

Ridgmont Parish Council Meeting Protocol

Participation in the Open Forum

This Council meets and makes its decisions in public and is committed to community engagement and therefore warmly invites members of the public, the press, the police and ward councillors to attend meetings and contribute within the open forum. A council meeting is not a public meeting; it is a meeting held in public and there is no requirement in law to provide an opportunity for the public to question the council, but this council welcomes the opportunity to offer it.

Members of the public are asked to respect the fact that this is a meeting to conduct council business and interruptions during council business are not permitted. If, in the opinion of the Chairperson, the business of the meeting is disrupted in any way, the Chairperson will ask the person/s causing the disruption to be quiet and if they refuse then ask them to leave. Mobile phones must be switched off during the meeting.

Public participation is permitted regarding items on any topic within the remit of the parish council. Written questions received in advance of the meeting are encouraged but not essential: if provided in advance this will make it easier for an answer to be prepared. The council will not enter into any substantive discussion on a question raised if it is unable to answer a question directly. If members of the public are unsure whether a question is within the remit of the parish council, then the clerk will be able to answer this.

Public participation will be for a maximum period of 10 minutes and will take place early on in the agenda, so that councillors may take into account views expressed when reaching decisions. If a question relates to a topic on the agenda then the Chairperson may decide to address it immediately or carry it forward for a response at a later date.

Members of the public should note that the council is only allowed to take decisions on topics that are publicised on the agenda, excepting items delegated to the clerk. Agenda items may be suggested no later than 1 week before each parish council meeting.

All communication at meetings shall be through the Chairperson. Councillors may not address questions raised by members of the public except through and with the permission of the Chairperson. Members of the public may not address individual councillors except through, and with the permission of the Chairperson. Councillors and members of the public must respect the role of the Chairperson and may be asked to leave if in the opinion of the Chairperson they breach this protocol in a way that disrupts the orderly conduct of the meeting.

This council will provide an opportunity via the agenda for the police and ward councillors to attend and report to meetings and respond to any questions or queries from Council.

The Chairperson may, at his or her discretion, invite a member of the public to speak on an agenda item during the parish council meeting if, in the opinion of the Chairperson, that individual has relevant information not available to the parish council which will help in its deliberations.

Recording and Filming of Council Meetings

The right to record, film and to broadcast meetings of the council, committees and sub committees is established following the Local Government Audit and Accountability Act 2014. This is in addition to the rights of the press and public to attend such meetings.

Any person wishing to record a meeting in any format whatsoever must contact, the Clerk prior to the start of the meeting. The Clerk's details are set out in the public notice and agenda of the meeting; (or in his/her absence, the contact will be the Chairperson of the parish council.

Meetings or parts of meetings from which the press and public are excluded may not be filmed or recorded.

Members of the public are permitted to film or record meetings to which they are permitted access in a non-disruptive manner.

The use of digital and social media recording tools, for example Twitter, blogging or audio recording shall be allowed as long as it is carried out in a non-disruptive way and only to the extent that it does not interfere with any person's ability, even where he or she has a disability, to follow the debate.

While those attending meetings are deemed to have consented to the filming, recording or broadcasting of meetings, those exercising the rights to film, record and broadcast must respect the rights of other people attending under the Data Protection Act 1998.

The Chairperson of the meeting has the authority to stop a meeting and take appropriate action if any person contravenes these principles or is deemed to be recording in a disruptive manner.

Any person or organisation choosing to film, record or broadcast any meeting of the Council is responsible for any claims or other liability from them so doing.

The Council asks those recording proceedings not to edit the film or recording in a way that could lead to misinterpretation of the proceedings or infringe the core values of the Council. This includes refraining from editing an image or views expressed in a way that may ridicule or show lack of respect towards those being filmed or recorded.

The Council will display these requirements as to filming, recording and broadcasting at its meeting venues and those undertaking these activities will be deemed to have accepted them whether they have read them or not.

The Council may itself photograph, film, record or broadcast meetings and can retain, use or dispose of such material in accordance with its retention and disposal policies.

Code of Conduct

Members of the parish council are bound by a Code of Conduct which sets out the standards of conduct that are expected when they are acting in that capacity, and in so doing providing the openness and accountability necessary to reinforce public confidence in the way in which Members perform those activities.

The rules of conduct include:

- Do treat others with respect and courtesy
- Do not do anything which may cause the Authority to breach any of its equality duties (in particular as set out in the Equality Act 2010)
- Do not bully any person
- Do not do anything which compromises or is likely to compromise the impartiality of those who work for, or on behalf of, the Authority
- Do not use or attempt to use your position as a member improperly to confer on or secure for yourself or any other person, an advantage or disadvantage
- Do not conduct yourself in a manner which could reasonably be regarded as bringing your office or authority into disrepute.

