

GREAT WALTHAM PARISH COUNCIL

Petitions Policy

Version 4

This policy document should be reviewed and updated as necessary.

Version	Review Date	Reviewed By	Summary of Changes
1			Existing document.
2	December 2021	S. Gilbert	Format changes.
3	March 2022	J. Jenkins	No changes.
4	March 2023	S. Gilbert	Closer alignment with Chelmsford City Council Petitions Scheme

Great Waltham Parish Council – Petitions Policy

1. Introduction

- 1.1. Great Waltham Parish Council (“GWPC”) welcomes petitions, as they are an important way for residents to let us know about their concerns and participate in the democratic process. This document sets out how we will deal with petitions that meet the criteria set out below.
- 1.2. If something is clearly intended to be a petition but does not meet the requirements set out, we will provide a response directly to the petition organiser to explain the situation.
- 1.3. GWPC does not provide an online or electronic petitions system but if you have created a petition by this means its existence and submission should also be notified to the Parish Clerk whose contact details are on the parish website: <https://e-voice.org.uk/greatwalthamparish/>.
- 1.4. We will consider all petitions that fall within the scope of this policy. A petition template is attached in the Appendix. This sets out the information we need to consider your petition.

2. Before starting a petition

- 2.1. Before you start a petition, you should consider if it is the best way to resolve your issue or make your views known. You could also:
 - Contact one of your parish councillors – their contact details are available on the parish website: <https://e-voice.org.uk/greatwalthamparish/>.
 - Attend a GWPC meeting to make your case – for dates, again see the parish website.
 - Respond to consultations which we may issue from time to time. Consultations provide us with robust, structured feedback and often cover a range of associated issues.

3. Starting a petition

3.1. Who can submit a petition?

Anyone who lives, works or studies in the Parish of Great Waltham can organise or sign a petition, including those under the age of 18.

3.2. Who can sign a petition?

Any individual signing a petition may be any age and should provide their name and an address or postcode which shows that they live, work or study in the Parish of Great Waltham. We will not count any signatures that do not provide this information.

3.3. How do people sign a petition?

For paper petitions, the petition organiser will gather signatures until a specific date that they have decided. These will then be submitted to us.

3.4. How do you start an e-petition?

GWPC welcomes e-petitions. E-petitions follow the same guidelines as paper petitions and the petition organiser and those who sign it must live, work or study in the parish of Great Waltham.

Although we do not operate our own e-petition system, we are happy to receive e-petitions created using someone else's online or electronic petition system. Once your e-petition is closed and has been passed to us, we will write to you to acknowledge its receipt. We may also ask you to explain some of the petition's information if the purpose of the petition is not clear to us. We will review the wording of the petition to ensure it is appropriate before we publish any content.

3.5. Can you run paper and online petitions at the same time?

Yes, you can run them at the same time, combining the two before sending them to us. You should send the paper petition to us at the same time as the closing date of the online petition so that all of the signatures will be counted at the same time.

Signatures duplicated on the paper and online versions of the same petition will only be counted once.

3.6. What happens if a petition cannot be accepted?

Please see section 5 for further guidance on the type of petitions that cannot be accepted. If the petition is rejected, we will inform the petition organiser within 10 working days, but sometimes we may need more time to assess the content of the petition to ensure it is appropriate. We will inform you if more time is needed.

3.7. What can a petition be about?

Petitions should be relevant to a matter over which GWPC has direct responsibility or statutory duties. If the petition does not fall within the remit of our powers, we will return your petition to you and, where possible, try to identify the correct organisation for you to send the petition to.

Any supplementary information submitted with your petition must relate directly to it. The signatures collected can only be considered in conjunction with the specific subject matter of the petition.

3.8. Where should you send your petition

You can send your petition by post to:

Parish Clerk,
The Parish Office,
Great Waltham Village Hall (Houlton Hall),
South Street,
Great Waltham,
Chelmsford,
Essex, CM3 1DF.

