program provided by ChALC is provided (available online at [ChALC Training Events](#)) and I will circulate other opportunities as they arise. Please consider attending an introductory course as soon as possible, and any others you feel would assist you in your role as a councillor. Please let me know which course(s) you wish to attend. The cost of attending, together with any reasonable expenses e.g. travel will be covered by Helsby Parish Council, which has provision in the budget for this.

4. Policies and Documents

Helsby Parish Council has a number of policies and documents which are available on our website. Copies of the two main documents, our [Standing Orders](#) and [Financial Regulations](#) are provided in this pack. These define, in great detail, how the Parish Council manages its

affairs. The website also contains our [Publication Scheme](#), which summarises information and policies related to the work of the Parish Council.

Policies and documents are reviewed routinely, typically each year, by the relevant committee.

5. Meetings

A schedule of meetings will be provided to you. The Parish Council meets once a month, usually at 7pm on the second Monday in the month, in the Upper Hall of the Methodist Church.

Each committee meets once every 3 months, usually at 7pm on a Monday, in the Parish Office at Helsby Community Sports Club. Non-committee members are welcome to attend, but do not have voting rights. Minutes of committee meetings are circulated with the papers for full Council meetings and so it is unusual for non-members to attend committee meetings unless there is an item of special interest, or they have been asked to substitute for a committee member.

Agendas are sent out by e-mail, together with minutes from previous council and/or committee meetings and reports relating to the agenda items. Hard copies are not provided. The Clerk can provide WiFi access details for the meeting venues if members wish to view materials on their laptop or tablet.

All meetings are open to the public and start with “Public Airtime”. This is when any member of the public can ask a question or raise an issue. It lasts a maximum of 10 minutes, although the Chairman may choose to extend the time if a number of people wish to speak. It is important to note that this is the public’s only opportunity to participate in the meeting, other than at the Chairman’s discretion.

If the Council needs to discuss a confidential matter e.g. competitive tenders, this is conducted at the end of the meeting as “Part B” business. The press and public must leave before Part B of the meeting commences.

The May Council meeting is termed the Annual Meeting of Helsby Parish Council. This is the meeting at which Councillors elect a Chairman and Vice-Chairman for the forthcoming year and appoint members to Committees and outside bodies. The website includes a list of current [Committee Membership and Outside Body Representation](#).

An Annual Parish Meeting is also held in April each year for the benefit of all residents. The Council Chairman delivers an address describing activities over the previous year and presents a brief synopsis of the Council’s accounts for the previous financial year.

The Parish Council holds a surgery, usually from 10-11am on the first Saturday in each month, in the Parish Office. A list of surgery dates and Councillors due to attend will be provided to you.

All Councillors are expected to attend all full Council meetings. If you cannot attend, please make sure that you let me know in advance. If you do not attend meetings for a period of 6 months without providing a reason(s) that is accepted by the Council, then you cease to become a Councillor.

6. Finance

The Council's financial year runs from 1st April to 31st March each year.

The Council's main source of income is the precept (money raised for it by CWAC as part of Council Tax). The precept for Helsby Parish Council has been around £100,000 for several years. The Council agrees how much precept it will request for the forthcoming financial year at the January meeting of full Council. This will be based on a recommendation by the Finance Committee, which meets early in January. The Finance Committee reviews budgets requested by the other committees (who meet for that purpose on a single evening in December the previous year) and considers other costs and income incurred by full Council, to propose a precept. **A copy of the Council's latest budget and precept request is provided.**

The Financial Report summarising the Council's income, expenditure, assets, leases etc at the end of the previous financial year is available on the website. The website also contains the Council's [Business Plan](#) which describes our plans and estimated expenditure over the period 2018 to 2023.

7. Planning

CWAC are the Planning Authority who decide all local planning applications. All documents submitted as part of a planning application are available on the [CWAC website - Public Access to Planning Applications](#). You can search using a reference number if you know it, or by line of an address.

Helsby Parish Council is consulted on all planning applications submitted to CWAC for sites within the Parish, and for some sites outside the parish which may impact us e.g. within neighbouring parishes or industries on the marshes. In particular, parts of the Mere's Edge area currently under development extend into the adjacent parish of Dunham on the Hill and Hapsford, and the traveller site at Towers Lane is in the parish of Alvanley.

