



**Finham Parish Council — The Story Of How A New Parish Council Was Created In
Finham, Coventry**

Headlines:

- Finham is a suburb, south of the city of Coventry, in the West Midlands.
- This case study tells the story of how the Finham Residents' Association triggered a Community Governance Review and established a parish council.
- The case study explores the difficulties of holding a campaign group together (with residents with a range of different interests campaigning for the same goal) – over a long campaign period.
- The case study also examines the difficulties of sustaining a campaign over a longer period of time than expected (with the first elections being delayed until May, 2016).
- The main focus of this study is to show how a campaign group prevailed against some differences of approach amongst its ranks, and delays to the first parish elections in a city with virtually no other parish councils.

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 under-developed 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. In addition, residents felt they had less of an opportunity to make their voice heard on the traffic congestion issue through the Tenants' and Residents' Association as the council was not bound to consult with or listen to its views on traffic matters.

It was felt – given the traffic issues already suffered by Finham residents – that the creation of a statutory permanent voice for the area would combat future such experiences. A new Finham Parish Council could claim to legitimately and democratically represent the views of residents in its area on traffic matters as it would be elected and be far more likely to be listened to by the local highways authority (Coventry City Council). The possibility of having a body which could deliver this influence on the highly contentious local issue of traffic was therefore irresistible to residents who in principle backed the campaign very strongly.

Furthermore, the parish council could also undertake projects and schemes, working in partnership with other bodies and scrutinising the principal authority with the scope of improving service delivery and ensuring that the needs of residents are being met, improving their representation at the local government level. A Finham Parish Council would also be far more likely to consult with residents on traffic calming measures and then be able to make specific proposals back to Coventry City Council to resolve them for residents – on matters such as the routing of buses, the need to ensure sufficient buses are routed on *school runs* and how to avoid congestion at peak times of day

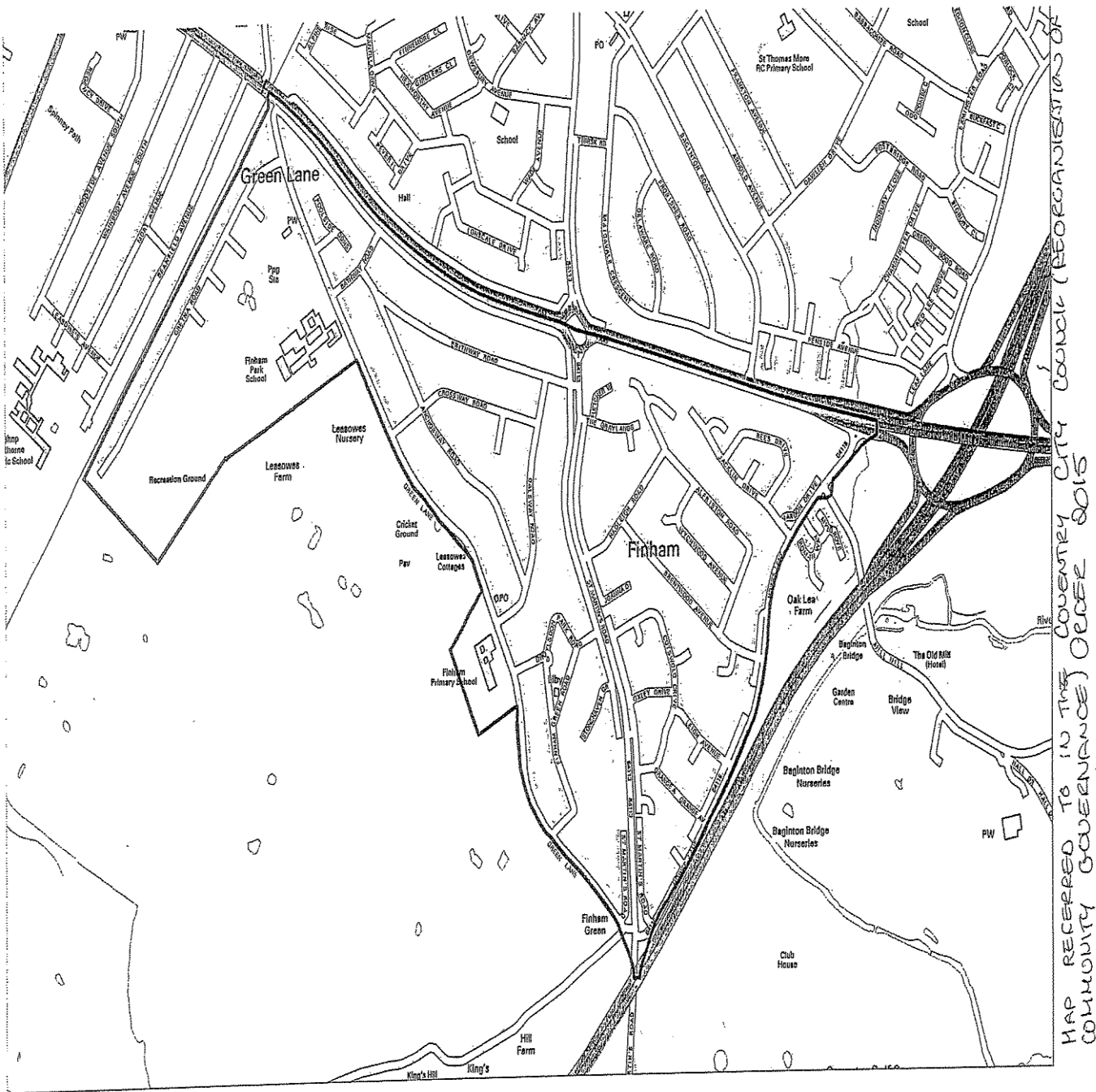
for traffic. A parish council could adopt and use the General Power of Competence to work in this way far more effectively with Coventry City Council. These are the main reasons Finham residents wanted a new parish council.

