

HOLTON PARISH COUNCIL

Holton Parish Council Meetings – Protocol for Public Participation

This protocol applies to:

Participation in the public forum by members of the public.

1. Introduction

1.1 **Council Approach to Public 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 district and county councillors to attend meetings and contribute within the public 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.

1.2 **Disruption to Council Meetings.** 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 Chairman, the business of the meeting is disrupted in any way, the chairman 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.

1.3 **Best Practice.** This protocol has been developed based on best practice and recommendations from other Parish Councils and advice from the Local Government Association.

1.4 **Reasons for Protocol.** Reflecting the fact that public discussion can occur on topics about which people care strongly (which is why they attend), this protocol exists to ensure that the public forum is conducted politely and in a structured and unemotional way that comes to a conclusion within a reasonable timeframe.

2. Protocol

2.1 **Duration.** Public participation will be for a maximum period of 30 minutes.

2.2 **Form of Questions.** 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. If questions are not provided in advance then members of the public should be aware that the Chairman may be unable to answer those questions and defer that topic to a future date.

2.3 **Time of public session.** The agenda will indicate when the public participation will take place. This will be early on in the agenda so that councillors may take into account views expressed when reaching decisions.

2.4 Topics for Questions. Public participation is permitted regarding items on any topic within the remit of the parish council but members of the public should be aware that if questions are raised which relate to topics not on the agenda then the matter is more likely to be deferred for a subsequent response as investigation may be required. 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.

2.5 Provision of responses. If the question relates to a topic on the agenda then the Chairman may decide to address it immediately or carry it forward for a response at a later date depending upon whether the question needs a quick response.

2.6 Discussions of topic by councillors. Members of the public should note that the council is only allowed to take decisions committing the council on topics that are publicised on the agenda, except where a response has a deadline prior to the next scheduled meeting of the council. Therefore, the council will not enter into any substantive discussion on a question raised if it is unable to answer a question directly.

2.7 Duration of each question. A maximum of 5 minutes is permitted for a member of the public to ask a question. If members of the public wish for a more detailed dialogue than the 5 minutes allows on a question then they should contact the Chairman or any other councillor for an individual discussion: the parish council meeting is not the correct forum for conducting debates between councillors and members of the public. Supplementary comments or questions are solely at the discretion of the Chairman.

2.8 Other ways to ask Questions. Members of the public should be aware that rather than bringing questions to the entire council and other members of the public attending questions may be addressed via the Clerk during business hours or via email. Agenda items may be suggested no later than 2 weeks before each parish council meeting, however, the agenda is subject to the approval of the Chairman.

2.9 Role of Chairman. All communication shall be through the Chairman. Councillors may not address questions raised by members of the public except through and with the permission of the Chairman. Members of the public may not address individual councillors except through, and with the permission of the Chairman. The Chairman's decision is final on public participation. Councillor and members of the public must respect the role of the Chairman and may be asked to leave if in the opinion of the Chairman they breach this protocol in a way that disrupts the orderly conduct of the meeting.

3. Other points

3.1 Guidance. Members of the public are recommended to make the most of the 5 minutes by preparing notes carefully. If several people want to introduce the same question, it would be helpful where possible, to get together in advance to pool your thoughts and choose the best person to speak for you all.

3.2 **Participation by Councillors and Police.** This council will provide an opportunity via the agenda for the police, District and County Councillors to attend and report to meetings and respond to any questions or queries from Council.

3.3 **Direction of Chairman.** The Chairman may, in exceptional circumstances, 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 Chairman, that individual has relevant information not available to the parish council which will help in its deliberations.

February 2015