

**MIDDLETON ST. GEORGE PARISH COUNCIL
POLICY ON PUBLIC PARTICIPATION AT MEETINGS**

Meetings of the full Parish Council (Ordinary meetings) of Middleton St. George are held on the second Monday of each month (except August) at 6.30 p.m.

Committee meetings are also held, with two standing Committees: Planning (meeting monthly on the first Wednesday), and Finance (normally meeting every two months on the first Monday). Meetings of other Committees are held when required, but at least once annually.

Notice is given by Tuesday of the previous week. You will find information on the Parish Council noticeboards at The Square (outside Londis), The Front, Middleton One Row and the Virginia estate, on the Parish Council's website <http://middleton-st-george.org.uk/> and on the Parish Council's Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/middletonstgeorgeparishcouncil/>

Pursuant to the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960, members of the public have a statutory right to attend meetings of the Parish Council and its Committees, and are welcome. However, they have no right to participate in a meeting, unless permitted to do so by the Council.

As part of its community engagement, Middleton St. George Parish Council has set out a time for public participation, near the beginning of its meetings, when members of the public are invited to speak. It would be helpful if members of the public write to the Clerk in advance of the meeting to advise if they wish to speak at the meeting (msgclerk@aol.com).

However, members of the public should not be involved in the decision making of the Council. The Council should not make any instant decisions at the request of the public on items that are not included on the agenda. If matters raised are not on the agenda for the meeting these can be used to form part of the agenda for a future meeting at the discretion of the Council. This is to allow the Parish Council sufficient time to research the issue and report on it at a future meeting. There may be instances when comments made by the public would be better addressed and considered at a later meeting, or at the meeting of a particular committee, as they may not have all the relevant information to make a valid decision.

"Members of the public have no rights to speak at a parish council meeting unless the council (not the chairman) authorises this. A district councillor has no special rights above those of an ordinary member of the public." (page 137, The Parish Councillor's Guide, twentieth edition).

As a matter of best practice the public forum will be kept separate from the debate of the councillors

Where a council permits the public to participate at a meeting, this session is:

- Included as an item in the agenda
- Forms part of the council meeting in law
- Is managed by the Chairman of the meeting
- Is documented in the minutes of the meeting
- May permit a councillor to speak on a matter in which he has an interest that is not a disclosable pecuniary interest (DPI) which he is otherwise not permitted to speak about at the meeting
(NALC Legal Topic Note 5, para 45)

Members of the public are welcome to stay for the remainder of the council meeting after the public session as observers, but will not be able to join in the discussion unless invited to do so by the Chairman.

The Parish Council is committed to making reasonable adjustments in order consider the needs of disabled persons in relation to their access to, and participation in, meetings.
(NALC Legal Topic Note 5 para 32, and NALC Legal Topic Note 78, paras 50 and 51). (Ref. Equality Act 2010)

EXCLUSIONS

Meetings shall be open to the public unless their presence is prejudicial to the public interest by reason of the confidential nature of the business to be transacted or for other special reasons. The public's exclusion from part or all of a meeting shall be by a resolution which shall give reasons for the public's exclusion. The Chairman of a meeting is expected to be vigilant of, and seek to control behaviour which obstructs the proceedings of a meeting. The Chairman is expected to ask people to modify any behaviour that disrupts a meeting. If disrupting behaviour continues, a councillor may move a motion requiring anyone disrupting the meeting to leave. Usually it is desirable for the Chairman to move the motion. A person can be excluded from a meeting if the meeting passes a resolution to this effect. If a person refuses to leave a meeting after there has been a resolution to this effect, and the meeting cannot proceed due to a person's continued disruptive behaviour, the Chairman may suspend or ultimately close the meeting. (NALC Legal Topic Note 5, March 2017).

Members of the public may be excluded by a resolution of the meeting for specific items which need to be discussed in confidence (e.g. staffing matters, tenders for contracts, some legal issues).

RULES

1. The Public Participation Session is an opportunity for members of the public to make representations, answer questions and give evidence relating to the business on the agenda
2. Members of the public are permitted to make representations, answer questions and give evidence in respect of any item of business included in the agenda.
3. The session will be limited to a maximum time of 15 minutes
4. The time for each member of the public to speak is limited to 3 minutes
5. 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 best use of the public participation period.
6. If there are a large number of people wishing to speak, the chairman will give priority of the time available to residents of Middleton St. George.
7. A person shall raise his or her hand when requesting to speak and stand when speaking (except when a person has a disability or is likely to suffer discomfort). The Chairman may at any time permit an individual to be seated when speaking.
8. Please address your comments to the Chairman
9. Neither Councillors nor the Parish Clerk should be put under pressure to respond immediately to comments made under public participation. Members of the public do not have the right to force items onto the council agenda nor to insist on how matters are recorded in the minutes.
10. A question raised by a member of the public shall not require a response and there should be no debate or discussion between the Council and the public.
11. The Chair may direct that a response to a question posed by a member of the public be referred to a Councillor for an oral response or to an employee for a written or oral response.
12. Any member of the Council, who has declared a disclosable pecuniary interest on an item to be discussed, will be allowed the same rights and time as a member of the public for this session.

The member will be required to leave the room before the council considers the matter in which they have declared the disclosable pecuniary interest.

13. **All persons present will act respectfully towards every other person present and will not behave offensively or improperly. Please note that threatening or offensive behaviour will not be tolerated. If a member of the public interrupts the proceedings of any meeting, the Council reserves the right to curtail the contribution of that person and to exclude a disorderly person (see Exclusions, above).**
14. All statements, questions and responses must be related to the facts of the matter and not be personal in nature. There should be no reference to personal views about any person.
15. A record of a public participation session at a meeting shall be included in the minutes of that meeting A brief record of topics raised at public participation will be included in the minutes of that meeting. However, libellous, offensive and discriminatory comments will not be minuted.
16. **Photographing, recording, broadcasting or transmitting the proceedings of a meeting by any means is permitted (please refer to the Parish Council's policy on recording at a meeting)**
17. In accordance with standing order 1(c) above, the press shall be provided reasonable facilities for the taking of their report of all or part of a meeting at which they are entitled to be present.