

Helmsley

Town Council

What's going on?

The agenda explained

Part one – opening business

Apologies

Councillors must attend council meetings unless they have a good reason to stay away – for example if they are ill. If they are unable to attend, they must send their 'apologies' to the Clerk along with an acceptable reason for absence.

Code of Conduct

The Code of Conduct says that councillors have to say if they have any personal involvement in anything that is on the agenda – for example, if an application for planning permission is on property that they own. This is called 'declaring an interest'. Councillors are not allowed to discuss agenda items in which they have declared a 'pecuniary' interest (i.e. one that relates to money) though they may make a statement. They may choose to leave the room while the item is being discussed.

Public comments

This is an opportunity for any resident to speak to the Council about any issue that they think is important. If you would like to speak, it is a good idea to let the Clerk of the meeting know beforehand, and to let her have copies of relevant documents if you have any. You will then have three minutes in which to speak.

It is important to be aware that although the Council may be able to give you some simple information in response to what you have said, it is difficult to discuss a question and give advice if no advance notice is given; also the law does not allow the Council to take decisions about matters that are not on the published agenda. If you would like the Council to take action about something, you need to be clear about exactly what you would like them to do. It can then be put on the agenda for the next meeting, when the councillors will discuss it and make a decision. Don't forget to come along next time to hear the discussion and also to contribute to it if asked by the Chairman.

Minutes

Minutes are the record of what was decided at a previous meeting, written by the clerk. She sends a draft version of the minutes out to all the councillors after each meeting so that they can read them, check that they are accurate, and send her any suggested amendments. At this point on the agenda, the Chairman checks that the Councillors are happy that the draft minutes (including any amendments) are a good record of the last meeting. It is only when the Chairman has signed an agreed version of the minutes they become an official record, but we are working towards publishing (on our website) draft Minutes within two weeks of each Meeting.

Part Two – for information

Exchange of information and items for the next agenda

This part of the meeting reports back about progress on earlier Council decisions (for example, letters written or questions answered). It also includes information that has been received about Council matters such as changes to the dates of other events that councillors may attend.

This part of the agenda also lists documents that have been sent to all the councillors before the meeting. There are often many of these, and councillors are expected to have read them all beforehand in preparation for the meeting. We are currently working on making as many as possible of these available to members of the public, through our website and through links to other websites.

Planning – to receive decisions

Planning decisions in Helmsley are made either by Ryedale District Council or by the North York Moors National Park planning committees, depending on which part of Helmsley the property is in. North Yorkshire County Council is also one of the planning authorities in relation to mineral extraction. The Town Council does have some input into the process of current applications (see below under 'Section 3: for determination'), but at this point on the agenda the Council is simply being told about decisions that the planners have already made about past applications.

Meetings, training and events: to receive reports

Councillors or staff report back about meetings, training or events they have attended as part of their Council work.

Finance, audit and governance

In practical terms, the Clerk deals with day-to-day accounts and the giving and receiving of payments, but it is the Council as a whole that is responsible for Council finances, and this point in the meeting requires the councillors to look at two specific matters:

The '**bank reconciliation**' means looking at the amount of money in the bank and comparing it with the amount that ought to be there according to the accounts. There may be a difference – for example, the accounts may show a payment as having gone out, but if the cheque has not yet been cashed, that money will still be in the bank. Bank reconciliation means being able to account for any discrepancies.

When the Council looks at the '**running budget**', it is looking at how the current financial situation compares with the planned budget for the year to check that the finances are where they ought to be at this stage.

Electronic copies of the bank reconciliation and the running budget are posted on the Town Council's website around the middle of each month. Councillors also receive copies along with other documents before the meeting so that they can study them.

Part three: for determination

This part of the agenda is concerned with ‘determining’ (deciding) what to do about a range of different things. The number of items in this section can vary a great deal.

Planning

Every other month the Council will consider any planning applications that have been received, and the paperwork relating to these will be laid out in the meeting room for councillors and anyone else attending to look at before the meeting. Although the Town Council does not make final decisions about planning applications, it does receive copies of the applications and plans from the planning authorities. The role of the Town Council is to give ‘comments’ on the plans – in other words, although the Town Council does not make the decision itself, it can give an opinion that the planning authority has to take into account when it decides. If the Council sees no problem with the application it can make ‘no comment’. Ryedale District Council and the North York Moors National Park (NYMNP) are the planning authorities for most of the applications that the Town Council comments on; North Yorkshire County Council also acts as a planning authority in relation to mineral extraction.

You may remember ‘**Exchange of information and items for the next agenda**’ from earlier on: this is where those matters that were raised last month reappear as an agenda item this month. Now the Council can discuss them and decide what action, if any, they will take. The same applies to item 3, ‘**public comments**’: if a member of the public at the last meeting asked the Council to do something, this is where they talk about it and decide. Members of the public attending the meeting may be asked by the Chairman to contribute information to the discussion if they have particular knowledge of the matter.

‘To agree payments and to sign cheques’ is usually the last item on the agenda, and it can take some time! The reason it is there is so that any payment made by the Council is clearly and publically reported to councillors and to anyone else attending the meeting. It ensures that everyone knows about how public money is spent and who it is paid to.

Staffing matters

Occasionally there are matters to discuss that relate to confidential staffing issues – for example, the Clerk’s annual appraisal. Members of the public will be asked to leave the room while these confidential matters are being discussed, but will be re-admitted to hear any decision that is made as a result of the discussion.