

Swaffham Bulbeck Parish Council Communications and Procedures

At the Parish Council meeting on 6th September 2016, it was agreed that a strategy for Communications would be drawn up.

1. Purpose

The purpose is to review current practice and to set out a strategy to ensure that communication systems and procedures are understood and that information is shared consistently and efficiently between all stakeholders. The strategy also seeks to consider further potential opportunities to develop communication systems in the future.

2. Approach

For the purpose of this review, communication systems are divided into three broad sections:

- Communications between the Parish Council and village residents
- Communications between councillors, and between councillors and the clerk
- Communications with the wider community

2.1 Communications between the Parish Council and village residents

Village residents should be kept well informed of the work of the Parish Council and be well prepared for forthcoming events and projects. Established and known methods for communicating with residents include: **notice boards**; **website**; **Bulbeck Beacon**; and **meetings**. Occasionally other methods are used to reinforce publicity and act as reminders, including leafleting and posters.

Notice boards

There is currently only one notice board which is adjacent to the school. The review proposes that two additional notice boards are provided – one close to the shop and another in Commercial End. Notice boards will display monthly minutes, agendas, and other occasional Parish Council notices. The clerk will post notices and the vice chair will act as back up when required.

Parish Council website www.swaffhambulbeckpc.org.uk

The Parish Council website primarily communicates Parish Council information to the public. It also provides other relevant community information, some of which may have been provided, or requested, by members of the public.

The website manager is the vice chair who determines the appropriateness of items requested to be included by members of the public. On occasions, where items to be included may be deemed sensitive or controversial, the decision to display the item will be made by the Parish Council. All information to be uploaded to the website should be done as soon as it becomes available.

The clerk is responsible for uploading agendas (3 clear days before a meeting), minutes (within 24 hours of being approved by the Parish Council) and current planning applications.

One other councillor will be available to upload items to the website in instances where the website manager and/or clerk are unavailable to carry out this job.

Those responsible for uploading items to the website will endeavour to ensure that the website is kept up-to-date and two Parish Councillors will monitor this.

A review of the website will be carried out to ensure that it is set up to enable efficient access to different areas. Associated training will be sought to facilitate the review and introduce one or two

additional councillors to website management. Once the review has been carried out, village residents will be informed via the Bulbeck Beacon.

The Swaffham Bulbeck Parish Council Social Media Policy (Appendix 1) was approved on 7th March 2017 and provides guidance on the management of social media.

Bulbeck Beacon

Each month a report, drafted by the clerk, from the most recent Parish Council meeting will include the key points and decisions from the current month's draft minutes.

Other occasional Parish Council reports, notification of forthcoming events and progress of on-going projects will be published by the Parish Council. Such articles may have been drafted by an individual councillor but should be shared with all councillors before being published and signed off under the title '*Parish Council*'. These items will also be uploaded onto the website.

Meetings

Village residents are welcome to attend all meetings of the Parish Council and are informed of times, dates and location on notice boards, the website and in the Bulbeck Beacon.

2.2 Communications between councillors, and between councillors and the clerk

As the Parish Council is a corporate body, its decisions are the responsibility of the whole council and therefore all councillors have a responsibility to be well informed. Key systems to ensure that this happens:

