

Public Participation at Parish Council Meetings

A Parish Council Meeting

The following may offer some assistance to members of the public to understand how a Council meeting works.

The role of the Parish Council

Parish councils are a local authority that makes all kinds of decisions on behalf of the people on issues that affect the local community, most commonly planning matters, crime prevention, managing open spaces and campaigning for and delivering better services and facilities.

A Parish Council is elected by the electorate of the area to serve as a body to decide upon and provide local facilities and fulfil requirements. Parish Councillors are unpaid volunteers who give their time and service freely to assist the local community Clifton Campville with Thorpe Constantine Parish Council is made up of 9 Councillor seats, managed by a Chairman.

Meetings of the **Parish Council are not public meetings** but members of the public have a statutory right to attend meetings of the council as observers. They have no legal right to speak unless the Parish Council Chairman authorises them to do so. However, as part of its community engagement, Coton in the Elms Parish Council sets out a time for public participation at an agreed time when members of the public are invited to speak.

We hope that you will find Council meetings useful and if you have any queries please consult the Clerk.

Are residents allowed to speak or contribute?

The law does not allow members of the public to take part in the debates. However, this council will allow members of the public the opportunity to speak following a temporary adjournment of the meeting, both at the beginning and end of the meeting. Public participation is an opportunity for members of the public to (a) make representations, (b) answer questions or (c) give evidence relating to the business to be transacted. Please study the agenda carefully so that when the opportunity occurs you can make the best use of your time.

If you wish to raise a point, which does not relate to an item on that evening's agenda, you are free to do so during public participation. However, the council's discussion of the point might have to be delayed until a subsequent meeting, as the council is unable to make a decision binding 'in law (this is particularly relevant to financial decisions) unless a specific item is included on the agenda.

Procedure for a member of the public to speak or raise issues at Council meetings?

If at all possible or feasible, prior to the meeting contact the Clerk to inform you wish to speak or raise an issue at a forthcoming Council meeting. This is because, if there is information the Clerk can bring along to the meeting or research before the meeting which may help with the query or the Councillors – the Clerk will be able to do this.

Members of the council are always willing to discuss topics put forward by the public. Our agenda is prepared about a week before the next council meeting so you will need to inform the Clerk about 10 days prior to the meeting. Although this might seem a long time in advance, the council is required by law to publicise its agenda at least three clear days before each meeting. Only business contained within the agenda can be considered at the meeting.

When the meeting reaches the agenda item of 'public participation', the Chairman will suspend the meeting and members of the public will be allowed to speak. At this point Councillors should not interrupt or debate issues with the public, but sometimes, if it is counter-productive not to, they may respond, but debate or long discussions should not take place between the public and the Council as this is the 'public' section.

The time for the public to speak is limited to 10 minutes and there are opportunities for public participation at both the beginning and end of the Parish Council meeting. If more than one member of the public wishes to speak on the same topic then they should nominate one person to speak on their behalf. This will avoid duplication and make the best use of the public participation period.

A question raised by a member of the public during a public speaking session shall not require a response and there should be no debate or discussion between the Council and the public. The Chairman has the right to say that any question or statement is inappropriate and will not be accepted.

Neither Councillors nor the Clerk should be put under pressure to respond immediately to comments made under public participation. Members of the public do not have a right to force items onto the council agenda nor to insist on how matters are recorded in the minutes. A brief record of topics raised at public participation will be included in the minutes of that meeting. But libellous, offensive and discriminatory comments will not be minuted.