

## COMMUNICATIONS AND ENGAGEMENT PLAN FOR BATHEASTON PARISH COUNCIL

### 1. Introduction

This plan aims to support the council to engage and communicate effectively with Batheaston parish and other audiences. Achieving the council's aims and objectives requires good communication with every individual, group and organisation we work with and a coordinated approach to communication will help ensure our messages are consistent and accurate.

The Batheaston Parish Council Communications and Engagement Plan has been developed in line with national guidance (e.g. Good Councillor's Guide 2018). The council has a statutory duty to engage with local residents and other stakeholders, but effective communication also helps lead to recognition and respect. The more people know about the council, the more likely they are to support and get involved with council activities. Good communication helps build trust which in turn helps us to build stronger relationships with our local community and a sense of shared responsibility for each other and for the facilities and assets within the parish.

Good communication is also the responsibility of every councillor, and this includes identifying potential news stories, sharing on resident issues or concerns and alerting the council of any emerging issues or opportunities that may result in media/public interest.

### 2. Objectives

- Make sure people are informed about the council and its work and that the council in turn is aware of and responds in a timely way to what local people want and need to know
- Engage and involve people in community and council matters
- Promote our parish, our people and our local services

### 3. Communication principles

Four principles underpin this plan. Our communications and the channels we use need to:

- Be accessible to all
- Help us to be inclusive and transparent in everything we do
- Enable us to have two-way positive engagement
- Be factual, timely, clear and relevant

### 4. Audience

People living or working in Batheaston parish boundary	Batheaston businesses
Batheaston primary school	Batheaston GP practice
Local voluntary sector and community groups	B&NES Council
Neighbouring parish councils - Swainswick, Bathford, Bathampton, St Catherine (Bathavon North)	Local Councillors/MP
Local media	St Catherine's and St John's churches

Census data from 2011 for Bathavon North (of which Batheaston forms part) indicates 30 per cent of the local population are aged 45-64 and 25 per cent are aged 65 or over. 96 per cent are of a white ethnic background and 19 per cent are retired. More information is available [here](#).

## **5. Communication channels**

The type of communication channels used will depend on the target audience and the message to be communicated. These will include:

- Parish council website
- Parish council meetings, in person and/or live on Zoom with the opportunity for Residents to speak on matters on the agenda. Also recordings on Youtube
- Features/advertising in Local Look
- Printed flyers, newsletter, posters and leaflets
- Press releases
- Social media
- Emails (via Mailchimp)
- Notice boards in Northend, Bannerdown and on the High Street
- Consultations, general correspondence and feedback forms

Over 95 per cent of UK households now have an internet connection, and over 80 per cent of UK adults use a smartphone, according to the most recent Office for National Statistics (ONS) data. These statistics demonstrate the value of developing our digital channels whilst maintaining traditional methods of communication such as flyers and use of the display boards so no one is excluded from our engagement activity. Audience segmentation is the processes of dividing our audiences into smaller groups with similar characteristics or communication preferences. It is not easy to do this without further research and it is proposed we consider how to make our communications more targeted once the above channels are re-activated.

### **5.1.The parish website**

A new website ([www.batheaston-pc.gov.uk](http://www.batheaston-pc.gov.uk)) that is GDPR compliant and will meet the new Accessibility Standard is in development. This will replace the current website ([www.batheaston.org.uk](http://www.batheaston.org.uk)). The new site will be an important repository of parish information and a vehicle to promote the council and wider parish activities. The parish clerk is the administrator of the site and has overall responsibility for maintaining and updating it with support from a small number of councillors or volunteers. All councillors have responsibility for highlighting out of date content or identifying new information that should be published to the site. Guidance on writing for the web will be provided to content contributors to ensure their copy is in line with the council's communication principles.

### **5.2.Social media**

Social media can be a very effective way to engage with our target audiences. The council has an account on Facebook (@Batheastonpc 342 followers) that has not been active since November 2019 and on Twitter (@Batheastonpc 366 followers) that was last active in January.

A new social media policy will be produced to support the use of these two platforms. In the meantime both sites will be re-activated, profiles will be updated and we will seek to establish a small group of volunteers to work with the parish clerk and establish a rota for monitoring, posting and responding to comments.

### **5.3 Handling media enquiries**

The parish clerk will manage all media enquiries. No councillor will issue a statement on behalf of the council without first notifying the parish clerk. Councillors must be prepared to work together to sign off statements and press releases and final drafts should be signed off by the parish clerk and chair. Councillors should not pass comments on leaks, anonymous allegations or allegations about their peers.

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. Should the media publish or broadcast something inaccurate about the parish council, a quick decision needs to be taken

on any action necessary to correct it. The issue should be discussed with the parish clerk to decide what action is appropriate. Occasionally the parish council will get something wrong. In these cases, damage limitation is the key – this can usually be achieved by admitting the mistake, apologising and stating how the parish council will learn from the error or put it right.

