

Guidance on petitioning against a private bill

This note is designed to assist individuals wishing to petition against a private bill in the House of Commons. For more information about private bills, please see the guidance available on the [Parliamentary website](#).

The deadline for submitting a petition against the Bishop's Stortford Cemetery Bill is 5pm on **Monday 16 October 2023**.

The Private Bill Office in the House of Commons can be contacted in the following ways:

- By email – prbohoc@parliament.uk
- By phone – 020 7219 3250
- By post or in person – Private Bill Office, House of Commons, SW1A 0AA

The petition template can be found [here](#).

To submit your petition via the online portal please access [here](#).

Private bills and petitions

A private bill is a piece of draft legislation which is for the interest or benefit of a particular person, group or organisation. Unlike public bills, which apply generally and affect everyone, private bills only affect a particular section of the population. Private bills are introduced by external bodies, such as organisations or local authorities, rather than by Members of Parliament, and are governed by the [Private Business Standing Orders](#). Like public bills, private bills only become law once they have been passed by both Houses of Parliament.

A petition against a private bill is a document submitted by an individual or body who believes they would be negatively affected by the provisions outlined in the bill and therefore opposes the bill's introduction. A petition can object to the whole of a bill or only to certain parts of it.

Petitions can also be submitted against Additional Provisions, which are amendments proposed by the promoter which affect further individuals or groups than were affected by the provisions of original bill. In this guidance, references to petitions against a bill apply equally to petitions against Additional Provisions unless otherwise stated.

Petitions against private bills are separate from [paper petitions](#) or [e-petitions](#).

Petitioners

While anybody can petition against a private bill, only petitioners who are "directly and specially affected" by the bill have the right to have their petitions considered. Being "directly and specially affected" means that the bill impacts upon the rights or interests of the individual or organisation in a way which is specific to that individual or organisation and different to the

effect on people and bodies generally. A petitioner can be an individual, a group of individuals, an organisation, or a group of organisations.

If the promoter of the bill – the individual or organisation which introduced it to Parliament – believes that a petitioner is not “directly and specially affected” by the bill, they can object to the petition being considered. See [‘Right to be heard challenges’](#) below.

Petitions cannot be submitted in favour of a bill. However, an individual in favour of a bill in its original or current form can submit a petition against alteration in response to any changes which are proposed to be made to the bill at committee stage (which can come from amendments proposed by the promoter or those that have been or will be requested by petitioners or made by the committee). For more information on petitions against alteration, please contact the Private Bill Office.

Writing a petition

Content and structure

A petition against a private bill should:

- Explain who the petitioner/s is and where they live (or what the affected business is and where its premises are located);
- Describe how the petitioner’s property or other interests are directly and specially affected by the provisions of the bill;
- State what the petitioner thinks should be done to reduce the adverse effects the bill would have on their property or interests and how the bill should be amended to achieve this.

A petition should not include:

- Pictures, maps or photos. A submitted petition should only include text. Petitioners will have the opportunity to share evidence such as photos or maps during their appearance before the committee appointed to consider petitions against the bill.
- Comprehensive evidence or explanations. The initial petition should outline the grounds upon which the petitioner is petitioning and summarise the issues involved. Detailed explanations can be given during an appearance before the committee.

The petition will form the basis of the petitioner’s case to the committee on the bill so it must include all objections the petitioner wishes to raise. Petitioners are not able to raise matters before the committee if they are not referred to in the initial petition.

A petition template is included for reference at the end of this guidance, and an editable version should be made available on the bill’s page on the Parliamentary website.

Support

Staff of the Private Bill Office can review petitions sent in draft in advance of formal submission. Feedback will only be given on form and structure; House staff will not comment on the arguments or evidence contained in a petition, and cannot confirm whether a petitioner does or does not have a right to be heard.

Petitioners seeking views on a draft petition should ensure that it is made available to staff in the Private Bill Office in sufficient time before the end of the petitioning period. Staff cannot guarantee to be able to provide specific advice or guidance on a petition if insufficient time is given before the relevant deadline.

Submitting a petition

When to submit

After a private bill is presented to Parliament, a petitioning period is arranged, during which time petitions can be submitted. Petitions can only be submitted during the appointed petitioning period. The length of the petitioning period is determined by the Private Business Standing Orders, and usually lasts for between seven and ten days.

The introduction of an Additional Provision triggers a further petitioning period, the timing of which will be announced separately.

How to submit

During the relevant petitioning period, petitions can be submitted via an online portal on the Parliamentary website, or by email to prbohoc@parliament.uk. Postal submissions should be sent to the Private Bill Office, House of Commons, SW1A 0AA.

