

## Belsay Parish Council

### Report of Clerk – Public Participation - May 2014

1. The Parish Council has, for some time, allowed members of the public to participate in meetings raising items of concern or providing information of interest. This is very valuable to the Parish Council and an agenda item provides an opportunity early in each meeting for this purpose.
2. There are two issues which have the potential to be a problem during future meetings and this report seeks to identify those issues and propose a solution which will enable the Parish Council to move forward whilst still giving members of the public the ability to talk to the Council in a constructive way.
3. Where an issue is raised at a meeting under the Public Participation agenda item, there is currently no advance notice of the content of that issue. As a result, the public at large have no knowledge of that issue unless they were also in attendance. Where such issues are of general interest, it would seem appropriate that the Parish as a whole should have the opportunity to be equally informed. While the Parish Council is not bound to give advance notice of everything it discusses or considers, it is best practice to give such notice where possible and more so when the issue may be of greater public interest.
4. Under current legislation, a non-member of the Parish Council may only address the meeting at the invitation of the Chairman – hence the existence of the Public Participation agenda item. The role of the Chairman is to manage the meeting in such a way as to enable parish councillors full opportunity to consider debate and, where appropriate, decide issues put before them. It is therefore important that the focus of any issue /debate is with the parish councillors and not within the wider audience in attendance. Limiting cross discussion between members of the public present would achieve that aim.
5. Recommendations –
  - 5.1 Any issues to be raised with the Parish Council be itemised on the agenda for the meeting by notifying the Clerk by the Tuesday of the week before the meeting. In exceptional circumstances the Chairman may still allow urgent items to be raised should the issue be so significant and within a very short timescale.
  - 5.2 Each identified item be allocated five minutes for the spokesperson to state their Case which should be addressed to the Parish Council. In the same manner, any counter case should also be addressed only to the Parish Council and will be allocated the same time. Having heard the stated cases, the Parish Council will, where appropriate, reach a view or course of action without further involvement of those present.