

BUCKLAND NEWTON PARISH COUNCIL

COMMUNICATIONS POLICY AND GUIDELINES

Introduction

Buckland Newton Parish Council articulates and represents the views and needs of the local community. It provides information on important parish matters affecting the community and encourages comment from interested individuals and groups

The Parish Council recognises that consistent, effective and appropriate communications are essential for the council to engage with parishioners on the work and activities the council is undertaking on behalf of residents in the parish and the principles and legal framework that apply to it as a publicly accountable organisation.

This document outlines the principles for managing communications, to inform residents and to receive information from them, and will include key strands of the use and types of communications employed and the responsibilities of the council in relation to using them.

Legal Framework

The Parish Council must all times conduct its business within the law, not only the law of the land, but especially the legal requirements of a public local authority organisation; Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960, the Local Government Act 1972, the Freedom of Information Act 2000, the Data Protection Act 1998 and the Council's Standing Orders. Further, The Parish Council must ensure that it maintains control of its information to ensure that is used appropriately and its use, by itself or others, does not bring the Parish Council into disrepute.

Good Practice

All correspondence received by the council, regardless of the means used, will be treated as confidential between the Parish Council and the correspondent. Information/correspondence received should not be forwarded to third parties without prior permission.

All correspondence relating to the parish should be addressed to the Parish Clerk in the first instance. This will ensure that the matter is passed to the relevant person or persons as soon as is practically possible. If a parishioner wishes a matter to be formally discussed at a Parish Council meeting the Parish Clerk must be notified at least 10 days prior to the meeting for the item to be placed on the agenda.

The Parish Council will only respond to matters or correspondence of any kind that is raised directly with them through the channels outlined in this document.

The Parish Council will not:-

- Respond to anonymous correspondence or comments.
- Respond to correspondence or comments if judged to be offensive.
- Respond to matters raised on a resident's behalf by a third party without being advised of the identity of the person in question

All individuals communicating on behalf of Buckland Newton Parish Council must be aware that every piece of communication reflects on the reputation of the council in the community. All communication should be courteous and professional.

Councillors and staff must ensure that any electronic device which they use to access an email address used for Parish Council business is secured (or that the email account is secured) using a password or PIN and that this is not shared with any other person. All such devices must have suitable anti-viral software running.

Emails received by the Council's Proper Officer, staff or Members may be disclosed following a request under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 or following a subject access request under the Data Protection Act 1998, under the General Data Protection Regulation or in the course of legal proceedings.

WHO IS COMMUNICATING?

Proper Officer

The Proper Officer (the Clerk) has overall responsibility for overseeing all communication with members of the community and outside bodies. The point of contact for the parish council is the Clerk, and it is to the Clerk that all correspondence for the parish council should be addressed.

The parish clerk may be contacted by letter, telephone or email. The Clerk is provided with a council email address (bucklandnewton@dorset-aptc.gov.uk) which is to be used solely for the purpose of conducting council business.

Official correspondence should be sent by the Clerk in the name of the council using council letter headed paper or using the parish council email address, making it clear that it is written in their official capacity and has been authorised by the parish council.

Where correspondence from the Clerk is copied to another person, the addressee should be made aware that a copy is being forwarded to that other person.

Council letter headed paper must only be used to convey information that has been authorised by the Parish Council and must not be used to convey personal views. Council letter headed paper is used by the Clerk and authorised staff in the day to day running of the parish council and its interests.

Councillors

Each parish councillor has a duty to represent, without bias, the interests of the whole community. Parish councillors will endeavour to do their best and be available to parishioners with regard to matters relating to the parish of Buckland Newton. A contact list will be available on the notice boards around the parish, in the Lydden Vale magazine and on the Buckland Newton Parish Council website www.bucklandnewtonparishcouncil.org.uk, or again, contact with councillors can be made through the Council's email account.

Information/correspondence received should be treated as confidential and not be passed on/forwarded to third parties without prior permission. Councillor's considering forwarding any information/correspondence on to third parties should request that this be done by the Clerk, so that the Council is aware of where information has been issued.

When in doubt about how to respond to an enquiry, the guidance of the Parish Clerk will be sought. At no time should councillors make any promises to the public about any matter raised with them other than to say they will investigate the matter. All manner of issues may be raised, many of which may not be relevant to Buckland Newton Parish Council. Depending on the issue, it may be appropriate to deal with the matter in one of the following ways:

- Refer the matter to the Parish Clerk who will then deal with it as appropriate.
- Request an item on a relevant agenda.
- Investigate the matter personally, having sought the guidance of the Parish Clerk.

A copy of all outgoing correspondence relating to the Parish Council or one's role within it should be sent to the Clerk, and it be noted on the correspondence, e.g. "copy to the Clerk" so that the recipient is aware that the Clerk has been advised. No individual Councillor should be the sole custodian of any correspondence or information in the name of the Parish Council, a committee, sub-committee or working party.