Payment

There is an administration fee of £20 per petition (not per petitioner). Payments can be made:

- Bank transfer – to sort code 60-70-80 and account number 10022317. Please ensure that you quote your surname as a reference, so that we can identify received payments with received petition.
- Cheque – payable to 'HOC Administration 2' and posted to Private Bill Office, House of Commons, London, SW1A 0AA.
- Credit card – by contacting our Accounts Department on 020 7219 6308.
- Cash – in person to the Private Bill Office, Clerk of the House Floor, Palace of Westminster.

A petition will not be considered if the fee has not been received.

Petitioners against a bill do not have to pay again should they wish to also petition against any Additional Provisions introduced in relation to the same bill. However, petitioners do need to pay a further £20 fee should they wish to petition again when the bill is considered in the House of Lords.

After submission

Next stages

Petitions submitted against a private bill will be published on the Parliamentary website

(including the petitioner's names and addresses). They will also be sent to the bill's promoter, who will likely contact petitioners to attempt to resolve their concerns with the bill.

After the petitioning period closes, and subject to the bill receiving its [second reading](#) in the House, the bill will be referred to a committee. If petitions have been submitted against the bill it will be referred to an [opposed bill committee](#), which will listen to the arguments presented for the bill by the promoter and against the bill by petitioners and decide whether the case for the bill has been proved (known as 'the preamble') or whether any amendments are needed. If no petitions have been received, the bill will be referred to an unopposed bill committee, which will hear from the bill's promoters and decide whether they have proved the preamble.

Both forms of committee can approve the bill, approve it with amendments or with undertakings from the promoters, make a special report to the House, or decide that the need for the bill is not proven. In this latter case, the bill cannot proceed any further.

Appearing before the committee

Petitioners against a bill can appear before the committee in person or can be represented by someone else. This does not have to be a qualified legal professional (although it can be) – it can, for instance, be a friend or family member. There are professional Parliamentary Agents (solicitors accredited by Parliament who specialise in promoting and opposing hybrid and private bills), known as "Roll A" Agents who can be employed to act on a petitioner's behalf. A list of registered Roll A Agents is kept on the [Parliamentary website](#).

If a petition has been submitted on behalf of a group of individuals, one of the petitioners may act on behalf of their co-petitioners, as their representative, provided all of the co-petitioners consent. Alternatively, the group could ask someone else to represent them (as above). Businesses or organisations should hold a properly constituted meeting and pass resolutions authorising a named person (who can be a member of the organisation or an external individual hired to represent them) to act as a representative before the committee. Local authorities must be represented by a nominated individual, who can be a councillor or someone else.

Individuals nominated to represent a group or organisation can also petition as an individual if they are personally directly and specially affected by the bill. However, petitions submitted in an individual capacity cannot be used to give evidence on behalf of the group or organisation the petitioner has separately been requested to represent, and vice versa.

Right to be heard challenges

If the promoter of a bill objects to the right of a petitioner to be heard by the committee appointed to the bill, on the grounds that they do not believe they are directly and specially affected by the bill, a 'right to be heard' hearing will be arranged in front of the [Court of Referees](#) (unless the petitioner does not wish to contest the promoter's objection).

In such a hearing, a petitioner (or their representative) has the opportunity to speak in support of their right to be heard by the committee on their petition, and the promoter will speak in reply, challenging that right. The Court of Referees will then determine whether the petitioner will be heard.

Withdrawal

Petitioners can withdraw a petition at any time (or withdraw a name from a petition with multiple signatories) by emailing or writing to the Private Bill Office. The fee paid upon submission will not be refunded.

In the case of petitions with multiple signatories, names can be withdrawn by individual signatories but the petition itself can only be withdrawn with the consent of all petitioners.

Petition template

1. Terms and conditions

We need your consent to use your data and to keep you updated on the progress of your petition.

Your data

Your petition will be published on the UK Parliament website. Please note this will include your name and part of your address. We will store your data and a copy of your petition in the Private Bill Office and as a record in the Parliamentary Archives.

Communications

Your data is stored so that you can be invited to have your petition heard by the Committee.

Private Bill Office staff may contact any of the people named in the petition to verify the information provided. Those communications will be stored with the information you have given.

Your petition and communications regarding it may be shared between the Private Bill Offices of the House of Commons and the House of Lords.

If you have completed this form on behalf of an individual, group of individuals, organisation or group of organisations, please ensure you have been authorised to do so.

For more information on how we handle your data, please see our [privacy notice](#).

Consent

I give consent for my information to be used for the purposes set out above.

2. Petitioner information

In the box below, give the name and address of each individual, business or organisation submitting the petition.