Campaign Area and General Campaign Approach:

Finham is a suburb, south of the city of Coventry, in the West Midlands. It shares its northern boundary along the A45 with the suburb of Styvechale / Stivichall, and part of its south-eastern boundary is shared with the village of Baginton in Warwickshire. The suburb of Green Lane lies directly to the west and the hamlet of King's Hill lies within a mile of Finham at Coventry's southernmost point.



(Above) Map of Green Lane, Finham.



(Above) Map of boundary of Finham Parish Council area from Coventry City Council (boundary is marked by bold black line).



With a population of 3,851 local government electors, Finham offers various leisure and educational facilities, such as Finham Park School – a large comprehensive school built in 1970, as well as Finham Primary School - both are situated in Green Lane.

The campaign group issued 2200 leaflets to residents in Finham in November, 2014 and January, 2015. These were hand delivered by members of the Finham Tenants' and Residents' Association in two leaflet runs. This saved the cost of hiring a private company to deliver the leaflets for the campaign group, was a public show of the Resident Association's support for the campaign, and demonstrated to residents that the campaign group were prepared to work very hard to give the area a permanent new local voice with a parish council. The leaflets both promoted the benefits of a new parish council and highlighted the process for securing such a new council (through a Community Governance Review). It was felt by the campaign group that the leaflets were critical to raising awareness of the campaign and its objectives across the whole would-be parish council area.

Posters were also printed and posted up to promote the campaign across the intended parish area using money from the NALC / DCLG / CALC New Councils' Programme. The posters promoted the benefits of creating a new parish council and highlighted (like the leaflets) the crucial public meetings where more information could be heard and the petition signed. The posters were located at critical local hubs such as community centres and local shops in the area where footfall was highest.

Public meetings were held at local venues to both promote the benefits that parish councils in or near the Finham area (such as Keresley and Allesley) already had. Such benefits include the right to be notified of planning applications and to develop neighbourhood plans. A Finham Parish Council might also adopt responsibility for cutting grass verges, looking after local footpaths and clear gullies. And a Finham Parish Council could also be given a say on and even responsibilities for street lighting, parking, road safety and street cleaning.

The Residents' Association drove the campaign and used the leaflets to drive residents also to the public meetings at local community venues in Finham. At the end of the public meetings residents were asked to sign the campaign petition once they heard of the benefits of a new parish council. This direct face to face contact was the reason in large numbers why the campaign group was able to promote the benefits so widely of a new parish council to Finham residents, so securing broader support from residents for the campaign and more petition signatures.

