

COLNEY HEATH PARISH COUNCIL

- ✉ **Postal Address:** Highfield Park Visitor Centre, Hill End Lane AL4 0RA
- ☎ **Telephone:** (01727) 825 314
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2024-25 Item 53c

Public Participation at Meetings Policy

1. Introduction

A Parish Council meeting is not a public meeting, but a meeting held in public. Members of the public have a statutory right to attend Council meetings as observers. Colney Heath Parish Council encourages community engagement by providing opportunities for public participation at each meeting.

2. Public Participation

As part of Colney Heath Parish Council's commitment to community involvement, time will be set aside at every Council and Committee meeting for a public forum called "public participation." This will occur at two designated times during the meeting.

3. Attendance and Observing

Members of the public are welcome to stay for the remainder of the Council meeting as observers. However, they are not permitted to participate in any discussions after the public participation session. If confidential matters (such as staffing, legal, or commercially sensitive issues) are discussed, the public may be excluded in accordance with Colney Heath Parish Council Standing Order 3(d).

4. Other Ways to Ask Questions

Public participation is just one way to ask questions. Residents may also write or telephone the Parish Council with their inquiries, which will be addressed separately.

5. Making Representations

As stated in Colney Heath Parish Council Standing Order 3(e), members of the public may make representations, ask questions, and present evidence at meetings on matters included in the agenda.

6. Behaviour During Meetings

All attendees at Council or Committee meetings must act respectfully. Any behaviour that demeans, insults, threatens, or intimidates others will not be tolerated. The Council reserves the right to end participation or exclude any individual acting inappropriately.

7. Public Participation Rules

The following rules apply to public participation:

- a) Public participation is allowed at all Parish Council and Committee meetings.

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- b) Participation will occur at the beginning and end of the meeting, lasting a maximum of 20 minutes, unless extended by the Chair, in line with Standing Order 3(f).
- c) Each speaker is limited to 3 minutes, in accordance with Standing Order 3(g).
- d) The Chair will determine the order in which members of the public speak.
- e) Public contributions should relate to items on the agenda, per Standing Order 3(e).
- f) Questions may also be submitted in advance:
 - A maximum of two pre-submitted questions will be allowed at each meeting.
 - Questions are accepted in the order received; excess questions will be deferred to the next meeting.
 - Pre-submitted questions will be read by the Parish Clerk during the first public session.
 - All pre-submitted questions count toward the total 20-minute public participation time.
- g) As per Standing Order 3(h), a question does not require a response during the meeting nor should it initiate a debate. The Chair may direct a written or verbal response.

8. Responses to Public Questions

- If an immediate response can be provided, it will be recorded in the meeting minutes.
- For questions that require research, answers will be included at a subsequent meeting and noted in the minutes.
- If the answer is not available by the next meeting, an update will be provided as soon as possible.
- Responses to pre-submitted questions will also be included in the minutes and may be sent in writing to the questioner within 10 working days.

9. Rejection of Questions

The Clerk, on behalf of the Parish Council, may reject any question or supplementary question that:

- Does not pertain to matters for which the Council is responsible,
- Is defamatory, frivolous, or abusive,
- Is substantially similar to a question asked within the past six months,
- Requires the disclosure of confidential or exempt information.

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If a question is rejected, the questioner will be informed of the reason, provided contact details were submitted.

This policy ensures that public participation during Colney Heath Parish Council meetings is structured, respectful, and aligned with the Council's statutory obligation.

10. Review

This policy was presented to Full Council in November 2024 and if adopted will be reviewed in November 2027 or as required if until legislation changes.