

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT POLICY

1. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This policy sets out what the Council believes community engagement is, why we do it and the aims and actions which support it.
- 1.2 This policy is about building on the good practice which already exists in the parish and making it better. It also acknowledges the genuine desire of all partners within our community to work more closely together for the benefit of local residents.
- 1.3 Crucially, it seeks to ensure that the many 'communities' within the parish have a voice in the debate around improving the delivery of local services and thus having a positive impact on life and work within the village.
- 1.4 The Council aims to seek community involvement openly by using means of consultation via the website, newsletter, notice boards and social media. The Council's objective is to maintain the level of communication and community involvement in all that it hopes to achieve.

2. WHAT IS COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT?

- 2.1 Community Engagement is a term covering many different activities carried out with people who make up our communities. It is about making sure that people can participate and engage in lots of different ways to make Staplehurst a better place. Community engagement can happen in many ways from Parish Meetings, survey polls, questionnaires, big events, through to the arts, festivals and much more.
- 2.2 Community engagement can also take place at a number of different levels from low involvement activity to high involvement activity. For example, this can range from providing information to people, to consultation by asking for feedback on a particular service or policy, to participation when decision making is shared and through to empowerment which gives people ownership of the decisions and support to carry out their own activities.

3. WHAT IS A COMMUNITY?

- 3.1 Communities can be:
 - Communities of Place – people within a defined geographical area like The Bartons, High Street, Headcorn Road estates, etc.

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- Communities of Interest – people who share a particular experience or characteristic, such as young people, faith groups, older people, disabled people or ethnic groups.

3.2 Communities may define themselves and definitions do change; people often belong to more than one community and communities themselves are often very diverse. The key point is that we always endeavour to engage with all residents.

4. WHY DO WE ENGAGE?

4.1 Community engagement gives individuals, communities and partners a range of very important benefits:

- Developing a better understanding of relationship with communities through genuine dialogue.
- Involving residents in public services and making sure their knowledge, experience and priorities shape those services, so they are more responsive to needs.
- Encouraging more voluntary and community groups to become involved in planning and delivering local services.
- Helping people to establish an improved sense of neighbourhood and more cohesive communities.
- Engaging more people in local democracy.

4.2

Meaningful engagement should follow the four Gunning principles below;

1. proposals are still at a formative stage, a final decision has not yet been made, or predetermined, by the decision makers
2. there is sufficient information to give 'intelligent consideration' The information provided must relate to the consultation and must be available, accessible, and easily interpretable for consultees to provide an informed response
3. there is adequate time for consideration and response There must be sufficient opportunity for consultees to participate in the consultation. There is no set timeframe for consultation, despite the widely accepted twelve-week consultation period, as the length of time given for consultee to respond can vary depending on the subject and extent of impact of the consultation
4. 'conscientious consideration' must be given to the consultation responses before a decision is made Decision-makers should be able to provide evidence that they took consultation responses into account

5. OUR PARTNERS

5.1 There are different partners involved in working together on community engagement:

- All residents of Staplehurst
- Borough and County Councillors as elected representatives of their communities.
- Voluntary and community groups both individually and through local organisations.
- Private sector organisations, local businesses and social enterprises.

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- Public service providers.

5.2 The approach to community engagement in Staplehurst is founded upon the principle that each agency, public, private or voluntary, is responsible for its own community engagement activity.

6. OUR PRINCIPLES WHICH SUPPORT ENGAGEMENT

6.1 Through this policy and the engagement work we are all involved in through the parish, we aim to:

- 6.1.1 Have clear objectives for engagement and to communicate clearly and openly about decisions and actions and the reasons for them.
- 6.1.2 Seek to reach those communities and individuals not yet engaged.
- 6.1.3 Share information and expertise.
- 6.1.4 Engage in innovative and creative ways using 21st century media where appropriate.
- 6.1.5 Recognise and value existing channels and work to make these more responsive and effective.
- 6.1.6 Engage using a range of flexible methods to avoid relying on one source or route.

7. OUR COMMITMENTS

7.1 Through this policy we commit to:

- Use the most appropriate levels of involvement and participation for each activity;
- Build on the existing skills of local people and communities so they are empowered to engage in decision making;
- Develop the voluntary and community sector to play a key role in helping in delivering services;
- Develop a culture where other peoples' views are valued and listened to and are part of the decision-making process and help build cohesion in Staplehurst.

8. HOW WE WILL DO IT

8.1 To help us achieve effective community engagement we will:

- Publish Full Council, Committee and other meeting agendas prior to the meetings on the website, noticeboards and Facebook along with the minutes on the website;

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- Engage with the community by holding local meetings to encourage people of all ages to share their opinions;
- Undertake surveys to encourage input from the community as to their views and comments on issues affecting them;
- Support the work of the village organisations, groups and societies where possible;
- Involve all residents in decision-making, ensuring that the hard to reach members of the community are included;
- Liaise with Maidstone Borough Council, Kent County Council and other agencies to develop or deliver activities/services for the parish

9. HOW WILL WE MEASURE SUCCESS?

- 9.1 Through attendance at meetings of the Council, committees and Annual Parish Meeting.
- 9.2 Responses received to questionnaires, surveys, polls or consultations.
- 9.3 Statistics from the website.
- 9.4 Statistics from social media.
- 9.5 The activity of and interest in the parish organisations and societies.
- 9.6 The Parish Council's Annual Report will include a section on community engagement.

Adoption

This policy supersedes any former policy and was adopted by Staplehurst Parish Council on

5th June 2023.....Minute.....**2109/6.6**.....