Or by email to: clerk@greatwalthamparishcouncil.co.uk

4. Requirements of the Policy

4.1. What should a petition contain?

To be considered, a petition should contain:

- **a title and short statement about the subject matter of the petition.** The petition statement should be clear about what action you want us to take. If this is not clear, we may have to return the petition to you for further clarification;
- **the name and postal address or email address of the petition organiser.** This is the person we will contact to explain how we will respond to the petition. The petition organiser should be someone who lives, works or studies in the Parish of Great Waltham. If the petition does not identify a petition organiser, we will contact signatories to the petition to agree who should act as the petition organiser. If no such person can be identified the petition may not be accepted;
- **the name, signature and Great Waltham address or postcode of each person who signed the petition.** We must be able to identify that the people signing the petition live, work or study in the Parish of Great Waltham. If you prefer, people signing the petition can put their work or study address, as long as this is based within the geographical boundaries of the parish. Entries that do not meet these requirements will be rejected and not counted towards the total number. You can use the template that is appended to this document.

4.2. Paper petitions must clearly display the above information.

4.3. E-petitions must clearly display:

- **the title/subject of the petition;**
- **the name and address or postcode of any person supporting the petition** (users must indicate that they live, work or study in the Parish of Great Waltham); and
- **the starting and closing date of the petition, and whether there is a paper petition collecting signatures in conjunction with the e-petition.**

4.4. Petitions that do not meet these criteria will not be considered. How we will respond to those that fall outside of our Policy is detailed in section 5.

4.5. How do I submit a petition?

Paper petitions can be submitted to the Parish Clerk. You can also submit a petition at a GWPC committee meeting or to your local councillor.

GWPC does not provide an online or electronic petitions system but if you have created a petition by this means its existence and submission should also be notified to the Parish Clerk.

A petition which is partly in paper form and partly electronic should have both parts submitted at the same time.

5. Petitions which GWPC cannot accept

5.1. The majority of petitions we receive will be accepted but there are some circumstances where we will not be able to deal with your petition. This will include petitions relating to:

5.1.1. **Any matter that GWPC is not directly responsible for.** We will return the petition to you and where possible direct you to the correct organisation.

5.1.2. **Any matter relating to a planning decision, including a development plan document.** These will be dealt with using existing procedures.

5.1.3. **Any matter relating to a licensing application.** These will be dealt with using existing procedures.

5.1.4. **A statutory petition** (for example, a petition for a directly elected mayor).

5.1.5. **Any matter where there is already an existing right of appeal or a separate complaints process.** These will be dealt with using existing procedures.

5.1.6. **A petition where we have received another petition on the same (or intrinsically related) issue within the previous six months.** In these circumstances, we will write to the petition organiser and include a copy of the response to the first petition received.

5.1.7. **Any petition which we consider to be vexatious, abusive or otherwise inappropriate.** You should not include potentially libellous, false or defamatory statements or which may cause personal offence, distress or loss.

5.1.8. **Any petition that is asking GWPC to do anything unlawful.**

5.1.9. **Any petition relating to the subject of any legal action taken by GWPC or an individual.**

5.1.10. **A petition which contains confidential information** (for example, about a specific individual).

5.2. Different procedures apply to all these types of petition; for example, there are some situations where there are existing ways of making representations. Those petitions will be dealt with in accordance with existing procedures in place.

5.3. Anyone trying to create an e-petition that falls outside the scheme will be informed that their petition is excluded. We will write to the petition organiser within 10 days of becoming aware of the petition to explain why it cannot be considered. Where possible, we will advise the petition organiser of the appropriate channel through which they can pursue their concerns.

5.4. It may also be inappropriate for GWPC to deal with certain petitions during periods when it is subject to restrictions, such as immediately before elections or referendums. In these circumstances, the petition organiser will be informed when the petition will be considered.

5.5. If we decide that a petition is not acceptable for any of the reasons listed above then we will inform the petition organiser of the reasons when we write to them. If you are

not satisfied with the reason for your petition being rejected, you can make a complaint under our complaints procedure.

