

Communications Policy (July 2023)

UFFORD PARISH COUNCIL

Judi Hallett
CLERK, UFFORD PARISH COUNCIL

Aims

To establish clear, easy to use, channels of communication in relation to members of the public, other agencies – including district and county councillors, fellow members, the press and Parish Council staff.

The Parish Council aims to provide information on important matters affecting the community and to encourage informed comment from interested individuals and groups. The Parish Council will work to maintain good communication and strong working relationships with organisations which can impact the community including East Suffolk District Council, Suffolk County Council, neighbouring Town & Parish Councils, Public Health bodies and the Police.

Responsibilities

Each Parish Councillor has a duty to represent, without bias, the interests of the whole community. He/she will always try to help with regard to matters relating to the entire parish. However, an individual Councillor cannot respond to enquiries outside of Parish Council meetings, other than to acknowledge such an enquiry. Neither can an individual Councillor, nor the Chair, make a decision or respond on behalf of the Parish Council.

Means of Communication

The Council defines communication as the process of exchanging information. This may be verbally, in writing or by other means to provide information on decisions made, options considered and action taken.

The Council is very open to feedback and is committed to encouraging the community to engage with the Council.

Website

The Parish Website is the primary electronic means of providing information about the village and Parish Council matters with the main purpose of promoting easier engagement with the community.

The website will also provide a means of promoting the village to visitors.

Whilst assisting the Council to meet its obligations to be transparent, it will not be used as a substitute for meeting obligations to make information available by other means, for example items will continue to be posted on Parish Notice Boards, and hard copy documents will be obtainable from the Parish Clerk.

Every effort will be made to maintain up to date and accurate content but this cannot be guaranteed.

The following information will be uploaded to the website:

- Details of Councillors
- Information on Council Services
- Meeting agendas and minutes
- Policy Documents including a Publication Scheme
- Accounts and Audit Reports
- Planning Applications to be discussed at Parish Council Meetings

The Website will also contain information and links to other websites or sources of information which may be of use to residents.

[Newsletter](#)

The Parish Council currently contributes a page of news and other articles to the PUNCH magazine and will continue to do so. It will so publish urgent news on the Ufford PUNCHLine.

[Notice boards](#)

The notice boards at the Ufford Place Gates, the Recreation Ground and Parklands, will display contact details for the Parish Clerk, the agenda for the next meeting, any statutory notices and other items of interest. Due to limited noticeboard space, more comprehensive information is available on the Parish Council website.

[Meetings](#)

The Parish Council normally meets on the third Tuesday of the month at 7.00pm in the Community Hall or the Parish Hall (details provided on the agenda). During every Parish Council meeting there is an opportunity for members of the public to raise a matter of concern or to comment on an item on the agenda.

After the conclusion of the public speaking section however, members of the public are not permitted to contribute to further agenda items unless permission is granted by the Chair. Further details can be found in the Parish Council Meeting Protocol.

[Annual meeting of the Parish Council](#)

This meeting will be held in May. It is in effect a normal Parish Council meeting except that item one on the agenda has to be 'The election of the Chair'.

[Annual Parish Meeting](#)

This is a meeting of the Parish and not the Parish Council. Electors can contribute to the agenda and these meetings can celebrate local activities and debate current issues in the community. Seven clear days' notice of the meeting will be given and the meeting will be held between 1st March and 1st June each year.

[Correspondence](#)

All correspondence and communications to the Parish Council should be addressed to the Clerk. This will ensure that the matter is recorded and passed to the Parish Council for their attention at the next meeting.

If a parishioner wishes a subject to be raised, and it is appropriate for discussion at a Parish Council meeting, then the Clerk will have to be notified seven days before the publication of the agenda.

The Parish Council will determine the response, if any, to communications received. The Parish Council reserve the right to not respond to any correspondents that are taking up a disproportionate amount of the Clerk's time. Advice will be sought upon receipt of vexatious communications and acted upon accordingly.

All official correspondence on behalf of the Parish Council should be sent by the Clerk in the name of the Parish Council. As deemed appropriate by the Clerk, correspondence sent to the public and correspondence replies will be forwarded to Parish Councillors for information. Correspondence from individual Parish Councillors should be avoided; however, there may be exceptional situations when it is appropriate for a Parish Councillor to issue correspondence in his/her own name. Such correspondence must be authorised by the Parish Council.

