



MIDDLETON ST. GEORGE PARISH COUNCIL

POLICY ON PUBLIC PARTICIPATION AT MEETINGS

This policy corresponds with legislation on public participation at meetings.

Meetings of the full Parish Council 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, the timings of which are advertised on the PC website and social media.

Notice is given three clear working days before each meeting. Information can be found 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/>

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. (*Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960*)

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. Members of the public are encouraged to write to the Clerk in advance of the meeting to advise if they wish to speak at the meeting (clerk@middleton-st-george.org.uk)

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

MSG Parish Council encourages the public to participate at a meeting, however this is:

- Included as an item in the agenda
- Managed by the Chairman of the meeting
- Documented in the minutes of the meeting
- Part of the council meeting in law

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.

Reviewed and adopted by the Parish Council on the 11th July, 2022.

MSG 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).

GUIDANCE FOR PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

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 information in respect of any item of business included in the agenda.
3. The session will be limited to 15 minutes
4. Members of the public may speak for up 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 indicate when requesting to speak .
8. Comments should be addressed 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 Chairman 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 those present will act respectfully towards others and will not behave offensively or improperly. 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 on condition that it does not interrupt or disturb the smooth running of the meeting (*see also the Parish Council's policy on recording at a meeting*)