



Odiham
Parish Council

**PRINCIPLES GOVERNING OPC'S
ENGAGEMENT AND CONSULTATION
PROCESS**

2 October 2017

Reviewed and adopted on 14 May 2018

1. INTRODUCTION

Odiham Parish Council is committed to engaging and empowering its residents and continually improving its approach to community engagement. We recognise the values of all residents in the Parish and recognize the enormous contribution that individuals and community organisations make to the development of the Parish.

This principle document outlines our approach to community engagement and consultation. It builds in OPC's existing good practice and strong tradition of community engagement. It ensures that the way the Council engages with the community reflects the needs of the people that live and work here and their priorities for the future of our Parish are taken into account.

A key principle to our strategy is that Odiham Parish Council celebrates diversity and recognises its responsibility to ensure that the views, needs, desires and preferences of everyone within the community - including those from vulnerable, minority and not yet reached groups - influence Parish Council strategy development.

This document sets out a framework to ensure that the way the Council consults and engages with the community is consistent and coordinated, that all the community engagement activities are monitored and evaluated and that all residents have opportunities to get involved. It also makes sure that there is a clear link between community engagement and decision making.

Communication and engagement is about letting people know what is going on and giving them a voice and involving them in the decisions that affect them and their community. It is about clear communication and development of relationships that help the Council deliver better services and projects.

The aim of communication and engagement principles should be to engage residents and encourage their participation in decision making to secure better services and to create a more active and informed community. This document sets out how Odiham Parish Council currently and will continue to engage with the community across a broad range of its activities, while outlining how we plan to build and improve and how our principles are applied to a framework of engagement techniques and activities.

2. CURRENT AND PREVIOUS MEANS OF COMMUNICATION USED TO ENGAGE WITH OUR COMMUNITY

The Parish Council is limited by the time of its elected volunteer Cllrs and part time staff. However, it strives to meet and exceed the engagement advice supplied by the Hampshire Association of Local Councils (HALC). We believe it is useful for residents and other interested persons/organisation to be aware of our current engagement tools to ensure there is visibility of how they can communicate with or receive information from the Council. It will also help residents to understand what activity has been undertaken that is influencing current projects and initiatives. These include:

- **Contact with the office staff** - can be made via telephone, email or post. The Parish office is manned by part time staff which members of the public can arrange to visit (please see the opening times on the website).
- **Contact with Cllrs** - All Cllrs can be contacted via their published details on the website and in our notice boards and welcome correspondence on local issues and to share their personal views on topics. In 2015 Cllrs were issued with their own OPC email addresses.
- **Noticeboards** - OPC has numerous notice boards at key sites throughout the Parish which are used to communicate details of Council employees and Cllrs, meetings and community adverts.
- **Parish council newsletter** - Published twice a year. This is an A4 colour magazine distributed to all households in the Parish. The publication is produced by the Community Committee and includes an update from the Chairman, key updates from Council committees and where appropriate other community organisations. For key topics, the newsletter is used as an opportunity to engage with the community and ask for public opinion. In the last two years the newsletter has increased in size to ensure the range and depth of topics required are covered.

- **Parish news** - This regular A5 magazine is sold and distributed throughout the Parish on a monthly basis by All Saints Church. It includes an article written by the Clerk, detailing any key news and requesting feedback or ideas when appropriate.
- **Annual Parish assembly** - This is held in April or May each year and gives all residents the chance to air their views or ask questions on matters relating to the Parish. There is usually a speaker invited by the Council to give an address on a local issues or areas of interest.
- **Annual report** - This is presented by the Chairman at the Annual Parish Assembly, supported by the Chairs of each Committee. It includes details of Council activities, achievements, organisation, grants awarded and a summary of the accounts.
- **Website** - The address is www.odiham.org.uk. Information is updated regularly and includes news information on the council and its activities, agendas, minutes, accounts, play areas, etc. It also includes contact details for the office and Cllrs. The new website was launched in 2016 to make it more accessible and optimised for mobile devices. Additionally, we have created a visitor website www.visitodiham.org.uk, which is rich with local activities, histories and information to support local businesses.
- **Facebook** - OPC set up a Facebook page that has proved to be a huge success. It is updated with news and information and links to articles on the website. The Facebook page often provides links to the community run Facebook Page 'Odiham People', a thriving source of local information and opinions. Parish Cllrs participate in their own social media activity to share their personal opinions and seek input on local issues. OPC's Social Media Policy provides guidance to Cllrs and the public on the correct use of all media and the rules for correct usage.
- **Public participation at meetings** – Council meetings are not public meetings, but meetings of the council that members of the public have a statutory right to attend as observers. At the start of each meeting there is a public session that gives residents a chance to speak on local issues or ask questions. To allow for more speakers, we recently increased the number of speaking slots at each meeting to 3. These slots can be booked by contacting clerk@odiham.org.uk. It is usual for the Chairman to direct a response to the next meeting so that the Council can consider the public input and agree on a reply as a majority.
- **Council documents** - OPC follows the transparency code for a Council of our size. All agendas and minutes are published in accordance with the code. Supporting documents and Council papers are provided at meetings so that the public can read and follow discussions. In addition, OPC follows the Freedom of Information Act, ensuring that our part time office staff can provide requested information within the required time.

