

Buckland Parish Council Communication & Engagement Strategy

1. The community

Buckland Parish Council (“Council”) considers the community of Buckland to be:

- everyone who lives or works in the Parish
- everyone who owns property, land or a business in the Parish
- all local voluntary organisations, clubs and societies active within the Parish
- everyone who benefits from services and amenities provided by Council.

2. Aims

Council aims to:

- represent and promote the interests of the community;
- provide the best “value for money” amenities and services for everyone living in, working in or visiting the Parish;
- promote equal opportunities and oppose discrimination;
- be open, transparent and accountable in its actions;
- uphold and promote local democracy.

3. What Council will do to achieve these aims

Council will:

- engage with as many members of the local community as prove willing to be involved and participate in decision making, supporting the delivery of services and amenities and planning for the future;
- work proactively to strengthen and improve working relationships with statutory bodies;
- utilise a range of approaches to encourage active involvement of a wide cross section of members of the community, to capture their different views and concerns and draw upon that knowledge and understanding when developing plans and taking decisions.

4. Desired outcome of this strategy

Through the implementation of this Strategy Council hopes to:

- maintain effective communications with the local community;
- promote good understanding, in the community, of Council’s role;
- engage local people to actively contribute to decision making.

5. Methods of community engagement

Council engages, with the local community, on an ongoing basis, in a number of ways:

- Council meeting agendas are displayed on Council’s noticeboard and published on the village website;
- Council meetings are open to the press and public¹ unless Council resolves that publicity would be prejudicial due to the confidential nature of the business to be transacted or for other special reasons²;
- Each meeting agenda includes an Open Forum, during which members of the public may speak for up to five minutes (or longer at the Chairman’s discretion);
- Council encourages members of the local community to bring ideas to Council that could be of benefit to the local community, and is happy to establish working parties to explore options to enable a report to be brought to Council by the Parish Councillors involved with a working party;
- Each May, when Council holds its Annual Meeting, Council appoints representatives to outside bodies and reports from representatives are received at Council meetings and included with the minutes;

¹ s1(1) of the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960

² s1(2) of the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960

- Council arranges an Annual Parish Meeting, between 1st March and 1st June, providing an opportunity for the Chairman to present an Annual Report and engage with electors (and other members of the public). The Annual Report is included within the minutes;
- Council will, from time to time, arrange a Public Meeting to provide an opportunity for the local community to be informed and to gauge local opinion about an important issue for the local community such as a major planning application;
- Council regularly updates Council content on the village website with details of Council meetings, minutes, initiatives, policy and procedural documents, contact details and consultations. Council, with the support of a volunteer webmaster, also ensures the website is refreshed as events, activities and community information changes;
- Council has adopted a Publication Scheme, a copy of which can be obtained from the Clerk or downloaded from the village website. Council publishes most information on the village website, including draft minutes of Council meetings, usually within two weeks of the meeting. The Publication Scheme sets out how hard copies of documents published on the website can be obtained from the Clerk;
- Council routinely publishes information on the village website to comply with both the Open and Accountable Local Government Act 2014 and the Local Government Transparency Code 2015;
- Emails are issued via the village email group to alert households to new information published on the village website;
- Council maintains two noticeboards on which it displays contact information for Council, notices of forthcoming meetings, and Parish Updates (summary of local news items). The larger of the two noticeboards also displays meeting minutes and additional information relating to local events, consultations and initiatives;
- Council submits a Parish Update for publication in the monthly “Buckland Parish Magazine” and includes an encouragement to households with internet access to sign up to the village email group;
- In the unfortunate event that the Council receives a complaint Council has adopted a procedure for handling complaints.

6. **Partnership working**

Council also works proactively to strengthen and improve working relationships with a range of external organisations including:

- Mole Valley District Council;
- Mole Valley Forum of Local Parish Councils;
- Surrey County Council (“SCC”);
- Surrey Hills AONB Board;
- Surrey Police;
- Buckland Village Charity;
- Buckland Estate.

7. **The roles of Parish Councillors and the Clerk**

- The seven Parish Councillors are the elected (or co-opted) decision makers of Council. Contact details for Council are available on the village website, the Parish notice boards and in the monthly parish magazine.
- The Clerk, who is the Proper Officer of Council and Responsible Financial Officer for Council, is employed, on a part time basis, to give advice and guidance on the legislation that governs the work of Council and to implement decisions taken by Council.

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Date proposed for next review : July 2023

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