Helsby Parish Council does not have a planning committee but instead relies on Councillors from the relevant ward reviewing each application and suggesting a response. The procedure is described in an Appendix within [Standing Orders](#) and is coordinated by the Clerk. A report on any planning responses which have been submitted to CWAC is included in the agenda pack for each Council meeting. Applications for major developments which may have a wide impact on the community tend to be handled on an individual basis, with all Councillors providing input and support as required.

[Helsby Neighbourhood Plan 2015-2030](#) was accepted at a public referendum and adopted in 2016. The Parish Council worked with local community representatives and organisations to draw up the plan which CWAC takes into account when deciding on planning applications. CWAC also consider policies within the adopted CWAC Local Plan and other supplementary planning documents such as those covering parking and house extensions. These are available on CWAC's website at https://inside.cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk/policies_plans_and_strategies/planning_policy/local_plan

Although planning matters can seem daunting at first, and it is undoubtedly a wide and complex field, courses such as those run by ChALC provide a good grounding and include sessions aimed at those with no prior knowledge. Other Parish Councillors, including those involved in preparing the Helsby Neighbourhood Plan, can also share their experience and

provide guidance - ask your “buddy” councillor to help. It may also be reassuring to remember that you are not personally deciding the planning application but simply recommending a response which will be submitted by Helsby Parish Council as a whole. Providing local insight and “insider knowledge” can be very useful for a CWAC Planner who may only be aware of the site through Google Maps and what the applicant has told them!

The Department for Local Communities and Local Government has produced a [‘Plain English guide to the Planning System’](#) which was published in 2015. Although there continues to be much discussion about planning reforms, the guide nevertheless still provides a useful summary of the overall system. Due to CWAC’s charging schedule, Helsby does not receive Community Infrastructure Levy payments for developments within the parish. Instead CWAC seeks “Section 106” contributions from the developer, some of which the Parish Council can access to fund local projects such as improving our green spaces.

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Please do not hesitate to get in touch with me or your “buddy” Councillor if you have any questions or queries as a result of your induction session.

With very best wishes for your time on Helsby Parish Council.

Claire Jones
Parish Clerk

Above programme agreed at the Parish Council Meeting on: 7 February 2022

Next Review Date: February 2023

APPENDIX 1

List of Acronyms for new Helsby Parish Councillors

Acronym	Full Name
AGAR	Annual Governance and Accountability Return
AONB	Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty
CC	Community Centre (see HCC)
CCG	Clinical Commissioning Group
CHALC	Cheshire Association of Local Councils
CIL	Community Infrastructure Levy
CILCA	Certificate in Local Council Administration
CNC	Cycle North Cheshire
CWAC	Cheshire West and Chester Council
DHH	Dunham on the Hill and Hapsford (Parish Council)
EA	Environment Agency
FOI	Freedom of Information
FTC	Frodsham Town Council
GA	General Assistant
GDPR	General Data Protection Regulation
HCC	Helsby Community Centre (see CC)
HCSC	Helsby Community Sports Club
HHS	Helsby High School
HNP	Helsby Neighbourhood Plan
HPC	Helsby Parish Council
HR	Human Resources (committee)
ICCM	Institute of Cemetery and Crematorium Management
LEA	Local Education Authority
LEP	Local Enterprise Partnership
LGA	Local Government Act
LPA	Local Planning Authority
NALC	National Association of Local Councils
NTC	Northwich Town Council
PCA	Park Cemetery and Allotments (committee)
PCC	Police and Crime Commissioner
PCSO	Police Community Support Officer
POS	Public Open Space
PPG	Planning Policy Guidance
PROW	Public Right of Way
RFO	Responsible Financial Officer
S106	Section 106
SLCC	Society of Local Council Clerks
SPG	Supplementary Planning Guidance
SUDS	Sustainable Drainage System
T/PC	Town/Parish Council

TPO	Tree Preservation Order
TRO	Traffic Regulation Order
TTRO	Temporary Traffic Regulation Order
VPA	Village Produce Association