

BRIDGNORTH TOWN COUNCIL COMMUNICATION AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY

INTRODUCTION

Bridgnorth Town Council believes that it is a true community champion. The engagement and participation of the public is about giving a local voice, often through consultation and giving local involvement in the decisions that affect the wider community.

The Town Council offers its commitment to work together with all sectors of the community to make bridgnorth an even better place to live, work and visit.

AIMS

This document forms the Council's Community Engagement Strategy and sets out:

- The role of community engagement and how the Town Council can improve community engagement
- The development of relationships and how to offer clear communication to deliver better services and projects.
- How the Town Council engages the wider community and identifies the needs and aspirations of the community
- How the Town Council ensures views are listened to and used to develop, enhance and improve services, the environment and the quality of life for residents, visitors and businesses
- How the Town Council can improve its profile by improving engagement with the wider community

OBJECTIVES

- To raise the profile of the Town Council
- Local residents to have a better understanding of the role and responsibility of the Town Council
- To encourage effective community engagement
- To ensure that there is a clear understanding of the need for Community Engagement embedded in the Council
- To improve the quality and delivery of services
- To use engagement to inform decision making, ensuring decisions are fit for purpose and meet the needs of the town
- To improve, plan and shape the future of the town according to local needs and priorities
- To enhance the well-being of the town
- To be a stronger, more active and cohesive town

OUR COMMITMENT

The Town Council is concerned with providing a democratic representative voice for the community of Bridgnorth and offers local people a voice by involving them in decisions which affect their community. Engagement in a meaningful and proactive manner in the community may include individuals, voluntary and community organisations as well as other public sector bodies and businesses.

The Council will also ensure that all communication acknowledges the differing needs and

accessibility of the community, regardless of culture or ethnic origin, nationality, religion or belief, gender, disability, sexual orientation, geographical location or other status. Where required it will ensure that communication materials will be available in formats that are reasonable and appropriate to take in the cultural and language needs of the community.

As part of our commitment to Community Engagement the Council meets informally when Councillors and Staff discuss the responsibilities and Vision of the authority. This meeting considers achieving value for money; reviewing the effectiveness and vision of the Council while also considering approaches to communication with the local community and community engagement.

COMMUNICATION

Communicating with members of the town will be achieved in many ways to ensure all sections of the community are reached.

- What's What

The Town Council writes editorial for this locally produced bi-monthly magazine on the work of the Town Council. The Town Council newsletter is published quarterly within the editorial of What's What (in addition to the bi-monthly report) as well as has been used to include the Council Tax Leaflet and Annual Report on additional pages once per annum. It can also be used for consultation and include articles on topical issues.

- The Town Council websites

www.bridgnorthtowncouncil.gov.uk

www.bridgnorthtownevents.org

- Has a wealth of local information and is updated as and when necessary
- All agendas are advertised as required under the Local Government Act 1972, including on the website
- Minutes of the meetings are included on the website within a calendar month of the meeting
- It may be possible to develop the website to include a forum or weblog, however, the potential for breach of security must first be explored
- Contact details for Council Members and Officers are published
- Develop the websites as the work of the Council progresses and changes

- Information leaflets

There are available from the Town Council offices and can also be downloaded from the website. New leaflets will be added as necessary.

- Meetings of the Council

Meetings are open to the public and include an opportunity for members of the town to engage with councillors before and after the meetings. All full Town Council meetings have an item "Residents Questions" where (subject to the questions being submitted within the required time frame) questions will be answered at the meeting. All Town Council and Committee meetings start at 7:15pm. (unless otherwise notified)

- Parish Notice boards

These are used to convey details of contact for residents wishing to address members, the office opening times and dates of meetings.

- Facebook and Twitter

Sites: Bridgnorth Town Council
Bridgnorth Town Events
Bridgnorth Carnival

Facebook and Twitter are regular forms of communication used by the Town Council

- Town Council Office

The Town Council 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. This neutral involvement allows more flexibility in the service and the personal element of the contact hopefully encourages more involvement from the hard to reach members of the community.

- Consultation

The Town Council will publish the results of all consultation that takes place

- Working with the Media

The media i.e. radio, newspapers etc plays an important role in the local community understanding the work of the Council and therefore the Town Council will be responsive and offer informed reporting to them. Press Releases will keep the local community informed about the work of the Town Council and any community events.

