

## **GUIDANCE FOR RESIDENTS WISHING TO ATTEND PARISH COUNCIL MEETINGS**

The Parish Council meets monthly, except in August, and has five Committees which meet at various intervals. The schedule of meetings is published on the Councils' website [www.finchampstead-pc.gov.uk](http://www.finchampstead-pc.gov.uk)

The Local Government Act 1972 section 100, along with the Public Bodies (Admissions to Meetings) Act 1960 provides that meetings of the full Council shall be open to the public and press.

At some meetings there may be confidential items to be discussed, such as staffing matters. Such discussions normally take place after the main part of the meeting. The legislation referred to above allows the press and public to be excluded from this part of the meeting in order to maintain confidentiality.

The Council's Standing Orders detail the order of business, rules of debate and general matters relating to how its meetings are run. <https://www.finchampstead-pc.gov.uk/policies/standing-orders>

### **The Parish Council welcomes members of the public and media to its meetings.**

- Every Council and Committee agenda includes provision for a fifteen minute public participation session when each guest is invited to speak to the Council for up to 5 minutes. If a group of residents attends in relation to a single matter they should nominate one person to speak on their behalf.
- Guests may however attend simply to observe the meeting.
- Parish Councillors may ask questions to clarify any points raised. However, the Council is not required to respond, nor will it enter into a debate during a Public Participation session.
- After the Public Participation session residents or other guests attending the meeting may only speak if invited to do so by the Chair of the meeting. They may leave the meeting at any time.

### **Attendance at in person meetings**

- It is helpful if anyone wishing to attend a Council or Committee meeting advises the Clerk in advance, but this is not essential.
- Again it is helpful if anyone wishing to attend provides an indication of the matter they wish to raise as this may enable the Council to respond more fully at the meeting.
- A guest attending a meeting does not have to provide their name, but we expect them to acknowledge any communications from the Chair.
- Any guest who disrupts a meeting or prevents a meeting from taking its usual course will be asked to leave the building. If necessary, Police assistance will be requested.

### **Attendance at virtual meetings**

- Since May 2021 it has no longer been legal for Councils to meet virtually. However, in the interests of the health and safety of Councillors, staff and any visitors, the Parish Council has chosen to continue to meet virtually.
- In person Extraordinary Meetings have and will continue to be held to ensure that statutory and other important decisions are made lawfully. Members of the public may attend these meetings.
- As the virtual meetings are not legal, the Council has no obligation to permit members of the public or press to attend. However, the Council welcomes guests providing that they act in a courteous manner, and will provide the meeting link on request.
  - A guest attending a meeting does not have to provide their name, but is expected to respond verbally to any communications from the Chair.
  - The Council expects guests to use their video by way of introduction, even briefly. All Councillors and staff attending meetings use video unless experiencing technical difficulties.
- If a guest does not verbally acknowledge or respond to the Chair, and does not use video without stating a good reason for this, they will be removed from the meeting.

*Members of the public wishing to attend a Planning Committee meeting should note the additional guidance on these meetings – please see overleaf.*



## **GUIDANCE FOR RESIDENTS WISHING TO ATTEND AND SPEAK**

### **AT PLANNING COMMITTEE MEETINGS**

Parish Councils are statutory bodies that are notified of every planning application submitted within their area, they are not the decision makers. The decision maker is the Planning Authority, for Finchampstead this is Wokingham Borough Council (WBC).

Finchampstead Parish Council's Planning Committee consists of up to 8 Councillors and has delegated powers to comment on planning applications on behalf of the Parish Council.

The Planning Committee meets every four weeks when it considers applications for development within Finchampstead Parish. Details of meetings can be found at [www.finchampstead-pc.gov.uk](http://www.finchampstead-pc.gov.uk) or by contacting the Council at [planning@finchampstead-pc.gov.uk](mailto:planning@finchampstead-pc.gov.uk)

The Committee takes into account the views of local residents when formulating its opinion, including viewing any comments published on the WBC website. The Committee may also send representatives to WBC's Planning Committee meetings to speak on applications and provide a local perspective.

- Residents, and applicants for planning permission, are welcome to attend Planning Committee meetings held either in person or by video conferencing. They may speak at the meeting if they wish, whether in support of or against an application.

At some meetings there may be confidential business to be discussed, for example in relation to enforcement matters. This will generally be dealt with after the main part of the meeting, and under the Local Government Act 1972 & Public Bodies (Admission to meetings) Act 1960 the press and public may be excluded from this part of the meeting as publicity would be prejudicial to the public interest due to the confidential nature of the business to be discussed.

- It is helpful if the Parish Council is informed if a resident or applicant wishes to attend a meeting by contacting [planning@finchampstead-pc.gov.uk](mailto:planning@finchampstead-pc.gov.uk) If a virtual meeting the meeting link will need to be requested.
- The Committee meeting will commence with the required formalities and will then move to a Public Participation Session.
- During this session the Chair of the meeting will invite residents or applicants present to speak in turn for up to 5 minutes in relation to a planning application to be considered at the meeting, or on another planning related matter. If present, the applicant will generally be invited to speak first, followed by any others present to support the application, and then those against the application.

If a group of residents attends in relation to a planning application they should nominate one person to speak on their behalf.

- Parish Councillors may ask questions to clarify any points raised.
- After the Public Participation session residents or applicants attending the meeting may only speak if invited to do so by the Chair of the meeting. They may leave the meeting at any time.
- The Committee will then consider the current planning applications and wherever possible will hear those applications of interest to residents / applicants attending the meeting first.
- The Committee will make comments which will be forwarded to Wokingham Borough Council, the Planning Authority, who will take into account comments from the Parish Council, residents and other parties before making their decision.