

Parish Council – Thursday 18th March 2021
Agenda item 15 – Use of Zoom for Parish Council meetings

Purpose

The purpose of this paper is consider the implications of the withdrawal of the option for Parish Council meetings to be held remotely after May 7th 2021. A final decision about meetings in May and June will need to be taken at the April Parish Council meeting.

Legal Position

Parish Council meetings must be held in person. However, due to the CoVid-19 epidemic, various restrictions have been in place over the last 12 months, which would have prevented Parish Council meetings taking place in person. Legislation was introduced (via a Statutory Instrument) in 2020, to allow various meetings (including Parish Council meetings) to be held remotely.

This legislation expires on 7th May 2021 and the UK government has indicated that it does not intend to extend it further. Unless this changes, with effect from 8th May 2021, it would not be possible to have any further remote meetings and if held, they would have no legal standing.

National Association of Local Councils (NALC)

NALC continues to lobby the UK government to extend the option of holding remote meetings until at least 21st June (ie the current date when the “Roadmap” out of lockdown removes all restrictions on gatherings). NALC recommends that Councils continue to hold meetings online up to 7th May, but “prepare for the real possibility of a return to face-to-face meetings”

Current Warbleton Parish Council Meeting schedule up to 7th May

Date	Meeting
18 th March	Parish Council
6 th April	Planning & Devt Committee
7 th April	Finance & GP Committee
13 th April	CIL Committee
15 th April	Parish Council
27 th April	Planning & Devt Committee*

* frequency of these meetings will be confirmed at Council meeting on 15th April.

Based on NALC advice it is expected that all these meetings will be held remotely via zoom

Current meetings scheduled between 8th May and 21st June 2021

Date	Meeting
18 th May	Planning & Devt Committee*
20 th May	Annual Statutory Meeting
8 th June	Planning & Devt Committee*
17 th June	Parish Council

Based on current UK government advice about the roadmap out of lockdown, it is not expected that Village Halls would be available for Parish Council meetings before 17th May at the earliest. Even if village halls can re-open after this time there may be restrictions on numbers/social distancing, use of mask etc.

It is also recognised that some councillors may feel uncomfortable about meeting in person in May/June.

Contingency Plans

In the event that meetings cannot be held face-to-face and remote meetings are not allowed, the following contingency plans are suggested:

Date	Meeting	Contingency
18 th May	Planning & Devt Committee*	Councillors to comment in writing to Parish Clerk, who with Chairman of P&D will agree a written submission to Wealden DC. Public encouraged to write to Wealden DC
20 th May	Annual Statutory Meeting	Rearrange to 6 th May and hold via zoom. Agenda to be restricted to essential items only
8 th June	Planning & Devt Committee*	Councillors to comment in writing to Parish Clerk, who with Chairman of P&D will agree a written submission to Wealden DC. Public encouraged to write to Wealden DC
17 th June	Parish Council	Rearrange to 24 th June. Meeting must be held by end of June to sign off AGAR

No other Committee meetings should be arranged for May/June until the legal position and availability of village halls is known. Essential business only can be added to full Council agenda if required (and subject to agreement of the Chairman).

This is a fluid situation and an update and proposal will be produced for the April Council to resolve the way forward.

Steve Williamson
Chairman
Finance and GP Committee

13th March 2021