

Finham Parish Council – New Parish Council Created

Background

Finham is a suburb, south from the city of Coventry, in the West Midlands, at the border with Warwickshire. With a population of 3,851 local government electors, Finham offers various educational and leisure facilities. These services were threatened to become insufficient in meeting the needs of residents, when a new housing estate in King's Hill was authorised. The desire to influence development plans and to have their concerns addressed by local authorities, prompted residents to initiate a campaign for setting up a local council in October 2014. With a lot of perseverance the campaign succeeded, Finham being parished in January 2015.

Why A Council Is Wanted

The development of a new housing estate raised concern among the residents of Finham, due to the increased volume of traffic, with roads being unable to accommodate the additional amount of vehicles, as well as the additional strain on schools and underdeveloped public transport. Although Finham Residents Association opposed the developments, it was felt that residents would have more say in the development plans of the area through the creation of a parish council. Furthermore, a parish council was perceived to also improve service delivery, providing Finham with facilities that already exist in other areas of Coventry.

Progress With Campaign To Date

The petition opened by the Finham Residents Association collected 711 signatures, more than the minimum required to initiate a Community Governance Review, by December 2013, when it was formally submitted to Coventry City Council. The Community Governance Review commenced the following year, in June 2014. Although Coventry City Council was due to reach a decision in December 2014, due to political implications the decision was postponed until January 2015. Nevertheless, following the perseverance of the Finham Residents Association, with the support of the National Association of Local Councils, the principal authority approved the creation of a Finham Parish Council, with councillors due to be elected in May 2016.

Learning From The Campaign

The creation of a parish council for Finham encountered opposition from the principal authority. Coventry City Council initially, allowed a very short period of time for the consultation, which was extended subsequently, with many electors being confused about the purpose of the consultation. Furthermore, the questions for the ballot paper were ambiguous, as agreeing with the way that Coventry City Council provides its services in the first two questions could have easily been interpreted as being against a parish council. The ambiguity of these questions also led to the decision on whether Finham ought to be parished to be postponed until January 2015.

Campaign Lessons To Share With Others

Finham Residents Association has shown that a campaign can be successful in spite of political opposition. Being at the heart of a political debate makes campaigning for a local council more difficult, not only due to opposition but also due to the way that the press covers your initiative, portraying it not as a struggle for democracy, but as a struggle for political interests. Nevertheless, campaign leaders were very quick to respond to the different challenges, defending the campaign through the media and making sure all residents were correctly informed, by distributing information material and organising public meetings. Engaging with your County Association of Local Councils at an early stage is also very beneficial, as they can help you with advice, information, support and guidance, as well as accessing specific grants to help you lead a successful campaign.