

Barley Parish Council Social Media Policy & Guidelines

1. Introduction

Social media can be used by the Parish Council as an effective and measurable way to inform residents, achieve resident engagement and attract publicity. Social media activity is not something that stands alone. To be effective it needs to integrate as part of the general communications mix. Any planned promotions and activities can be plugged into social media platforms to increase reach and exposure.

The aim of this policy is to provide Barley Parish Councillors and Contractors with the:

- Definition of Parish Council Social Media
- Guidelines on responsibilities when using such channels of communication.
- Moderation of user participation and user-generated content.

2. Definition of Parish Council Social Media

Social media are applications and websites based on user participation and user-generated content. Currently, the Parish Council only uses Facebook and the Parish Council Website. Nominated Councillors and / or the Parish Clerk control and edit the Barley Parish Council Facebook page, the Barley Parish Council Notices Facebook account and the website.

All Councillors have access to the Barley Residents Facebook page and other social media platforms as individuals. The Code of Conduct for Parish Councillors applies when using social media in an individual capacity as well as the guidelines in section 3 of this policy.

3. Guidelines on Parish Councillor and contractor responsibilities

The purpose of these Parish Councillor and Contractor guidelines is to support:

- Engagement with individuals and the Parish community through social media.
- Successful promotion of Council-based services through the use of social media.
- A consistent approach in the use of social media.
- Council information remaining secure and not compromised through the use of social media.
- Parish Councillors and contractors operating within existing policies, guidelines, and relevant legislation.
- The Council's reputation being upheld and improved rather than adversely affected.
- Communication by use of social media being effective, timely, appropriate, useful, engaging with a wider audience and utilising cross-promotion of other Council communication tools (e.g. meeting minutes, newsletters).

The guidance for Contractors is attached at *Appendix A*.

Councillors' views posted in any capacity in advance of matters to be debated by the Council at a council meeting may constitute Pre-disposition, Predetermination or Bias and may require the individual to declare an interest at council meetings.

Anyone with concerns regarding content placed on social media sites that denigrate Parish Councillors, volunteers, contracted people / agencies or members of the public should report them to the Parish Clerk for referral to the site moderator. The Council has a moderator of parish council social media and who has the authority to remove any posts made by third parties from council social media pages which are deemed to be of a defamatory or libellous nature.

Information about how to make a complaint about the Council's administrative procedures or about a serving Parish Councillor who may be in breach of the "Code of Conduct for

Councillors” can be found within the Code of Conduct. A copy of this can be provided on request to the Parish Council Clerk or found on the PC website.

When using social media, Councillors must be mindful of the information they post in both a personal and Council capacity. Keep the tone of any comments respectful and informative. Councillors should not post comments that they would not be prepared to make in writing or face-to-face.

When participating in online communication as representatives of Barley Parish Council (or when likely to be perceived as representatives of Barley Parish Council), Councillors must:

- Act in accordance with the Code of Conduct for Councillors.
- Be responsible and respectful, ensuring posts are positive, informative, and balanced and in keeping with information already in the public domain.
- Respect the privacy of other councillors, staff, and residents.
- Keep the tone of comments respectful and informative, never condescending or ‘loud’ i.e. use sentence case format and not write in capital letters or red to emphasise points.
- Seek permission to publish original photos or videos (posting copyright images or text on social media sites is an offence so Councillors and staff must ensure any information does not infringe copyright).
- Always disclose their identity and affiliation to the Council, never hide their identity using false names or pseudonyms.
- Be objective, balanced, informative, and accurate.
- Spell and grammar check everything.
- Maintain updated anti-virus and malware protection to avoid infections of spyware and adware that social networking sites might place on your computer.
- Report it as required by law if you find information on the social networking site that falls under the mandatory reporting guidelines.

Parish Councillors must not:

- Give out the personal data of others on social media, including home address and telephone numbers (even if available elsewhere in the public domain) unless with the expressed permission of the individual for the purpose of the post.
- Use an individual’s name or tag an individual in social media communications unless pre-agreed, or post information about an individual unless given written permission to do so (publishing personal data of individuals without permission is a breach of Data Protection legislation).
- Present personal opinions as that of Barley Parish Council. If a Councillor or contractor blogs, tweets or communicates online personally, and not in the role as a Councillor or contractor they must not claim to act or give the impression that they are acting as a representative of the Council i.e. they should not include web links to official Council websites, Council logos, Council email addresses or any other Council identification as this may give or reinforce the impression that they are representing the Council.
- Present themselves in a way that might cause embarrassment to the Council; they must protect the good reputation of the Council.
- Make false or misleading statements.
- Post personal or political content, content that is contrary to the democratic decisions of the council or post controversial or potentially inflammatory remarks.

- Make derogatory, defamatory, discriminatory, or offensive comments about any person including Parish Councillors, the Parish Council or about the people, volunteers, businesses, and agencies the council works with and serves, or post online activity that constitutes bullying or harassment. Language that may be deemed offensive relating to race, sexuality, disability, gender, age or religion or belief should not be published on any social media site.
- Engage in personal attacks, online fights, hostile communications or in any way allow their interaction on websites or posts to damage their working relationships with others.
- Publish photographs or videos of minors without parental permission.
- Post any information that may be deemed libel (publishing untrue statements about a person which is damaging to their reputation is libel and can result in a court action).
- Post obscene material (publication of some obscene material is a criminal offence and is subject to a custodial sentence).
- Conduct any online activity that violates laws, regulations or that constitutes a criminal offence.
- Bring the Council into disrepute, including through content posted in a personal capacity.
- Install any external applications that work with the social networking site. Examples of these sites are calendar programs and games.
- Fall for phishing scams that arrive via email or on your wall, providing a link for you to click, leading to a fake login page.

