

Boxley Parish Council.
Protocol for members of the public attending parish council and committee meetings.

Parish councillors are always pleased to have visitors to their meetings, especially if there is an issue with which the parish council might be able to assist with.

If you are attending a meeting and wish to address it about an issue either on the agenda or which you wish to bring to their attention, it may help to be aware of the procedures.

As only councillors may speak at council or committee meetings, time is always provided for the meeting to be adjourned (that is suspended) for members of the public to address them. You will be invited to speak during this period and will be allowed a maximum of three minutes to do so. You may then be asked questions by councillors but you have no right to ask them questions in return or enter into a debate. Once the meeting has reconvened you can make no further comment.

If the issue is very personal, or you are disabled, have a speech or hearing impediment or just find it difficult to talk to a public gathering please discuss this with the Clerk. If necessary, she will make alternative arrangements to inform members of your issue. Assistive Listening Devices can normally be made available at meetings. If you use a hearing aid please therefore ask the Clerk for assistance.

It would be very helpful if you could give the Clerk advance warning of any matter you may intend raising. You can do this by either writing to or telephoning the parish office. This will allow the relevant information to be gathered and possibly for you to be advised whether there is a better method by which you can bring the issue to the attention of the parish council. If this is not possible, or you are unwilling to do so, it is not a problem.

On arrival at the meeting, you should be approached by the Clerk as you enter the room. If not, please introduce yourself to her or any member of the parish council. You will be asked for your name and on what subject you wish to speak. The Chairman has the power to recommend a change to the order of the agenda so that you are not kept waiting too long to speak. You are of course welcome to stay for the whole of the meeting but are free to leave at any time.

Once the allocated time for public involvement has been reached the Chairman will generally welcome you to the meeting, addressing you by name and inviting you to speak. Although three minutes is quite a long time, it can go very quickly if the issue is complex. The following suggestions may help you to get your comments across effectively:

- ◆ Stand whilst you talk, acoustics can be a problem in some halls.
- ◆ Open your talk by explaining the location of any problem, try to be as specific as possible e.g. the piece of land at the junction of... and ...
- ◆ Have a list of the relevant points you wish to make.
- ◆ Try to be concise and not go off the point.
- ◆ If you know what you want please ensure that you clearly inform the council.
- ◆ The parish council may wish to send you information or keep you in touch with any developments, don't forget to supply your name and address to the Clerk. There are always spare paper and pens at a meeting.
- ◆ You should not slander anyone or make any comments that are offensive or which you feel should not be public. If yours is a sensitive issue please contact the Clerk to discuss the best way to proceed.
- ◆ If you are disabled, have a speech impediment or find it hard to talk to a public gathering, discuss this with the Clerk who can make alternative arrangements for your issue to be notified to members.

Because the official minutes may only record discussion and decisions taken within the meeting, they will not include any of your personal details or quote verbatim what you say. The Clerk will keep a separate note of your issue and any action needed. However, be aware that members of the press and other members of the public may be present at the meeting.

Agendas and minutes of meetings are published on the parish council's website at www.boxleyparishcouncil.org.uk.

Please remember that the people you are addressing are volunteers. They have volunteered because they care about their community and wish to help local residents. They are not salaried officials.