

## **Why can't Parish Council Meetings be held at present?**

Meetings of local councils, including Parish Councils, are governed by "Standing Orders" that are laid down by Parliament and are designed to ensure maximum transparency and openness. These standing orders, among many points, state that all voting councillors must be physically present and also that the meetings must allow members of the public to attend.

When the Coronavirus lockdown first occurred at the beginning of 2020 it became clear that councils could no longer meet physically so emergency legislation was passed to permit these meetings to be held remotely using internet conferencing software such as Zoom. This legislation was time limited and expired on 7<sup>th</sup> May 2021. Attempts by the National Association of Local Councils and others to get the period extended were refused in the High Court and the government have declined to provide parliamentary time to legislate for an extension. So, since 7<sup>th</sup> May, formal Parish Council meetings must be held with both councillors and members of the public physically present.

However, due to the restrictions in force under coronavirus legislation, unlimited indoor meetings are currently banned. Moreover, even after the easing on 17<sup>th</sup> May, it is still only possible for a maximum of six non-related individuals to meet indoors. It is not until the full lifting of restrictions takes place, no earlier than 21<sup>st</sup> June, that anything like a normal council meeting can be held.

At the last permitted remote council meeting on 6<sup>th</sup> May, councillors put in place measures to ensure that the functions of the council could continue until such time as physical meetings can take place. These are to be reviewed at "Informal" meetings of councillors which will take place on the dates originally scheduled for Council and Planning Committee meetings. Although designated as "informal", these will follow the same format as "formal" council meetings and will continue to be fully open to members of the public.