

RAMSBURY & AXFORD PARISH COUNCIL

SOCIAL MEDIA AND ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATION POLICY

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

Social media describes a range of websites and online tools which allow people to interact.

This includes blogs and postings on a wide range of platforms including, but not limited to, Facebook, Twitter, Linked-In, Instagram and Snapchat. Social media is all about sharing information and people use social media platforms to give opinions, create interest groups and to build online communities and networks which encourage participation and engagement. This policy relates to any social media communication published by or on behalf of the council or any individual in their capacity as a councillor.

The Parish Council has a website, has administration access to the Ramsbury & Axford Parish Council Facebook and Instagram page, and uses email and WhatsApp groups to communicate. The Parish Council has appointed specific Parish Councillors to have Administration rights to the website, Facebook, and Instagram pages, and WhatsApp groups.

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.

Potential Legal Issues

Libel – If an untrue statement about a person which is damaging to their reputation is published, they may consider it as defamatory and consider legal action.

Copyright – Using images or text on social media from a copyrighted source (for example extracts from publications or photos), without obtaining permission, is likely to breach copyright laws.

Data Protection – Personal data of individuals must not be published unless you have their express permission. Personal information in an email or personal exchange should not be presumed to imply any consent to pass it on to others.

Bias and Predetermination – Councillors should not say anything on social media (or indeed anywhere) that suggests they have made up their mind on an issue that is due to be formally decided by the Parish Council. While your likely view on a particular application may be well known, you need to be able to show that you attended the committee or hearing prepared to take on board and weigh all the evidence, and were genuinely persuadable to a different view, or the decision may be later challenged as invalid.

Parish Council Social Media Platforms

The Facebook & Instagram pages are available to provide information and updates regarding activities and opportunities within the parish and promote our community positively.

Communications from the parish 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;

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- not contain content knowingly copied from elsewhere, for which we do not own the copyright;
- not contain any personal information;
- if it is official parish council business, it will be moderated by either the Clerk to the council or nominated parish councillor(s);
- not be used for the dissemination of any political advertising.

In order to ensure that all discussions on the council page are productive, respectful, and consistent with the parish 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 council's social media platforms for personal gain or commercial purposes.

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 passed to the relevant people or authorities. Please do not include personal/private information in your social media posts to us.

Sending a message or posting via social media platforms will not be considered as contacting the parish council for official purposes and we will not be obliged to monitor or respond to requests for information through this channel. Instead, please make direct contact with the council's Clerk and/or members of the council by telephoning or sending an email or letter.

Where the Parish Council considers that content is inappropriate, we will inform the sender / content creator of our policy and remove any offensive content as soon as practically possible. The parish council may post a statement that 'A post breaching the parish council's Social Media Policy has been removed'. Repeat offenders will be blocked. Examples of content considered offensive are outlined below, this list should not be considered to be comprehensive but provides examples of the type of content that the parish council views as inappropriate.

- obscene or racist content;
- personal attacks, insults, or threatening language;
- potentially libellous or defamatory statements;
- 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;

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If the post alleges a breach of a parish council's policy or the law, the person who posted it will be asked to submit a formal complaint to the parish council or report the matter to the police as soon as possible to allow due process.

Parish Council Website

Where necessary, we may direct those contacting us to our website to see the required information, or we may forward their question to one of our councillors for consideration and response. We may not respond to every comment we receive particularly if we are experiencing a heavy workload.

Parish Council Email & WhatsApp Groups

The Clerk to the Parish Council has a specific council email address. The email account is monitored at variable hours through the week. We aim to reply to all questions sent within 10 working days.

The Clerk is responsible for dealing with email received and passing on any relevant mail to councillors 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.

The Parish Council uses a WhatsApp group for any urgent communication between Councillors. The Parish Council also uses a WhatsApp group to communicate with Emergency Wardens.

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

Do not forward personal information on to other people or groups outside of the parish council, this includes names, addresses, email, IP addresses and cookie identifiers.

Internal communication and access to information within the council

The parish 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 parish 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 parish council's Code of Conduct and will be dealt with through its prescribed procedures (at the extreme it may also involve a criminal investigation).

Members should also be careful only to cc essential recipients on emails i.e. to avoid use of the 'Reply to All' option, if at all possible, but of course copying in all who need to know and ensuring that email trails have been removed.

Review Period

This policy will be reviewed every three years from the date of the first adoption and thereafter from the date of the last ratified review by the whole Parish Council, or earlier if there are changes in legislation.