

BEARSTED PARISH COUNCIL
COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT POLICY
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Version History & Change Control

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Document Sign Off and Adoption

Signed off for Adoption by Councillor 1:

Name: _____

Position: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Signed off for Adoption by Councillor 2:

Name: _____

Position: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Adoption Witnessed by the Clerk to Bearsted Parish Council:

Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

1. INTRODUCTION

Bearsted Parish Council has developed a community engagement strategy with the aim of constructing a standard for engagement with its community and partners.

It recognises that the services it provides must reflect the needs of its community and the locality.

Bearsted Parish Council strongly believes that its community should be involved in decisions affecting them and their neighbourhood and in shaping the future of their parish.

2. AIMS

The aim of the strategy is to improve the way in which the Council engages and consults its community and partners on important issues by:

- Informing – providing information so the community can be aware of the issues which could affect them.
- Consulting – obtaining feedback on the information provided
- Involving – drawing on local knowledge and awareness of the community's views to improve the decision making process

3. OBJECTIVES

- To encourage the residents to be involved in the community, if they so choose.
- Improve, plan and shape the future of the parish according to local needs and priorities.
- To improve the quality and delivery of services.
- To use engagement to inform decision making, ensuring decisions are fit for purpose and meet the needs of the parish.
- To be a stronger, more active and cohesive parish.

4. HOW THIS WILL BE ACHIEVED

Community engagement will be achieved by Bearsted Parish Council by communicating, consulting, supporting and working together with its community.

Communication

Communicating with members of the parish will be achieved in many ways to ensure all sections of the community are reached:

- Parish Council office which is open to the public between the hours of 9.00am to 12.30pm and from 1.00pm to 3.30pm Monday to Friday. This provides a welcoming point of contact for the public seeking guidance on any Parish Council matter;
- Parish Council contact –:
 - phone line (both landline and mobile as advertised on the Parish Council website);
 - email address (as advertised on the Parish Council website);
- Newsletter, the Parish Council quarterly publication, delivered to every household in the parish, informing the community of important issues. This will be developed as a medium of consultation;
- The Parish Council sponsored page in the Downs Mail, the local news publication, delivered to every household in the parish. The page to include reports on recent activities and meetings of the Parish Council and local issues for discussion and information;
- The Parish Council website, www.bearstedparishcouncil.gov.uk, has a wealth of local information and is updated on a regular basis. Special events and important notices will continue to be added regularly. All agendas are advertised as required under the Local Government Act 1972, including on the website, and minutes of meetings are included on the website within ten days of the meeting. The site contains a 'contact us' form which can be submitted direct to the clerk;
- Social network sites – the Parish Council will maintain both a Facebook and Twitter page allowing an interchange of comments;

- All agendas advertised as required under the Local Government Act 1972, including on the website;
- Draft minutes of each council and committee meeting to be uploaded to the Parish Council website within three working days of each meeting, marked clearly as 'DRAFT'. Approved minutes to be uploaded to website as soon as possible after being approved by Full Council or the relevant Committee;
- Website email address capture – allowing the community to sign up for email delivery of the Parish Council newsletter;
- Meetings of the Council and its standing Committees are open to the public and include an opportunity for members of the parish to engage with councillors. All meetings include a 15 minutes' slot for public participation at the start of the meeting;
- Parish notice boards – containing regularly updated information regarding meetings, consultations and other events;
- Parish Council stall at the annual Bearsted and Thurnham Fayre;
- Annual Parish Meeting normally held in April or May each year.

Consultation

Consulting all the community on important issues will be key to the strategy and the Parish Council will decide which important issues should be consulted on. It will ensure those most affected are able to put forward an opinion and given an opportunity to make a difference.

Ensuring consultations include all members of the parish by identifying the hard to reach groups such as youths, the elderly, the housebound, the disabled etc. may require the establishment of different engagement channels.

Support

Supporting local organisations and engaging with them will assist them in meeting their own aims and objectives through the appointment of a 'lead' councillor per organisation, project or event.

Supporting local projects and participating in local events will raise the awareness of the Council and its aims and objectives.

Supporting members of the parish in shaping the future of their parish will bring about a more cohesive community.

Working Together

Working together with the community and partners in finding solutions to local problems will ensure they will be accepted and are fit for purpose.

Working together to carry out agreed action plans, will engage the community in working with the Council to enhance the environments and the quality of their lives.

Working together in decision making and policy drafting will ensure they have a voice and can make a difference.

5. MEASURING SUCCESS

Success will be measured by predefined targets, including reviews of consultation outcomes, monitoring the community's participation in the consultation process and involvement in local projects and events.