Communication with the Press and Public

The Clerk will clear all press reports, or comments to the media, in consultation with the Chair. The Clerk will be the first point of contact for the media; however, where it is appropriate for a Councillor to represent the Parish Council, the Chair or Vice-Chair shall be authorised as the official spokesmen for the Council.

Individual Councillors will not be permitted to issue media releases on behalf of the Parish Council.

In the restricted period before an election, commonly known as “purdah”, media releases will not include quotes from Councillors who are due for re-election.

Press reports from the Parish Council, its committees or working groups shall be sent from the Clerk or via the reporter’s own attendance at a meeting.

Unless a Parish Councillor has been authorised by the Council to speak to the media on a particular issue, Parish Councillors who are asked for comment by the press should make it clear that it is a personal view and ask that it be clearly reported as their personal view.

Elected members will be regularly approached by members of the community as this is part of their role. How enquiries from the public are dealt with by Councillors will reflect on the Council. At no time should Councillors make any promises to the public about any matter raised with them other than to promise to investigate the matter. All manner of issues may be raised, many of which may not be relevant to the Parish Council. Depending on the issue raised it may be appropriate to deal with the matter in the following ways:

- refer the matter to the Clerk who will then deal with it as appropriate
- request an item on a relevant agenda
- address the matter personally, having sought the guidance of the Clerk

Unless a Parish Councillor is absolutely certain that he/she is reporting the view of the Council, they must make it clear to members of the public that they are expressing a personal view. The only clear way of being aware of the Council’s view is if the matter has been discussed at a Parish Council meeting, and a decision made on that item.

Communication with District and County Councils and Councillors

All communication to District and County Councils and Councillors on behalf of the Parish Council should be made through the Clerk. Where Parish Councillors receive communications from District or County Councillors, they should normally refer these to the Clerk who will respond on behalf of the Parish Council. If the communications may be relevant to an item on the agenda of a Parish Council meeting, Parish Councillors should declare those communications at the start of the meeting under the 'lobbying' item on the Agenda.

Internal Communication

E-mails, telephone calls and other communication between Councillors, should be kept to a minimum and be appropriate to the work of the Parish Council.

Councillors are discouraged from exchanging views on planning applications prior to discussions at Parish Council meetings to avoid any possible pre-determination.

Information that a Councillor has regarding a planning application may be forwarded to the Clerk for circulation as appropriate.

Any other matters for information to the other Councillors should be directed via the Clerk. Instant replies should not be expected from the Clerk.

Social Media

The Parish Council does not have any official social media pages. Occasionally it is useful to publicise information on a social media platform by the Clerk or a Councillor if it has been agreed at a Parish Council meeting or following guidance from The Clerk. It should be made clear by Councillors that any other postings on social media are their personal views unless the Councillor is absolutely certain that he/she is expressing the view of the Parish Council. If it is agreed that further, more regular use of social media are accepted methods of promotion of the Council's activities going forward, then this policy will be amended accordingly to incorporate this.

Planning Applications

East Suffolk Council is the Local Planning Authority (LPA) for Ufford. It is their responsibility to manage all Planning Applications and ensure they are advertised according to their procedures.

All applications discussed by Ufford Parish Council are placed on to the meeting Agenda and this is published on the parish website and in the notice boards, with three clear days' notice before the meeting.

In addition to these procedures, Ufford Parish Council will undertake the following additional measures:

1. All Planning Applications which are sent to the Parish Council for consultation will be listed on the parish website, with a link to the ESC Planning Portal and details of how residents can respond to ESC
2. All proposed 'major' developments, and development outside the defined settlement boundary, will be advertised on PUNCHLine, and where possible, in the PUNCH Magazine. A 'major' development is defined as one that will have a significant impact on a small number of residents or an impact on a large number of residents.
3. Where a resident shows in interest in a particular application, the Clerk will endeavour to keep them informed of developments, via way of e-mail.

Adopted by the Parish Council at a meeting on: *18th July 2023*

Signed:

J Hallett

Mrs Judi Hallett
Clerk

D Findley

Cllr. David Findley
Chair

Policy based on a template kindly borrowed from Ewyas Harold Group Parish Council