Councillors must ensure that all communication with the public on council related matters reflects and does not in any way contradict the decisions and policies of Buckland Newton Parish Council, regardless of the councillor's individual views on any subject.

Councillors assigned responsibility for some action which involves written or verbal communications with other agencies shall keep the Clerk updated and report back to the next relevant meeting.

Council letter headed paper may be used if requested, when preparing communications from any councillor to other agencies but must only be used to convey information that has been authorised by the parish council at a meeting and must not be used to convey personal views. All written communications to third parties should be approved by the Clerk before being sent.

In cases where a response to communication needs to be sent urgently and cannot wait until a meeting, councillors should liaise with the Clerk to agree an appropriate response. This must not commit the council to any action that has not already been resolved at a meeting and must not imply liability or contradict the decisions and policies of Buckland Newton Parish Council.

MEANS OF COMMUNICATING

Parish Council Meetings

The Parish Council will hold ordinary meetings once every two months on the second Tuesday of the month. The meetings will take place in The Parish Pavilion and commence at 7.00pm unless otherwise notified. Meetings will include time for public participation at the start of each meeting. The Annual Meeting of the Parish Council will take place in May when councillors will elect the Chairman and appoint a Vice Chairman for the forthcoming year. The Annual Parish Meeting will also take place in either May or June giving parishioners the opportunity to listen to the progress of the Parish Council over the last year, to ask questions and the opportunity to discuss local issues and concerns along with celebrating local events and activities.

Noticeboards

The following items will be displayed permanently; the name, address, telephone number and email for the parish clerk, the names of parish councillors with their contact details. Copies of Parish Council agendas, minutes of meetings and annual audited accounts will be displayed when appropriate. Notice of items of significant interest, information or concern will also be shown when applicable.

Buckland Newton Parish Council website www.bucklandnewtonparishcouncil.org.uk

The Parish Council website will only publish matters relating to its work, responsibilities and other items that fall within the scope of its remit or purview. This includes all items required to be published under the Transparency Regulations; details and contact arrangements for the parish clerk and all parish councillors; agendas and minutes of meetings. Announcements, which will include information about matters that the Parish Council wishes to bring to residents' particular attention, will be posted on the website.

All information on the website is copyrighted.

Buckland Newton Parish Council Facebook Page

The Facebook page will be used for notifications and announcements only. Any other communication should be done through the correct channels (email, letter or telephone) No restrictions have been placed on the sharing of the Parish Council's information published on the Council's Facebook page, but the Parish Council must be alert to the possibility of the information being used inappropriately or in a way that is detrimental to the Parish Council.

When using social media (including email) parish councillors and council staff must be mindful of the information they post in both a personal and council capacity and keep the tone of any comments respectful and informative. Parish councillors and council staff must not:

- hide their identity using false names or pseudonyms
- present personal opinions as that of the council
- present themselves in a way that might cause embarrassment to the council
- post content that is contrary to the democratic decisions of the council
- post controversial or potentially inflammatory remarks
- engage in personal attacks, online fights and hostile communications
- publish personal data of individuals without permission
- publish photographs or videos of minors without parental permission
- post any information that infringes copyright of others
- post any information that may be deemed libel
- post online activity that constitutes bullying or harassment
- bring the council into disrepute, including through content posted in a personal capacity
- post offensive language relating to race, sexuality, disability, gender, age, religion or belief
- conduct any online activity that violates laws, regulations or that constitutes a criminal offence

Letterbox Drop

Buckland Newton Parish Council may consider doing a Letterbox Drop if it wishes to ensure that all parishioners receive certain information. A communication may be delivered to every household in the parish, with details of the issue and the timeframe for responses and comments to be received by the Parish Council.

Other Communication Opportunities

The Parish Council publishes a monthly report in the parish magazine the 'Lydden Vale' which is delivered to most households in the parish.

The Parish Council may facilitate other communication channels to signpost residents to important council matters, providing the Parish Council's copyright is not breached, that the Parish Council is credited as the source of the information and it is clear that any comments or responses to the information are sent directly to the Parish Council.

The Media

All media enquiries should be directed to the Parish Clerk.

All media comment must accurately reflect Buckland Newton Parish Council's position on the topic, as adopted in documents e.g. minutes and policies. Councillors must not commit the council to any action which has not previously been decided at a council meeting. Buckland Newton Parish Council as a whole will agree its statements for release to the press and social media.

All decisions of Buckland Newton Parish Council made in an open meeting can be quoted and made available to the media.

Councillors wishing to make a 'personal statement' to the media must clearly inform the media:

- that their comments are made as an individual and are not necessarily the view of Buckland Newton Parish Council
- that other councillors may hold a different view
- that the matter may still need to be discussed or resolved by Buckland Newton Parish Council

Other Matters

Anyone with concerns regarding content placed on social media sites that denigrate parish councillors, council staff or residents should report them to the Clerk of the Council.

Buckland Newton Parish Council Communications Policy	
Adopted by Full Council	
Version1 written 10 July 2023	To be reviewed every 3 years