4. Moderation of user participation and user-generated content

Requests for something to be posted on social media by the Council should be directed to the Parish Clerk. Comments posted on and messages received via social media are views of individuals and do not represent the views of the Parish Council. Council social media is reactively monitored. The Council does not accept responsibility for the content of any participant or user-generated comment. The Council reserve the right to remove comments received on social media that:

- Contain abusive, obscene, indecent or offensive language, or link to obscene or offensive material,
- Contain swear words or other sorts of profanity,
- Are completely removed from the topic of conversation or are not relevant to the item posted,
- Contain abusive language and/or inappropriate comments directed towards an individual involved in the thread, other organisations or the page administrator,
- Constitute spam or promote or advertise products, except where it is for an event, publication or similar item that has direct relevance to the subject of discussion. Information about locating and sharing knowledge and expertise is welcomed, but within the specific discussion,
- Are designed to cause nuisance to the page administrator or other users.

For serious and/or persistent breaches of the above, we reserve the right to prevent users from posting further comments.

Appendix A - Social Media Guidelines for Contractors

Definition of Social Media

Social media are applications and websites based on user participation and user-generated content. When participating in online communication in relation to Barley Parish Council (or when likely to be perceived as representatives of Barley Parish Council):

Contractors must:

- Be responsible and respectful, ensuring posts are positive, informative, and balanced and in keeping with information already in the public domain.
- Respect the privacy of other councillors, staff, and residents.
- Keep the tone of comments respectful and informative, never condescending or 'loud' i.e. use sentence case format and not write in capital letters or red to emphasise points.
- Seek permission to publish original photos or videos (posting copyright images or text on social media sites is an offence so Councillors and staff must ensure any information does not infringe copyright).
- Always disclose their identity and affiliation to the Contractor, never hide their identity using false names or pseudonyms.
- Be objective, balanced, informative, and accurate.
- Spell and grammar check everything.
- Maintain updated anti-virus and malware protection to avoid infections of spyware and adware that social networking sites might place on your computer.
- Report it as required by law if you find information on the social networking site that falls under the mandatory reporting guidelines.

Contractors must not:

- Give out the personal data of others on social media, including home address and telephone numbers (even if available elsewhere in the public domain) unless with the expressed permission of the individual for the purpose of the post.
- Use an individual's name or tag an individual in social media communications unless pre-agreed, or post information about an individual unless given written permission to do so (publishing personal data of individuals without permission is a breach of Data Protection legislation).
- Present personal opinions as that of Barley Parish Council. If a contractor blogs, tweets or communicates online personally, and not in the role as contractor they must not claim to act or give the impression that they are acting as a representative of the Council i.e. they should not include web links to official Council websites, Council logos, Council email addresses or any other Council identification as this may give or reinforce the impression that they are representing the Council.
- Present themselves in a way that might cause embarrassment to the Council; they must protect the good reputation of the Council.
- Make false or misleading statements.
- Post personal or political content, content that is contrary to the democratic decisions of the council or post controversial or potentially inflammatory remarks.

- Make derogatory, defamatory, discriminatory, or offensive comments about any person including Parish Councillors, the Parish Council or about the people, volunteers, businesses, and agencies the council works with and serves, or post online activity that constitutes bullying or harassment. Language that may be deemed offensive relating to race, sexuality, disability, gender, age or religion or belief should not be published on any social media site.
- Engage in personal attacks, online fights, hostile communications or in any way allow their interaction on websites or posts to damage their working relationships with others.
- Publish photographs or videos of minors without parental permission.
- Post any information that may be deemed libel (publishing untrue statements about a person which is damaging to their reputation is libel and can result in a court action).
- Post obscene material (publication of some obscene material is a criminal offence and is subject to a custodial sentence).
- Conduct any online activity that violates laws, regulations or that constitutes a criminal offence.
- Bring the Council into disrepute, including through content posted in a personal capacity.
- Install any external applications that work with the social networking site. Examples of these sites are calendar programs and games.
- Fall for phishing scams that arrive via email or on your wall, providing a link for you to click, leading to a fake login page.

When a contractor breaches a council's social media policy in the UK, the primary consequence is that the **council can require the third-party organisation to remove the individual from the service provision account**. The council may also take legal action depending on the severity of the breach.

Potential Consequences for the Contractor

- **Removal from the contract/service:** The council has the discretion to demand that the contractor (the individual) is taken off the council's work or project entirely.
- **Contractual repercussions for the employing company:** Breaches can damage the relationship between the council and the contractor's company, potentially leading to a review or termination of the main service contract. Third parties may be reluctant to engage with the council in the future, impacting the ability to obtain best value.
- **Reputational damage:** Both the individual and the contracting company may suffer significant reputational harm.
- **Personal liability:** The individual responsible for the breach can be held personally liable for their actions, particularly if their posts are defamatory, breach confidentiality, or break the law (e.g., copyright infringement, harassment, discrimination, or sharing private sexual images without consent).
- **Criminal charges:** In the event of a serious breach of law (e.g., hate speech, threats of violence, or breaking court orders), the council will report the matter to the police or other external agencies, which could lead to criminal charges and prosecution.