



Social Media Policy

1. Aim of this Policy

The purpose of this document is to set out a code of practice and to provide guidance to Abbey Hill Parish Council Councillors and staff in the use of online public communications in the context of social media, particularly where this is representing the Parish Council and its work.

2. What is Social Media?

Social media is a collective term used to describe methods of publishing on the internet and that allow users to interact with each other in some way, e.g. by sharing information, opinions, knowledge and interests. This interaction can be through computers, mobile phones and new generation technology, including tablet devices.

This policy covers all forms of social media and social networking sites which include (but are not limited to):

- Parish Council Website
- Facebook and other social networking sites (Parish Council Facebook Page and Parish Pages)
- X (Twitter) and other micro blogging sites
- YouTube and other video clips and podcast sites
- LinkedIn
- Blogs and discussion forums
- Email

Social media can provide a useful and often more far-reaching alternative to official means of communication such as written correspondence for the Parish Council to inform and respond to questions and queries raised by the people who live in, work in, and visit the Parish.

Throughout this policy the term 'post' or 'posting' is used to cover all kinds of publication on all social media platforms whether that is the publication of web pages, platform posts, tweets, comments or other means of information sharing.

The principles of the policy apply to all Councillors and the Clerk to the Parish Council. It is also intended as guidance for the wider community to understand expectations regarding content and response. This policy sits alongside relevant existing policies which need to also be taken into consideration.

3. How the Parish Council use Social Media

- To share information relating to the official business of the Parish Council, e.g. posting dates of meetings, minutes and agendas; sharing updates on Community Speed Watch.
- Outside of the sharing of the meeting minutes, to share information related to decisions of the Parish Council only when such an action has been agreed within the official business of the council (e.g. information related to a particular Parish Council project).
- To share information related to MKCC driven activities of Parish relevance, e.g. highways maintenance, public consultations.
- To share information from public sector bodies such as MKCC, Police, Library Services, NHS etc. which is informative for residents.
- To advertise events and activities of potential interest to those who live in, work in, or visit the Parish; but the Parish Council will not promote any commercial activity or interest but may choose to promote charity activity which is sponsored by commercial businesses.
- To promote newsworthy stories of potential interest.
- To alert the public to both Councillor and staff vacancies on the Parish Council.
- To support local individuals or community groups by sharing information that may be of benefit or interest.
- To conduct online surveys or other information gathering to assist the Parish Council in its discussions and decision making.
- To announce new information that may be of relevance in relation to the work of the council.
- To function as an alternative platform for residents to express their views or queries to the Clerk or Councillors, although this will not be treated as being in an official capacity.

4. Code of Practice for using Social Media

The following rules and guidance set out how the Parish Council's social media platforms will operate and how Councillors should use their respective personal and Parish Council accounts:

- Each social media platform is managed by a nominated Councillor or Councillors in conjunction with the Clerk (hereinafter referred to as 'editorial board'). All other Councillors may request posts on the Parish Council's social media platforms and such posts will be published if it falls within one of the areas specified in Section 3 above. If it does not fall within Section 4, the editorial board will determine.
- Councillors will not be permitted to have their own Councillor-named Social Media accounts (i.e. Cllr Bloggs) as all Parish Council matters should be posted via the official platforms and accounts. This does not apply to email accounts provided to Councillors by the Parish Council i.e. firstname.lastname@abbeyhillparishcouncil.gov.uk.
- Councillors should refrain from commenting on posts using their personal accounts on any decision made by Parish Council whether that be as a comment on the Parish Council's social media or elsewhere.
- Cllrs should not post any views about any future item yet to be discussed in a Parish Council meeting to avoid any risk of pre-determination. The Parish Council may choose to post to highlight an upcoming agenda item for decision to encourage public participation but without sharing any opinion on the outcome.
- All Parish Councillors need to be mindful of the information they post on their social media platforms or sites in a personal capacity and take special care that personal opinions are not

published as being those of the Parish Council or could bring the Parish Council into disrepute, especially by contravening the Parish Council's other policies. If necessary, such posts should clearly state that they are a Councillor's personal views and not those of the Parish Council.

- All posts, whether belonging to a Councillor or the Parish Councillor, should:
 - Be responsible, respectful as well as direct, informative, brief and transparent;
 - Never make false or misleading statements;
 - Not present themselves in a way that might cause embarrassment.
 - Not post content contrary to the democratic decisions of the Parish Council.
 - Refrain from posting controversial or inflammatory remarks.
 - Not present political views unless it is made clear that it is done so in a personal capacity and does not represent the views of the Parish Council.
 - Avoid personal attacks or hostile arguments.
 - Not contain offensive language relating to race, sexuality, disability, gender, age, religion or belief.
 - Not conduct any online activity that violates laws, regulations or that constitutes a criminal offence.
- Respect the privacy of other Councillors and residents.
- Publishing untrue statements which are damaging to a person's reputation is libel and can result in a court action and a fine for damages. This also applies if someone else publishes something libellous on a social media platform belonging to another person. A successful libel claim will result in an award of damages.
- Posting copyright images or text on social media sites is an offence. Breach of copyright will result in an award of damages against you. Permission to publish photographs or videos should be sought from the persons or organisations before being uploaded. It will be assumed that these permissions have already been obtained if these are shared from third-party sources.
- Publishing personal data of individuals without permission is a breach of Data Protection legislation and therefore an offence.
- Publication of obscene material is a criminal offence and is subject to a custodial sentence.
- Residents and Councillors should note that not all communications require a response or will be responded to. If a matter is intended to be brought the Parish Council's attention in an official capacity then it may be raised at a Parish Council meeting or by email to clerk@abbeyhillparishcouncil.gov.uk. The response will then be communicated via the minutes of the meeting or by email, as appropriate.
- The editorial board has the authority to remove any posts containing personal or inflammatory remarks or deemed inappropriate.
- Councillors or residents who have concerns regarding content placed on online or social media sites which is under the control of the Parish Council should report to the Clerk.

5. Responsibilities and monitoring accounts

The Parish Council will appoint one or more Councillors/members of staff to be responsible for each social media platform. The editorial board will be responsible for posting and monitoring content, ensuring that it complies with this policy. They will also act as moderator, overseeing comments made by the public, with the authority to remove any posts which are deemed to be of a defamatory, libellous nature or inappropriate in content. Such posts will be reported to the hosts (e.g. Facebook, Twitter) and also the Clerk if he/she is not a nominated person.

Social media platforms operate 24/7, however, it is not expected that they will be monitored continuously and not all messages or comments will be individually responded to or necessarily seen. Therefore, sending a message via the website or social media will not be considered as contacting the Parish Council for official purposes. However, if a communication received via social media is deemed relevant then it may be referred to in Parish Council meetings for the benefit of updating the Parish Council on issues of potential importance.

Views expressed by other persons on social media platforms managed by the Parish Council are not necessarily endorsed by the Parish Council and it is not responsible for the accuracy of content posted by others, nor does it accept any responsibility or liability for any injury, loss or damage incurred as a result of reliance upon information posted online.

6. Conclusion

The overriding purpose of any online or social media communication is to provide those with an interest in the work of Abbey Hill Parish Council with an additional source of information in a timely and accessible way. It is not designed to replace other official channels of communication, rather to enable more members of the local community to understand the work of the council and to promote greater knowledge of the council's processes, actions and decisions.