

WINGHAM PARISH COUNCIL

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY

Reviewed and adopted at the council meeting on 14 December 2015

1. INTRODUCTION

The Spring of 2009 saw the publication of the Wingham Parish Plan, which was initiated by the Parish Council and is a summary of the aspirations of residents for the economic, environmental and social development of Wingham for the foreseeable future. The whole community was involved in identifying its needs and as such, the Parish Plan is a tangible expression of the local voice.

Wingham Parish Council is committed to engaging residents by encouraging them to become actively involved in decisions that affect them and the community, to delivering better services and to improving the quality of life of residents by creating a more active and informed community.

2. AIMS

The aim of the Community Engagement Strategy is to:

- improve the way in which the Council communicates with members of the community
- listen to the views of residents on important issues
- use these views to deliver better services
- improve the long-term social, economic and environmental well being of residents
- plan future development of the parish in accordance with community priorities and needs

3. OBJECTIVES

The objectives of the Community Engagement Strategy are to:

- use a variety of methods to make information available
- actively facilitate and encourage community engagement
- proactively engage with all sections of the community
- ensure that decisions meet the needs of the community by involving members of the community in the decision making process
- work in partnership with other organisations and authorities to improve the quality and delivery of services
- enhance the well being of members of the community

4. COMMUNICATION WITH THE COMMUNITY

Information will be made available in a variety of ways to ensure that all sections of the community are reached.

Parish Council Notice Boards

Information including agendas for meetings, minutes of meetings and contact details for the Clerk and Councillors, is displayed on the three notice boards located in the High Street, at Staple Road and at Wingham Green.

Kentish Gazette

Reports from the monthly meetings are published in the Gazette. The Gazette is also used to inform residents of Parish Council activities and this will be developed further to include information on important issues affecting the community and to give notice of consultations.

Wingham Community News (WCN)

Information on Council activities and local issues is published in the WCN which is delivered to every house in the parish and can be delivered electronically on request to the editor.

Parish Council News

More detail is given in the bi-monthly Parish Council News which is displayed on the three notice boards and in other public areas in the parish. Copies are also delivered to the residential care home in the village and can be delivered electronically on request to the clerk.

Special events and important notices will continue to be added regularly to both the above publications.

The Parish Council Website

The website also provides much information including agendas and minutes for meetings, council policies and reports, local news, forthcoming events, District and County Council news, Neighbourhood Watch community messages and Trading Standard messages. The website is updated with information on a daily basis by the clerk. The local news page includes information on important local issues and changes in legislation or government policies which will affect the work of the Parish Council and/or the well being of the community.

Twitter

The council now also have a twitter account: <http://twitter.com/winghampc> and follow various local, district, county and regional organisations in order to share relevant information with the community. The account is also used to announce decisions, information and council activities.

Information Leaflets Information leaflets are available from the Post Office and these will be reviewed regularly to ensure their effectiveness.

Where information affects a specific section of the community, the Council will ensure that the information is delivered directly to the village organisation representing that section e.g. the over 60s, parent and toddlers, teenagers and youth.

5. Opportunities for Community Involvement

Parish Council Meetings

The monthly (except August) council meetings are open to the public and time is set aside, prior to the commencement of the meeting, for members of the parish to make comments or to ask questions. An Annual Parish Assembly (APA) is held each April giving residents the opportunity to contribute to plans for the village and a Parish Budget Meeting will usually be held in December giving residents the opportunity to share their opinion on how the parish budget should be managed for the next financial year.

Residents will continue to be encouraged to submit items which they wish to be brought to the attention of Councillors at the monthly meetings, or to give their opinion on a particular agenda item, to the Clerk.

Message Forum

Residents will be encouraged to use the Message Forum on the Council website to start or participate in discussions on matters affecting the community.

Access to Parish Councillors

Councillor contact details are displayed on the three village notice boards, on the website and on the bi-monthly newsletter. Councillors can be contacted on these numbers or at the start of each monthly meeting in order to discuss concerns or questions about local issues. Parish Council Surgeries have been held at the Village Hall in the past in order to provide a more informal atmosphere, particularly for hard to reach members of the community, to engage with councillors. Unfortunately these were poorly attended and are therefore currently not running, but could be held again should demand be demonstrated.

6. Consultation

Consultations and surveys on important issues will be carried out. The Council will ensure that those most affected by an issue will be given the opportunity to voice an opinion.

The Council will ensure that all members of the community are included in the consultation by identifying the hard to reach groups such as the elderly, youths, the housebound, the disabled, ethnic minorities etc.

Results of all such consultations or surveys will be made available to all members of the parish.

The Annual Parish Assembly will continue to be used to obtain the views of residents on matters affecting the community.

7. Partnership Working

The Parish Council is committed to working with local voluntary and community groups to improve the quality of life for residents in the parish.

The Parish Council will work with Local Authorities (District, County and the Police) to ensure an improvement in the quality and delivery of services.

The Parish Council will work with neighbouring parish councils to find a solution to common problems.

The Parish Council will continue to support and engage with local organisations to assist them in meeting their own aims and objectives.

The Parish Council will continue to support local projects and events.

A copy of the Parish Plan was delivered to each house in the parish in 2010 and members of the community are encouraged to become actively involved in addressing the issues which have been highlighted in the Plan including:

- improving facilities for youth
- the reduction of vandalism and anti-social behaviour
- reducing traffic speeds and the number of heavy goods vehicles passing through the village
- the provision of affordable housing
- encouraging tourism.

The Parish Plan document is also available on-line via the Parish Council website.

The Community Engagement Strategy will be reviewed annually to assess its effectiveness and amended as necessary.