6. How GWPC deals with petitions about issues that it is consulting Great Waltham residents on

6.1. If we receive a petition about an issue that we are already consulting with residents about, the Petitions Policy will be suspended for that petition and:

6.1.1. All petitions received that relate to the subject of a formal consultation will automatically be incorporated into the formal consultation process at the earliest stage possible.

6.1.2. Petition organisers will be informed of this and the petition will be submitted to the organiser of the consultation for them to respond.

6.2. This approach will also be taken for petitions that are received relating to any issue about the GWPC's budget during its annual budget setting process. The petition will be incorporated into the formal consultation process and made available for inspection at the GWPC budget meeting so that it can properly inform our budget decisions.

6.3. Sometimes we receive petitions after the consultation deadline has passed but before the final decision has been made. In these circumstances, we will take the petition into consideration when we make the decision.

6.4. Petitions received after a decision has been made on a matter that GWPC has consulted residents on will not be considered.

7. How GWPC responds to petitions

7.1. What happens after the petition is submitted?

We will send an acknowledgement within 10 working days to the petition organiser. This acknowledgement will also say as much as we can at that stage about what we have done, or plan to do, with the petition. In some circumstances, more time will be needed to clarify some details about what action GWPC can take but we will inform you of this in our acknowledgement letter.

7.2. How will GWPC respond to my petition?

The response to a petition will depend on what a petition asks for and what type of petition it is but may include one or more of the following actions:

- taking the action requested in the petition;
- considering the petition at a parish council meeting if the petition receives 50 or more signatures (or 25% of the residents in the area the petition applies to);
- undertaking research into the matter;
- holding a public meeting
- holding a meeting with petitioners;

- writing to the petition organiser setting out our views about the request in the petition.

8. How GWPC will respond to petitions outside of its Policy

8.1. GWPC may receive correspondence that is intended to be a petition but does not necessarily meet the criteria set out in this Policy. We intend to be as flexible as possible when we are dealing with this correspondence but it will not be possible for it to be dealt with under the formal requirement of the Policy.

8.2. What are the main reasons for petitions to be rejected?

The specific criteria for petitions are set out in the previous sections, together with general exceptions. If a petition does not meet these criteria, it will not be considered under the scheme.

Outside the general exceptions, there are several reasons why a petition may not fall within the scheme. It may be that:

- the petition statement is not clear;
- the subject matter of the petition is not within our remit;
- the entries contain incomplete or invalid information such as no full address or postcode;
- we are not able to identify that people signing the petition live, work or study in the Parish of Great Waltham;
- there are not enough valid entries to meet the threshold for a petition.

8.3. What will happen to petitions that fall outside of the scheme?

The Parish Clerk will have discretion to decide whether or not a petition meets the criteria set out in the Policy.

If a submitted petition does not fall within the criteria, we will explain the reason why in our acknowledgement letter and set out what action we will take in response to your submission.

Petitions that fall outside of the criteria of the scheme will be treated as correspondence. The Parish Clerk will have discretion to decide how to reply to this correspondence and take the most appropriate action.

9. How to proceed if you are not happy with how we handled your petition

9.1. If you feel that we have not dealt with your petition properly, the petition organiser may submit a complaint in accordance with under GWPC's Code of Practice for Handling Complaints, available on the parish website:

<https://e-voice.org.uk/greatwalthamparish/>.

Appendix – Petition Template

PETITION TO GREAT WALTHAM PARISH COUNCIL – SIGNATURE SHEET

We the undersigned petition Great Waltham Parish Council to: _____

Each person signing the petition should provide their name, signature and a home, work or study address that is in the boundaries of the Parish of Great Waltham. Any signatures that do not include this information will not be counted.

Name (Please print)	Address or Postcode (This must be within the Parish of Great Waltham)	Signature	Live/Work/Study (Address or Postcode – please indicate which)