

ASHWICK PARISH COUNCIL

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT POLICY

Adopted: -

Introduction

The purpose of this policy is to guide Ashwick Parish Council's communication activity and public engagement. The Council aims to ensure that there are effective channels of communication both from the Council to the public and from the public to the Council.

Aims

Ashwick Parish Council aims to:

- The Role of community engagement and its importance
- Work more closely with residents, business and community groups
- Engage with as many people as possible in decision making, monitoring services and planning for the future
- Ensure that through the use of a wide range of approaches to public involvement and community engagement that residents are encouraged to share their views, ideas and concerns with the Council
- Use the views of the residents as an integral part of the decision-making process; and
- Ensure that residents have opportunities to be heard at every stage

Objectives

The Council is committed to creating and maintaining effective working relationships with all sectors of the community, based on trust, openness and constructive challenge.

The Council's objectives include:

- Improving communication through the establishment of new channels of engagement
- Improving residents understanding of the role of the Council and Councillors
- Improving engagement with local communities, with more people feeling that they are involved in their area; and
- Improving satisfaction with local public services and the area.

Ashwick Parish Council and Community Engagement

The Parish Council will facilitate community engagement in the following ways:

- Making information on what decisions are being considered and how residents can influence or contribute to the discussion in good time. Methods used to ensure engagement will be – through the Parish Council website, notice board, The Beacon Magazine, posters, consultations, reports, and word of mouth.
- All meetings of the Parish Council and its committees are open to the public and press and there is a period set aside for residents to speak. Residents can access agendas for meetings via the Parish Council web site and notice boards. The Parish Council website, notice boards and agendas explain the procedure for residents wishing to speak at meetings. Facilities also exist where residents can, where appropriate or necessary, make written reports, present petitions or have a case presented on their behalf to councillors.

- Planning applications are considered at Council meetings held monthly. The opportunities for people to speak applies equally to these agenda items. Equal opportunity is given to applicants / supporters, objectors and local community groups.
- The Parish Clerk is required to play a neutral role so that residents can be fully involved and be confident that they are receiving unbiased information and support. This neutral involvement will allow more flexibility in the service and the personal element of the contact, will hopefully encourage more involvement from the hard to reach members of the community.
- Details of how to contact the Clerk will be displayed on notice boards, council website and the Parish Magazine.
- The Parish Council will produce a list of annual council and committee dates to include the start times of the meetings and agenda distribution dates.
- The Parish Council will be open and accountable in its dealing with residents and the community.
- The Parish Council will be receptive to requests from residents or communities and will attempt to be flexible in order to ensure their opinions are known not only to the Parish Council but also to other organisations. This may be by including an item for discussion on an agenda or allowing a local group to put their opinions into an official report undertaken by the Parish Council.

Communication

Ashwick Parish Council is committed to improving community engagement by:

- Continuing all the above activities and services into the future and improving relationships with community groups, including developing measure to harness the views and opinions of people and groups who are often missed out of community engagement activities.
- Ashwick Parish Council will be proactive and will be willing to consider any reasonable opportunities that support its purpose of getting information available and increasing contributions from the community, especially those difficult to reach.
- When dealing with controversial issues that affect a particular community then consideration will be given to holding a public meeting.
- Consultations and surveys are to be considered when necessary and appropriate and results will be made available.
- Identifying and embracing opportunities to work with other local community groups when the need arises.
- Publicising the positive results that have been achieved from working relationships between the Council and other community groups; in order to encourage new relationships / partnerships to be formed and to raise community spirit.
- Promoting elections and the importance of the democratic process and the value of being a councillor.
- Promoting the value of the parish of volunteering.
- The Parish Council will review its community Engagement Strategy on an annual basis to ensure that it remains relevant.

Provision of Information to the Community

Ashwick Parish Council will make available to the community information relating to who we are, what we do, what we spend and how we spend it, how we make decisions, our policies and procedures and the services we offer.

Information will be provided to the community in the following ways;

- Contact details for the Clerk and all Councillors are displayed on the Council's website
- The Council's website address is widely published and the site contains all the information an individual might wish to know about the work of the Parish Council and its individuals, including meeting minutes, policy documents, financial statements, annual report and how to contact anyone associated with the Council.
- Information such as agendas are published on the two notice boards located in the Parish and on the website.

Freedom of Information

In accordance with the Freedom of Information Act 2000, this document will be posted on the Council website.

Outcomes

The outcomes which we are striving for and against which the success of this policy will be measured are:

- Improved communication through the establishment of new channels of engagement
- More residents understanding the role of Councillors and getting the best effect
- Improved engagement with local communities, with more people feeling that they are involved in decision-making.
- Improved satisfaction with service provided by the Council.