

# COMBERTON PARISH COUNCIL

## Community Engagement Policy



### Introduction

This document forms the Parish Council's Community Engagement Policy and covers:

- The role of community engagement and its importance.
- How Comberton Parish Council engages the wider community and identifies the needs and wishes of those living in the village.
- How the Parish Council can improve community engagement.

The objectives of the policy:

- Encourage effective local community engagement.
- Ensure that embedded throughout the council there is clear understanding of the need to engage with communities about decisions that affect them.
- Enable aspirations/comments/suggestions obtained from community engagement to have an impact on decision making and the way services are being delivered.
- Identify how the council can enhance its profile by improving engagement with the wider community (with specific reference to hard-to-reach groups).

### Community Engagement – an Overview

Community engagement is concerned with giving local people a voice and involving them in decisions which affect them and their community. This may include individuals, voluntary and community organisations as well as other public sector bodies.

It provides opportunity for local people to talk to the council about their aspirations and or needs in their community and neighbourhood. It allows the council to consult with and inform people about what services it provides, how it prioritises, how policies are determined and how well it's performing.

Hard to reach groups refers to those who experience social exclusion and are sometimes perceived as being disempowered. Some examples include young people, elderly people, those with a physical disability, language barriers, financial constraints, cultural differences, or social expectations. The Parish Council will put effort into seeking their views, but it also recognises that sometimes they have excluded themselves through personal choice.

#### The key aspects of community engagement include:

- Development of a network of relationships between council, individuals, voluntary and community groups.
- Clear and open communication to ensure that information is made accessible to all groups.
- Listening and understanding from a range of people to identify aspirations, needs and problems of local people and groups.

### Effective and meaningful community engagement can provide many benefits:

- The problems and needs of local people are clearly identified in order that appropriate new or improved facilities /services can be provided.
- Those participating feel empowered by being involved in decision making in their community.
- This may result in enhanced leadership and greater interest in elections and standing for council.

## Comberton Parish Council and Community Engagement

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

1. Making information on what decisions are being considered and how residents can influence or contribute to the discussions in good time.
2. Methods used to ensure engagement will be - through the Parish Council website, notice board, posters, consultations, reports, newsletters, and word of mouth.
3. All meetings of the Parish Council are open to the public and press and there is a period set aside for residents to speak.
4. Residents can access agendas for meetings via the Parish Council web site and notice board.
5. The Parish Council website and agendas explain the procedure for residents wishing to speak at meetings. Residents can, where appropriate or necessary, make written reports or have a case presented on their behalf to councilors.
6. 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.
7. 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.
8. 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.
9. Details of how to contact the Parish Clerk is displayed on notice boards and the council website.
10. The Parish Council will produce a list of annual council dates to include the start times of the meetings and agenda distribution dates.
11. The Parish Council will be open and accountable in its dealing with residents and the community. It will make information on its policies and procedures freely available.
12. The Parish Council will be receptive to requests from residents and will be flexible in order to ensure their opinions are known not only to the Parish Council but also to other organisations.
13. Parish councilors will continue to represent the Council on various outside bodies, to ensure that they are kept informed of the communities' needs.

## Communication

### Comberton 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 measures to harness the views and opinions of those who are often missed out of community engagement activities.

Comberton 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.

Consultations and surveys are to be considered when necessary and appropriate.

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 Council and other community groups.

Promoting elections and the importance of the democratic process and the value of being involved with the Parish Council.

Promoting the value to the parish of volunteering.

The Parish Council will review its community Engagement Strategy on an annual basis ensuring that it remains relevant.

## 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 and a higher percentage of people involved in volunteering.

Improved satisfaction with services provided by the Council

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