This approach between 2014 and 2015 worked as 711 of 3,851 people living in the area signed a petition requesting the establishment of a parish council in the Finham area. Later during the Community Governance Review a total of 1,461 Finham residents then voted on the issue with 73 per cent of resident respondents saying they would support the creation of a parish council.

The Finham Residents' Association drove the campaign and used every opportunity at their own meetings and events (including stalls) to promote the concept of a Finham Parish Council to as wide a range of residents as possible. Without the Residents' Association the campaign would probably not have succeeded.

Who Are The Key Partners / Stakeholders Involved?:

The campaign for setting up a parish council in Finham has been led by the Finham Residents' Association, which worked closely with the Warwickshire and West Midlands Association of Local Councils, and the National Association of Local Councils. The Finham Residents' Association has also been liaising throughout the campaign with Coventry City Council, working towards triggering a Community Governance Review (the process through which a new parish council is created). Though the council was helpful, it had only been involved in setting up two parish councils in its area before (Keresley and Allesley) so it did not have a huge experience of going through a Community Governance Review process procedurally - which proved a challenge for the campaign group.

The campaign also received the support of the Department for Communities and Local Government, being offered a grant under the New Councils' Programme, which the campaign leaders used to promote awareness about the benefits of having a parish council and to mobilise residents in the area. Campaigners have openly said that the grant helped the campaign to complete the Community Governance Review process in the ways described above.



Above; St Martins-in-the-Fields Church, Finham – whose hall was used for some campaign activity.

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. This six month wait was very difficult for the campaign group as maintaining campaigner enthusiasm can be challenging through long periods of apparent inactivity. However, as the Residents' Association was a standing presence in the area, it was able to grasp the campaign mantle again at the start of the Review, from June, 2014.

Although Coventry City Council was due to reach a decision in December 2014, due to a technicality the final Full Council decision was postponed further until January 2015. The Conservative opposition on Coventry City Council had been campaigning for the creation of a parish council in Finham and a decision on whether to form the parish council was due at the last full council meeting of 2014. But, following a technical change, the controlling Labour Group voted to delay the decision until 13 January, 2015.

The campaign group strived to avoid party politics becoming involved in the campaign – but its involvement was unavoidable and delayed the date of the final full council vote by several weeks. This meant that the campaign group had to constantly amend its campaign plan during the Community Governance phase. However, the campaign group were flexible in their approach. Timings with leaflet deliveries and public meetings were amended to work around the delay with the final full council vote – and the timely new councils' grant from NALC / DCLG was used to pay for leaflets raising ongoing awareness about the campaign and a meeting venue for a meeting with Coventry City Councillors to promote the overall benefits of a new parish council for Finham.

In spite of these challenges, the establishment of a parish council in Finham has been approved. Coventry City Council found that the population of Finham is large enough to sustain a parish, particularly if it were to take over services from the City Council. The first elections for the new Finham Parish Council took place in May, 2016. This is testament to the very hard work of the campaign group and its determination to sustain an ongoing dialogue with both councillors and officers from Coventry City Council.

Partnership Working:

The creation of a parish council for Finham encountered some opposition from the principal authority. Coventry City Council initially allowed a very short period of time for the consultation, which was extended subsequently, with a prevailing need for some Council clarification on the need for the consultation. However, the campaign group worked very effectively with the City Council to promote the consultation and its purposes (as mentioned in earlier sections this was through public meetings and leaflets) and its crucial importance in delivering a new Finham Parish Council. Such joint partnership working and dialogue between Finham Residents' Association and Coventry City

Council ensured the Community Governance process broadly worked smoothly and, with the support of the National and Warwickshire and West Midlands Associations of Local Councils, the principal authority approved the creation of a Finham Parish Council on 13 January, 2015.

Learning From The Campaign:

The Finham campaign has run smoothly, overcoming any obstacles along the way, due to its dedicated group of volunteers from the Finham Residents' Association, who worked closely with the Warwickshire and West Midlands Association of Local Councils (WALC). However, with three significant periods of delay along the way (including a sixteen month wait between the Coventry City Council permission for the new council and the first parish elections for Finham on 5 May, 2016) – regular communication between the Residents' Association, WALC and other residents was always going to be critical (but not easy) to maintain campaign momentum.

