

Atcham Parish Council

SOCIAL MEDIA AND DIGITAL COMMUNICATION POLICY

The use of digital and social media and electronic communication enables Atcham Parish Council to interact in a way that improves the communications both within the Council and between the Council and the people, businesses and agencies it works with and serves.

The Parish Council has a website (www.atchamparishcouncil.org.uk) and a Facebook page (Atcham Parish Council). The Parish Council uses email to communicate.

The Parish Council will always try to use the most effective channel for its communications. Over time the Council may add to the channels of communication that it uses as it seeks to improve and expand the services it delivers. When these changes occur, this Policy will be updated to reflect the new arrangements.

Communications from the Council will meet the following criteria:

- be civil, tasteful and relevant;
- not contain content that is knowingly unlawful, libellous, harassing, defamatory, abusive, threatening, harmful, obscene, profane, sexually oriented or racially offensive;
- not contain content knowingly copied from elsewhere, for which we do not own the copyright;
- not contain any personal information;
- if it is official Council business, it will be moderated by either the Clerk to the Council or nominated Parish Councillor(s);
- Councillors should sign up to be held accountable as the same standards as the Parish Clerk, when posting on social media.
- not be used for the dissemination of any political advertising.
- every effort will be made to ensure factual accuracy.

In order to ensure that all discussions relating to the council on social media platforms are productive, respectful and consistent with the Council's aims and objectives, we ask you to follow these guidelines:

- be considerate and respectful of others - vulgarity, threats or abuse of language will not be tolerated;
- differing opinions and discussion of diverse ideas are encouraged, but personal attacks on anyone, including the Council members or staff, will not be permitted;
- share freely and be generous with official Council posts, but be aware of copyright laws; be accurate and give credit where credit is due;
- stay on topic;
- refrain from using the Parish Council's Facebook page for commercial purposes or to advertise market or sell products.

Facebook

The Parish Council Facebook page is available to provide information and updates regarding activities and opportunities within the Parish and promote our community positively. Items posted here may also be shared to other Facebook groups. The clerk is responsible for the Facebook communication.

The site is not monitored 24 hours a day and we will not always be able to reply individually to all messages or comments received. However, we will endeavour to ensure that any emerging themes or helpful suggestions are dealt with appropriately. Although we will do our best to respond to communications on social media, it should be remembered that sending a message or posting a comment via Facebook will not be considered as contacting the Council for official purposes and we will not be obliged to monitor or respond to requests for information through these channels. Instead, please make direct contact with the Clerk (atchampc@gmail.com) and/or members of the council by email, letter or phone call.

Please do not include personal/private information in your social media posts to us. The Parish Council does not have control over social media, although the content will be monitored periodically by the Clerk and any inappropriate content removed.

We retain the right to remove comments or content that include:

- obscene or racist content;
- personal attacks, insults, discriminatory or threatening language;
- potentially libellous or defamatory statements;
- swear words or other sorts of profanity
- abusive language towards an individual or organisation
- plagiarised material; any material in violation of any laws, including copyright;
- private, personal information published without consent;
- information or links unrelated to the content of the forum;
- commercial promotions or spam;
- allegations of a breach of a Council's policy or the law;

The Council's response to any communication received not meeting the above criteria will be to either ignore, inform the sender of our policy or send a brief response as appropriate. This will be at the Council's discretion based on the message received, given our limited resources available. Any information posted on social media not in line with the above criteria will be removed as quickly as practically possible. Repeat offenders will be blocked. The Council may post a statement that 'A post breaching the Council's Social Media Policy has been removed'. If the post alleges a breach of a Council's policy or the law, the person who posted it will be asked to submit a formal complaint to the Council or report the matter to the Police as soon as possible to allow due process.

Parish Council Website

The Atcham Parish Council website will contain as a minimum all the necessary information as stipulated under transparency regulations (see Transparency Code). The Parish Council strongly supports good communication and the website will be used to share as much information as possible about the actions of the Council, with the exception of materials considered confidential under Data Protection or other laws. It will also be used to support and encourage local facilities, organisations, businesses and individuals in any way that benefits the community.

The Parish Council has overall responsibility for the content of the website. Routine management, monitoring and content posting will be carried out by the Clerk. All costs of website hosting, domain name, management, and maintenance will be met by the Parish Council. All material posted on the website will adhere to copyright and Data Protection law. Information will be factual and professionally presented. The website will be updated regularly. The website may carry links to external sites. The Parish Council accepts no responsibility for the content of these.

Parish Council email

The Clerk to the Parish Council has a specific council email address – atchampc@gmail.com. The email account is monitored mainly during office hours, Monday to Thursday. The Clerk's hours are flexible and part-time, so response times may vary.

The Clerk is responsible for dealing with email received and passing on any relevant mail to members or external agencies for information and/or action. All communications on behalf of the Council will usually come from the Clerk, and/or otherwise will always be copied to the Clerk.

Any emails sent to the Clerk or Councillors in their official capacity will be subject to The Freedom of Information Act 2018. Councillors must adhere to the Code of Conduct. These procedures will ensure that a complete and proper record of all correspondence is kept.

Councillors or the Clerk should not forward personal information on to other people or groups outside of the Council, without the sender's permission. This includes but is not limited to names, addresses, email, IP addresses and cookie identifiers.

Internal communication and access to information within the Council.

The Council is continually looking at ways to improve its working and the use of social media and electronic communication is a major factor in delivering improvement.

Councillors are expected to abide by the Code of Conduct and the Data Protection Act in all their work on behalf of the Council.

As more and more information becomes available at the press of a button, it is vital that all information is treated sensitively and securely. Councillors are expected to maintain an awareness of the confidentiality of information that they have access to and not to share confidential information with anyone. Failure to properly observe confidentiality may be seen as a breach of the Council's Code of Conduct and will be dealt with through its prescribed procedures (at the extreme it may also involve a criminal investigation).

Adopted: 8th November 2023

Minute ref: 11a