- Liaising with local community groups and organisations

The Council will liaise regularly with local community groups and organisations and look to work with them. Invite these groups to make presentations to Council on a regular basis about their work.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Engaging with the community is achieved in many different ways ensuring that all sectors of the community are reached.

- Consultation

Consultation on new projects, improvements and proposals for the town. Feedback is important and an evaluation of the consultation will take place

- Website

Upload information about the work and services of the Town Council on a regular basis.

- Annual Town Meeting

This meeting is for the residents of the town to hear the work of the Town Council (is not a Town Council meeting) and gives them the opportunity to ask questions of their elected members and the Town Council

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- Bridgnorth Community Events Working Party

This working party is made up of representatives of community groups and organisations, businesses, Shropshire Council and the Town Council. The group considers and works together to put on a diary of community events throughout the year taking into account the needs of the community.

- Representatives on Outside Bodies

The Town Councillors are invited by local and community organisations and bodies within the town to sit on their committees and get involved in the organisation.

- Freedom of Information

The Town Council has adopted the requirements detailed in the Freedom of Information Act and the public can request sight of any council documentation (with the exception of Private and Confidential items). Many documents are readily accessible on the council website, but can also be obtained (for a small fee to cover administration) from the Town Council Offices.

- Partnership working

Bridgnorth Town Council is very willing to work with any and all partnerships that influence or work towards making positive changes in the town or any other individual, group or organisation that requires support in order to bring about such influence or change. The Council already works in partnership working with Shropshire Council and will continue to support these organisations and look for new opportunities for partnership working throughout the community. Bridgnorth Town Council encourages and supports public meetings organised by the police, the health authority, the district and county councils and all other organisations which are working for the benefit of Bridgnorth.

- Local Democracy Week

This is an opportunity to communicate with and educate the future of the local community through working with schools and other young people based groups to assist in their understanding of the work of the Town Council but also listen to their views, concerns and ideas.

- Town Mayor

The Town Mayor tries to visit as many local clubs, organisations, groups, the hospital and community care facilities as possible throughout their year in office.

- Councillor Surgeries

Surgeries will be held in each ward where the local Councillors will be available to answer questions

- Town Plan

The Town Plan has allowed residents to inform the Town Council of the areas around the town that need to be improved or where they would like to see new projects. This consultation took place with the assistance of the Town Plan Steering group. A revision of the Town Plan will be commissioned in the near future with the assistance of a group of volunteers.

- User Surveys

The Town Council will communicate with those who use their facilities to seek public opinion on this service

- Complaints Procedure

The Town Council has an agreed complaints procedure adopted by the town council. Complaints can be made by letter, telephone, email or personal visit to the town hall. All complaints received will be acknowledged within three working days followed by a further letter advising of the outcome of the complaint.

SUMMARY

The Council has a wide communication strategy. It is both innovative and traditional in its approach to communication and has a track record of introducing change when considered appropriate. It will help in understanding the needs and aspirations of the wider community and enhance an enhanced community spirit.

CONTACT DETAILS

The Town Council Offices are open to the public from 9am to 5.30pm Monday to Thursday and on a Friday from 9am to 5.00 p.m. inclusive (closed 1 p.m. – 2 p.m.) though on occasions where there are urgent or important matters to do with Bridgnorth and/or its Council these hours can be extended.

Full contact details of all councillors and officers are accessible on the Town Councils Website www.bridgnorthtowncouncil.gov.uk and in the Council's quarterly newsletter or from the Town Council Offices.

The Town Council can be contacted at town.clerk@bridgnorthtowncouncil.gov.uk, through the website www.bridgnorthtowncouncil.gov.uk or by telephone on 01746 762231 - there is an answering machine for out of hours calls. Contact details of Town Councillors are available on the website but can also be obtained from the Town Council offices.

Correspondence should be addressed to: The Town Clerk, Bridgnorth Town Council,
College House, St. Leonards Close, Bridgnorth, Shropshire WV16 4EJ

Signed
Town Mayor

Signed
Town Clerk

ALTERNATIVE FORMATS:

- Disability Discrimination Act 1995 - copies of this document are available in large print (A3 format) or recorded onto a CD on request from the Town Council office
- The Council can also arrange to provide versions in other languages

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION

In accordance with the Freedom of Information Act 2000, this document will be posted on the Council's website www.bridgnorthtowncouncil.gov.uk and copies of this document will be available for inspection on deposit in the Town Council office.

May 2017

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Town Clerk: Anne Wilson BA Hons AIH