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. Parish council press releases will not promote the views of specific political groups, publicise the activities of individual parish councillors, identify a councillor's political party or persuade the general public to hold a particular view. All official parish council releases will be placed on the parish council's website within one working day of issue.

## **1. Media coverage of council meetings**

Provision is made for members of the media to attend parish council meetings. During meetings councillors should be mindful that any comments and messages are put across in a manner which gives the journalist an accurate picture rather than relying on the journalist's interpretation of what may be a complex issue. Public participation is regulated by the parish council's Standing Orders. Both the media and the public are entitled to film and record council meetings held in public.

## **2. E-mail updates (BREDAC)**

The parish council has a database (held on the Mailchimp platform) of 338 contacts, 324 are subscribers who last opted in to receive parish communications in June 2019. They received regular email updates and there was positive feedback about this mode of communication entitled BREDAC.

We will re-establish this email update, contacting everyone on the database first to check they wish to continue to be subscribed to our communications.

An effective link has been established between the website and Mailchimp to push news items out to BREDAC subscribers, according to their interests. Users subscribe to tags (or channels) on the website, such as Meetings, Traffic, Events, and they then receive an email the morning with the news.

In addition we can evolve the email template and relaunch as a regular parish e-newsletter, also via Mailchimp. One benefit is that subscribers know when to expect the next issue and are less likely to miss updates in their inbox. One disadvantage is that this is a less spontaneous approach and requires event-planners etc. to give the parish council more advance notice of newsletter content.

## **6. Evaluation**

Ongoing monitoring of the impact of this communications plan and the council's communication channels is important so that we can make adjustments so they are more effective. This includes tracking engagement with our social media platforms, website and email updates via Mailchimp, participation in parish meeting and number of other interactions (face to face, email, telephone).

## **7. Resource considerations**

It is proposed that we set aside budget for a bi-monthly one page advert in Local Look to target members of the community who are digitally excluded. There will also be the ongoing subscription costs for Mailchimp and ongoing website maintenance and security (£200 per annum).

It is not tenable or appropriate for the parish clerk to be solely responsible for delivery of this plan. It is proposed that a small group of volunteers support him with posting on social media etc. and that all Councillors play their part in contributing content (from elsewhere, or new), promoting the Council's official channels, and in continuous improvement.

### Action plan – short-term and immediate

Action	Status	Lead	Deadline
Approve this communications plan	In progress	Council	Submit by 27/10 for November BPC (10/11)
New site published as live but remains unpromoted whilst we populate with new content	Done	Richard	
Decide about visual identity for website. We propose to use the logo developed alongside the site and revisit in the new year once this plan has been implemented.	Done	TM/HS/AL	14/10/20
Ask Councillors to provide bio and photo	Draft attached	All council members	26/10/20
Ask Councillors to review / provide missing content per site map RAG – add names?	Draft attached	All council members	23/10/20
Add remaining cttees papers (FinCo per AJ doc of 23/9, and more!): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• policies on MSFT, then here</li> <li>• financial documents (AGAR)</li> <li>• grants given</li> <li>• assets register</li> <li>• annual meeting of electors (minutes – AJ none) (and note re 2020)</li> </ul>	Little progress; still to be done	RM	26/10/20
Develop M.O. for the website including workflows for papers and content; sign-off; who authors, etc	To be done	RM	26/10/20
Accessibility – “save as pdf is OK”; Accessible statement, which includes exceptions (AJ has draft)		AJ/RM	30/10
Blue Level to provide training to use the content management system.	In progress	Richard	By 2 November
Announce expected arrival of new site (to put on existing website and noticeboards)	Not started	Richard	By 11 November
Develop top tips for writing for the web guidance	Not started	Tamsin	By end October
Rota of volunteers to monitor and post to social media channels	Not started	Hannah Richard Tamsin Andrew L	By 8 November
Approval at Council	Not started	Tamsin	By 17 November
<b>“Launch Day”: Tuesday 24<sup>th</sup> November</b>			
Launch new user-friendly website with recent policy and meeting documents.	Not started	Richard	24 November

Update and re-activate social media channels	Not started	Tamsin Richard	By 24 November
Update noticeboard content	Not started	Tbc	By 24 November
Redirect added to old site to signpost users to our new site.	Not started	Richard	24 November
Produce social media policy for council approval	Not started	Tamsin	By January council meeting
Re-establish regular email updates/e-newsletter	Not started	Hannah Richard	By 2 December
Audit of current communications by undertaking a resident survey to explore awareness of the council and what we do, satisfaction with our communication channels, media preferences	Not started	Tbc	By February

#### **Longer term – 6 – 12 months**

Review visual identity including the parish logo or graphic	Not started		By Summer 2021
Review effectiveness of communications; Audience segmentation, more targeted	Not started		By Summer 2021

**Update 18.10.20**