

Introduction

Good communications and community involvement is critical to earning and maintaining the respect and good will of the community we serve. Resident engagement is key in building local trust, improving the level of satisfaction of local residents and of providing Boston Spa Parish Council with a greater understanding of the needs and views of the local community.

Boston Spa Parish Council is committed to improving resident engagement as per the community actions in the adopted Neighbourhood plan.

This is about giving local people a voice and involving them in the decisions that affect them and their community. The aim of our Residents Engagement Strategy is to improve engagement with 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 Boston Spa Parish Council intends to action this commitment.

Current Engagement Methods

The Parish Council already has a number of methods to engaging with resident, these include:

- contact details for the Parish Council are made available in the monthly newsletters, on the Notice Boards in the villages and on the Parish Council's website;
- monthly newsletters are produced and sent electronically to all those who sign up, providing the latest village news. The newsletters are also available in paper format;
- notices of meetings are posted on each of the notice board and on our website;
- the local PCSO and Wetherby Ward Councillors attend most monthly Council meetings;
- the notices we provide positively remind members of the community of their entitlement to attend meetings and address the Parish Council for the first 20 minutes of each meeting;
- all monthly meeting minutes are available on the website for the public to view;
- we publish an Annual Report which is made available both electronically and in paper format;
- we manage a website which provides details of local services and activities and gives access to a range of documents as well as links to other sites and information about our villages;
- we are transparent in the information we provide including our financial health and audit reports;
- we have developed a facebook page and twitter feed, to try and communicate better with a broader demographic of residents;
- pages on our website are dedicated to working groups and getting people involved in what is happening and can happen in our village;

- our website aims to draw our communities' attention to important public meetings that affect them, whether or not they are Parish Council sponsored, and encourage their participation;
- we provide grants to groups and organisations only where there is perceived direct benefit to our communities such as the gala;

Neighbourhood plan and the future

The adopted Neighbourhood Plan had a number of actions within it, one specifically related to engagement was CACW2 which provided the residents steer of how they would like the PC to engage with them:

- *The Parish Council will endeavour to establish methods to improve communications with residents and visitors by developing a village-wide interactive website. New technologies will be explored in order to enhance connectivity within the community. Increased use of social media will be encouraged and supported;*
- *The welcome pack will be improved to include all information relevant to life in Boston Spa. All newcomers to the village will receive a welcome pack and all current residents will be able to apply for one through the website;*
- *Liaison with all shopkeepers will be established to provide up to date information on what is available in our village;*

The Parish Council has taken these community actions on board and plans to improve resident engagement in line with these preferences by implementing the following key changes

Website

The current website contains a lot of great information, but appears dated when compared to other Parish Councils. Now is a great time to revisit and relaunch the site ensuring that it meets the objectives set in the NP.

Key Actions:

- Simplify and give a clean look;
- Make navigating more intuitive eg drop down menus;
- Add in new content to reflect the Neighbourhood Plan;
- Signpost to the Social Media channels and vice-versa;

New Design Proposals:

- Main Navigation Menus on the top, drop down options;
- Add search option into header;
- Change left hand menu options to be static;
- Remove Message board as this is not used;
- Move newsletter sign up to the footer with social media icons;

New Content Proposal:

- List of all community action groups (any PC involvement);
- Photos of parish councillors;
- Events – diarise PC meetings, create these as events in FB, bin collection days;
- Business directory with photos and description;
- Welcome pack page with shortcuts to relevant information;

The Parish Council see this as a medium to long term aim, as there is no budget in the current financial year.

Social Media

Social media engagement through Facebook or Twitter offers a more responsive way to inform residents of events in the village. Often planning submissions need bringing to resident's attention more frequently than the newsletter allows. It also offers a more interactive form of communication, this in turn will drive increased engagement with the Parish Council. These updates should include wider village news. Challenges faced are:

- How to increase digital exposure;
- How to keep likes / followers engaged;
- How to handle posts / tweets;

Increasing digital exposure

To increase the number of residents reached in the digital space the following actions will be taken

- Greater emphasis placed on this initiative within the newsletter;
- Advertise the social sites via notice boards – Village Hall, Cost Cutter, Post Office, Newsagents, Library;
- Current Facebook and Twitter users should be encouraged to invite their local contact;
- Invite anyone that comments to follow / like our pages;
- Link in with existing local pages to post / share the Parish Council page;

The Parish Council see this as an immediate and ongoing aim to be actioned.

Keep the likes / followers engaged

Once the digital engagement is achieved, the process for communication needs to reflect the channel of choice. Facebook and Twitter users expect frequent updates which should be:

- Short and snappy;
- Emphasis on images;
- Content from the newsletter if requiring timely action;
- Inform them of wider events within the village
 - Jazz in the Village

- Bin dates
 - Gala / Festivals
- Encourage residents to attend the monthly meetings;

The Parish Council see this as an immediate and ongoing aim to be actioned.

Handling Posts / Tweets

A major concern of the Parish Council is that these channels, by nature, demand a level of responsiveness which may not be able to be met by council members whom are volunteers. Another concern, is that this could turn into a complaints forum, where councillors are expected to give instant responses to queries which may require wider engagement from other members of the Parish Council.

It is therefore imperative that an agreed process on how to handle these posts / tweets is put in place and followed. Ultimately the response needs to be on a case by case basis until the Parish Council builds up a greater understanding on how residents want to interact. Simple queries can be answered, but for more complicated matters, residents should be encouraged to raise these at the monthly Parish Council meetings as the appropriate forum for these types of queries.

The Parish Council see this as an immediate and ongoing aim to be actioned.

Measuring Success

The Residents Engagement Strategy will be reviewed formally on an annual basis by the Parish Council.