Previous means of communication included:-

- **Surveys** - In 2013 the Council received the results of its Parish Projects survey, which asked the community to consider 15 different possible investment projects. Many of these projects require funding that have and will continue to take many years to implement. Currently the Council are working on projects associated to public toilets, recreation (teen and junior), cycle racks and improving our walk ways. As well as working with our District Council by exploring funding for cycle paths and options for additional parking.
- **Group engagement** - OPC appoints Cllrs as representatives to key village groups. This ensures a two-way exchange of information and views as well as extensive collaboration on initiatives and village events. Additionally, where required OPC will conduct focus groups. For example, qualitative research undertaken in 2016 with teens to guide teen play ideas as well as Cllrs meeting with residents to listen to their concerns and input regarding the location of any such investment. In all such cases reports are provided back to OPC's full Council meeting.
- **Neighbourhood Plan consultation** - OPC agreed to embark on a Neighbourhood Plan in April 2014. After many public exhibitions, the issuing of paper and online questionnaires and engagement with village groups, organisations and businesses, the Plan was passed by public referendum in 2017. The Neighbourhood Plan outlines numerous visions, aims and objectives for the Parish Council to take forward. OPC committee chairs have formed a monitoring group to

ensure that these projects can be driven forward. The Neighbourhood Plan can be viewed on our website.

3. AIMS FOR IMPROVING COMMUNICATION AND ENGAGEMENT

- To continue providing information and engagement through multi-media platforms.
- To create and make use of public events to engage with residents.
- To promote local democracy and encourage residents of different ages and interests to join and/or attend Parish Council meetings so that the Council is a better representative of the local demography. Provide information on the functions of the Council, standing for the Council and on its committees and Cllrs.
- To continue the dialogue with community organisations and groups, encourage their membership and support them in their activities.
- To use our newsletter, Annual Parish Assembly and reports to demonstrate the range of challenges that face the Parish Council as the Parish grows in the forthcoming years.
- To continue to keep residents informed and engaged as our Neighbourhood Plan is implemented.
- To encourage an interest in community landmarks, events and environmental features such as the War Memorial, All Saints Church, the Canal, the Castle and RAF Odiham.

To achieve this OPC will consider 5 levels of engagement:

The Five Levels of Locality Engagement				
Informing	Consulting	Involving	Collaborating	Empowering
Providing information to the community to enable them to understand problems, alternatives, opportunities and solutions.	Obtaining the communities feedback on specific issues to inform decision making. Obtaining feedback on formal proposals.	Involving the community to ensure that issues, concerns and aspirations are understood and considered.	Working in partnership with the community to shape ideas, options and identifying preferred solutions.	Placing final decision making in the hands of the locality.
The intention is to				
Keep the community informed.	Keep the community informed, listen to their views and ask for their input on community matters.	Engage with the community to ensure that ideas, concerns and aspirations are provided so that they can be reflected in Council decisions and delivery.	Look to the community for advice and innovation to shape initiatives and the future of the Parish.	Facilitate community members and groups to take responsibility for designing and delivering services themselves.

Techniques / Examples				
Website.	Newsletter engagement (asking for input).	Public session at meetings.	Working with village groups to share ideas and develop initiatives.	Collaboration on budgets, provide grants and assistance for community initiatives.
Social media.	Social Media engagements.	Engaging with village groups.	Involving the community on specific tasks / research (NP, teen research etc).	Further assist and empower community groups (such as InOdiham, Lions Fireworks night, Footpaths group).
Newsletters.	Surveys.	Focus groups (i.e. teen research).		
Minutes.	Annual Parish Assembly.	CLLr dialogue with the community.		
Notice boards.				
Annual Parish Meeting.				

4. ASSESSMENT OF THE NEEDS AND VIEWS OF THE COMMUNITY

All relevant and appropriate comments will be considered by the Council or one of its committees' working parties. The Council will respect all input on any subject, but understands that it cannot be assumed that representations reflect the views of all of our community, including hard to reach groups and young people. Through its 10 elected members, the Council will strive to be representatives for all areas of our community.

As demonstrated through our project research, Neighbourhood Plan, social media and regular newsletters, OPC aims to continue to engage with the wider community to find out the community's views and input on key issues and gain feedback on the work that the Council undertakes on behalf of the Parish.

5. POST COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

- **Keep residents informed** - Engagement activities are often surrounded by a great deal of energy and enthusiasm, both in Council and throughout local communities. However, once this energy has subsided, it is very important to ensure that residents are kept informed of the progress in the development of the community engagement project and any future opportunities for their involvement.
- **Access to data** - To ensure that all processes surrounding the development of the community policy are transparent and accountable, if the Council receives multiple replies, the Council will hold a composite and hold the actual replies for 30 days before destruction by shredding. It is important to ensure that individual participants in the engagement process are not identified in the data.
- **Observe the timetable** - Once the timetable is set and publicised, it is important to keep to the timetable and publicise if the timetable cannot be met. Residents will regard the various stages of engagement as milestones in the overall process, and it is most important to maintain community trust and support by meeting their expectations in this regard.
- **Evaluation** - Following each round of community engagement, it is important for the Parish Council team to evaluate the community engagement process. An evaluation of these processes will enable the Parish Council to pinpoint the strengths and weaknesses of its approach to community engagement, and will foster a 'continuous improvement' approach to planning and managing community engagement.

6. REVIEW OF THE POLICY

This policy will be reviewed annually and updated as required.