- Email communication should be used as the most efficient means of communicating between councillors, and between councillors and the clerk. Parish Councillors are strongly advised to have a dedicated email address for Parish Council business only; at a minimum Parish Councillors are advised to have an individual email address which is neither shared nor work-related*.
- The clerk will forward to all councillors emails of a routine nature, for example emails from ECDC, with those of key importance *flagged*.
- Emails between councillors, and between the clerk and councillors should indicate whether the email is **for information only** (FYI) or whether it requires **a response**. Where a response is required, it should be made to **Reply All**.
- The Parish Council has a number of Working Groups, for example Finance, and Pavilion. Notes and dates of meetings should be circulated to all parish councillors and the clerk.
- Three days before a meeting, the clerk provides councillors with paper and digital copies of: an agenda and its supporting documentation; and draft minutes of the previous meeting. Any councillor who requires digital copies of paperwork only must give written authorisation to the clerk and photocopying paper will be supplied if requested.
- An induction procedure is provided for new councillors consisting: a copy of *The Good Councillor's Guide*; signposting to the council's website for policies and other documentation; an expectation and encouragement to attend the first available induction course; and allocation of a named Parish Council buddy (to contact on an individual basis if required).
- On occasions when the Parish Council has no clerk, the following procedure is recommended:
 1. Seek CPALC advice for a locum clerk (list currently being drawn up)
 2. Contact LGS Services for a locum clerk.
 3. In the longer term all hardware and associated software to be handed to a locum, or new, clerk.

2.3 Communications with the wider community

The Parish Council should be proactive in developing further opportunities to communicate with the local and wider community through a wide range of means. Examples could include:

- ❖ Whilst in the first instance there should be a focus on reviewing the website, following this review a strategy should be developed which aims to reach younger community members via digital means such as face book, blogs, twitter.
- ❖ A map of the local area, replacement information board for the moated site and fingerpost signage on the Denny placed close to the main car park.
- ❖ Physical indicators, such as false gates, installed at key gateways to the village which communicate to motorists that they are entering the village and should reduce speed.

* Best Practice suggests that parish councillors should have a separate email address for council business with regard to FOI requests and Data Protection, in order to avoid any pitfalls that may arise from a shared email account.

Approved: March 2017

Review date: April 2018

Social Media Policy

The aim of this policy is to set out a Code of Practice and to provide guidance to Swaffham Bulbeck Parish Councillors in the use of online communications, collectively referred to as social media. Social media is a collective term used to describe methods of publishing on the internet.

The Policy covers all forms of social media and social networking sites which include (but are not limited to):

- Parish Council website
- Facebook, Myspace and other social networking sites
- Twitter and other micro-blogging sites
- Youtube and other video clips and podcast sites
- LinkedIn
- Blogs and discussion forums
- Parish Council emails

The principles of the Policy apply to Parish Councillors and the Clerk to the council. It is also intended for guidance for others communicating with the Parish Council.

No direct costs will be incurred by implementing it. It will require a volunteer to update and monitor the social media sites.

The use of social media is not to replace existing forms of communication. The website and other forms of social media will be used to enhance communication. Therefore existing means of communication should continue with social media being an additional option.

Aspects of the Members' Code of Conduct apply to online activity in the same way it does to other written or verbal communication. Online content should be objective, balanced, informative and accurate. What you write on the web is permanent.

In the main, councillors have the same legal duties online as anyone else, but failures to comply with the law may have more serious consequences. There are some additional duties around using their websites for electoral campaigning and extra care needs to be taken when writing on planning matters, see further notes below.

Swaffham Bulbeck Parish Council Social Media Policy

1. The Council will appoint a nominated councillor or councillors as moderator(s). They will be responsible for posting and monitoring of content ensuring it complies with the Social Media Policy. The moderator will have authority to remove any posts made by third parties from our social media

pages which are deemed to be of a defamatory or libellous nature. Such posts will also be reported to the Hosts (i.e. Facebook) and also the Clerk.

2. The Council will appoint a nominated “Webmaster” to maintain and update the Parish Council website.

Social media may be used for:

- Posting minutes and dates of meetings
- Advertising events and activities
- Posting good news stories linked to website or press page
- Advertising vacancies
- Retweeting or ‘sharing’ information from partners i.e. police, library and health etc.
- Announcing new information
- Posting or sharing information from other parish related community groups/clubs/associations/bodies e.g. schools, sports clubs and community groups.
- Referring resident queries to the Clerk and all other councillors.

Facebook will be used to support the website information above.

Emails will be used to distribute information of council business.

Individual parish councillors are responsible for what they post. Councillors are personally responsible for any online activity conducted via their published email address which is used for council business. Councillors are strongly advised to have separate council and personal email addresses.

