



Community Engagement and Communications Policy

1. Introduction:

Holbeach Parish Council is an open and transparent Council, which values the opinions of the community which it serves. It continues to listen to the needs and concerns of the community and will do everything within its power and financial constraints, to make the Parish a better place to live and work.

The purpose of this document is to deliver a standard policy for engagement with residents and partners, whilst recognising the services that the Parish Council provides must reflect the needs of its residents and the locality.

This policy aims to improve communication between the Parish Council and the residents of the Parish in order to increase awareness of local issues and council involvement, encourage public participation and receive feedback.

2. Legal requirements and restrictions:

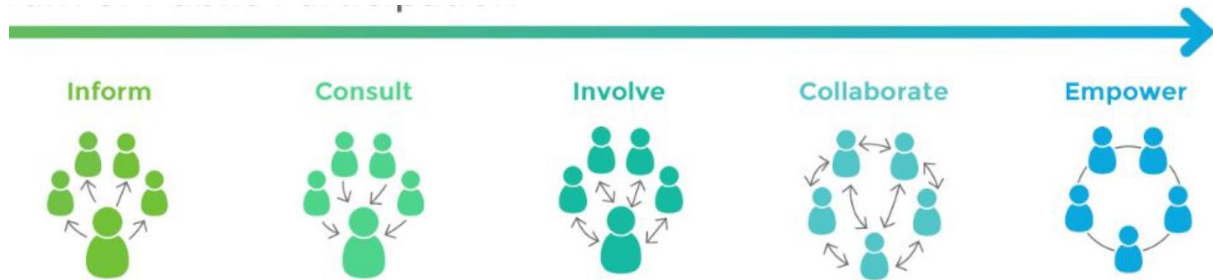
This policy is subject to the Council's obligations which are set out in the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960, the Local Government Act 1972, The Local Government Act 1986, The Freedom of Information Act 2000, the Data Protection Act 1998 and other legislation which may apply to the Council's Standing Orders and Finance Regulations.

The Council cannot disclose confidential information or information the disclosure of which is prohibited by law. The Council can not disclose information if this is prohibited under the terms of a court order, by legislation, the Council's standing orders, under contract or by common law. Councillors are subject to additional restrictions about the disclosure of confidential information which arise from the code of conduct adopted by the Council, a copy of which is available via the Council's website.

3. Communication Principles and Objectives:

The Parish Council will ensure that it communicates with residents in a timely and effective manner. Holbeach Parish Council will aim to engage with the community at all levels, best described by the Ladder of Engagement, as seen in the diagram and table below.

STEP	MEASURE
5	Empowering: placing decision-making in the hands of the community.
4	Collaborating: working in partnership with communities in each aspect of the decision, including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution.
3	Involving: working directly with communities to ensure that concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered. For example, partnership boards, reference groups and service-users participating in policy groups.
2	Consulting: obtaining community feedback on analysis, alternatives and / or decisions. For example, surveys, door knocking and focus groups.
1	Informing: providing communities with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding problems, alternatives, opportunities, solutions. For example, websites, newsletters and press releases.



All methods of communication should:

- encourage two-way positive engagement.
- be concise, factual, and easy to access and understand.
- be accessible for the whole community.
- not disclose information which is confidential.
- reflect the views of the Parish Council not the individual.
- not contain content that is unlawful, libellous, harassing, defamatory, abusive, threatening, harmful, obscene, profane, sexually oriented, or racially offensive
- not promote political parties
- not publicise personal information

4. Methods of communication:

Public Participation at Meetings:

At each ordinary meeting of the Council and its Committees there will be provision for members of the public to address the meeting.

The following procedures will be followed:

Full Parish Council Meetings

- 1) Prior to the commencement of the meeting there will be a public forum for a maximum period of 25 minutes when members of the public may ask questions or make short statements. Any individual must limit their questions/statements to a maximum of 3 minutes. All questions must be addressed through the Chairman.
- 2) The format for the public forum and the length of individual representations may be extended at the discretion of the Chairman.
- 3) Following which a maximum of 10 minutes will be set aside for reports of the Police, County and District Councils.
- 4) Details of the questions asked, and answers provided will be included within the clerk's report of that council meeting.

Committee Meetings

- 1) At the commencement of each Committee meeting the Chairman will ask if any member of the public present wishes to speak on any item set out in the agenda for that meeting.

- 2) Where a member of the public indicates their desire to speak they will be heard prior to consideration by the Committee of the particular item. At that point the Chairman will adjourn the formal meeting to allow a maximum of two individuals to address the Committee for a maximum of 3 minutes each.
- 3) Where more than two people wish to speak the individuals will be required to agree who will represent their views, provided that where there are differing views one will be allowed to speak in favour of an issue and one against.
- 4) After hearing any representations, the Chairman will reconvene the formal meeting.
- 5) Councillors will not question nor enter into discussion or debate with any member of the public during the meeting.

