



National Association of Local Councils

**Finham Parish Council – New Parish Council Created – The Story Of
How A New Parish Council Was Created In A Previously Un-Parished
Area Of Coventry**

Headlines

- Finham is a suburb, south from 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 provides an example of good practice for campaigns aspiring to set up a parish council, outlining key elements of success as well as some of the challenges faced by the Finham campaign and how these were overcome.
- Currently Finham is due to have its first elections in May 2016 and over the past months the main focus of campaign organisers has been to encourage residents to stand for election.

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, 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 local government level.

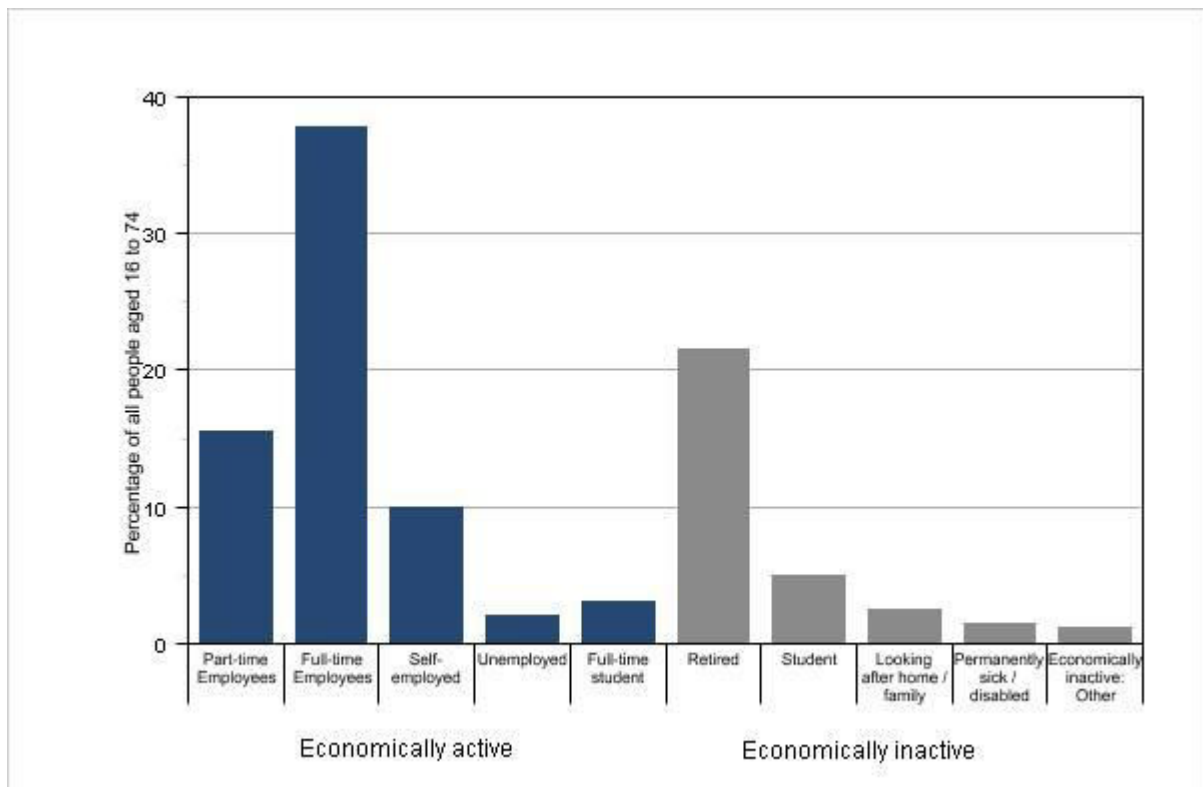
Contextual issues related to the theme

Finham is a suburb, south from 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 southeastern 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.

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 completed in 1970, as well as Finham Primary School both situated in Green Lane.

Data from the [2011 Census](#) shows that a large proportion of the residents in Finham are economically active. The neighbourhood also scores low on the [Indices of Deprivation 2015](#), being ranked 30,202 among 32,844 English neighbourhoods, where the most deprived

neighbourhood has a rank of 1. The Office of National Statistics estimated in 2008 the average total income in Coventry at £690. This compares with £600 for the West Midlands region.



Graph showing economic activity in Finham based on 2011 data from the [Office of National Statistics](#).

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, who worked closely with John Crossling from Warwickshire Association of Local Councils, and the National Association of Local Councils. The Finham Association has also been liaising throughout the campaign with Coventry City Council, working towards triggering a Community Governance Review.

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 mobilise residents in the area.

Progress With Campaign To Date



St Martins-in-the-Fields Church, Finham

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. In spite of these minor 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. Finham Parish Council is awaiting its first elections in May 2016.

How have issues/challenges been overcome?

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 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. 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.

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).

Although satisfied with the outcome, John Crossling, County Secretary at Warwickshire and West Midlands Association of Local Councils, would have done some things differently: *"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."*

What have been the key elements of success?

"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: *"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 and it now looks as though the first election will be contested!"*

Once the 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. To this end, having a good clerk is key. A local association is able to advise and provide support on recruiting a

good clerk, as well as other essential steps that are needed to take place during the interim period, before the first elections.

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 an 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 a County Association of Local Councils at an early stage is also very beneficial, as they 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 on to 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

Create A Council - <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> .