



Communication and Community Engagement Strategy

March 2016

The Parish Council has explored in its paper on Local Democracy and Citizenship how it can get the local community involved in democracy and the decision making process. In order for this Council to be providing the facilities and services that are needed or wanted by the local community, it has recognised the need to consult with the local community too.

The Council already undertakes community consultation in a number of different ways and members of the community may be participating in community involvement without even realising it.

The Community

The parish of Billingshurst extends from approximately one mile south of Adversane, the village of Billingshurst to Five Oaks in the north. When using the term 'community', it includes:

- Those residing or working in the parish.
- Businesses based in the parish.
- Users of Parish Council services.
- Visitors to the parish.
- Community and interest groups.
- Voluntary and not-for-profit organisations.
- Church and faith groups.
- Educational establishments.

Methods of Community Involvement

The steps set out below detail how this Council is consulting with the local community on an ongoing basis:

Parish Office

The Parish Council has an office at Billingshurst Centre which is open Monday to Thursday 9.30am to 1pm every week, and at other times by appointment.

Information Point

Leaflets for various community and voluntary sector organisations are provided in the lobby of Billingshurst Centre.

Electronic Sign

The Council has an electronic sign located in Sainsburys supermarket in the High Street, Billingshurst. Messages about Council meetings and community events are updated on a daily basis.

Meetings Notices

All Council, Committee and Sub-Committee meeting agendas are displayed on the Council's noticeboards of which there are 5: 3 in Billingshurst, 1 in Adversane and 1 in Five Oaks.

Meeting agendas are also posted on the Council's website.

The Library

Copies of approved Council minutes are provided to Billingshurst Library.

Posters advertising meetings and consultations are provided to the library.

Meetings Open to the Public

Under s1(2) of the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960, all meetings of Billingshurst Parish Council are open to the press and public. Meetings or part thereof are only closed to the press and public when there is business to be transacted that is of a confidential nature.

Public Participation in Council Meetings

At all Council meetings, time is set aside early in the agenda for members of the public to speak for up to three minutes (or longer at the Chairman's discretion) on items on the agenda.

Billingshurst Parish Council's adopted Code of Conduct includes paragraph 12 (2) which enables Parish Councillors with a prejudicial interest to participate in the public session of a meeting.

Annual Parish Meeting

A meeting of the electors of the parish is held annually between 01 March and 01 June inclusive. The Parish Council organises the meeting and usually invites a guest speaker on a current topical issue. Electors are given the opportunity to participate in the meeting, and a report from the meeting is fed back to the next meeting of the Parish Council.

Website

Details of Council meetings, minutes, projects, Council documents, contact details for Parish Councillors and much more are frequently updated on the Council's website. It is the role of the Office Administration Assistant to check the Council's website daily to ensure that it is kept up to date.

Email

The Council publishes an email address for the Parish Office and for all Parish Councillors enabling members of the public and other authorities, community and voluntary organisations to communicate with the Council.

Monthly page in the Village Tweet

The Parish Council publishes Council news on a page in the Village Tweet which is delivered to every household in the parish on a monthly basis. A synopsis of the Annual Report is also included in one issue of the Tweet.

Annual Report

The Chairman produces an Annual Report presented at the Annual Parish Meeting and widely distributed in the parish through the Billingshurst Centre, library and other information points. The Annual Report includes a report from the Chairman, all Committees and details of the Council's finances. A synopsis of the Annual Report is included in one issue of the Tweet.

Community Events

Each year the Parish Council participates in the Billingshurst Show in June and the Christmas Fayre called Billifest in December. Each opportunity is used to consult on the work of the Council and seek volunteers to assist the Council with its projects.

Social Media

Billingshurst Parish Council has a Twitter feed @BillingshurstPC and Facebook page.

Representatives on Outside Bodies

At the annual meeting of the Council, representatives are appointed to outside bodies. Agenda items are included for main Council meetings for reports from those representatives including the Horsham Association of Local Councils and the Dauxwood Pre-School.

Involvement with Outside Bodies

The Council was instrumental with the formation of BAIT, has a memorandum of understanding with the Friends of Station Road Gardens and is actively working with the Trustees of Adversane Hall.

Use of Working Parties

When the Council is asked by the community for a new facility or service, the Council is happy to work with the local community through a Working Party to investigate the facility or service. Members of the community are invited to join the Working Party to help research the new facility for a report to be taken to Council by the Parish Councillors involved with the Working Party.

Specific Consultation

The Parish Council recognises the need to hold consultation on specific projects as and when they arise, and has utilised road side banners to publicise consultation events.

Young People

The Council will consult with young people when considering providing facilities and services specifically aimed at young people. The Council will work with the Community Youth Worker to consult with young people.

Community Led Plan

The Parish Council worked with Billingshurst Community Partnership Limited and the Chamber of Commerce to create the Community Led Plan in 2015. A Working Party continues to meet to discuss the implementation of the Plan.

Parish Design Statement

The Billingshurst Parish Design Statement was produced by the local community in partnership with Billingshurst Parish Council. It records the valued characteristics of the parish and is used by the Planning and Environment Committee when responding to planning application consultations. Its effectiveness is monitored by the Parish Council and it will be subject to periodical review in consultation with the local community.

Freedom of Information

Billingshurst Parish Council has adopted a Publication Scheme which is available from the Parish Office or via the Council's website. The Council publishes routinely as much information as possible on its website, including draft minutes of Council meetings usually within a week of the meeting. Hard copies are available on request.

Openness and Transparency

The Parish Council routinely shares information on its website under the Open and Accountable Local Government Act 2014 and the Local Government Transparency Code 2014 including details on Council land and buildings, fixed asset register, staff structure, staff pay multiple, expenditure over £500, details of grants given and requests for tender.

Complaints Procedure

In the unfortunate event that the Council receives a complaint about its facilities or services, the Council operates a Code of Practice for Handling Complaints.