



COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT STATEMENT

WRITTEN BY:

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INTRODUCTION

1.1 The purpose of this Statement is to describe how the Town Council will engage effectively with communities to ensure they are actively involved in decision-making.

1.2 This document should be read in conjunction with the **Partnerships Protocol**, which highlights the Town Council's belief that effective partnerships assist the Council in meeting its strategic priorities.

The Council recognises that there are issues to be addressed in Biddulph which we cannot, and should not, undertake on our own. We need, therefore, to work positively and constructively in partnership with other individuals and organisations.

This Statement builds on the principles established in the Partnerships Protocol.

1.3 Biddulph Town Council is committed to:

- sharing resources to achieve outcomes;
- monitoring how well we have used our resources;

- actively encouraging ideas and innovation;
- ensuring that decision-making is transparent; and,
- driving continuous improvement.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PRINCIPLES

2.1 The Council will seek to understand communities within the town and will use its role, as the level of local government closest to the people, to develop communities and encourage interaction between them.

2.2 The Town Council will ensure that the following principles guide its interaction with communities, to ensure that engagement is meaningful and effective:

- The Town Council cannot force any individual or group to become involved but it can, and will, make it easier and more attractive to do so.
- It will always be clear, before the start of any participation or consultation event, to what extent the result will inform a decision. The Council will be clear what output is expected e.g. a recommendation, strategy suggestion etc.
- If the outcome of a participation or consultation event is intended to inform a decision and a different decision is taken, the reasoning behind that decision will be clear and published.
- All involvement will be time-bound and the aggregated results will be published openly.
- If an event calls for wider public involvement, the event will be advertised locally allowing people time to organise their engagement with the event. Consultations will be targeted at the relevant group or groups.
- Care will be taken to ensure that no one voice is given greater weight than any other.

The Town Council will seek to promote good relationships between members of the community, and actively tackle actual or perceived discrimination.

CURRENT METHODS OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

3.1 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, voluntary and community organisations as well as other public sector bodies. It allows the Council to consult with and inform people about what services it provides, how its priorities and policies are determined and how well it is performing.

3.2 Biddulph Town Council will actively engage groups that are traditionally believed to be 'hard to reach'. They may experience social exclusion and often feel disempowered. Examples of these groups could include: young people, elderly people, those with a physical disability, those whose first language is not English, people experiencing financial constraints or cultural differences.

3.3 The Town Council will informally monitor age, race, disability and gender and will target methods of community engagement towards groups that appear to be under-represented. For example, the Town Council often find that young people do not engage in consultation events. To combat this, the Town Council will increase the use of social media and ensure that consultation venues are neutral and inviting.

3.4 The Town Council recognises that some individuals and groups wish to be actively involved in face-to-face discussions, whilst others prefer to read information and comment privately. The Council currently facilitates community engagement in the following ways, to accommodate a range of preferences:

- Public Participation at the beginning of each Council meeting. This provides an opportunity for residents to make representations to the Council or ask questions relating to items on the agenda.
- The publishing of agendas and minutes for all Council meetings on the website, in the office window and on a notice board within the town.
- Active involvement in the Annual Town Meeting with its public question time.
- The annual External Audit provides the opportunity for questions to be asked about the latest Statement of Accounts and Balance Sheet. A synopsis of the financial accounts is published within the Annual Report.
- The ability to provide Town Council information, when requested, to those with a need for alternative formats or languages.
- Making Councillor contact details available on the website.
- News and events are publicised through the website and a variety of social media platforms.
- When the Council is considering specific issues, methods of engagement such as surveys, focus groups/ workshops or seeking comments through social media may be used.

The emerging Neighbourhood Plan provides a range of opportunities for communities to help influence development within their town.

GOING FORWARD

4.1 Biddulph Town Council is committed to improving community engagement by abiding by the principles above and:

- Investigating the use of incentives to encourage involvement, such as competitions or prize draws.
- Improving relationships with community groups by developing measures to harness the views and opinions of those who are missed out of community engagement activities.
- Identifying and embracing opportunities to work with other local community groups, as and when the need arises.
- Extending and developing the range of electronic communication including through social media and a re-vamped website.
- Participating in local networks to share knowledge and experience of community engagement activities.
- Publicising the positive results to encourage new relationships to be formed and raise community spirit.

Ensuring that appropriate evaluation is carried out following consultation exercises to ensure that lessons learned are carried forward.