Parish Council meetings:

- 1) A meeting of the Council and its committees is open to the public unless the meeting resolves to exclude them because their presence at the meeting is prejudicial to the public interest due to the confidential nature of the business or other special reason(s) stated in the resolution. In accordance with the Council's standing orders, persons may be required to leave a meeting of the Council and its committees, if their disorderly behaviour obstructs the business of the meeting.
- 2) The photographing, recording, filming, or other reporting of a meeting of the Council and its committees (which includes e.g., using a mobile phone or tablet, recording for a TV/radio broadcast, providing commentary on blogs, web forums, or social networking sites such as Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube) which enable a person not at the meeting to see, hear or be given commentary about the meeting is permitted unless:
 - i. the meeting has resolved to hold all or part of the meeting without the public present or
 - ii. such activities disrupt the proceedings or
 - iii. paragraphs 4 and 5 below apply.
- 3) The photographing, recording, filming or other reporting of a child or vulnerable adult at a Council or committee meeting is **not** permitted unless an adult responsible for them has given permission.
- 4) Oral reporting or commentary about a Council or committee meeting by a person who is present at the meeting is **not** permitted.
- 5) The recording and reporting on meetings of the council, its committees and sub-committees is subject to the law, and it is the responsibility of those doing the recording and reporting to ensure compliance. This will include the Human Rights Act, the Data Protection Act and the laws of libel and defamation. The recording should not be edited in a way that could lead to misinterpretation or misrepresentation of the proceedings or infringement of the council's values or in a way that ridicules or shows a lack of respect for those in the recording. The council would expect any recording in breach of these rules to be removed from public view. The council will have no liability for material published by any other person unless it is itself undertaking the publication through its offices.
- 6) The Council shall, as far as it is practicable, provide reasonable facilities for anyone taking a report of a Council or committee meeting and for telephoning their report at their own expense.
- 7) The minutes of a Council meeting remain the statutory and legally binding formal record of Council decisions.

Website:

The Parish Council will maintain an up-to-date website which will be used to publish official documentation identified in the Councils Publication Scheme, including:

- Details of Full Council and Committee Meetings – Schedule, Agendas and Minutes
- Details of each Committee and its responsibilities
- Contact details for the Councillors and the Clerk.
- Finance Reports, Policies and Documentation.

The Clerk and Assistant Clerk in conjunction with the PR & IT Committee are responsible for managing the content of the website.

Social Media:

Social media can be used by the Parish Council as an effective and measurable way to achieve resident engagement and attract publicity. Holbeach Parish Council will use its Facebook Page to engage with individuals and communities, through posts, comments, and direct messages.

A consistent and professional approach is adopted and maintained in the use of social media. The Councils Social media policy should be followed for both the official Council Facebook page and individual councillors.

Social media activity is not something that stands alone. To be effective it needs to integrate as part of the general communications mix. Any planned campaigns, promotions and activities can be included in social media platforms to increase reach and exposure.

The Clerk and assistant Clerk in conjunction with the PR & IT Committee are responsible for managing the Facebook Page.

Press Releases:

The use of press releases is a key technique for publicising Parish Council activities, decisions, and achievements. An official Parish Council release is made on behalf of the Parish Council as a whole; it will be written and issued by the Parish Clerk in conjunction with the PR & IT Committee. Official Parish Council releases will follow a corporate style appropriate for the media being targeted and a central record will be maintained. All releases will accurately reflect the corporate view of the Parish Council, contain relevant facts, and may include an approved quotation from an appropriate Parish Councillor.

The Parish Council should not pass comments on leaks, anonymous allegations or allegations about individual staff and Members. The phrase “no comment” should not be used as a response to a media enquiry. The Parish Council is open and accountable and should always try to explain if there is a reason why it cannot answer a specific enquiry.

Members and Parish Council staff who are directly approached by the media should not attempt to answer questions themselves without establishing the full facts. If Members are in any doubt, they should consult the Parish Clerk and PR & IT Committee.

Noticeboard:

The Clerk will maintain an up-to-date noticeboard located on Market Hill junction. Contact details for the Clerk and Parish Councillors, agendas for its meetings and other information relating to Parish Council business will be displayed. Copies of this documentation will be sent out to the various villages to place in their own noticeboards.

5. Review

The PR & IT Committee will oversee the development and implementation of this policy. The policy will be reviewed by the PR & IT Committee, but all decisions will be taken by the full Council.

Version	Date Approved	Amendments Made	Next Review Date
V1	12/07/2021		
V2	19/04/2022		11/04/2023
V3	12/12/2022		11/04/2023
V4	08/04/2024		April 2025