

New Buckenham Parish Council

13th April 2021

Agenda Item 12

Meeting Arrangements from May 2021

Introduction

1. As Councillors may be aware, the Government has declined to extend the special legislation which has allowed local authorities to legally hold meetings online since last April, when the first national lockdown was imposed as a result of the COVID -19 pandemic. This means that any meetings held after 7th May 2021 must be held physically (but subject still to social distancing rules pertaining at the time), in order for any decisions made at those meeting to be legal.
2. NALC and the Local Government Association has strenuously challenged this, but the Government were apparently unwilling to dedicate the Parliamentary time required to pass the necessary primary legislation.

Options available for the next Parish Council Meeting:

In person Meeting on 11th May, (or later in May).

3. The next Parish Council meeting is scheduled for 11th May, which means that it would need to be held physically. It is not clear at this stage whether the Village Hall will be in a position to host the meeting. This would normally be the **Annual Parish Council Meeting**, at which the Chair of the Council is elected for the forthcoming year. By law, this meeting must be held during May. If the Village Hall is not available on 11th May but will be later in May we could therefore just reschedule.

Online Meeting on 4th May

4. Until 7th May, online meetings will still be legal, so one option would be to hold the Annual Parish Council a week earlier. This could have a restricted agenda – the election of the Chair and authorisation of any payments for May, with any other business deferred to the June meeting. This could potentially be combined with an online Annual Parish Meeting. (See below)

Annual Parish Meeting

5. The **Annual Parish Meeting** (not to be confused with the Annual Parish Council meeting mentioned above, is a meeting of the electors of the Parish which we are legally required to hold between 1st March and 1st June each year. The emergency legislation passed in 2020 removed this requirement for last year. As it stands the Annual Parish meeting does need to take place this year. I personally have concerns about staging an Annual Parish Meeting with a possibly large number of members of the public attending, and the danger of either the Parish Council or the Village Hall breaking COVID restrictions in the process, or us having to turn away people from their own meeting.
6. As with the Parish Council meeting, this could be held online until 7th May, so one option would be to hold the Annual Parish Meeting online straight after a PC meeting on 4th May. This would fulfil our legal requirements and allow for some flexibility to hold later meetings at a time when the COVID restrictions have been lifted further.

Recommendation:

That the Council determine when and how to hold the Annual Parish Council Meeting and the Annual Parish Meeting.