Although satisfied with the outcome, John Crossling, County Secretary at Warwickshire and West Midlands Association of Local Councils (WALC), would have done some things differently. Though the Residents' Association did what it could to drive communication between itself and the council, other agencies such as residents and WALC would have benefitted from more dedicated briefing sessions: *“WALC believes that communications should have been improved. Regular monthly progress meetings between Coventry City Council, the Residents' Association and WALC should have been put in place. We might have been able to get the interim Council established more than 1 month before the election which would have been a significant benefit.”*

Why This Campaign Succeeded:

Once a given principal authority has reached a decision, although marking the end of perhaps the more difficult part of the process of establishing a new parish council, it is important for campaign groups to keep momentum until the elections. It is also a good time to start setting up the “infrastructure” of the new council, as WALC have pointed out (such as setting up an interim temporary or shadow council). To this end, having a good clerk (the chief officer of a parish council) is key. A local association is able to advise and provide support about recruiting a good clerk, as well as for other essential steps that are needed to take place during the interim period, before the first elections.

As such the main focus of this study has been to show how a campaign group won out against the odds to create a parish council in a city with very few other parish councils. Whilst the machinery of gaining petition signatures worked well for the campaign group in Finham – there did need to be better and more joined up holistic communications between the campaign group and some other agencies like WALC in the latter stages of the Community Governance phase. However, as below – for most of the campaign, residents were kept fully updated and involved.

"The success of the campaign depended very much on the well-established communication links between the FRA and the local and wider community. Using its website, email system, meetings and leaflet drops we made sure that everyone was kept informed. Following the successful outcome the FRA met with officers from the CCC who advised them on how to proceed. The FRA has appreciated the valuable help received from WALC during the latter stages of this campaign" - Bob Fryer, President of the Finham Residents' Association and campaign champion.

John Crossling, County Secretary at Warwickshire and West Midlands Association of Local Councils, believes that appointing an interim clerk has been very beneficial for the new council (such as drafting standing orders and an interim and initial council budget). The interim clerk recruited by the new council has been instrumental in helping to set up much of the infrastructure the new council will need to adopt and use: *"WALC have been concerned about the need to have an interim clerk in place to help put in place the key infrastructure ready for the new council. To that end WALC granted the Finham Residents' Association £1500 to employ a clerk temporarily. This has also enabled local publicity to be generated."*

Campaign Lessons To Share With Others:

Finham Residents' Association (FRA) 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 an initiative, portraying it not as a struggle for democracy, but as a struggle for political interests.

Nevertheless, campaign leaders in Finham 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 a County Association of Local Councils at an early stage is also very beneficial, as a local association can help with advice, information, support and guidance, as well as accessing specific grants to help lead a successful campaign.

Bob Fryer, President of the Finham Residents' Association and campaign champion: *"The main advice we would like to pass onto others campaigning for the establishment of a parish council would be to establish a strong communication and dialogue with the local residents. The people of Finham knew the FRA and what it stood for over many years, for example campaigning for a better bus service and fighting planning applications that adversely affected the local area. Therefore they were willing to listen and support us when we explained our desire to establish a parish council that would add a stronger layer of local democracy. Now we hope to move forward with a very successful Finham Parish Council. Good luck to all campaigners and if we can advise, please contact us."*

Who Can I Contact?:

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Other Information:

More information on creating a Council: The NALC ‘Create a Council’ web page:

<http://www.nalc.gov.uk/our-work/create-a-council> .

To see template resources such as a media release, leaflet and poster, please click here:

<http://www.nalc.gov.uk/our-work/create-a-council> .

To see case studies from other areas campaigning to set up new parish councils please click here

<http://www.nalc.gov.uk/our-work/create-a-council> .

Power to the People resource - <http://www.nalc.gov.uk/publications> .

Finham Residents’ Association - <http://www.finham.org.uk/> .

Finham Parish Council - <http://www.finhamparishcouncil.btck.co.uk/> .

Warwickshire and West Midlands Association of Local Councils - <http://www.walc.org.uk/about> .