**Public Access to Town Council Meetings (August 2020)**

In recent months there have been a number of queries to Councillors and council staff about public attendance at Town Council meetings. The statement below is therefore aimed at providing the statutory and legal context of meetings.

Firstly, and for clarification, Town Council Meetings are not Public Meetings. However In the interests of ‘Open Government’ and in compliance of the ***“PUBLIC BODIES (Admission to Meetings) ACT” 1960***, the Public and Members of the Press are entitled to observe and report on these meetings. Furthermore, dependent upon the type of agenda item being discussed, and providing that no disruption is caused to the meeting, the Public and Press may also record or report on these meetings. Items of a sensitive nature identifying individuals, employees or commercially sensitive information will not be discussed in public and will be noted as ‘exempt’ on the agenda..

As per the requirements set out in the ***“PUBLIC BODIES (Admission to Meetings) ACT” 1960***, the Town Council also sets aside a half hour period at the start of a Town Council meeting for a “Public Forum” to take place. This period allows individual members of the public attending a meeting and who have also made a previous arrangement with the Town Manager (being a minimum of 48 hours’ notice before the scheduled start of the meeting) to ask a question, make representations, answer questions and give evidence in respect of any item of business included in the agenda, or on a matter concerning the Halewood Township.

In normal circumstances, the public would attend Town Council meetings in person to listen to the discussions taken place by Town Councillors and have the ability to report back on the business of any particular meeting. In recent months however, because of the Coronavirus Pandemic, the government advises that where practicable, meetings should be held remotely using electronic means, to allow for the safety of participants. In addition, Paragraph Six of Part Two of the **‘STATUTORY INSTRUMENTS 2020 No. 392 LOCAL GOVERNMENT, ENGLAND POLICE, ENGLAND AND WALES (The Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings) [England and Wales] Regulations 2020**)’ states that *“a local authority may make other standing orders and any other rules of the authority governing the meeting about remote attendance at meetings of that authority, which may include provision for—*

*(a) Voting;*

*(b) Member and public access to documents; and 3 Document Generated: 2020-04-30*

*Status: This is the original version (as it was originally made).*

*(c) Remote access of public and press to a local authority meeting to enable them to attend or participate in that meeting by electronic means, including by telephone conference, video conference, live webcasts, and live interactive streaming.”*

The Town Council will ensure that the People of Halewood, its members of staff and members of the Town Council are given the utmost support in providing as safe an environment as possible in conducting the Council’s business. To this aim, it will use the discretionary powers given by the aforementioned ‘**Statutory Instrument 2020 No. 392’** with regard to access to Town Council Meetings to ensure that the management of Town Council Meetings will always err on keeping the participants of these meetings as safe as possible.