Code of Practice

Guidance when using social media (including email):

3. All social media sites in use should be checked and updated on a regular basis to ensure that the security settings are in place.

4. When participating in any online communication:-

- (a) Be responsible and respectful, be direct, informative, brief and transparent.
- (b) Always disclose your identity and affiliation to the Parish Council. Never make false or misleading statements.
- (c) Parish councillors should not present themselves in a way that might cause embarrassment. All parish councillors need to be mindful of the information they post on sites and make sure personal opinions are not published as being those of the Council, or bring the Council into disrepute, or which are contrary to the Council’s Code of Conduct or any other policies.
- (d) Keep the tone of your comments respectful and informative, never condescending or ‘loud’. Use sentence case format, not capital letters, to emphasise points.
- (e) Refrain from posting controversial or potentially inflammatory remarks. Language that may be deemed as offensive in particular to race, sexuality,
- (f)
- (g) disability, gender, age or religion or belief should not be published on any social media site.
- (h) Avoid personal attacks, online fights and hostile communications.
- (i) Never use an individual’s name unless you have written permission to do so.
- (j) Permission to publish photographs or videos on social media sites should be sought from the persons or organisations in the video or photograph before being uploaded.

5. Respect the privacy of other councillors and residents.

6. Do not post any information or conduct any online activity that may violate laws or regulations, see below libel and copyright.

7. Residents and councillors should note that not all communication requires a response:

- (a) There will not be immediate responses to communications as they may be discussed by the Parish Council and all responses will be agreed by the Parish Council.
 - (b) The Parish Clerk and the moderators will be responsible for all final published responses.
 - (c) If a matter needs further consideration it may be raised at either the open forum or as a full agenda item for consideration by a quorum of councillors. Again, the poster shall be informed via the page or direct message that this is the case.
 - (d) If the moderator feels unable to answer a post, for example of a contentious nature, this shall be referred to the Clerk. The poster will be informed by way of response to this fact and also be invited to correspond with the Clerk directly.
 - (e) Some communication from residents and other third parties may be required to be discussed at a Parish Council meeting. When this is necessary the item will be placed on the next available agenda. Any response will then be included in the minutes of the meeting.
8. The nominated moderator(s) shall remove any negative posts which may contain personal and inflammatory remarks, libellous or defamatory information without further comment or notification.
9. Councillors or parishioners who have any concerns regarding content placed on social media sites should report them to the Clerk of the council. Mis-use of such sites in a manner that is contrary to this and other policies could result in action being taken.
10. This Policy shall be reviewed annually.

Additional background information

Libel

If you publish an untrue statement about a person which is damaging to their reputation they may take out a libel action against you. This will also apply if you allow someone else to publish something libellous on your website if you know about it and don't take prompt action to remove it. A successful libel claim against you will result in an award of damages against you.

Copyright

Placing images or text on your site from a copyrighted source (for example extracts from publications or photos) without permission is likely to breach copyright. Avoid publishing anything you are unsure about, or seek permission in advance. Breach of copyright may result in an award of damages against you.

Data Protection

Avoid publishing the personal data of individuals unless you have their express written permission.

Bias and pre-determination

If you are involved in determining planning or licensing applications or other quasi-judicial decisions, avoid publishing anything that might suggest you don't have an open mind about a matter you may be involved in determining. If not, the decision runs the risk of being invalidated.

Obscene material

Publication of obscene material is a criminal offence. In England, the law is governed by the Obscene Publications Act (1959). It defines obscenity as "content whose effect will tend to deprave and corrupt those likely to read, see or hear it".

The Council's legal position

Material published by a local authority as an organisation is, for obvious reasons, restricted in terms of content. It must not contain party political material and, in relation to other material, should not persuade the public to a particular view, promote the personal image of a particular councillor, promote an individual councillor's proposals, decisions or recommendations, or personalise issues. Nor should the council assist in the publication of any material that does any of the above.

