September 2016

Communications Plan

Sherfield Park Parish Council

Introduction

Research shows that communication with residents is a major contributor to overall satisfaction with their parish councils.

We have a duty to inform residents about how we're managing their resources. We also want to encourage wider involvement. We believe clear, frequent communications will support a successful, happy community.

Communicating well demands a plan.

This document explains our communications goals and provides practical guidelines for interacting with residents, people who work in or visit the parish, the media or other interested parties.

Our Goals

Everything we say, write or share will support our efforts to…

Inform, Educate …

- Residents should understand the Council's role, and how we fit into the wider community
- If we can't help, we guide people to those who can
- People should feel their taxes are being used to help the community
- Residents should see us as a trusted, "go to" resource

and Inspire

- We want to boost community involvement, especially from younger residents
- We will work to increase community clubs, organisations & events
- Our work builds satisfaction and pride in our community
- We want to build the value of the Sherfield Park "brand", specifically in the eyes of potential residents and employees (increasing property value)

Our Principles of Communication

As councillors, we all promise to do these things when it comes to sharing information with our residents

Prompt
- We share news as soon as we possibly can, ideally within 24-hours of knowing about something.
- Headlines from Council meetings should be out the next day, with details across the week following

Frequent
- The website should have new content at least once a fortnight; ideally every week.
- Residents should see evidence of Council communications activity several times each week. (Including individual activity on social media.)

Friendly
- We are informal and approachable. Anyone should feel comfortable talking to us about anything.
- We use words like you, your, us, our and we.
- We make ourselves regularly available.

Responsible
- We take great care with our residents' money. We use research and consultation to make sure our efforts support a broad community.
- We are scrupulous about following governmental ethics guidelines

Straightforward
- We tell it like it is. No waffly governmental language. No wordy drivel. No dodging the issue.
- We use simple language and get to the point quickly.

Understanding
- We listen. That's often more important than providing answers.
- Our residents are never wrong. We listen to their opinions with respect, even if we disagree.
- We don't correct them (unless it's an obvious, black and white issue) … we offer other perspectives.
- We work to uphold a tone of civility across all public fora in which we're involved

Inclusive
- We realise that different residents have different communications needs and we try to meet them all.
- All important communications will be digital and print, and we will use every relevant channel available.
- We use a wide variety of channels to reach people, including digital options that allow people to participate even if they can't be present.

Our Channels

We must repeat our communications across a wide range of channels to reach our audience

We will:

Maintain a high quality website, regularly updated

- Everything starts here
- Ambition: to become the preferred news and information hub for the community

Use collection of social media channels regularly to blast out news items

- Increase & enhance Facebook presence; consider FB advertising when relevant
- Add Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat. Canvass community for others
- Always link back to website

Maintain print channels for the digitally challenged

- Loddon Valley Link, notice boards
- These, too, should always push back to the website

Take part!

- All councillors and the clerk should be commenting, sharing, re-tweeting
- Ellen manages Facebook, but everyone should be getting involved

Treat Face-to-Face is a channel, too

- Organised, visible councillor outreach at community events
- Continuing promotion of Council meetings with goal of increasing attendance

Ongoing communications

Promote and follow up all official meetings

- Promote agendas, in advance, through all relevant channels
- Capture and promote news highlights
- Individual follow up will any member of the public who asks a question

Broadband campaign

- Consistent communications activity to educate, inform and engage … until we find a solution

Web site

- Regular updates, promotion
- Steady addition of new features

Social Media

- Be an active presence … be available
- Encourage discussion, answer questions, refer people to the right people
- Refer people back to FAQs on web site whenever possible

Sherfield Park Events

- Be an active and visible presence at all significant community events, whether or not we organise them

Additional communications activities and events

Aug & Sept	Oct – Dec	Jan - March
Broadband Campaign – Part 1

Launch website | Broadband Campaign – Part 2 (dependent on public input & participation)

Light Up Sherfield Park | #SPGoodNeighbour campaign (online celebration of neighbours who do good things for others & the community, leading to awards at AGM) |

Measurement

We will track these things each month to see how we're doing.

Web site visits (These numbers should go up steadily each month for the first 6-12)

Likes and Friends on Facebook (These should increase regularly for the first 6 months)

Interaction with the Council Numbers of members of the general public attending meetings and submitting questions to Clerk and Councillors

Community engagement Numbers of people who give their time to help the community in Council-organised activity (eventually we'll want to track total hours rather than people, but this is a simple start.

We should track and report on these four measures each month at the main Council Meeting. For our first six months of effort … since we're starting from nothing … all measures should improve every month.