

Aldbury Parish Council

Social Media Policy

Social media can be used by the Council as an effective way to communicate and engage with the community it serves. It provides the opportunity to do so instantaneously on a range of subjects relating to its activities, provide updates, news and information. It also provides an opportunity to communicate with members of the community who are not reached by existing forms of communication.

The use of social media will not replace existing forms of communication. The website and other forms of social media will be used to enhance communication. Therefore existing means of communication should continue.

AIMS

The aim of this policy is to guide members of Aldbury Parish Council in the use of online communications, collectively referred to as social media.

Social media is a term used to describe methods of publishing on the internet. The policy covers all forms of social media and social networking sites which include (but are not limited to):

- Parish Council Website
- Parish Council Emails
- Facebook and other social networking sites
- Twitter and other micro blogging sites
- Youtube and other video clips and podcast sites
- LinkedIn
- Blogs and discussion forums

OBJECTIVES

- A consistent approach is adopted and maintained in the use of social media
- That Council information, external correspondence and personal data remains secure and is not compromised through the use of social media
- That users operate within existing policies, guidelines and relevant legislation
- That the Council's reputation is upheld and enhanced rather than adversely affected
- That communication by use of social media is effective, timely, appropriate and useful

PERSONAL, COUNCILLOR AND COUNCIL COMMUNICATION

PERSONAL

Councillors should not use their own personal social media accounts when posting or commenting on posts with regard to Parish Council business or anything that maybe construed as such.

Councillors using their own personal social media accounts or any other form of communication for community or other purposes do so as private individuals and should not use any privileged material gained from their position as a Parish Councillor.

COUNCILLOR

Individual Councillors are at liberty to set up their own Councillor social media accounts to communicate and engage with their community with regard to Parish Council business. Communication should be limited to issuing information or encouraging feedback to information already in the public domain, i.e. published agendas, minutes, local news / events etc.

Councillor's views posted in any capacity in advance of matters to be debated by the Council at a Council or Committee Meeting may constitute Pre-disposition, Pre- determination or Bias and may require the individual to declare an interest at Council meetings.

Councillors should ensure that they comply with the Code of Conduct whenever they act or appear to be acting in an official capacity on social media in the same way as with any other form of communication. Councillors should also ensure they comply with all other relevant Parish Council policies such as Information and Data Protection Policy.

Individual Councillors are responsible for what they post. Councillors are personally responsible for any online activity conducted via their published e-mail address that is used for Council business.

COUNCIL

The Parish Clerk is responsible for all formal communication between the Council and members of the public and will be responsible for maintaining the Council website, Facebook page and any other Council social media. Councillors officially appointed by the Council may assist the Parish Clerk to disseminate information and act as moderators for social media content. However all must ensure they follow this policy. No account details may be changed without the permission of the Parish Clerk.

FACEBOOK

Councillors wishing to utilise the Parish Council Facebook account should email the Parish Clerk with the proposed content and posting instructions with a copy to the Chair and Vice Chair. Typically the subject of a post would have been discussed and agreed at an earlier full Council meeting although it is recognised that this may not always be possible e.g. information requiring immediate posting and in such circumstances email agreement by majority is required. Where relevant posts should cross reference to the Parish Council website and provide the appropriate link. Once approved by either the Chair or Vice Chair, the Parish Clerk will make the post or comment as instructed. The post may then be shared by the Clerk or Councillors to local community Facebook pages, i.e. Everything Aldbury, Tring Station Community Group, Aldbury Outlook etc.

The Parish Clerk may initiate posts or comments without prior approval for the purpose of circulating or responding with public domain information, public service notices and details from approved Parish Council minutes or on instructions from a full council meeting.

Posts to the Parish Council Facebook page will be made during 'office hours' (Monday – Friday, 9am-5pm) unless there is a compelling reason to post outside of these times.

Sending a message / post via Facebook will not be considered as contacting the Council for official purposes and the Council or Councillor is not obliged to monitor or respond to requests for information through Facebook channels.

OTHER SOCIAL MEDIA

At this stage it is not intended to use any other forms of social media for official use by Aldbury Parish Council. However this could be open to review in the future.

Councillors are entitled to use any form of social media they wish to but must abide by this policy at all times when so doing.

PRE-ELECTION PERIOD

Councillors and The Council shall ensure the restrictions on communication activity during pre-election periods are observed. Further guidance can be found at <https://local.gov.uk/our-support/guidance-and-resources/pre-election-period>.

CODE OF PRACTICE

When using social media (including email) parish councillors and council staff must be mindful of the information they post in both a personal and council capacity and keep the tone of any comments respectful and informative.

Online content should be accurate, objective, balanced and informative. Parish councillors and council staff must not:

- hide their identity using false names or pseudonyms
- present personal opinions as that of the council
- present themselves in a way that might cause embarrassment to the council
- post content that is contrary to the democratic decisions of the council
- post controversial or potentially inflammatory remarks
- engage in personal attacks, online fights and hostile communications
- use an individual's name unless given written permission to do so
- publish photographs or videos of minors without parental permission
- post any information that infringes copyright of others
- post any information that may be deemed libel
- post online activity that constitutes bullying or harassment
- bring the council into disrepute, including through content posted in a personal capacity
- post offensive language relating to race, sexuality, disability, gender, age, religion or belief
- conduct any online activity that violates laws, regulations or that constitutes a criminal offence
- Publish untrue statements about a person which is damaging to their reputation is libel and can result in a court action and fine for damages
- This also applies if someone else publishes something libellous on your social media site. A successful libel claim will result in an award of damages against you
- Post copyright images or text on social media sites. This is an offence and breach of copyright may result in an award of damages against you
- Publish personal data of individuals without permission. Breach of Data Protection legislation is an offence

Publication of obscene material is a criminal offence and is subject to a custodial sentence.

Anyone with concerns regarding content placed on social media sites that denigrate Parish Councillors, council staff or residents should report them to the Clerk of the Council.

COMMITMENT

This policy is fully supported by all Members of the council.

The Policy will be reviewed every two years to ensure it remains commensurate with the law and best practice.

Dated: Adopted by Council March 2021