



COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT POLICY

1. Introduction

1.1. This policy sets out the role of community engagement and its importance; how Old Basing & Lychpit Parish Council (“OBLPC”) engages the wider community and identifies the needs and aspirations of the community. It also covers how OBLPC can improve community engagement.

1.2. Community engagement:

- Is concerned with giving local people a voice and involving them in decisions which affect them and their community. This may include individuals, local businesses, voluntary and community organisations as well as other public-sector bodies.
- Is a means of providing an opportunity for local people to talk to OBLPC about their aspirations and/or needs in their community and neighbourhood. OBLPC recognises diversity and that everyone has a voice and opinion of worth.
- Allows OBLPC to consult with and inform people about what services it provides, how it prioritises, how policies are determined and how well it is performing.

2. Objectives

2.1. The objectives of the policy are to:

- Encourage effective local community engagement.
- Ensure that embedded throughout OBLPC there is clear understanding of the need to engage with communities about decisions that affect them.
- Enable aspirations/comments/suggestions obtained from community engagement to have an impact on decision making and the way services are being delivered.
- Identify how OBLPC can enhance its profile by improving engagement with the wider community, with specific reference on hard-to-reach groups.
- Encourage feedback whether positive or negative.

2.2. In order that:

- The problems and needs of local people are clearly identified so that appropriate new or improved facilities / services can be provided.
- Those participating feel empowered by being involved in decision making in their local community.
- There may be enhanced leadership and greater interest in elections and standing for OBLPC.
- The general wellbeing of the parish and its residents is enhanced.
- The capacity of local councillors to act as leaders of the community is strengthened.

3. GENERAL PRINCIPLES

3.1. The key aspects of community engagement include:

- Development of a network of relationships between OBLPC, individuals, voluntary and community groups.
- Clear, honest, and open communication to ensure that information is made accessible to all groups.
- Listening and understanding from a range of people to identify aspirations, needs and problems of local people and groups.

- Providing accurate and unbiased information that sets out the significance of the issues and makes it clear what can be influenced by parishioners and when parishioners input is particularly required.

4. How Community Engagement will be achieved

4.1. OBLPC is committed to facilitating and improving community engagement in the following ways:

- By holding an Annual Parish Meeting to allow residents to question and review how the elected members help shape the community. The main objective of the annual meeting must be to provide and encourage two-way communication between the community and Councillors.
- Providing opportunities for parishioners to have their say about decisions, services and plans. All meetings of the Parish Council and its Committees are open to the public and press. Residents can access agendas for meetings via the OBLPC website and noticeboard, or a copy may be collected from the Parish Office by appointment.
- The OBLPC website explains the procedure for residents wishing to speak at meetings, or to send a deputation where the meeting is held remotely. Facilities also exist where residents can, where appropriate or necessary, make written reports, present petitions or have a case presented on their behalf to Councillors.
- Making relevant information available on what decisions are being considered and how residents can influence or contribute to the discussions in good time. Methods used to ensure engagement will be through the OBLPC website, noticeboard, appropriate social media notices, agendas, parish newsletter, word of mouth and having stalls at village events and such other methods as OBLPC considers appropriate.
- Providing regular 'Meet the Councillor' sessions, to give residents a drop-in opportunity to contact Councillors for an informal conversation or suggestion.
- Planning applications are considered at meetings of the Planning & Development Committee. The opportunities for people to speak applies equally to these agenda items. Equal opportunity is given to applications / supporters, objectors and local community groups.
- The Parish Clerk's Office is required to play a neutral role so that residents can be fully involved and be confident that they are receiving unbiased information and support.
- Details of how to contact the Parish Clerk's Office are shown on the OBLPC website.
- OBLPC will produce and publish on its website a list of annual Council and Committee dates to include the start times of the meetings and the agenda for each meeting.
- OBLPC will be open and accountable in its dealings with residents and the community. It will make information on its policies and procedures freely available.
- OBLPC will be receptive to requests from residents or communities and will attempt to be flexible in order to ensure their opinions are known not only to OBLPC but also to other organisations.
- Councillors will continue to represent OBLPC on various outside bodies to ensure that they are kept informed of the community's needs.
- Continuing all the above activities and services into the future and improving relationships with community groups, including developing measures to harness the views and opinions of people and groups who are often missed out of community engagement activities.
- OBLPC will be proactive and will be willing to consider any reasonable opportunities that support its purpose of getting information available and increasing contributions from the community, especially those difficult to reach.
- When dealing with issues that affect a particular community then consideration will be given to holding a public meeting or some other suitable form of public consultation.

- Consultations and surveys are to be considered when necessary and appropriate, results will be made available on our website, or upon request by contacting the Clerk.
- Continuing to work with others to produce and review community led policies such as the Neighbourhood Plan.
- Identifying and embracing opportunities to work with other local community groups when the need arises, and to help facilitate solutions and ways forward.
- Publicising the positive results that have been achieved from working relationships between OBLPC and other community groups to encourage new relationships/partnerships to be formed and to raise community spirit.
- Promoting elections and the importance of the democratic process and the value of being a Councillor.
- Promoting the value to the parish of volunteering.

5. **Contacting your Councillors**

Councillors are the decision-makers of the council. The contact details for all our councillors and employees are published on the council's website. Councillors welcome contact with members of the public and will endeavour to be available immediately prior to council meetings and committees for anybody who wishes to speak with them and will listen to their representation at Council meetings whether you attend in person, ask another person to raise matters for you or provide your comments in writing.

The Parish Clerk is the Proper Officer of the Council and is the appropriate contact in most cases for raising specific issues or requesting further information from the council.

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