In the box below, give a description of the petitioners. For example, “We are the owners/tenants of the addresses above”; “My company has offices at the address above”; “Our organisation represents the interests of...”; “We are the parish council of...”.

3. Objections to the Bill

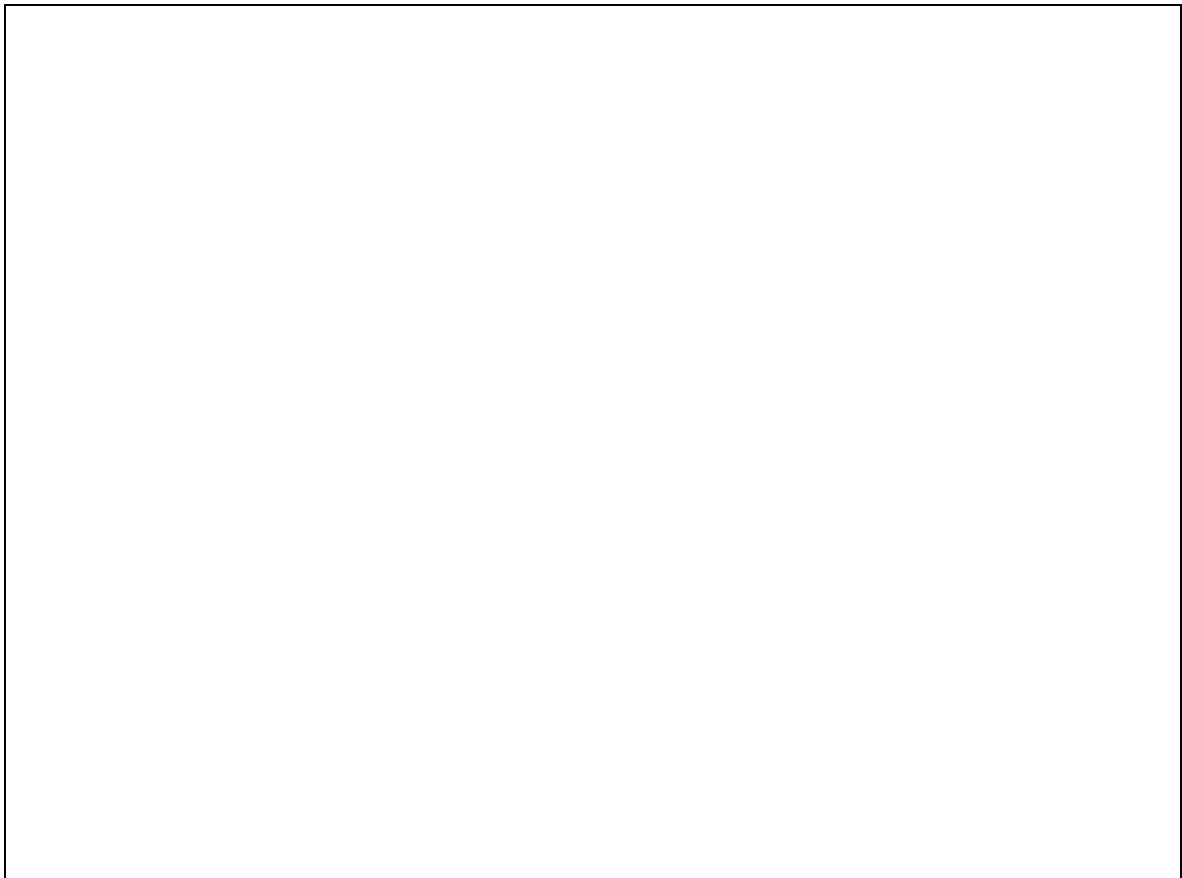
In the box below, write your objections to the Bill and why your property or other interests are **directly and specially affected**. Please number each paragraph.

Only objections outlined in this petition can be presented when giving evidence to the Committee. You will not be entitled to be heard by the Committee on new matters not included in your written petition.

4. What do you want to be done in response?

In the box below, tell us what you think should be done in response to your objections to the Bill. You do not have to complete this box if you do not want to.

You can include this information in your response to section 3 'Objections to the Bill' if you prefer. Please number each paragraph.



5. Petitioner details

Organisation/group name (if relevant)

First name(s)

Last name

Address line 1

Address line 2

Post code

County

Email

Phone (landline or mobile)

Who should be contacted about this petition?

- Individual above
- Another contact (for example, Roll A Agent or other representative)

If another contact, complete the 'Main contact's details' section below.

6. Main contact's details

First name(s)

Last name

Address line 1

Address line 2

Post code

County

Email

Phone (landline or mobile)