Members are required to register their interests and, where it is required or appropriate to do so, should always declare any relevant interest in any proceeding of the Council and follow the relevant procedure, dependent upon the nature of the interest.

Disclosable Pecuniary Interests

The following list indicates those interests which members should declare as “Disclosable Pecuniary Interests”, for themselves and for any “relevant person” other than themselves, namely: a spouse or civil partner, any person with whom living as husband and wife, or any person with whom living as if we were civil partners: Employment, office, trade,

profession or vocation, Sponsorship, Contracts, Land, Licences, Corporate tenancies and Securities

Members should ensure they comply with the statutory requirements to register, disclose and withdraw from participating in respect of any matter in which they have a disclosable pecuniary interest, ensure that their register of interests is kept up to date and notify the Monitoring Officer in writing within 28 days of becoming aware of any change, make verbal declaration of the existence and nature of any disclosable pecuniary interest at any meeting at which they are present at which an item of business which affects or relates to the subject matter of that interest is under consideration, at or before the consideration of the item of business or as soon as the interest becomes apparent.

Where members are present at a meeting of the council and they are or become aware that they have a disclosable pecuniary interest in any matter to be considered, or being considered, at the meeting, they do not participate, or participate further, in any discussion of the matter at the meeting; and do not participate in any vote, or further vote, taken on the matter at the meeting

Members may make a written request if they consider it appropriate that the Council grant a dispensation relieving them from either or both of the restrictions above.

In respect of disclosable pecuniary interests, failing to act as required by the Localism Act is a criminal offence.

Non-Disclosable Pecuniary Interests

In addition to the requirements set out above if Members attend a meeting at which any item of business is to be considered and they are aware that they have a “non-disclosable pecuniary interest” in that item, they must make verbal declaration of the existence and nature of that interest at or before the consideration of the item of business or as soon as the interest becomes apparent.

A “non-disclosable pecuniary interest” in an item of business of the Council where: A decision in relation to that business might reasonably be regarded as affecting their well-being or financial standing or of a member of their family or a person with whom they have a close association to a greater extent than it would affect the majority of the Council Tax payers or inhabitants of the electoral area for which they have been elected. Where a matter arises at a meeting which relates to a financial interest of a friend, relative or close associate, you must disclose the nature of the interest and may not vote on the matter. You may speak on the matter only if members of the public are also allowed to speak at the meeting. If it is a “sensitive interest”, you shall declare the interest, but not the nature of the interest.

What is the Role of a Chairperson

A Chairperson:

- Is a member of the Council and is elected annually
- Has the authority at meetings and must be obeyed
- Is the interface between the public and the Council
- The one to welcome speakers and make them 'feel at home'
- Is to make sure the decision is clear for the clerk to act upon

Note: The Chairperson on his own has no power to make decisions

Presiding at the first Annual Meeting of the Parish Council:

The retiring chairperson, or in his or her absence, the vice chair must preside at the meeting for the first item on the agenda 'To Elect Chairperson'. If it is a meeting after an election then the retiring chair or vice chair presides, even if they are no longer councillors. If both are absent then the meeting may appoint another councillor to preside. It is illegal for a clerk to take the chair at a meeting.

Election of a Chair:

If the presiding chair is no longer to be a member of the council then he/she only has a casting vote. If he/she is still going to be a member then he/she has a vote and a casting vote (he/she can vote for him/herself if he/she wants). The chairperson of the council should give a report to the Annual Parish Meeting on the activity of the council.

Once voted in, the new chair signs his declaration of acceptance of office and presides over the meeting immediately.

What does a good chairperson do?

- Plan the meeting with the clerk and ensure that everything on the agenda is legal.
- Brief themselves and prepare fully – study all relevant information and anticipate the needs and interests of the members. The Chairperson can then answer questions or deal with requests for information.
- Be punctual – the Chairperson should set a good example by arriving early to check the arrangements and welcome members, the public and any visiting speakers.

- Conduct the meeting:
 1. Check there is a quorum (minimum number of members needed to make the meeting legal).
 2. Call the meeting to order and declare it open
 3. Welcome members, the public and visiting speakers to the meeting and remind everyone present that under the 2014 Regulations they may be filmed, recorded, photographed or otherwise reported about
 4. Introduce the standard items on the agenda – apologies; declarations of interest; confirmation of minutes of previous meeting
 5. Introduce the agenda items and ensure that all members know what they have to achieve and how they might do it encourage participation
 6. Stimulate an exchange of ideas and experience
 7. Ensure that all have a chance to express their views freely
 8. Keep the members aware of objectives
 9. Maintain focus
 10. Guide and progress discussion towards achieving the objectives
 11. Manage conflict
 12. Be fair and balanced
 13. Preserve order
 14. Enforce rules of procedure
 15. Rule on disputed matters.